A Psychoanalytical Examination of the Experience of the Specialist Leader of Education in English Secondary Schools

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This thesis is dedicated to my mum, Monica Grant, for her belief in me always, and to my dad, Samory Touré, who has been with me in spirit throughout the highs and lows of this journey.

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) in secondary schools in England and draws on Lacanian theory to examine the role within the context of a competition-driven school improvement policy agenda. The research incorporates both the experiences of the researcher, as participant-SLE, as well as the experiences of a group of SLEs, thus capturing the specific activities involved in school-to-school support today.

Having identified the SLE role as a microcosm of a wider set of issues in current educational discourse, this research encapsulates the tensions experienced by many of those working in schools in England today. It claims that the SLE role is the current iteration of a succession of 'expert teacher' roles, and that the notion of the expert teacher is problematic for relationships in the school environment, since it can be seen as conflicting with dominant discourses of collaboration.

The research presents the complexities of the role of a system leader and identifies the tensions they can experience (consciously and unconsciously) when working beyond their own institutions within a neoliberal school improvement agenda. A structured discussion and critique of neoliberal education policy is offered which allows the data to be analysed to examine how such policy emerges through the SLE role. The Lacanian lens examines the wider dominant discourses, the accounts given by participant-SLEs, and data collected from the research diary of the participant-researcher. A theory of illusory identities is proposed to explain how system leaders successfully carry out two roles (of teacher and of SLE, for example) with the potentially conflicting demands, expectations and values that are placed upon them in each.

Neoliberal ideals of competition, choice and in particular accountability emerge through the research data, which, it is claimed, is symptomatic of the issues and tensions inherent in the neoliberal school improvement agenda affecting all areas of, for the purposes of this research, secondary education. This research establishes a framework for examining the wider school improvement agenda through a Lacanian lens to then understand how such discourses, and in particular ideas around competition and accountability, emerge through system leader roles.

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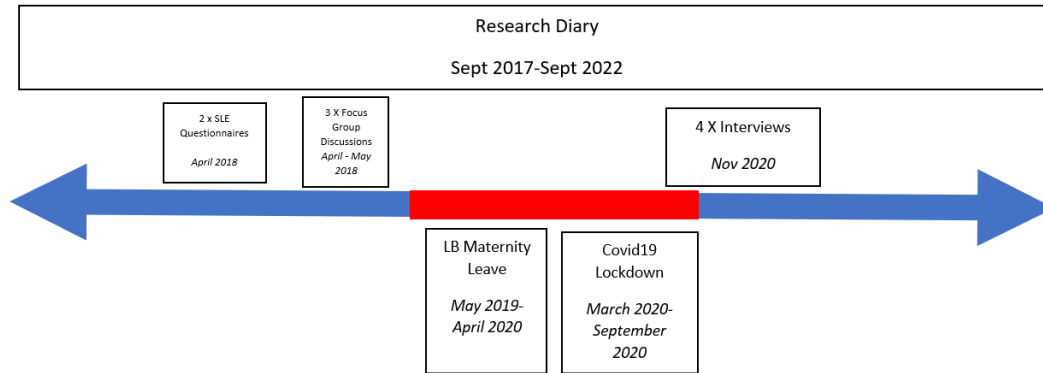
Figure 2   Focus Groups and Interview Participants

Focus Groups and Interviews (in date order)

Focus Groups	Participant-SLEs
1	Ellen, Gemma and Stacey
2	Khristy and Sophie
3	Sharon and Paul

Interviews	Participant-SLEs
A	Sharon
B	Ellen
C	Paul
D	Beverley

Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
AST	Advanced Skills Teacher
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
EdD	Doctor of Education programme
FG	Focus Group
LEA/LA	Local (Education) Authority
LLE	Local Leader of Education
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
MMU	Manchester Metropolitan University
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NLE	National Leader of Education
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NSS	National Support School
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SISS	Self-Improving School-Led System
SLE	Specialist Leader of Education
TSA	Teaching School Alliance

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the research

'What is needed most of all is decisive action to free our teachers from constraint and improve their professional status and authority, raise the standards set by our curriculum and qualifications to match the best in the world and, having freed schools from external control, hold them effectively to account for the results they achieve' (DfE 2010a:8).

In 2010, the government's White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' (Department for Education, 2010a), signalled a shift towards a Self-Improving School-Led System (SISS) and set the tone for a new era of schools working together to improve, by sharing expertise, strengthening school leadership and pooling resources. However, this period of educational reform, while giving more autonomy to school leaders to run their schools, further increased the accountability leaders faced for those decisions and their schools' outcomes. Those outcomes became increasingly publicly accessible thus renewing competition between schools and further encouraging parental choice, ensuring that the SISS became a key part of 'the general shift to a decentralised and marketised [school] system' (Close and Kendrick, 2019:1).

Key to this new school improvement agenda post-2010 was the promotion of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and the creation of models of collaboration between schools such as Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) (Armstrong, 2015). As part of this shift towards a SISS, local authorities significantly reduced their involvement in school improvement work, allowing schools to form partnerships and take the lead on their own improvement (Gilbert, 2017). The best schools (as judged by Ofsted inspections and other accountability measures) would reach out to other schools, offering their support so that all schools would improve, reducing the need for local authority intervention (Close, 2016). Alongside the greater autonomy that school leaders would get, which they would use to make significant decisions (such as how they spend their budget, who they employ, how to go about school improvement and who to work with in order to achieve this) came much greater accountability for those decisions and for the school's subsequent outcomes. The basis for the government's two-pronged approach of greater autonomy and greater accountability was the OECD analysis of PISA data (OECD, 2010; 2011), which looked into factors affecting student performance internationally. As stated in the

Department for Education's (DfE) 2010 research paper which was written to support the announcements in the White Paper:

> A system in which schools are free to decide how things should be done and are then accountable for the results appears to be the most effective in raising achievement (DfE, 2010b:20).

Greater accountability came in the form of external assessment data, such as GCSE results, which the DfE not only claimed was important for accuracy, but also for comparability in performance tables, so that parents (and the public) could have this information available to them when choosing their child's school (DfE, 2010b). While school performance tables (sometimes known as league tables) were not new, there was an abandonment of 'contextual value-added,' a measure which the government claimed allowed schools to make excuses about their contexts and challenges, and a new emphasis on 'expected progress' that students should be making (Leckie and Goldstein, 2017:193). This increased scrutiny of schools added to the facilitation of the growing marketisation of education by encouraging and informing parental choice.

There had already been some success in extending the impact of the best leaders beyond their own schools. The first National Leaders of Education (NLEs), serving headteachers with a record of excellent results, had already been identified by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and appointed in 2006, and their schools designated as National Support Schools (NSSs) (NCSL, 2008). They were soon hailed as having made 'a significant contribution to supporting improvement in under-performing schools' (NCSL, 2008:13). This was closely followed in 2008 by the introduction of Local Leaders of Education (LLEs), experienced and successful headteachers who provide coaching and mentoring to other headteachers who need school-to-school support. While it was the National College for School Leadership (whose name changed to National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in 2013) who had originally designated LLEs and NLEs, this was now given over to Teaching Schools whose role in leading system-wide improvement in their area significantly increased following the 2010 White Paper. Following the successes of the NLE and LLE programmes and the White Paper announcement that Teaching Schools would now be expected to 'brigade together and broker as necessary the different forms of support that other schools might need' (DfE, 2010a:78), the Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) role was born. Specialist Leaders of Education are experienced and

successful middle or senior leaders (below headteacher), each with a subject specialism or expertise in a specific area, who are deployed to support leaders in other schools. Specifically, SLEs should ensure that they develop those leaders 'so that they have the skills to lead their own teams and improve practice in their own schools' (DfE, 2014:3). Teaching Schools became even more central to the government's school improvement strategy as it was now also within their remit to appoint, train and deploy SLEs. Crucially to this research project, deployment involves brokering the financial arrangement between the two schools. The first SLEs were invited to apply for their positions in November 2011, with the aim of appointing 5000 by 2015. There are now thought to be over 7000 SLEs working in English schools (Close and Kendrick, 2019) within this competition-driven school improvement agenda, playing their role in a Self-Improving School-Led System which gives schools autonomy over how they improve and who they request to help them in order to achieve that.

Although critiques and limitations of market-based education reform are well-documented (Jones, 2016; Ball, 2013; Hall and McGinity, 2015), it was not until I became a Specialist Leader of Education in 2014 that I started to experience for myself how complex the concept of school-to-school support could be. My experiences ranged from problem-solving, developing curricula and teaching, to mediating between members of warring departments, and coaching leaders who didn't want to be coached. Alongside this, I became increasingly conscious that, although weaker schools were benefitting from SLE support, they were having to pay large sums of money for it, further impacting their already squeezed budgets. For me, the SLE role started to embody a space where existing tensions between education policy and practice were magnified, and where market-based reform was leading to various interpretations of how school leader autonomy could be used to improve schools. This thesis is a response to those tensions and an exploration of how SLEs manage those critical spaces in which their role as teachers exists alongside their additional role in supporting other teachers in other schools. It also explores how their complex encounters with Supported Teachers (the teachers who are supported by the SLE) bridge educational policy and enactment of that policy in schools. In the thesis I examine these tensions and show how they have led to the research aims and theoretical framework that underpin the methodological approach and analysis. This thesis argues that SLEs' professional identities are tied up in how they interact with educational policies, and that SLEs' encounters with Supported Teachers and other professionals reveal the

wider discourses that have influenced how they understand and interpret those policies in their professional lives.

In order to explore the ideas of professional identity and how educational reform influences discourse, I required a theoretical framework that would enable me to grasp the complexities of encounters, conversations and relationships. Psychoanalytical theory offers a way of understanding how forces that might be considered beyond our control influence our behaviours (Frosh, 2012), enabling me to examine what those forces are and how they influence the actors in the SLE's professional relationships. However, this basic understanding of psychoanalysis does not allow for the complexities of the identities and nuances in the relationships that the SLE develops. Lacanian psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the relationship between subjectivity and language, further allows for a discussion around discourse, and in particular how SLEs position themselves in discourse in their role, thus enabling me to gain further insights into the SLE's role as a product of dominant educational discourse today.

1.2 Situating 'me' in the research

I stated earlier that I became a Specialist Leader of Education in 2014. This was significant because I had already been exposed to the concept of school-to-school support during my teaching career in the years preceding my appointment as SLE, since I had colleagues who supported other schools, and my headteacher was a National Leader of Education (NLE). However, it was when I began to carry out work as an SLE that I started to get a sense of how multidimensional the role was (well beyond what was suggested in the application and training process), but also how problematic it could be compared to how I saw it from the outside. For example, I felt there were competing priorities for SLEs between the demands of their Home School (the school where the SLE is employed and carries out her substantive teaching role) and those of their Supported School (the school where the SLE is deployed to support), especially when I spent less time preparing my lessons for my own classes because I was preparing for SLE work. I also experienced challenging situations where the Supported Teacher was resistant to change which was an entirely different situation to when this scenario happens

in your Home School where there are structures and systems to support you in managing a colleague.

I started to question my previously held beliefs about school-to-school support and about market-based education policy: in particular I believed that it was a positive approach to incentivising schools to work together in order to improve education for all students, no matter which school they attended. These beliefs started to be challenged by my experiences as an SLE, leading to the beginnings of my research journey.

I began to realise that my own experiences of school as a child, and later as a teacher, seem inextricably linked to my researcher identity in this project. It therefore seems important to disclose some of the more relevant parts of my own education and teaching career, not only because my past experiences play a major part in motivating me to explore this topic, but also because it will help you, the reader, to understand some of the methodological decisions I make and how my experiences enable me to reflect critically, influencing the routes I take through this research project.

Primary school was largely an enjoyable experience for me and my twin sister, and we thrived academically but were acutely aware of the low expectations the teachers had of us and our classmates. However, my Year 6 teacher, Mrs Knowles, encouraged me to do well. While most of our classmates went to the local secondary schools, my sister and I passed the 11+ and some entrance examinations, which meant that we were eligible for Assisted Places at an independent grammar school instead, starting in 1994. While our parents could not have afforded the fees if it were not for the Assisted Places Scheme, it was important to them that we were educated well and that we were able to achieve highly. They didn't want us to face the same challenges and issues that they had faced as first-generation immigrant children in school. After turbulent experiences in their schooling, our parents had returned to education as adults, our mother gaining her degree in the weeks before we were born. For a while, my sister and I were the only Black children in our secondary school, and we were conscious of the affluent backgrounds that most of the children in the school came from, compared to our own. It was at this school, however, that I found my love of Languages, and, encouraged by a teacher who believed in me, went on to study French and Spanish at the University of Manchester in

2001. My sister, despite being told by her Biology teacher that she would 'never be a doctor', went on to study Medicine, also at Manchester. By the end of my school career, I had experienced two very different environments where aspirations for children's futures were vastly different, but also where individual teachers had a great impact (good and bad) on children's personal expectations.

Leaving primary school in 1994 meant that I had experienced many of the reforms that the 1988 Education Reform Act had brought, but none greater than the National Curriculum, widely thought of as the 'most modernizing element of... English Thatcherism' (Jones, 2016: 77). However, I had narrowly missed out on the SATs, new national tests to be taken at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. The year group below me were the first to sit them, enabling 'measurement and performance of individuals and of schools' so that 'both entitlement and accountability would be secured' (Jones, 2016:77). Students' Key Stage 2 data would follow them into Key Stages 3 and 4, holding their teachers and schools to account for their progress and attainment at the end of their secondary education, with the aim of improving student outcomes. Other changes included more frequent and more rigorous Ofsted inspection as well as more regulated teacher training, resulting in a...

> ...system of regulation and competition, centralization and autonomy [which] was presented as the set of forces that would drive change (Jones, 2016: 79).

Under this new system in state schools, students' progress and attainment were tracked and monitored, holding their teachers to account, unlike the progress data for my year group (and the year groups before me) where teachers were not as accountable in the same way. This was the same for primary and secondary students in the state sector.

My independent secondary school experience of high standards and public accountability was different; regardless of whether or not individual teachers believed in our ability to achieve highly, it was in the school's interest that all students did well, regardless of their background. The market forces governing the survival of fee-paying schools, ensured that academic outcomes were publicly available (Ward and Eden, 2009). In my case my GCSE and then A Level results were literally printed in the local newspapers alongside my name, ensuring personal and family accountability, as well as that of my teachers and school. This ensured that my sister

and I, children from a disadvantaged and ethnic minority background, and therefore statistically more likely to underachieve (Ward and Eden, 2009:138), experienced an equality of experience and high-quality teaching from our school.

My journey through education and its relationship with market-based policies is therefore a complex one. When there were no market forces governing my primary school's education offer, there was a culture of low expectations, and those who thrived did so with their family's support. When financial income and reputation were at stake, public scrutiny and parental choice ensured that my secondary school did everything possible to ensure that every child did as well as possible. This complexity is in the background when, as a researcher in this project, I consider how marketised education policies are playing out in schools today.

To further add to this complexity, the school I work in is a high-achieving, over-subscribed state secondary with a reputation in the area for being the school of choice for parents. The school's engagement with market-based policies and opportunities is strong; for example, it is the founder school of a successful MAT, it has operated as a Teaching School from which it deploys over 40 SLEs and it is a leading school in the region for professional development in certain areas, such as Maths. Without the financial income from the above-named policies and many more, the opportunities that we offer to students, and the experiences they get, might not be possible. It is true to say that I often count myself as lucky to have 'landed' in such a school, where there are such opportunities for both students and staff career progression. However, a persistent question that I come back to is, is it right that only lucky students have a good education?

As well as my own education as a child, my experiences during my teaching career and the policies and reforms that have taken place throughout it, are important in positioning 'me' in this research.

In 2006 I completed my PGCE with 'Fast Track', a programme designed to accelerate career progression to senior leadership. It was one of a series of reforms proposed in the 1998 Green Paper to 'attract' and 'retain talent that might otherwise be lost' (Churches, Hutchinson and Jones, 2009:6). While I had no real intention of climbing the ladder quickly, I was incentivised

by the financial support it offered, on top of the PGCE bursary and the vast offer of training courses and development opportunities as well as one-to-one coaching, that I would have throughout my early career as a teacher. I was encouraged to apply for a teaching job at my placement school, an independent boys' school. I reluctantly declined the opportunity and applied for a state school role because my Fast-Track programme would have ended and incentive payments would have needed to be re-paid if I had started my career in the independent sector, and I wouldn't have been entitled to further Fast Track incentives, nor the 'Golden Hello' for teaching a shortage subject (Languages). The programme was a 'cross-fertilisation of ideas between business, industry and education' (Churches et al., 2009:281) complete with its penalties for defaulting to the other side (i.e., the state sector). The teaching career that I entered into was very much like the world of business, with its focus on developing its employees and rewarding their hard work and loyalty. The decision I made was the first of many opportunities I took up which stemmed from the proposals in the 1998 Green Paper entitled 'Teachers: Meeting the challenge of change'. David Blunkett, Secretary of State for the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1998, wrote in his foreword:

> Part of this investment is for a new pay and rewards structure. As many teachers, heads and school governors would accept, the present arrangements reflect a different era. We need a new vision of a profession which offers better rewards and support in return for higher standards. Our aim is to strengthen school leadership, provide incentives for excellence, engender a strong culture of professional development, offer better support to teachers to focus on teaching in the classroom, and improve the image, morale and status of the profession (DfEE, 1998:5).

As the title suggests, this Green Paper signalled the beginning of many changes for the teaching profession with the aim of improving schools. The themes of rewards, incentives and support in return for high standards, run throughout my sixteen-year teaching career and are still significant in the present-day discussion around school improvement.

I started as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) in the same school in which I am now a deputy headteacher. Two years into teaching, I was encouraged to apply for department-wide and then school-wide roles, gaining more experience and responsibility each year and benefitting from the aforementioned pay and rewards structure. In 2014, I was encouraged to apply for a Specialist Leader of Education role and, shortly after, I also joined the EdD (Doctor of Education) programme at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). It was the combination

of the EdD and the SLE role that suddenly opened up to me a world beyond the constraints of my own classroom and school which I had not previously considered or been interested in. Having worked in only one school thus far, I was oblivious to the struggles and challenges that other schools faced, and ignorant to the political landscape that underpinned them. Whilst starting to notice how my whole teaching career had been relatively 'plain sailing' compared to other teachers' that I encountered in my SLE world, I was also given the time and space while on EdD study weekends to interrogate, question and critique educational policy through new theoretical lenses. Not being a senior leader at this time further enabled me to question government and school policy without feeling conflicted or disloyal. It was during an EdD weekend that I was copied into a school email, revealing how much my school was charging another school that I was supporting for my SLE work. I started to feel uncomfortable when I thought about the amount of money this school (whose facilities were run-down, was struggling for roll numbers and couldn't even consider my recommendation of investing in new textbooks) were paying to my school. I even recalled previously saying to my department: 'well we all have to chip in with school-to-school support, since we all benefit from the proceeds' when I had asked them to cover some of my lessons, so that I could go out on an SLE deployment. The competition-driven school improvement agenda had winners *and* losers, and I happened to work in a winning school; some teachers and students would end up in a losing school, however. This presented a tension which led me to start to explore the impact of SLE work (and the wider competition-drive school improvement agenda) through my EdD research.

While my early EdD research focused on marketised education policies and to what extent the competition-driven school improvement agenda further disadvantages students in weaker schools, my appointment as assistant headteacher in 2017 started to give me a wider perspective on how schools work and how they manage financially. This role gave me an insight into the whole-school impact of market-based education policies as well as the subject specific departmental level perspective that I already had. The new insight added to my understanding of wider political discourse, but also challenged my previous viewpoints on certain policies and their impact on teachers in the classroom. This happened again when in 2020 I became deputy head and started to be more involved in discussions and decisions which gave me an even broader understanding of how schools interpret government policy and how they work

together in collaboration to achieve school improvement. Again, all new insight gained challenged me to consider how different perspectives can cause, but sometimes resolve previous existing tensions.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge my current substantive post as deputy headteacher (since my experiences in this role influence my understanding of school improvement), this thesis focuses on my role and experiences as a Specialist Leader of Education, a role which I have continued to carry out throughout the changes to my substantive post in school. In addition, behind each of the three aims of the thesis (outlined below in 1.3), there is the persistent question of why, as participant-researcher, taking into account the background that I have outlined above, I am asking the questions that I choose to ask.

This thesis seeks to explore the experience of SLEs in order to gain insights into how their conceptions of school improvement not only reflect the broader sphere of the competition-driven school improvement agenda, but also how they are shaped by such current educational discourses.

1.3 Research aims

Having introduced the context of this thesis and having given some background to me as a participant-researcher, I now present the reader with the three overarching research aims.

Aim 1: To critically examine the role of the SLE and its effect on relationships within the school environment, in the light of the notions of competition-driven school improvement and student attainment that dominate educational discourse today.

Aim 2: To provide a psychoanalytical account, from the perspective of the SLE, of the formation of the SLE's professional identity.

Aim 3: To examine the wider school improvement agenda through a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework and understand how such related educational policy and discourses emerge through the SLE role.

These aims are re-visited at various stages during the thesis and are re-framed and explained as necessary, depending on the focus of the chapter.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 is the Literature Review in which I examine the political landscape and educational reforms that have led to the current agenda of competition-driven school improvement and the creation of the SLE role. This chapter also reviews some of the school improvement roles that have been carried out by teachers in England and in other countries that pre-date the SLE; I argue that all of them are iterations of the notion of the 'expert teacher'. The chapter goes on to explore research around system leadership (leading beyond one's own institution to bring about system-wide change), how SLEs are situated within it and the complexities and tensions it brings about, before looking at the SLE role in more detail. The final part of the chapter explores issues of professionalism including notions of professional identity and how this might fit with the SLE who often straddles two worlds (her Home School and her Supported School) and issues of autonomy and accountability (which are treated earlier in the chapter from a policy perspective and at the end of the chapter from an educational research perspective to explore how teachers' lives in relation to autonomy and accountability are shaped through discourse.

In Chapter 3 I set out my rationale for using Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts as a theoretical framework in this research. I use extracts from the data collected to explain my interpretation of the Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts that drive this research, and to explore how these concepts have been used by researchers who critically examine education policy and political discourse. My aim in this chapter is to show how Lacanian concepts open up certain analytical opportunities and begin to generate different possible understandings of the experiences of SLEs and of the wider school improvement agenda.

Chapter 4 sets out my research design and my rationale for the chosen research methods of a research diary, focus group discussions and interviews, and the implications of those choices for the nature and quality of the data. It then goes on to explain how and why I use

autoethnography as an approach at the start of my research, and then how the Lacanian concepts from the previous chapter (Chapter 3) influence the research design and analysis.

Chapter 5 aims to present the data collected from all three sources: the research diary, focus group discussions and interviews. It will highlight the main themes that emerged and the significant ideas from each of them. It will summarise the content of the data and remind the reader of the methodology, orienting them in the research ahead of the subsequent data analysis chapter (Chapter 6).

In Chapter 6 I use the three research aims as the organising principle for presenting and analysing extracts from the data, which I aim to address by theorising the concepts underpinning the data, using Lacanian concepts. This creates a space within the research (enriched by the ideas that emerged from the literature around school improvement in Chapter 2 and the thematic analysis of the data collected in Chapter 5) to evaluate current educational practices brought to the fore by the experience of SLEs and allow for interaction between the three research aims.

Chapter 7 draws together the analysis from Chapter 6, the literature from Chapter 2 and the Lacanian concepts from Chapter 3 to answer my research questions and argue that the examination of the role and experience of the SLE shines a light on the complex and multifaceted nature of the Self-Improving School-Led system. SLEs are constantly negotiating various positions in discourse while developing, refining and deploying ideas about their professional identities in a constantly shifting policy landscape. I conclude by reimagining the role of the SLE as completely different to the picture that education reform and school improvement policy paints and reframing how teachers might be seen in a world where it is their moral imperative to be teachers of all students, not just their own.

1.5 Concluding remarks

This introductory chapter has provided the reader with the educational and political context to the current school improvement agenda, which will be supported by the related literature in Chapter 2. It has also given the relevant background to me as participant-researcher, in order

to explain how the topic of study came to be, and how the multitude of educational reforms that I have experienced as a child and later as a teacher shape not only my practice as an SLE, but also how I conduct the research in this study. I then set out the three overarching research aims of this thesis and a synopsis of each of the chapters within it.

This thesis adds to literature that presents school improvement from a policy perspective, as well as contributing to the growing body of research that uses a psychoanalytical framework to explore the role and implications of discourse in education. Importantly, it attempts to bridge the gap between research on how to improve schools and raise student attainment and research that focuses on teacher professionalism and identity. In doing so, it provides more nuanced understandings of the complexity of the roles of those who undertake school improvement work, and an alternative perspective -the voices of those carrying out the work- rather than those solely analysing its impact.

2. Literature Review

This literature review draws together some of the relevant developments and research in relation to school improvement that have impacted on the role of the teacher and on those involved in school improvement work. Although this thesis focuses on the experiences of Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) in schools, it is relevant to the work of other education professionals who work in a school improvement capacity. Therefore, this literature review incorporates the wider research around other school improvement roles as well as research on the recent history of school improvement itself.

In this chapter, I identify four areas of literature that are significant to the context of the role of the SLE:

(1) Literature relating to the government policy landscape which led to the creation of the current school improvement context.

(2) Literature relating to the concept of system leadership in education and the role of system leaders (such as SLEs) in delivering system-wide reform.

(3) Literature relating to the role of the SLE itself, including recent academic research that focuses on the role.

(4) Literature around professional identity, autonomy and accountability.

Each of the four areas, and my reasons for selecting them for this literature review, are explained here:

The issue of school improvement has been on the government's agenda since the state first began heavily investing in compulsory education in the 1870s (Ward and Eden, 2009). However, it was later Education Acts (1944 and 1988, for example) and more recent White papers (in 2010, for example) that brought about the biggest shifts towards school improvement agendas characterised by autonomy, accountability and the 'quasi-market' (Ward and Eden, 2009:21). The first part of this chapter reviews the literature relating to recent government policy that has led to the current competition-driven school improvement agenda. This literature is also essential to understanding the context out of which the SLE role was born, and for understanding the current educational landscape in which SLEs are working.

The second part of this chapter reviews literature around the growing use of system leadership approaches to improve schools, and how this has been applied to education to produce system leader roles such as the SLE (and others, for example National and Local Leaders of Education – NLEs and LLEs). The concept of system leadership, which can be defined as 'leadership beyond a single institution' (Cousin, 2019:520), underpins the rationale for leaders working beyond their own schools, and links to the ideological goals of a decentralised government approach to school improvement (Close and Kendrick, 2019).

The third part of this chapter focuses on the role of the SLE. There is very little research to date relating to this role, making the literature that does exist an essential contribution to the contextualisation of this project. Although the SLE role is one of the newest school improvement roles in schools, the first SLEs were appointed in 2011 and there are currently over seven thousand SLEs working in UK schools (Close and Kendrick, 2019:291). Considering that SLEs have been working in schools for over a decade, there is still very little research evaluating their specific role or its impact. This chapter will also draw together government documentation from the Department for Education (DfE) and the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) in order to give an account of what the SLE role entails and the government's intention for the deployment of SLEs in schools. Much of what is known about the SLE role has come from my first-hand experience of the application and recruitment process, as well as the training I received ahead of my first deployment. The literature and documentation pertaining to the recruitment and training of SLEs is therefore significant, as it is the information and messages contained within it (which I explore in part three of this chapter) that helped to form my first impressions of the role, and my initial research questions. Therefore, these fragments of information will be weaved in, where they add to the review of literature, alongside more formal published research around the SLE role.

The final part of this chapter reviews literature around the concept of professional identity. Questions relating to professional autonomy and accountability, as well as those concerning professional values and professional knowledge, have always been pertinent to the teaching profession (Hargreaves, A., 1994); however they are brought to the fore for the SLE in her specific role and also for the Supported Teacher, as both teachers experience a new aspect of their existing roles, and this can call into question what they had previously accepted and

deployed as their professional identities. This part of the literature review, therefore, gives some context to the question of how the SLE sees herself professionally as a teacher of one school, as well as a system leader deployed to improve another school.

2.1 Part one: The School Improvement Agenda

The role of the SLE was not created in isolation, but in conjunction with a number of other system leader roles and as part of a much broader shifting notion of school leadership and school improvement. Armstrong (2015) describes this shift as moving from

> …the traditional concept of institutional leadership, whereby the headteacher is responsible for a single school, to educational leadership, implying a much broader sphere of responsibility encompassing multiple schools and educational well-being across wider geographical boundaries (Armstrong, 2015:3).

This shifting landscape of inter-school collaboration for the purpose of school improvement forms the meta-context of the questions posed in this thesis.

The school improvement agenda, and in particular the notion of a *competition-driven* school improvement agenda, is well documented in government policy documents and other government research (for example: DfE, 2010a). This literature is essential to understanding where the concept of the SLE role came from, what it was intended to replace and its envisioned purpose within this agenda. As part of this contextualisation, this section also refers to other key roles in recent history that have been part of the school improvement drive. These roles and initiatives reveal some of the complexities of the competition-driven school improvement agenda within the sphere of inter-school collaboration and school-to-school support.

2.1.1 Previous School Improvement Initiatives (1979-97)

This section will show that the Self-Improving School-Led System (SISS) is not an entirely new concept, and that there have been previous attempts to improve standards in schools by encouraging and also mandating teachers and educational professionals to improve the education system for themselves. However, the literature in this chapter shows that each

school improvement initiative reveals a potential shift in political ideology which then impacts on the lived experiences of teachers as they interpret the policies and enact them in school. It is important to consider that many SLEs (including some of the participant-SLEs in this research) have experienced some of these initiatives at points during their own teaching careers and, whether they are conscious of it or not, this is likely to have impacted on their professional roles as teachers and as SLEs; the ideologies behind policies that teachers have to interpret can be conflicting with the values of the school and those of the individual teachers who work there, causing tension when they have to be enacted in practice. Here, I propose that ideological alignment might be said to have been achieved when all stakeholders agree with the objectives and vision of a policy, as well as the methods of achieving them; something that can be difficult to achieve in an area as complex as education.

Ball (2021) describes the policymaking approach in the period between 1979 and 1997 as a reaction by the New Right to the previous welfare state which had shifted its focus to post-war economic growth and the expansion of the middle class, resulting in a move to universalist welfare state education. Ball (2021:83) states that the

> …antidote to regulation and intervention… was a reassertion of the twin pillars of individual liberty (the freedom to choose) and market freedom (the disciplines of competition).

Although Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 1980 Education Act began to give some degree of choice of schools to parents, it was her 1988 Education Reform Act which saw a renewed emphasis on schools competing for students in a market-based approach to raising standards in education (Jones, 2016). Subsequently, John Major's government of 1990-1997 was characterised by three main policies (Chitty, 2014) in the improvement of education: the introduction of SATs (a new testing regime for school children) in 1991, the establishment of a new Teachers' Pay and Conditions review body also in 1991, and the creation in 1992 of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) who would oversee school inspections. School league tables would become a publicly accessible guide to the performance of students, schools and local authorities. Kenneth Clarke, former Secretary of State for Education and Science, described the changes to teachers' pay structures (which resulted in significant increases to the pay spines of all teachers, especially for headteachers, deputies and those with

responsibilities) as 'incentive allowances' which 'have a key role to play in recruiting, retaining and motivating teachers' as well as providing 'an attractive career structure' which would attract 'high quality entrants to the profession' (Clarke, 1991). The three above-described policies would ensure that teachers and schools were financially incentivised to do their jobs well, while also being held accountable (by the new SATs).

Of course, schools where students did not meet expectations in SATs or GCSE results, would come under greater scrutiny from the newly formed Ofsted. Alternatively, they would be praised by Ofsted when they did well in accountability measures. Ball (2021:87) notes that the education policies of both Thatcher and Major's governments

> ...tie together as a reform package that provides the infrastructure for an education market and a neoliberal vision of the education system.

Neoliberalism was (and is) a global phenomenon which promoted notions of personal freedom and reduced state control in an attempt to put market competition at the centre of social life (Ward and Eden, 2009). The neoliberal vision of education would enable the nation to compete in global markets, but would also create an 'internal market' leading to schools competing with one another (Ward and Eden, 2009:19). It could be said that the central purpose of the 1988 Act appeared to be about equalising the experience of education for all children, by ensuring, for example, that all children learned the same curriculum content. However, commentators have identified that the underlying purpose was

> ...to create the conditions for a free market in education: parents were to be given a choice of school in the state system and schools would be forced to compete with each other for those parents' choice (Ward and Eden, 2009: 20).

National testing, Ofsted inspections and public accountability through school league tables all opened schools up to potential parents (as consumers) allowing them to compare and make their choices. Whilst the ideology of neoliberal education policies was centred around deregulation and the decentralisation of government control, this resulted in surveillance and accountability (Ward and Eden, 2009), never before experienced by teachers. While many of today's teachers entered the profession after this ideological shift which impacted dramatically

on the role of the teacher (Ball, 2013; Tomlinson, 2005), others had enjoyed a 'Golden Age of teacher control' when teachers were trusted professionals who knew what was best for their students without state intervention (Whitty, 2000:283). As I will explore further in chapters 6 and 7, participant-SLEs in this research allude to the different attitudes of younger teachers, or those relatively new to the profession, (who have only ever known surveillance and accountability) and those teachers who had been teaching for more than 25 years (who remember the 'Golden Age') to the support they offered during their deployments, possibly revealing how the Supported Teachers had experienced different shifts in teacher autonomy over their careers, which, according to Jones (2016) resulted in a change in educational culture.

2.1.2 Previous School Improvement Initiatives (1997 to Present)

Under New Labour, Tony Blair's promise of focusing on three priorities, 'education, education and education' (Blair, 1996), saw many new policies relating to 'driving up' standards in schools so that Britain could compete globally (Chitty, 2014). The success of these policies would be measured via testing, then published in school league tables (Whitty, 2000). The list of education policies, initiatives and funding decisions that Blair's government had announced in approximately one year came to 47 (Ball, 2021:91), making for a busy year for school leaders and impacting on the professional lives of teachers. While the detail of the policies is important, the focus here is on the ideological changes that the policies reveal and the impact they have on the day-to-day professional lives of teachers.

However, while this seemed to be a time of much educational change, and while one might ordinarily expect an alternative approach to policy when the political party in government changes, ideologically, some noted that there seemed to be very little difference to the previous Conservative governments' approaches (Smithers, 2001). John Major famously referred to Blair as a 'political kleptomaniac' in reference to the similarity of his policies to those of the previous conservative government. A main difference, however, was the extent to which New Labour's so-called 'Third Way' (an approach based on distancing themselves from their left-wing politics and finding a centre ground between left and right that sought to transcend both ideologies) prioritised new forms of financial control, which allowed funding to the public sector to be allocated, based on performance or competitive success (Ball, 2021:91).

This was perhaps one of the more overtly marketised approaches to policy that this government made.

The 1997 White Paper, Excellence in Schools, sought to further increase levels of autonomy whilst also strengthening accountability, which is emphasised by the statement: 'There will be zero tolerance of underperformance' (DfEE, 1997:5). And the following year in 1998, the government announced that

> …schools judged to be failing by Ofsted would be given two years to improve, or they would be closed or have radical management changes imposed on them (Gillard, 2018).

This increased government scrutiny of school leaders meant that they were now not only responsible for the education of their students, but also for ensuring that their schools were not closed down. The increased pressure on school leaders would start to filter down to all school staff, marking a significant change in the culture of education at school level and creating expectations on teachers at classroom level (Ball, 2021). Alongside the pressure and expectation, the initiatives that were to follow (some of which are mentioned below) gave school leaders some opportunities to access support to improve their schools.

The late 1990s saw a number of educational changes including the Excellence in Cities initiative to improve the schooling of inner-city children, the privatisation of failing Local Education Authorities and a major expansion of the specialist schools programme (first conceived in 1994 by Major's government) to increase diversity of parental choice (Ward and Eden, 2009). Although they taught the full curriculum, specialist schools acted as centres of excellence in specific subjects, and Dimmock notes that the curriculum specialism was used in policy as a 'means of addressing issues of whole-system school improvement' (Dimmock, 2011:444). Although many specialist schools did not change their admissions policies, with this designation they were allowed to select up to 10% of their intake on students' ability, as related to the specialism of the school, for example sports or music (Ofsted, 2001). Designation attracted a significant one-off grant of £100,000 for the four-year period, as well as additional funding annually (Ofsted, 2001). After four years, in order to be re-designated their specialist status, schools were expected to meet their targets as well as the aims of the programme, two of

which were 'to raise standards of achievement for all their pupils of all abilities' and 'to benefit other schools and the wider community in the area' (Ofsted, 2001:1). Here we see an example of how financial incentives encourage school leaders to engage with government initiatives, whilst also enabling them to compete with other schools for the best students. The best students are more likely to produce the best examination results, resulting in a more favourable place in public league tables.

Also under New Labour, 1998 saw the introduction of the role of the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) which, out of all of the school improvement initiatives, is probably the closest role in education to the SLE. I therefore return to the role of the AST later in this chapter (see 2.1.6), for a more in-depth examination of its relevance to the context of the school improvement agenda.

The 2001 Green paper, Schools: Building on Success, set out the idea of further increasing school leaders' autonomy and accountability by demonstrating 'trust in the informed professional judgement of teachers while maintaining a focus on accountability and standards' (DfEE, 2001:17). While autonomy and accountability are at this point embedded as part of a significant culture shift in education, this highlights the growing dichotomy between trust in teachers and scrutiny of them. The issue of trust and distrust, comes up in the participant SLEs' interviews (see Chapter 6) when SLEs describe how their Supported Teachers feel 'spied upon' by senior leaders; this is a grievance familiar to me in my SLE role, too. It seems therefore that while this 2001 paper set out to increase trust in educational professionals, it was perhaps not as successful as hoped. Ball warns that 'it cannot be assumed that there is a straightforward relationship between policy and practice' (Ball, 2021:6) and therefore, the aforementioned policies are not necessarily representative of the reality for teachers in schools.

Following the 2001 White paper, Schools: Achieving Success (DfES), in which the ideas of diversity of provision and parental choice were further extended, headteachers were faced with 'floor targets' (minimum performance levels) which their schools had to meet, regardless of their catchment area or context (Chitty, 2002). With the freedom to choose what worked best for the staff, students and local community, as well as the potential consequences of not reaching the floor targets and other accountability measures, headteachers had to create an

internal management system to deal with the accountability that they faced. As with every previous new initiative that sought to increase autonomy for school leaders, the agenda of central government and the pressure from the communities and families that the school served, continued to significantly constrain this autonomy. For Ball (2021), the policy language used in this white paper in terms of its dynamism and modernistic framing, echoes the pace of globalisation and contemporary capitalism (Ball, 2021:100).

The 2002 Education Act sought to increase innovation and diversity in schools, while also detailing how appraisal could be used to improve individual teacher standards and school inspections to drive up standards in schools (DfES, 2002). At this point, despite the fact that Ofsted reported that there was an increase in polarisation between popular and unpopular schools which required immediate action (Gillard, 2018), the government pursued and implemented its Academies programme which added to the further diversification of schools, giving parents even more choice. Between 2002 and 2005 there was much focus on Curriculum reform; notions of knowledge in the curriculum, and consequently teacher knowledge, and its impact on outcomes were becoming increasingly central to discussions around school improvement. School improvement work at teacher level would also start to involve discussions around curriculum knowledge and teacher subject knowledge, with the AST (see 2.1.6) being a key person to drive up standards in both areas.

The 2005 White Paper, Higher Standards, Better Schools for All (subtitled 'More choice for parents and pupils'), proposed a radical new school system in which 'self-governing Trust schools' would take control over their own financial assets, admissions policy, recruitment of their own governing body and staff, curriculum etc (DfES, 2005:18). Alongside this, predictably (given the strong recurring themes of the previous white papers) failing schools would be subject to even more consequences, and parents encouraged to urge Ofsted and Local Education Authority (LEA) action if they were unhappy with the standard of education in the schools available to them (DfES, 2005). Importantly, it was at this point that inter-school collaboration was significantly increased, as 'good' (DfES, 2005:18) schools were encouraged to link with local schools in partnerships. It now in fact became the 'duty' of Trust schools to 'spread good practice and demonstrate collaboration' and their performance in this area

would be monitored (DfES, 2005:30), further setting the tone for the introduction of the SLE (and other system leader) roles.

Under Gordon Brown's premiership, the 2009 White Paper: Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future, announced various policies that would closely resemble later policies that went on to produce the SLE role. This paper further enabled schools to establish networks of school-to-school support to help drive up standards, encouraged 'good' education providers to run groups of schools, cut funding to private consultants who had been employed to improve schools, and promised 'strong accountability and rapid intervention to improve schools when needed' (DCSF, 2009:55; Gillard, 2018). Alongside the phasing out of external school improvement consultants and the AST, the government made a clear case for schools to become academies or Trust schools which would provide partnerships where schools could support each other to improve.

The deluge of bills, white papers and policies relating to school improvement, and in particular competition-driven school improvement, up to and throughout 2010 is characterised by recurring themes of strategies to motivate and incentivise teachers, alongside the testing of students and inspection of schools, leading to increased parental choice; this sets the scene for the creation of system leadership and the SLE role. The history of the competition-driven school improvement agenda could also indicate to us that, if (or when) the SLE role no longer exists, its successor is likely to fit into the incentive-accountability model, since with each past school improvement policy, there has been a renewed emphasis on either incentive, accountability or competition by means of reform of, or intervention in, existing practices.

This section has shown that leading up to the creation of the SLE role in 2011, there had been numerous previous attempts to improve standards in schools by devising and creating roles to ensure that teachers improve standards for themselves. This is significant because with each initiative and role created, there has been a shift (small or large) in political educational ideology, such as the shifts towards neoliberalism, and it is this ideology which sets the tone for the changes in policy and the new initiatives which affect the lived day to day experiences of teachers in schools.

2.1.3 Neoliberalism

Having set out the overview of school improvement initiatives from 1979 to the present day, I will now offer a structured discussion of neoliberalism, which since the 1980s has been an organising framework influencing not only education, but all aspects of modern life (Starr, 2021).

Section 2.1.1 of this chapter documented how the education policies of Thatcher and Major's governments set the tone for the neoliberalist vision of education that was to prevail over the following two decades; and Section 2.1.2 described how what followed under New Labour was not the alternative approach that was expected, but a flurry of school improvement policies, some of which demonstrated overtly marketised approaches to the education system. Neoliberal policies have continued to be a driving force of all policy (not just education) to the present day.

The origins, the reach and the ultimate fate of neoliberalism have been debated since the early 1980s, with some seeing its omnipresent effects throughout all aspects of modern life, and others claiming it is simply a theory with no real basis in today's reality (Cahill et al., 2018). What is clear, is that where the term does appear, it is mainly used by policy critics, with very few prepared to reveal themselves as 'neoliberals' (Cahill et al., 2018). Furthermore, this negative association leads to calls for resistance to neoliberalism, with aims of redressing the societal inequalities for which some say it is responsible.

William Davies points out that, while neoliberal states have sought to extend and liberate markets in certain areas, the neoliberal era has actually been defined by reforming non-market institutions, such as healthcare and universities, to make them more market-like. Davies defines neoliberalism as 'the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state endorsed-norms' (Davies, 2017:xiv). He explains that under the banner of neoliberalism, all areas of life are infused, not necessarily with markets, but with economic calculation. As such, he states, therefore, that neoliberalism is also 'the disenchantment of politics by economics' (Davies, 2017:xiv).

The commonly agreed features of neoliberalism (free markets, consumer choice, deregulation, reduced government interference and low governmental spending, along with high accountability) are present throughout the last four decades of education policy with varying degrees of focus on the different elements. However, Davies argues that the central component of neoliberalism's market-oriented approach is the principle of competition alongside the ethos of competitiveness, around which the neoliberal state seeks to reorganise society (Davies, 2017). Having already introduced the concept of the competition-driven school improvement agenda in the introductory chapter, I will take the opportunity here to discuss the implications of the principle of competition, as one of the main critiques of neoliberalism, in particular for education policy.

While competition, a key feature of market forces, is seen as a means to drive efficiency, allocate resources and prioritise individual choice and responsibility, Davies's work challenges the assumption that competition alone can lead to positive outcomes in education and other domains, and he draws attention to its potential negative effects on society. One main effect of a culture of competition is that there are inevitable winners and losers of each and every competition. Davies (2017) points out that when this applies to individuals, it is known as meritocracy: the winners (economically and politically) are those who, based on talent and effort, rather than wealth or social class, achieve the most success. While this appeals to those who seek a society in which great ideas are generated and people are incentivised to work hard and achieve success, Davies points out a major defect: 'it consigns the majority of people, places, businesses and institutions to the status of 'losers'' (Davies, 2017:xvi). Since, within a neoliberal society or institution, desire, effort and ability lead to success, failure to succeed can appear to reflect laziness, inadequate talent or lack of desire. Furthermore, if winning is held as the highest form of success, then those who are doing very well (but not the very best) are always looked upon (or see themselves) as could do better or must do better and feel that they have only themselves to blame (Davies, 2017). Henry Giroux (2019) argues that agency, in current times is being emptied of its democratic possibilities in a neoliberal order in which identities and desires are defined through a market logic that enshrines consumerism, unending competition, unbridled individualism, a survival-of-the-fittest ethos and the celebration of unbridled self-interest (Giroux, 2019:33).

Davies (2017) and Giroux (2019) both argue that those from disadvantaged backgrounds (and those who are the most vulnerable in society) can face structural barriers that may limit their access to the resources and opportunities that others have, hence an illusion of meritocracy since it claims to level the playing field and reward merit, but often does not. This for Davies, presents a tension between the liberal ideas of fairness in competition, and ideas around victory over the competition, as seen in business strategy. The two can never be fully achieved in reality.

Alongside the competitive function of neoliberalism comes the metrics used for tracking and judging performance. In education, standardised testing and public examination performance measures are just some of the numerical measures that have been reduced from complex phenomena and simplified in order to be viewed by the public as part of their right to choose. Davies (as well as other education researchers such as Biesta, 2009 and 2010, and Ball, 2003 and 2013) discusses how this can distort the true nature of educational outcomes. More widely, Davies argues that there is a significant social impact of competition, as it can foster individualism and self-interest which can in turn undermine principles of cooperation and solidarity, detrimentally effecting social cohesion.

2.1.4 School Improvement Roles Outside of the UK

Research by Smyth et al. (2000), who are based in South Australia, but write about various countries around the world, explores 'the wider forces shaping the work of teachers', what these forces mean to teachers and how they might start to separate their practice from policies that the authors argue are linked to 'extremely destructive' economic policies (Smyth et al., 2000:vi). The authors posit that a globalising economy is the main driving force which shapes the expectations and limitations placed on teachers' practice. Alongside this, it has been widely recognised that it is important to value expert teachers and acknowledge that they are the most important variable in high performing education systems (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). This has resulted in rewarding teachers and raising their status with titles such as Highly Accomplished Teacher and Lead Teacher (USA, and Australia, then more recently the UK), Chartered Teacher (Scotland, and more recently UK) and Advanced Skills Teacher (first in Australia, and then in the UK) (Smyth et al., 2000). All of these roles (and others like them)

recognised knowledgeable and effective classroom teachers who, rather than be promoted to roles which removed them from the classroom, would model their practice to others, and lead beyond their classroom to shape others' practice (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). The Specialist Leader of Education therefore is similar, in that they work with Supported Teachers to improve teaching and learning in other schools, but remain substantively in the classroom teaching and continuing to have an impact on their own students.

2.1.5 The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010

In the 2010 White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching', the Cameron-Clegg (Conversative-Liberal Democrat) coalition government used for the first time the language of self-improvement, and set the stage for the further shift towards a decentralised and marketised, Self-Improving School-Led (SISS) system which would underpin school improvement policy over the decade that was to follow (Close and Kendrick, 2019). In the White Paper's foreword, the focus is placed firmly on the UK's falling position in the world in the 2006 OECD PISA survey, and subsequent reference is made to how those more successful countries 'are those where teaching has the highest status as a profession' (DfE, 2010a:3). Alongside strategies and programmes to raise the status of the teaching profession (the creation of role of the SLE being one), the White Paper encouraged and incentivised schools to work together in new ways in order to improve. The Academisation programme gave headteachers more autonomy whilst ensuring that the 'best' schools worked with less successful schools to help them improve. To reinforce the accountability that schools have to help each other improve, Ofsted inspections were 're-focused… on their original purpose – teaching and learning' in order to 'strengthen the performance measures we use to hold schools accountable' (DfE, 2010a:4). All of these ideas together combine as the basis of a new system leadership which uses multi-academy trusts (MATs) and Teaching School alliances (TSAs) to raise the status of experienced teachers (to become SLEs as well as other system leader roles), give schools the autonomy to spend and earn money through the deployment of their best teachers, and ensure that accountability is taken for those autonomous decisions through the Ofsted inspections programme. The then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, ended the second foreword by highlighting the importance of teaching:

> At the heart of our plan is a vision of the teacher as our society's most valuable asset… There is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching… The importance of teaching cannot be overstated (DfE, 2010a:7).

Importantly, this paper critiqued previous governments' centralised approaches to improving schools, suggesting that the micro-management of headteachers to ensure that schools comply with governmental initiatives was the wrong approach. Instead, the aim should be to

> …support the school system to become more effectively self-improving. The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools, and the wider system should be designed so that our best schools and leaders can take on greater responsibility, leading improvement work across the system (DfE, 2010a:13).

This then saw the end of the requirement for every school to have a Local Authority School Improvement Partner (SIP) and, in its place, the development of Teaching Schools who would deploy NLEs and LLEs (National and Local Leaders of Education), headteachers of successful schools, who would support weaker schools, and SLEs (Specialist Leaders of Education) who would support specific areas of schools in their subject/area specialism. Significantly, it was made clear that this new system leadership would be incentivised in order to reward those schools who 'effectively support weaker schools and demonstrably improve their performance' (DfE, 2010a:14).

The coalition government emphasised the renewed focus on accountability for student progress and the consequences for weaker schools who do not achieve the new floor standard. The combination of accountability and autonomy ensure that there is not only collaboration, but also competition between schools, and that stronger schools will thrive financially, whereas weaker ones will inevitably face serious consequences. Consequently, the SLE's experience is underpinned by the tension between the two schools that she represents. Her objective is to improve 'all… young people's lives regardless of which school… they attend' whilst 'being driven by a moral purpose' (NCTL, 2014; para 5), yet the practicalities of the role mean that she is sometimes choosing between which of the two schools to prioritise. Ball (2021) highlights the overall direction of travel that these policies point to, which leave teachers and

school leaders faced with a '…welter of criticism and reduction in autonomy… increased workloads, anxiety and dissatisfaction with dire consequences' (Ball, 2021:102).

Not only does the SLE have to interpret the new policies for her own practice in her Home School, but she also has to support her Supported Teachers with new policies too, balancing this with the improvement work that she is encouraging them to undertake, all of which has an impact on their workload.

2.1.6 The Advanced Skills Teacher

This chapter has so far examined the political and educational contexts which frame the emergence of the SLE role. However, it was the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) role which, although no longer in existence, emerged first (in 1998) and was the role closest in nature to that of the SLE. If one of the ways in which we are to understand the SLE role is in relation to pre-existing constructs, then it could be said that the SLE inherits aspects of its framing from the AST.

A core aim of this thesis is to explore how SLEs form their professional identity and how they perceive their role in schools, conceptualising their purpose within the wider school improvement agenda. A 2010 report reviewed the experiences of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) and, in particular the value of 'expert teacher' identities as a career route for experienced and highly accomplished teachers (Fuller et al., 2010). The authors concluded that the designation of AST was a key factor in the retention of these expert teachers in the classroom. The AST grade, was introduced

> …as a means to recognise and reward teaching expertise and was framed as a way of also raising the status of the teaching profession. As to what a teaching professional should look like, the AST was in many ways positioned as the embodiment (Fuller et al., 2013:463).

The role involved raising student attainment by 'broadening the skills and knowledge base of schools' and 'increasing the quality of teaching and learning' (Fuller et al., 2013:466). While the AST was based mainly in one school teaching her own classes, at least 20% of her time was spent on 'outreach' work in other schools, 'where the focus is on using their expertise to

improve the practice of other teachers' (Fuller et al., 2013:466). The difference with SLE work is that there is no designated proportion of time to be spent on school-to-school support, and no requirement for this to be built into the SLE's standard teaching timetable, making it potentially more flexible to the needs of other schools, but also potentially more disruptive and unpredictable for the SLE's Home School.

With the background of the recruitment and retention crisis in teaching as well as reports of low job satisfaction, Fuller et al. found that the AST designation impacted positively on teachers' perceptions of their professional identity, especially in terms of their self-esteem, but that they were 'reticent about being perceived as having all the answers, thereby exemplifying 'expertise'' (Fuller et al., 2013:472). This rejection of the notion of the teacher as expert can be interpreted as a concern over the enactment of government agenda, in that the responsibility for the improvement of the school's results is placed firmly on the shoulders of the 'expert', without taking into account the wider contextual factors that could affect a school's improvement, and the challenges that different ASTs may face in their work.

To further recognise the expertise and status of the AST, the role was paid at management level on its own separate pay scale (TES Connect, 2010) depending on the AST's experience, strengths and responsibilities, potentially adding further pressure on ASTs to achieve their objectives of (amongst others) providing model lessons to staff who observe them and advising other teachers on lesson planning and teaching. Having already been first introduced in Australia in the late 1980s, the concept of the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) became synonymous with the definition of a good teacher (Smyth and Shacklock, 2003; Fuller et al., 2013), with the intended effect of raising their status in schools and the status of the teaching profession more widely in recognising the highly skilled nature of their work. A potential effect of this, however, was to reduce the AST's work to a list of competencies and tasks, undermining the complex work they do; a criticism which was being echoed more widely among class teachers. Another effect, which had been a criticism from the start, was to diminish the experience and expertise of those who chose not to apply for AST status; a theme which occurs in the participant-SLEs' accounts of their roles in the interviews and focus group discussions in this research (see Chapter 6).

There are many similarities between the roles of the Advanced Skills Teacher and the Specialist Leader of Education; these are important to note, since the research on the AST can be used to give context to, and to help explain, the issues around the SLE role. There are also some key differences, which reveal significant changes in political ideology in the realm of school improvement. Both ASTs and SLEs work beyond their own institutions to support other teachers and schools, but the AST also has this remit in her Home School. Both roles involve establishing a relationship with the Supported Teacher and both require the Supported Teacher to recognise and respect the expertise of the AST or SLE. Therefore, the above criticism of the AST role in relation to other experienced teachers who chose not to apply for the role applies to the SLE role too.

The main difference between the AST and SLE roles relates to pay: Unlike the AST, there is no government SLE grade or national pay scale; there is no requirement for schools to pay the SLE for this aspect of their work. SLEs are not directly remunerated for their new status or for any of their deployments to other schools (unless individual schools choose to do this); any money exchanged between schools is intended to cover back-fill or supply cover for the SLE's absence from their Home School. ASTs however, worked most of the time in their own schools and their salary was in line with that of a school senior leader, regardless of the number of deployments they carried out. As Fuller et al. (2013) identify, this, alongside the rigorous AST recruitment process (involving classroom observation and scrutiny of examination results) resulted in a high level of recognition and respect for ASTs with ASTs reporting a sense of achievement. The AST grade ended in 2013 with the teachers' pay reforms; the SLE role was introduced in 2011 (although the first recruitment round after the pilot was in 2013) with requirement to pay teachers extra for this aspect of their work[1] The fact that post-2013, schools start to have to pay for an SLE to support them to improve (since the free support of the AST is no longer available) is a shift towards the neoliberal ideology underpinning the change in education policy at this time: schools are in a free market arena, choosing how to spend their money and making key financial decisions depending on areas they wish to invest in. The SLE's Teaching

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[1] Although schools can, and some do, choose to pay SLEs for their work, particularly if they are recruited with 'SLE' as their part and a major part of their substantive role. Many SLEs (like the ones in this research) do SLE work alongside their substantive roles. In this case, it is entirely possible that the employer considers this role in deciding on the SLE's salary, but it is not a requirement to do so.

School (who deploys them) makes money from the Supported School and benefits from this free-market approach to school improvement. By eliminating the AST role, government spending is reduced and government control over school improvement is reeled in, in-line with the neoliberal approach.

2.1.7 The Chartered Teacher and the Notion of the Expert

The creation of the SLE could also be said to be a successor[2] of the Scottish Chartered Teacher role, which began in 2003 and ended in 2013, and whose conception was driven by the same discourse of low teacher status and the need to retain the best teachers. The Chartered Teacher, however, was not required to work in other schools, although it was hoped that they would support colleagues and contribute to Continued Professional Development (CPD) and subsequently improvement in progress of the students in their schools. The 2010 Donaldson Report (Scottish Government, 2010) recommended the cessation of the scheme; it claimed that it had not delivered against its stated objectives, that the credibility of the scheme had been damaged (there had not been appropriate gatekeeping in allowing some teachers access to the scheme) and that it therefore did not represent a good investment. Although one intention of the scheme was 'rewarding teachers who remained in the classroom' in order 'to recognise and reward excellence' (Scottish Government, 2011:29), the 2011 McCormac report (Scottish Government, 2011) revealed that those who were promoted down more traditional routes of school leadership had commented that 'theirs is a vital role and should not be equated with not wanting to teach or being inferior teachers' (Scottish Government, 2011:30).

Once again, as with the AST, the juxtaposition of those designated expert teacher status versus ordinary teachers seems to be a factor which contributes to the discontinuation of the initiative. This raises questions around how notions of the expert are framed within education, particularly given the background of poor teacher recruitment and retention, and the urgent need for schools to improve, against which ASTs, Chartered Teachers and other similar schemes (including the SLE) have been created. The notion of the SLE as expert is a theme which arises throughout the data (see Chapter 6) where participant-SLEs raise issues around

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[2] Although Specialist Leaders of Education only currently work in England; SLEs do not exist in Scotland.

the weight of responsibility on them to improve another school, and the lack of clarity over who is ultimately accountable for the outcomes.

2.1.8 Summary so far

Although the role titles are different with each initiative, the literature suggests that the designation of some teachers as expert is a tool being repeatedly used to address the problem of underperforming schools. Lacanian psychoanalytical discourse (explored further in Chapter 3) might describe this as a 'reject'. The underperformance is characterised by the school or department or individual teacher who is not doing well in their role and they are, in Lacanian terms, rejected from the discourse; the expert (symbolising what is desired of all teachers) is invited in as the solution. The ideology of the SISS therefore is underpinned by 'reject' and 'desire' producing a discourse through which governments and school leaders can allocate resources and make other school improvement-related decisions.

The literature also suggests an endless repeated reincarnation of the expert role in various guises, coupled with the sense that school underperformance does not seem to be a problem that has, or ever will, be solved. Matthew Clarke, an educational researcher who uses Lacanian theory to explore connections between neoliberal politics and education policy, describes education as being in a perpetual state of crisis whilst in a simultaneous state of impasse where no change happens (Clarke, 2019). The resultant state of 'crisis-impasse' then, is one of a number of paradoxes in education that Clarke identifies. In Chapter 3, I explore how Clarke's concepts can be used to explore and explain the repeated government attempts to address the issue of school underperformance.

As well as an examination of the wider school improvement agenda, of which the SLE is a small but significant part, this thesis asks questions around the effect of the SLE role on relationships with others within the school environment. Research into the now obsolete Chartered Teacher and AST roles shows that the very existence of the roles and those teachers being classified as experts has been problematic among other staff who are not designated as experts in this way. I go on to explore this issue when speaking to participant-SLEs in the focus group discussions and interviews (see Chapters 6 and 7). Another question this thesis explores is that of the SLE's professional identity, how this is formed and how it goes on to shape their work. It seems that

there is a tension between the ideology in education of the Self-Improving School-Led System which requires expert teachers and leaders to lead others, and the reality of how SLEs (and ASTs and Chartered Teachers before them) perceive this accolade, and how it is received in the teaching profession. Again, I explore this further when talking with participant-SLEs (see Chapters 6 and 7).

2.2 Part Two: System Leadership

Thus far in this chapter, I have explored the political and educational background that has led to the increasingly competition-driven school improvement agenda. Alongside this, the crisis in teacher recruitment and retention has led to the subsequent creation of roles such as AST and Chartered Teacher, which I argue are symptoms of a need to characterise some teachers as expert as part of the solution to the problem of school underperformance. The SLE, therefore, is the current iteration of the expert teacher, intended not only to model expert teaching, but also to model (and coach Supported Teachers in) expert leadership of their specialist area of education.

2.2.1 The System leadership agenda

SLEs (along with Local and National Leaders of Education) are part of a 'system leadership' approach to school improvement. System leadership involves leaders working across boundaries (departmental, institutional or organisational), and in partnership, to bring about change (Bolden, 2020). The term seems to be used interchangeably with the plural *systems leadership* and is derived from the concept of 'distributed leadership'[3]. System leaders, therefore, are leaders who work within and beyond their own schools, leading change and building capacity for change in others that they work with. They play a part in a system leadership approach that aims to share and harness the resources and expertise that exist across groups of schools, rather than keep them within individual institutions. For SLEs, this means working in other schools to support teachers and departments to improve their practice for the benefit of their students, but also building capacity in those Supported Teachers and

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[3] Distributed Leadership (which can also be used interchangeably with Shared Leadership and Collaborative Leadership) is defined in education as: creating opportunities for others to lead in order to build expertise at all levels of the school and generate more capacity for change and improvement (Hallinger and Heck, 2009).

Supported Departments enabling them to continue the improvement work once the SLE's deployment has ended. The NCSL (2008) described the benefit of system leadership as

> …influencing thinking, policy and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people.

While SLEs represent a large proportion of school system leadership today, the first suggestion that school leaders should take responsibility for supporting schools other than their own came in 2003 from the Labour Government's Minister of State for School Standards: 'in the interests of raising productivity… and ensuring sustainable improvement' (Miliband, 2003). Then in 2005, Michael Fullan was among the first educational researchers to use the term 'system leader', asking questions around how leaders can sustain improvement in any public service or corporate institution; he suggested that sustainable reform in the education system must have 'the capacity… to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose' (Fullan, 2005:ix). Since then, there have been various other definitions (for example; Boylan, 2016) of a system leader from which D.H. Hargreaves (2010) in his think piece written for the NCSL[4], identified three core features '…all of which reflect a deep moral purpose':

> - 'a value: a conviction that leaders should strive for the success of all schools and their students, not just their own
>
> - a disposition to action: a commitment to work with other schools to help them to become successful
>
> - a frame of reference: understanding one's role (as a person or institution) as a servant leader for the greater benefit of the education service as a whole'
>
> (Hargreaves, D.H., 2010:11)

The moral purpose of the school system leader and the responsibility that all school leaders have to enact system wide change is emphasised by the OECD, who in 2008 put forward system leadership as an important and effective approach to delivering public services (such as education) in response to factors such as globalisation, new technologies and societal and

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[4] The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) temporarily changed its name to The National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services in 2009, reverting to NCSL in 2011.

economic change. The OECD also recognised the altered role of school leaders who now had more autonomy but much greater accountability; they stated that school leaders

> …must take increasing responsibility for helping to develop other schools, their local communities and other public services. [They] must become system leaders (Pont et al., 2008:3[5]).

Given the emphasis on moral purpose in the literature around system leadership, as well as the ideas around a commitment to improving education as a whole, not just in one's own school, questions around moral purpose became part of my focus group discussions with participant-SLEs. I already knew before conducting the focus group discussions however, from my own work as an SLE, that there were inevitable tensions between having a moral imperative to work as hard for the students in the Supported School as those in your Home School, and the accountability you felt in the Supported School, compared to your Home School who employs you, pays your salary and performance manages you. I explore these tensions through the data collected in Chapters 6 and 7.

Recent educational research suggests that system leadership has been a successful approach to school improvement from, not only a government perspective, but also from leaders in education. Cousin notes that the contextual narrative within which the OECD located system leadership was of 'a global governance trend away from hierarchical central government control towards professional self-regulation of a complex adaptive system' (Cousin, 2019: 521), which, she argues, was underpinned by the rationale that traditional top-down approaches to public services were becoming increasingly difficult in an increasingly complex society. While this represents a normative view of governments searching for ways to improve public services, the OECD study, which examined countries such as Austria and Finland, where system leadership had already had a significant impact, suggests that system leadership represents a substantial move away from hierarchical control, towards more open forms of governance and increased public engagement, consent and cooperation, and improved school outcomes through distributed leadership (Pont et al., 2008). There was an optimism surrounding the concept of system leadership which seemed to have achieved 'a rare and global alignment of

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[5] Pont el al (2008) were writing for an OECD publication

professional and government ambition' (Cousin, 2019:521), whilst also aligning academic and political worldviews meaning that it had the potential to redress the balance of professional and political power. Certainly in my experience, the system leadership approach to school improvement has been talked about positively in my own school, as well as most Supported Schools that I have worked in. While they express tensions and issues with the practicalities of the role, the participant-SLEs in this research talk positively about the concept of system leadership too, supporting the view of this being a rare alignment of 'professional and governmental ambition' (Cousin, 2019:521).

2.3 Part Three: The Role of the Specialist Leader of Education

As described in Chapter 1, Teaching Schools took over from the National College in designating not only National and Local Leaders of Education (NLEs and LLEs) but also Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) from 2011 (when the first SLE pilot began). Since SLEs are recruited predominantly from the middle tier of school leaders, as opposed to NLEs and LLEs who are headteachers, the SLE represents a policy extension of system leadership (Boylan, 2016). However, there have only been two government reports specifically on the role of the SLE, neither of which researches the impact of the role on school improvement or the extent to which it is meeting its key objectives. The first government report was commissioned by the National College (NCSL) in 2012 to evaluate the 2010-11 pilot of the SLE role; however, this focused solely on best practice and how schools could make the most of SLE support (HOST, 2012). Then, in 2019 a DfE review looking at the characteristics of effective inter-school collaboration entitled 'What works in delivering school improvement through school-to-school support' (Greatbatch and Tate, 2019) concluded that there were some significant evidence gaps in the research, and that much more research was needed to evaluate the role and impact of SLE programmes specifically. This review did not collect primary data from schools or teachers directly involved in SLE support, but instead reviewed studies which made generic references to school-to-school or inter-school partnerships since 2010, which includes the work of SLEs, but also other system leader roles. There therefore continues to be a significant lack of knowledge about the specific work of SLEs.

At the time of writing there are only three research papers which focus on the SLE and therefore add to our understanding of the role: A research study by Peter Close and Ann Kendrick (Sheffield Hallam University and Cumbria University) published in 2019, a doctoral thesis case study by Sarah Allen (University of Birmingham) in 2015 and a master's thesis by Julie Grant (University of York) in 2015.

All researchers identify system leadership and leadership development as key aspects of the role of the SLE. Close and Kendrick focus on the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of SLEs, while Allen researches the contribution that the SLE role makes to SLEs' leadership development and to the capacity of leadership in the middle leaders and Supported Teachers with whom they work in Supported Schools. Grant (2015) does not enquire into the nature of the role of the SLE in the same way as the other researchers in this section, making her study less relevant to this research; however she explores the complexities in the brokering of SLE support between Teaching Schools and local schools in need of support, highlighting that there is a disconnect and tension between the competitive nature of school improvement and the essential collaboration that a successful Self-Improving School-Led System requires (Grant, 2015).

In light of the fact that there are no concrete measures in place to quality assure the SLE role, and that there are currently approximately more than 7000 trained SLEs (Close and Kendrick, 2019) working in schools, both the Allen (2015) and the Close and Kendrick (2019) studies are most important in evaluating the impact so far of this relatively new role.

Allen's case study of a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) in the West Midlands, and the SLEs deployed there, explored the question of the impact of their deployments on their own leadership learning and the professional growth for the leader in the Supported School. Allen found that the SLEs in her case study highlighted the value of the opportunities they had to work outside of their usual context; they noted that this brought many benefits for their own schools and therefore to themselves, their colleagues and their students in their Home Schools. Allen also found that SLEs, through their new experience, had been given 'other, wider professional opportunities that they may not otherwise have had' (Allen, 2015:121). The study found that Supported Teachers found many aspects of the deployments valuable, in particular

'coaching, modelling, joint lesson observations, learning walks, data analysis and pupil work scrutinies' (Allen, 2015:121-122).

Although significant in being the first study to look at any impact of the SLE role on SLEs themselves and on Supported Teachers, Allen's study does not attempt to evaluate the impact of the role on school improvement, students' progress or attainment, either at school level or national level. One could argue that in showing that there is a significant increase in the leadership capacity of Supported Teachers and substantial professional growth in SLEs following a deployment is tantamount to proving a positive impact on the education of students in both sets of schools. However, this would be a big leap and Allen does not make it.

In fact, at the time of writing it has been impossible to find any research which looks at any impact (measurable or not) of SLE work on the outcomes of young people. This is perhaps unsurprising since it would be difficult to confidently attribute a school's improvement in GCSE results, for example, to the work of an SLE. However, as stated in the SLE Core Training materials, one of the main principles underpinning system leadership is 'ensuring there is a positive impact with measurable outcomes' (NCTL, 2014). Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to expect the government to publish data detailing these 'measurable outcomes' or at least a summary of them to show how effective SLEs' work has been over the last eleven years. It could also be that the evidence collected from schools does not show an improvement in performance following SLE support and therefore would not promote or support this particular approach – in this scenario there would have been a deliberate decision not to publish this data, or it would not have been collected in the first place, to avoid potential embarrassment.

Similarly to Allen's research, Close and Kendrick (2019) focus on the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs of SLEs. The authors explicitly make the assumption that SLEs are consultants working in a public role. They therefore posit that consultancy research should be used to give intellectual coherence to the role and so recent literature on

> …organisation, networks and structural reform should be used to provide a critical understanding of the wider policy context necessary for such a role (Close and Kendrick, 2019:2).

This is significant for the research questions that I am asking, as the 'consultant' is one of the ways that the SLE could perceive her role, even though this is not the terminology used in any of the government training materials or literature around the SLE role.

Close and Kendrick (2019) give examples of the National College (NCTL) materials used to train SLEs ahead of their first deployment and these are examples that are familiar to me from my own SLE training. One such exercise was about different ways of driving change; SLEs are prompted to evaluate terms such as demonstrators, facilitators, coaches, instructors, tutors and mentors, and discuss the merits and drawbacks of each. Through their research study, the authors conclude that the term 'consultant' is more in-keeping with the underlying transactional nature of the relationship established between the SLE and Supported Teacher (or between their two schools) – there is an exchange of expert advice for payment – and consultancy research is therefore relevant to the study (Close and Kendrick, 2019).

Close and Kendrick seem to make sense of the disconnect between the Department for Education literature about SLEs (which uses business language) and the National College training materials (underpinned by models of change) by bridging the two with the term 'consultancy'. They discuss the idea of SLEs needing to understand concepts of reputation and accountability in the organisational contexts of the various schools in which they are working and needing the ability to analyse and evaluate different groups of schools as organisations. Importantly, they look at the training given to SLEs when they are first appointed: the equivalent of 2 days of training delivered by schools using licensed materials from the National College. Close and Kendrick's previous research in 2016 had found that, although various aspects of the training were reported to be positive and useful, (for example, rehearsing conversations with teacher clients and practising giving feedback)…

> …limitations of time meant that the plethora of organisational models introduced in the training from the business literature only received cursory attention, which precluded any joining-up of such models into a coherent whole (Close and Kendrick, 2019:2).

They also draw our attention to the fact that the literature used to train SLEs comes from business rather than education, limiting the contextual understanding and application for SLEs

during this already limited training. The limited training that SLEs receive raises the question of why more resources are not spent on ensuring that SLEs are prepared for the varied and difficult situations they will inevitably face. SLEs were asked to read prescribed literature on consultancy and organisational change and discuss the impact of the reading on the CPD needs that they had identified. The authors claim that the consultancy concepts introduced to SLEs during the study 'enhanced understandings and offered perspectives' (Close and Kendrick, 2019:12). It could be that this is because consultancy is a more honest and open description of the SLE's role, so these concepts have helped SLEs to understand the nature of their role, acknowledging the presence of the financial contract behind their work. Money and Payment is a theme that arises both in my research diary and in conversations I have with participant-SLEs in the focus group discissions and interviews.

Neither the Allen (2015) nor the Close and Kendrick (2019) papers ask similar research questions to the ones I ask in this research, but both explore ideas relating to the wider agendas of competition-driven school improvement and the context of the increasing marketisation of education. They are significant mainly for being the only research studies centred around SLEs, highlighting the lack of inquiry in this area.

2.3.1 Government Literature on the SLE

This section examines how the discourses of school improvement and competition emerge through the government literature that I (and participant-SLEs) have engaged with before becoming SLEs and during training for the role, and how the language in the literature has shaped how school leaders and others involved in school-to-school support interpret this aspect of collaboration and system leadership.

First published in March 2014, the gov.uk website hosts a number of documents written by the DfE (Department for Education) and NCTL (National College for Teaching and Leadership) which provide information on the recruitment of SLEs. For most teachers who are interested in the role, these documents are the first insight into the nature of the role and the application process. Although there have been a number of updates since, the application form and process remain largely the same as when I applied for the role in 2014. The content of these materials shows how the role is framed in policy literature and contextualises how the role is

first understood by the SLE herself. As participant-researcher, it was important to remind myself of the training materials and other government literature to understand the background to the participant-SLEs' responses and perceptions when carrying out the focus group discussions and interviews for this research.

The most relevant sections of these documents relate to the 'time commitment' and 'payment' sections of the application guidance and application form. It is made clear to the potential SLE that deployments in schools may vary from one-day 'one-off' reviews of a department, to three months full time support of a Supported School. Therefore, schools need to 'consider and negotiate this' (DfE, 2014: para 8). One might view this as a positive aspect of the autonomy given to schools to reach an agreement, that suits both schools; or one might believe that the act of financial negotiation belongs in the world of business. Considering there are up to three schools involved in this process (the Teaching School, the Supported School and the SLE's school, if different to the Teaching School), this could be a time-consuming and complicated process.

Added to the complication is the issue of payment. The Teaching School is given the freedom to state or negotiate the cost of the requested support: 'Discussions on payment for SLE support will be held at a local level between the Teaching School, the supported school, the SLE and SLE's home school' (DfE, 2014: para 11). Although the impression given is that all schools have autonomy in these discussions, this leaves the Supported School in a very vulnerable position as it needs the help it requested and the Teaching School (who in this scenario holds significant power) could impose a high price for the deployment of its SLE. Reflecting on some SLE deployments that I have undertaken, I found myself in departments where staff would say that there was not enough money to buy resources such as textbooks, or to subsidise the cost of revision guides for GCSE students. Additionally, I was conscious that they were also paying my school for my time and support as an SLE. Although I would hope that no Teaching School would be unscrupulous enough to charge more than necessary for the release of an SLE, what is 'necessary' is not set out in the guidance and therefore, leaves Supported Schools vulnerable to paying more than they should for this type of support. Furthermore, although The Teaching School is probably in a better financial position that the

Supported School, they too may be under financial pressures which can be relieved by money from SLE deployments.

A more recent government guidance document for schools (DfE, 2021) shows an increased sensitivity to schools' financial situations by stating that 'Support can be free but there may be costs depending on what type of support you need.' This suggests more of a spirit of collaboration, rather than working for another school and making money for one's own school, which is an interesting shift from earlier government literature. Nowhere is it documented why this change in language came about, but it could be the criticism of this overtly marketised policy or the change of personnel in government between the original and revised versions, again responding to criticism. The shift in literature does not seem to have translated into practice, where SLE work for other schools still appears to always require a financial agreement, at least in my experience and those of the participant-SLEs. Therefore, the new guidance still leaves Supported Schools susceptible to high costs. It is this vulnerability which potentially contributes to the unequal power dynamic in the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship, which is a theme I explore when speaking to the participant-SLEs in the focus group discussions and interviews.

Contrary to the language of business and competition ('negotiate', 'payment', 'broker' etc) that seems to dominate the DfE literature on SLEs, the National College materials produced to train new SLEs ahead of their first deployments in the role seem more focussed on reciprocity and partnership. The core training day that all new SLEs are required to attend, focuses first of all on introducing the participants to 'the current climate involving school to school support' (NCTL, 2014), and goes on to describe a climate of system leadership with a focus on collaboration and the imperative to see students in other schools as equally important to their own students. Interestingly, the materials the SLE will come across before being appointed, while talking of system leadership and the importance of the SLE developing the capacity to lead in others, will conversely focus on the compensation of their time, support and expertise.

This seems to imply the view that the phenomenon of marketisation in education is entirely consistent with notions of professional values and collegiality which, I argue in later chapters, is the very issue that causes conflict and tension for SLEs in their role.

The government literature examined in this section brings into the question the discourse of improvement through competition, and highlights the market-based neoliberal ideology that underpins system leadership roles. There appears to have been a very recent move away from the language of business in the government SLE documentation and a suggestion that collaboration does not have to involve a financial exchange, signalling a shift in the ideological discourse, or a perception that there might be a lack of appetite for this market-based collaboration among school leaders.

2.4 Part Four: Professional Identity

So far in this chapter I have synthesised the relevant literature around the recent school improvement agenda which underpins the role of the SLE and gives context to how current teachers and school leaders' conceptions of school improvement might have been shaped through such discourse; I have drawn on literature which examines system leadership and how this approach is being used in education with the aim of driving system wide change; and I have drawn on the limited research available on the specific role of the SLE to explore what current educational researchers have discovered about the realities of the role for teachers.

This section will review literature around the concept of professional identity, a key issue in this research. While there is a significant body of research around teacher identity and its importance in the classroom, the issue of teacher identity when the teacher has two distinct roles in education is a more complex one. When a teacher becomes an SLE, she not only has to grapple with how to deploy her teacher identity in a different school setting, but also, how to form a new identity as an SLE and shape new colleagues' perceptions of her role. A key question in this research is how does the SLE occupy that space between her Home School and her Supported School? Through my exploration of the literature in this section, I argue that the SLE's new identity is not formed in isolation from the socio-political context in which she has been working. Rather, the socio-political landscape in which she was herself a school student, as well as her experiences during her teaching career, are all significant contributors to how her professional identity has come to be. Furthermore, exploring the professional identity of the SLE, allows us to further understand the socio-political context (in this case, the

competition-driven school improvement agenda and the ensuing discourses of student attainment and accountability) in which it has been formed.

2.4.1 Thinking about Professional Identity

Research on professional identity in education tends to focus on particular influencing factors, which are examined through specific theoretical lenses. For example, there are studies which examine the importance of personal factors, and how they cause tension with professional factors, as well as studies which focus on emotions in the construction of a teacher's professional identity (Vavrus, 2009; O'Connor, 2008; Shapiro, 2010). In my introduction (Chapter 1), I aligned with this concept of teacher identity, when I disclosed how certain early personal experiences and the emotions that I attached to them were pivotal in forming my beliefs and values as a teacher today. I am conscious of how my past experiences were significant in forming my early teacher identity and the aspirations that I had for my students.

Another group of studies looks at the significance of a teacher's self-image in the formation of their professional identity (Sutherland et al., 2010; Settlage et al., 2009; Gee, 2000). This research highlights the differences in pre-service teachers and post-qualification teachers; it posits that the transition from student to teacher marks the beginning of not only accreditation but social recognition of a new status through interactions with other members of the profession (i.e. colleagues, parents and children). The teachers develop a voice which articulates perceptions of themselves as professionals (i.e. their self-image) and contributes to a construction of their professional identity (Sutherland et al., 2010). The transition also marks a new position and status within wider society, further contributing to a teacher's professional identity (Gee, 2000). The SLE's status is elevated when she transitions from being a teacher, to being both a teacher and an SLE, thus bolstering her self-image and altering her professional identity. Beijaard et al. (2004), who conducted a synthesis of research on teacher identity, highlighted that an essential feature of teacher professional identity (and identity itself) was that it is not a fixed entity, but rather part of an ongoing dynamic process. This would indicate that teachers' identities would change throughout their careers, particularly when they take on new roles, such as that of SLE.

Other studies focus on the role of teacher education itself as having a significant impact on the formation of professional identity of teachers by promoting certain ideas (Ronfeldt and Grossman, 2008). This concept of professional identity as being shaped by the realm of education itself can be extended to the CPD that takes place in the school(s) where a teacher spends her early career. Ideas and agendas taught by senior and experienced people in education are very likely to have an impact on how you see your role within the wider aims of the institution (be it school, or teacher training provider). Hsieh (2010) identifies a further set of studies that focus on the significance of the school site and learning contexts (for example, Hung, 2008) and those studies that define professional identity in relation to socio-political contexts (for example, Barrett, 2009). In summary, most research in this area identifies a lack of clarity around the definition of professional identity (and identity itself) since it is complex and multifaceted (Hsieh, 2010). It is difficult to define professional identity without excluding a significant factor. For this reason, in the following section I attempt to clarify my view of professional identity for the purposes of this research.

2.4.2 How I Understand Teacher Professional Identity in this Research

In light of the research explored above, for the purpose of this research, teacher professional identity is how a teacher perceives themselves in terms of the values, beliefs and knowledge that they hold and deem important, and their motives to be a good teacher. It encompasses their status as a professional, but it is also only one part of a person's whole identity; it is never fully formed and always has the potential to change (Gee, 2000).

A key part of this research is examining how SLEs manage their teacher identity when going from their Home School to work in a Supported School. Whilst I did not plan to ask the participant-SLEs in this research about their identities directly, I hypothesised that I would be able to identify expressions of professional identity from the accounts they gave of their SLE work. Using Chaffee's research on reflexive identities (2020), one could say that SLEs' actions are not necessarily components of their identities; however, the behavioural choices they make as reflexive beings can be said to be part of a process that drives identity formation, or at least maintains it (Chaffee, 2020). Choices concerning professional values and

accountability, therefore, could be said to be indicators of how a teacher identifies with her profession and the policies she is required to enact.

However, Brown and McNamara (2011) argue that it is difficult to separate the individual teacher from the social structures around her, leading to complexities around how we define teacher agency. They explain that a teacher's aspirations cannot be separated from those demanded of her by her employer, since individuals 'express their aspirations in terms of participation in shared agendas' (2011:11). Since what it is to be human, and therefore what it is to be a teacher, 'draws on socialised accounts of what it is to be human [or a teacher]' (Brown and McNamara, 2011:11), there is a common sense through which teachers understand themselves and through which they are understood by others. This idea fits well with the remit of this research, which aims to understand how the ideological and political landscape of competition-driven school improvement has shaped the SLE role. Teachers, including SLEs, rather than constructing their own professional identities will inevitably and almost always unconsciously be '*identified*' against certain social structures (Brown and McNamara, 2011:11). This view of professional identity presents a difficulty in understanding a teacher's agency in her role since an individual cannot possibly have full agency over her self-image and actions if they are governed by social structures. Coldron and Smith (1999) identify the tension between the role of teacher agency and social structure, since social theory 'offers powerful explanations of the social determination of identity [leaving] little room for agency' (Coldron and Smith, 1999:712).

This understanding resonates with Lacanian psychoanalysis, which I use as a framework for understanding how SLEs conceptualise their professional identities. Lacan's subject is driven by forces (unconscious desires and drives) beyond her control, leaving the extent to which she has agency over her conception of her own identity in question. Educational researchers who draw on Lacanian concepts often identify 'desire' and 'fantasy' as key drivers in how professional identity is conceptualised by an individual. For Lacan, the subject cannot consciously understand her real self; instead, she can only conceptualise herself as situated within a fantasy of herself. It is her desire of this fantasy that forms her conception of herself as a subject (Brown, Dore and Hanley, 2019).

In the chapter which follows (Chapter 3), there is a fuller explanation of how I understand identity formation through a Lacanian lens, and how I intend to use Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts in this research.

2.4.3 The Changing Nature of Teachers as Professionals

The issue of professional identity cannot be fully understood without understanding the wider issues around professionalism in teaching. While the discourse around the school improvement agenda set out in parts one and two of this chapter outlined the vision of governments (at macro level) to give school leaders more autonomy in running their schools and improving outcomes for their students, this was coupled with more accountability for those outcomes (at meso, or school, level). Additionally, we have examined how marketised policies accompanying this agenda force schools into a competitive arena creating a space where inter-school collaboration is desirable, but problematic. For the school leader, the autonomy they have is therefore limited.

To extend the discussion around the recent historical policy landscape in part one, it could be said that professional autonomy for the teacher has decreased rapidly (with the National Curriculum and standardised testing, for example) in tandem with the increase in accountability (through league tables and Ofsted, amongst other factors) and use of professional standards (with are enforced through appraisal and performance-related pay).

At a micro, or individual level, the SLE could be seen as an example of teachers being given autonomy to lead, since they can support other schools in whichever way suits the given situation. School leaders can also request SLE support to improve, unlike the previous imposition of LEA support. However, the data from participant-SLEs (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7) shows that Supported Teachers can appear to feel de-professionalised and unvalued, as they are stripped of some autonomy when an SLE starts to support them to make changes. Participant-SLEs reveal issues around the contrast and tension between their professional knowledge and that of the professional knowledge of the Supported Teacher; issues which are explored in Chapter 7.

In 2000 Hargreaves' research documented the changing nature of teachers' professionalism and professional learning over four periods in history: the pre-professional age, the age of the autonomous professional, the age of the collegial professional and the fourth age, post-professional or postmodern (Hargreaves, A., 2000). It can be argued that current experiences and perceptions of teacher professionalism draw on all of these ages.

Hargreaves describes the concept of professionalism as related to high quality and standards of practice, and professionalisation as the improvement of status and standing of the profession. While ideas around teacher professionalism have fluctuated and taken on different meanings over the four ages, there are key ideas which persist throughout: high levels of autonomy, specialised knowledge and shared standards of practice (Hargreaves, A., 2000)

The fourth age of postmodernity is characterised by a tension between those groups and forces who aim to de-professionalise the teaching profession by, for example 'subjecting them to the detailed measurement and control of narrowly conceived competence frameworks' and those who propose a 'broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive' postmodern professionalism (Hargreaves, A., 2020:167). This struggle, Hargreaves argues, can also be seen in areas other than education, where governments have embraced marketisation resulting in government cutbacks and resultant competition for 'clients'. Since teachers' pay is the most expensive budget item, their salaries and working conditions have been vulnerable to this shift in ideology and teachers themselves have become viewed as obstacles to the marketisation necessary for the improvement of education (Hargreaves, A., 2000). The resistance of some Supported Teachers (as reported by participant-SLEs in this research) to engage with certain policy agendas at school level can be seen as disruptive or trouble-making by school leaders, when in fact Hargreaves might recognise this, not as rebellious, but revolutionary.

Hargreaves concluded that, as per the fourth age, 'the forces of de-professionalization in teaching have cut deep' and that it is the challenge for teachers to become professionally stronger in the postmodern age (Hargreaves, A., 2000:176).

2.4.4 Autonomy and Accountability

As per widely accepted notions of professionalism, teachers have enjoyed, at least since the mid-twentieth century, high levels of autonomy. The 'golden age of teacher control' allowed them to decide what was best for their pupils, and parents and society saw them as trusted professionals. Whitty (2000) notes that it wasn't until the 1970s that a view emerged that teachers had 'abused this licensed autonomy to the detriment of their pupils and society' (Whitty, 2000:283). The shift towards a more regulated autonomy began for teaching and other professions, leading to teachers being 'subjected to the rigours of the market and/or greater control and surveillance on the part of the reformed state' (Whitty, 2000:283).

Evers et al. (2017) conducted research which highlighted the following four teacher activities as dimensions of teacher autonomous behaviour: primary work processes in the class; curriculum implementation; participation in decision making at school; and professional development (Evers et al., 2017:807). The researchers, like Whitty (2000) and Hargreaves (2000), note that the teacher's control over classroom-based decisions is much diminished, despite autonomy being a crucial element of any frontline profession (where discretion of the individual is needed in order to make the correct decisions) (Evers et al., 2017). The authors distinguish the notion of autonomy from agency, which they note is a much broader concept describing one's experience of control over personal or professional choices; like Evers et al., I will use the term autonomy to describe the freedom to act as a professional and organise one's own job (Evers et al., 2017:806).

As outlined in the Introduction (Chapter 1), the 2010 coalition government set out to further increase the autonomy that school leaders had over school-based decisions, while holding them to account for their results, including student outcomes:

> ...[t]he features of the strongest education systems combine autonomy (e.g. over staffing powers at school level) with accountability (e.g. systematic and external pupil-level assessments) (DfE, 2010a: para 5.1).

In his research which documented the rise of autonomy and accountability in England from 1975 through to 2011, Glatter explains that, although this was not a new political focus, the

emphasis on this theme 'persisted and grew sharply' (Glatter, 2012:560) over the period since 1975.

Paradoxically, whilst there has been a growing emphasis in government discourse on autonomy, many teachers in my experience complain that government constraint is one of the main reasons they would leave (and in some cases have left) the profession. However, Reynolds (2005) argues that the struggle for control over teachers and teachers' work is a long-term rather than a new phenomenon. It seems to be that teachers have historically mediated, managed and resisted government interventions into teaching practices and school policy, but that structural control of teachers has always existed (Reynolds and Smaller, 1997).

Hammersley-Fletcher et al. (2021), investigated the differences in experiences between teachers and school leaders in England who were given high levels of autonomy, coupled with high accountability, and those in another country (Turkey) who had low levels of autonomy and low levels of accountability. The researchers argue that even in settings where autonomy is relatively high, there are still external agents deciding what knowledge should be taught (for example; National Curriculum and GCSE specifications) and how it should be evaluated (by national testing for example); and for the individual teacher, there are always 'multiple others including headteachers and government regulation' impacting upon a teacher's perceived agency (Hammersley-Fletcher et al., 2021:3). In the case of England, the authors conclude that:

> Teacher autonomy in England may be something advanced in political rhetoric, but the reality appears to be far more constrained and complex (Hammersley-Fletcher et al., 2021:5).

2.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the history of school improvement policy since 1979, identifying the shifts in ideology and the changing nature of school improvement discourse. It has highlighted certain school improvement roles that teachers have taken on in the recent past and how these are related to the current iteration of the 'expert teacher': the SLE. I have discussed notions of professionalism and professional identity drawing on various ideas around how teachers develop their professional selves, and I concluded this chapter with a discussion

around the concepts of autonomy and accountability, which are present through the chapter in relation to policy and discourse, but are then examined in terms of the realities of the everyday lives of teachers.

The following chapter examines the Lacanian theoretical framework which drives this research.

3.Theoretical Framework: Lacan

In the previous two chapters I have set out my main research interests in this project, showing how tensions in education between school improvement discourse and the enactment of policy through teachers' roles are highlighted through the role of the Specialist Leader of Education. In particular, I have explored literature that tells the story of recent school improvement policy and its impact on the changing role of the teacher, as well as literature around issues of professionalism, such as professional identity, autonomy and accountability.

In this chapter I start by setting out my rationale for using Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts as a theoretical framework in this research. I then move on to the main body of this chapter which has two overarching aims: to set out the Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts that drive this research, and to explore how these concepts have been used by researchers who critically examine education policy and political discourse. At certain points throughout the chapter, I use extracts from data collected in this research (from my research diary and from focus group discussions and interviews with participant-SLEs), to show how Lacanian concepts open up certain analytical opportunities and begin to generate different possible understandings of the experiences of SLEs and of the wider school improvement agenda.[6]

3.1 Why psychoanalysis? Why *Lacanian* psychoanalysis?

This section explains how I came to use Lacanian psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework for this research, and how Lacanian concepts enhance and drive the research.

During Phase A of the EdD[7] programme I started to create a research diary which incorporated notes from my SLE deployments (such as those from meetings, lesson observations and

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[6] The Methodology chapter of this thesis (Chapter 4) will set out the background to the data collection more clearly, and Chapter 5 will present the main themes from the data collected. Data is used here not to be analysed (as the analysis takes place in Chapter 6), but rather to exemplify and clarify how I intend to use some key Lacanian concepts in this thesis.

[7] Phase A is the taught component of the Doctor of Education programme at Manchester Metropolitan University and takes place over two years. This Phase incorporates five units of study (the first of which is Professionalism), each assessed by a 5000-word assignment. All assignments must be passed in order to continue on to Phase B, which is the thesis.

conversations with Supported Teachers), as well as my reflections on interactions and events that I had experienced in Supported Schools[8]. It was through these diary entries that issues of professional identity and professional relationships began to arise frequently, and I realised how important they were to the topic of school-to-school support that I had chosen to focus on. The research diary enabled me to notice tensions, for example between the demands of my work in my Home School and the work I was expected to carry out in my Supported Schools, that I hadn't previously considered; I also realised that I had a heightened awareness of professional status and questioned my own professional knowledge when working with a Supported Teacher, as opposed to when working with colleagues in my Home School, an example of this being when a Supported Teacher questioned my advice and refused to accept it, which I had never experienced outside of SLE work; and I found that relationships with colleagues where I was providing school-to-school support were more complex (for example, there were issues of accountability and hierarchy) than those at my Home School in my day-to-day 'teacher' role.

Once I had decided that professional identity and professional relationships were going to be at the centre of this project, I began to research into teacher identity construction. I found, as documented in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), that educational researchers tended to focus on particular factors that influenced teacher identity. For example, some focussed on the importance of personal factors and emotions (Vavrus, 2009; O'Connor, 2008; Shapiro, 2010), while others looked at self-image (Sutherland et al., 2010), learning contexts (Hung, 2008) and socio-political contexts (Barrett, 2009). All of this research was valuable, as it prompted me to consider which factors were important in this research and to me as a researcher. However, as well as ideas that were commonly thought of as contributors to a person's identity, I required a theoretical framework that would enable me to grasp the complexities of encounters, conversations and relationships, and their effect on a person's identity.

The article that first opened my eyes to how Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts can be used to study teacher identity was 'Identity, Narrative and Practitioner Research: A Lacanian perspective' by Tony Brown and Janice England (2005), in which the researchers documented

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[8] See Methodology Chapter (Chapter 4) for a full explanation of the research methods used in this research.

the latter's emancipatory doctoral research (England, 2003) in a secondary school. The beginnings of the doctoral research are centred around the teacher-researcher's objective of designing interventions aimed at preventing a group of Black boys in a French class from becoming disengaged in the French classroom, and therefore 'falling down the sets' (England, 2003:9). During the research project, the researcher (England) has a lightbulb moment in which she realises that it is her own subjectivity, not the boys', that is critical to the research. She uses Lacanian theory to understand her own subjectivity and how her desire to change the lives of the boys may actually be a symptom of her own lack in perhaps her self-image or her professional identity. At this point in the research, she is able to re-frame how she works with the boys and find new ways of understanding the issues (Brown and England, 2005). This was also my lightbulb moment, as I noticed the significance of examining the construction of my own identity and my own subjectivity as participant-researcher, in order to be aware of how this impacts on the questions I choose to ask in this research, and on the way in which I frame those questions.

Other research has since informed my use of Lacanian concepts in this thesis by showing different ways of applying them to educational contexts. For example, Brown and McNamara (2011) researched into how trainee primary school teachers conceptualise their own identities, and how those conceptions influence their understandings of teaching Mathematics from the beginning of their four-year training programme, until the end of their first year as a qualified teacher. The authors take the premise that the professional landscape which guides the trainees' practice can conflict with the complex social demands placed upon them, causing tension that emerges through their actions. They use the work of Slavoj Zizek, a Slovenian commentator who is influenced by the work of Lacan, to explore alternative conceptions of how trainee teachers function within the social framework that they encounter (Brown and McNamara, 2011). They also use psychoanalysis to examine the construction of trainees' identities in response to policy frameworks, such as curriculum reform (Brown and McNamara, 2011).

As well as the above-named researchers, this chapter goes on to draw on the work of others who write about socio-political and educational areas of interest using a Lacanian framework.

3.1.1 Different Approaches to Using Lacan's Work

Broadly speaking, there are two main approaches to using Lacan's psychoanalytic theory: one approach applies the theories to the individual (much like in the clinical sense that Lacan originally intended) and so the researcher becomes the analyst, and the research-participant becomes the patient. The patient/participant is then subject to analysis as though they were a patient of Lacan. In this approach, since psychoanalysis is widely understood as a method of understanding individual consciousness, there is a direct application of the theory to an individual. Academics who deploy Lacan more widely however (for example, Tony Brown (2001, 2005), Matthew Clarke (2012, 2015, 2019) and others) argue that Lacanian concepts such as the unconscious, desire and fantasy 'clearly have insights to offer beyond the clinical encounter' (Clarke, 2015:73).

Therefore, this research draws mainly on the other approach to using Lacanian theory which uses the lens of psychoanalysis to look mostly beyond the individual and instead examine wider society and in particular policy. Clarke argues that there is great potential for critical dialogue between education and psychoanalytical theory, since policy 'is enacted by individuals and is individuating in its governance effects' (Clarke, 2015:74).

That is not to say, however, that the two approaches cannot be used together: in this research, I am interested in the individual SLE's identity and how it is shaped by her professional context and by policy. For Lacan, the subject's identity is never fixed; it is continually being shaped by the world in such a way that she can never quite capture it or fully articulate it satisfactorily (Brown, Dore and Hanley, 2019). Brown, Dore and Hanley's practitioner research (2019) examines how trainee and practising teachers develop conceptions of themselves through offering accounts of their actions and building up an evolving narrative of their subjectivity. The authors explain that the Lacanian subject is continually dissatisfied with the account she gives as it never quite captures what she intends to say, which drives her to attempt the account again and again, each time failing, but each time being motivated to keep trying (ibid). In their research, the authors show how Lacanian theory can enlighten the process of identity construction for teachers as they respond to demands and expectations placed upon them in their roles (ibid).

In this chapter, and throughout this thesis, I try to embrace the Lacanian sense of never fully managing to successfully express my ideas in the way that I hope to; and I allow the frustration that this causes to motivate me to re-frame, and attempt again to explain, the Lacanian concepts that I focus on in this research. I do this in the sections below by using various extracts of data, in the hope that they will help to clarify my explanations, where my own words fail. My ultimate aim is then to use these concepts to analyse the data (in Chapter 6), creating a dialogue between Lacanian concepts and education policy, and showing how teachers conceptualise themselves as they respond to personal, institutional and societal and political demands and expectations of them in their roles as Specialist Leaders of Education.

3.2 Key Lacanian Concepts and their use in this research

This section gives an overview[9] of the key Lacanian concepts that I am using in this research, beginning with the underpinning ideas of lack, fantasy, desire and subjectivity. At this point, it is important to note that Lacanian concepts are difficult to summarise, since the ideas contained within them can be elusive and paradoxical. Therefore, this section, while based on Lacan's own seminars and those who have studied him in depth, can only ever be my understanding of the theory, and is intended to offer my interpretation of it and use of it in this research project. Moreover, while I attempt to separate out the four concepts of subjectivity, fantasy, desire and lack, they are inevitably linked together in ways that cannot be completely untangled.

3.2.1 Lacan's Subject and Subjectivity

Lacan's concept of the subject accepts that elements of identity are unconscious. Therefore, there are always going to be aspects of my identity as a teacher, an SLE and a researcher that are invisible to me; and it is those elements that I believe are important to examine when attempting to understand how I navigate certain spaces in my teacher-SLE-researcher world(s). As a researcher, my own subjectivity must be taken into account when analysing data through

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[9] An overview at this point is required before looking at how present-day researchers in education use Lacanian concepts in their writing. Later in the chapter, I re-visit these concepts in more depth, using data to explain them. For example, at this point I give an overview of Lacanian Subjectivity, but later on in the chapter, we look at Lacan's Mirror Stage which explains how he understands the birth of the subject.

a reflexive process. For Lacan, those unconscious elements of identity are revealed by signifiers (words and sounds), which reveal unconscious processes such as desires and drives, of which we are not fully conscious. Lacan's early work was based on Freudian notions of the unconscious as well as the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974). A central notion of Lacan's work is that the subject comes to be through language. For Lacan, subjectivity is constructed both socially and historically through language, and language is 'the condition of the unconscious' (Lacan, 2007:41). Language predates us as humans, and so we are born into it, rather than the other way around: the human mind is inserted into the social order.

The Lacanian subject is shaped by discourses which are instrumental in the construction and assertion of one's subjectivity; while an individual can and does consciously reject certain demands and expectations placed upon them, other demands and expectations work through discourse to form one's identity and subjectivity. Actions and behaviours, therefore, can reveal elements of subjectivity, but for Lacan, this is a shifting subjectivity which is continually being shaped and influenced by changing dominant discourses.

Lacanian subjectivity encompasses the subject continually trying to construct an image of themselves, from the fantasy that they have of themselves which they can never quite achieve.

3.2.2 Lacan's Subject: The Mirror Stage

Lacan's Subject comes to be through the Mirror Stage, a concept that can be used, whether figuratively or literally, to understand how self-identity is constructed. The Mirror Stage describes how the child, who previously only recognised other people in a mirror image, first identifies his own image in the mirror's reflection. In this moment, he understands that although the image is *of* him, the image is not actually him. This moment is schismatic for the child as he is now a subject, but at the same time, he is an object, from which he is completely separate; the subject is now himself, but also what others see of him (Bailly, 2006). This subjectivity is, for Lacan, a fundamental human condition. This, for the child, is the beginning of a lifelong reflection upon itself, a narcissism which exists within the unconscious subject (Bailly, 2006).

The change that the child undergoes during this process of subjectification is transformative; it gives way to a previously inaccessible situational apperception, Lacan's theory of the awareness that the child now has of its own position within the physical world, and its ability to imagine that position in relation to other physical objects. This process is an alienating experience in which the splitting of the subject results in a tension between what is captured in the image and what is not quite captured.

Following on from the work of researchers who use Lacanian theory to consider teacher identity, such as Tony Brown, I use the Mirror Stage, part of Lacan's Imaginary order, to imagine alternative ways of thinking about the formation of the identity of the SLE. There are, therefore, some assumptions made when I use Lacanian theory as a lens to examine the formation of the identity of the SLE: the first is that SLEs, being humans, have already undergone the Mirror Stage process themselves as children; and the second is that this process of subjectification can recur, albeit in a less schismatic and life-changing way, when there is a significant change to your circumstances and environment. One could argue that this recurrence can be numerous throughout one's life, particularly professionally, when new roles are met with new constraints and regulation, and the result can be inner-conflict and tension that did not previously exist.

3.2.3 The SLE in the Mirror

This section uses Lacan's Mirror Stage to understand how the SLE forms her new identity.

Even before I was appointed as an SLE I had to engage with the idea of being one, in order to be successful in the application and interview process. Having seen the role advertised internally in my school, I was encouraged to apply by a senior member of staff, who was also an experienced SLE. First of all, I needed to think of myself as an SLE, to work out if I felt I could do the role. Then, in the process of completing the application form, I began to attempt to identify with the image of an SLE.   In anticipation of mastery of this role, the self (me, non-SLE) identifies with the image (as reflected in the experienced SLE) in the hope of becoming that image. Although I identify with the image, I am also at the same time isolated by it, as it is not yet me. This is the alienation process through which the ego (the organised part of my consciousness which is trying to reason and make sense of my external world) emerges, as a

result of trying to identify with the image. This happens as I start to feel that perhaps I am not good enough to be an SLE. Gradually, as I complete the application form, trying to articulate my experience and transferable knowledge that I have in order to convince the reader of my expertise, the image takes the place of the self as I 'become' an SLE, and this is my mirror image. The ego is battling to reconcile the self and the mirror image, and works to maintain this illusion of coherence and mastery, refusing to accept the alienation that the self and mirror image create. It is the ego that speaks of my identity using statements such as '*I am unwavering in my commitment to improve language learning for students, whichever school they attend*' (SLE application form, 2014). Of course, part of this is the conscious need to convince the reader that you are the right person for the role, and a common technique used by most people when applying for a job is to speak highly of themselves. However, Lacan's ego is organised by the function of *méconnaissance*; the idea that the subject is blind to the object:

> Our experience shows that we should start instead from the function of méconnaissance that characterizes the ego in all its structures… (Lacan, 2001:7)

Alienation

The Lacanian concept of alienation has also been used to describe the sense of isolation that educators can feel with education policy, even if they identify with the image or fantasy of the policy. The continuous production of policies and strategies which are intended to improve teaching and learning in our classrooms and outcomes for students, whilst admirable and ambitious in their aims, can leave teachers and school leaders exasperated with the rate of change and unsure whether or not to invest time in something that might become a forgotten fad in very little time. The consequence of this can be an alienation from the policy; a disconnect between the initiative and the teacher/school, resulting in the policy not being carried out with the intended authenticity, or not being carried out at all.

Clarke describes both neoliberal politics and education policy as characterised by entangled relationships, lending themselves to the Lacanian lens. He sees the backdrop to this as the divide between society and education, leading to contradictions and tensions, which give rise to the state of crisis-impasse, amongst other paradoxes and seemingly contradictory ideas in education (Clarke, 2019). Lacanian psychoanalysis is therefore helpful, Clarke argues, in thinking paradoxically in order to engage with the complex relationship between education

policy and educators. One of those paradoxes is the idea of policy alienation. For Clarke, educators will relate to the notion of impasse, when faced with what he calls 'a pandemic of policy initiatives' (Clarke, 2019:6) alongside threats of 'educational decline' unless they are adopted (Clarke, 2019:7). Clarke argues that this 'policy hyperactivity' has led to a sense of policy alienation. I can see this in my own school setting where, as a school leadership team, we struggle with top-down government policy and how it translates into our context for our students (Clarke, 2019:7). The participant-SLEs in this research reveal their struggle with top-down policies that they have to interpret for their school contexts and subject disciplines, having to find a way to reconcile their differences of perspective with their school improvement roles. Linking back to the collective blaming of teachers for school underperformance, it is students, not just teachers, who are 'positioned as responsible for the outcomes of their efforts' in a constantly shifting policy context (Clarke, 2019:89).

One of the SLE's roles is to recognise where teachers have adopted government policy to the letter, without using their professional judgement in making it work for their context. Sometimes schools have misinterpreted government policy or even ignored it and then it would be up to the SLE to identify this and work with them to find a solution to the issue. One example is the Ebacc accountability measure which encourages schools to ensure that a large proportion of students follow a broad range of GCSE subjects at Key Stage 4, including a Modern Foreign Language. Some schools reduce student choice to ensure that this measure is met (so forcing students to study a narrow curriculum), while others ignore the measure and allow students a completely free choice (meaning that students are not guided to opt for a broad range of subjects). This wide range of possible interpretations of the measure can be said to be a symptom of policy alienation in two possible senses: schools might either disengage from the discussion around what is right for their students, and apply a blanket policy in order to meet the measure, or disregard the measure entirely to avoid 'playing the game'. The Lacanian subject, which is shaped and influenced by dominant (neoliberal) discourses, can choose to consciously reject certain demands and expectations placed upon them, but other demands and expectations work through discourse to form one's identity and subjectivity.

In Clarke's introduction to Lacan's four discourses (explained below in 3.4), he refers to discourse as creating a sense of social cohesion, which in turn enables us to 'ignore the alienation, and alterity, fragility and fallibility, denials and divisions that constitute both the subject and society' (Clarke, 2019:44). So, alienation allows educators to make sense of their roles, the top-down policies and interpret them in a meaningful way. Perhaps alienation is a necessary stage which allows for learning and growth in the never-ending quest to get better?

Le Moi

For Lacan, the child begins to attach ideas to the objectified self as his language develops, and this becomes the ego, or *le moi*. He can now use the words 'I' and 'me' in sentences because of his successful identification with the image. These ideas are produced by a denial of reality, as well as denegation, which help to maintain the fiction of *le moi* (Bailly, 2006). In asserting that, for example '*I am passionate that every child should learn a language, no matter what their background or ability'* (SLE application, 2014), I am making a statement about schools that reserve Modern Foreign Language learning for the high ability students, or the ones who opt to study them because their grandparents have a house in France. I am outwardly rejecting that approach, but not necessarily because I believe it to be the right one. The real 'I' is the subject, but is hidden by conscious thought about itself:

> The Subject can only come into being when it is not thinking, because the very act of any thinking that involves its ego creates a smokescreen behind which it disappears (Bailly, 2006:36).

In another extract from my SLE application notes, it seems that I am in the process of starting to identify with the image of the SLE:

> *I've applied to be an SLE for MFL because … If I can support another school to achieve just some of what we have achieved here and give other students in other schools the opportunity to love learning languages as much as our students do …then that will be extremely rewarding* (SLE interview presentation notes).

In Lacanian terms, it is clearly the ego speaking here, what I wish to say about myself. In choosing the words that I do, I have selected not to say other things. The subject creates ideas and stories about its ego, using signifiers (here the signifiers relating to the SLE are *achieve,*

opportunity, love learning languages, rewarding); but it represses just as many signifiers in order to try to hide something of itself.

Looking at my notes from my very first SLE-Supported Teacher conversation, I start to see the conflict between the self and the mirror image. I want to remain true to my identity as a classroom teacher who, like the Supported Teacher, is at times frustrated with bureaucracy, box-ticking and the continuous movement of goalposts by outside agents, but at the same time, I feel that I am becoming that very outside agent who I know I would resist if the roles were reversed. I have asked the Supported Teacher what she feels are the main issues in her role, and have made some notes on what she told me:

> *[She] feels like the head doesn't understand the pressure she's under… others in the department are not open to new ideas… needs support with the changes to the GCSEs and A Levels but not given any time for courses/training… expected to do too much when heads of department in other schools have seconds and admin assistants* (Research Diary, June 2018).

As I look at the notes, I remember trying not to seem as though I agreed with her grievances by making a conscious effort to remain neutral in my facial expressions and use of words. I am trying to be the mirror image that I have identified with in my application and interview process, and I need the Supported Teacher to reinforce this image of me. I will not be able to become the SLE in this relationship if the Supported Teacher does not see me as such. Our roles are mutually dependent, as are our identities, since in order to exist,

> …one has to be recognized by an-other. But this means that our image, which is equal to ourselves, is mediated by the gaze of the other (Homer, 2005:26).

As an SLE, the Supported Teacher's gaze is essential to my conception of self in this situation.

3.2.4 Desire and Otherness

A main focus of Lacan's work is the unconscious drives and desires that govern human behaviour. While this seems to be to the exclusion of almost all other affects, Lacanian desire can actually be seen as a component *of* other affects such as jealousy, anger or enjoyment. This is because for Lacan, desire 'plays a structuring role in the Subject', and therefore cannot

be separated from all other human affects (Bailly, 2009:110). Desire is closely linked to language, since it is the result of the impossibility that one can express one's need. For Lacan, what one desires is never what one actually needs; this creates a desire-gap, a space between need and demand where desire appears (Bailly, 2009).

Pivotal to the understanding of Lacan's notion of desire, and indeed to Lacan's thinking in the main, is the concept of otherness; in particular the small other (lowercase 'o') or in French, *le petit autre* and his big Other (uppercase 'O'), *le grand autre*. Lacan makes an important distinction between *le petit autre* and *le grand autre. Le petit autre* derives from the mirror stage and belongs to the realm of the Imaginary. These imaginary other people are recognised as 'little others', and are treated as objects of projection, since they are reflections of ourselves which give us the sense of being complete and whole (Homer, 2005). *Le grand autre* belongs to the Symbolic order, since it cannot be resolved through identification or assimilated to our subjectivities like *le petit autre*. *Le grand autre* is associated with the language that we were born into that predates us, and that we must learn to speak if we are to articulate our own desires (Homer, 2005).

The Lacanian subject is constituted from the *le grand autre,* which I will refer to as Other. For the child, at the start of life, the Other is embodied by the mother. For the SLE at the start of her journey, the Other is embodied by, in my case, the experienced SLE who supports me in my application to become an SLE, who shows me the ropes and leaves me her work as a kind of inheritance when she retires. Like the child acquires language from the mother, who is synonymous with the Other, so do I acquire language from, the experienced SLE (as well as from other places, too).

Throughout all of this research, my own desires (conscious and unconscious) as participant-researcher are central to the questions I am asking and the way in which I am asking them. For Lacan (2001), when a subject makes a demand (or in my case, asks a question), this indicates a lack or a loss, which the subject expects to be filled by the Other. However, it is impossible for this void to be filled, since the demand is never really what is needed. There is consequently a fundamental gap between demand and need, and this is where desire exists. Lacan's subject is continuously seeking to fill this void, to achieve ultimate identification, and so, while she has

no possibility of ever completely filling it, and therefore, an impossibility of ever achieving a complete identity, the affects of drive, desire and absence are always present within her (Lacan, 2001).

Importantly in Lacan's theory, desire is the by-product of language. In other words, it is the result of the subject not being able to fully express her need. The demands of the subject can only be made through language, and therefore, while some of the need manages to be articulated, what is not successfully communicated remains behind and is lost; this constitutes desire (Bailly, 2009; Lacan, 2001). In relation to this research, as a researcher, I am making demands of my participants and attempting to communicate what it is I need from them, resulting in a persistent desire that cannot be fulfilled.

For Lacan 'Man's desire is the other's desire' (Zizek, 2006:31), since the subject's desire is for that which the Other desires; but also there is a desire for recognition from the Other. Zizek describes Lacanian desire as a fundamental human impasse in which there is 'desire for the other, desire to be desired by the other, and, especially, desire for what the other desires' (Zizek, 2006:31). This research leans towards the understanding that this is a desire, not for something in particular, but for recognition, and acknowledgement, from the Other, as articulated below by Lacan (2001:291):

> But let us articulate that which structures desire.
> Desire is that which is manifested in the interval that demand hollows within itself, in as much as the subject, in articulating the signifying chain, brings to light the want-to-be, together with the appeal to receive the complement from the Other, if the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this want, or lack.

Just as desire plays a structuring role in me as an SLE, so it also does in my researcher role and in what I am trying to achieve in this study. Whilst convention dictates that I set out clearly stated research questions around which I structure my investigations and thesis, the actual thing that I am trying to discover is always just out of reach; it is only ever hinted at, as language cannot convey it, nor am I ever satisfied with answers that are uncovered during the research process. I am driven to desire what the Other desires, even though I do not know what that is. The recognition from my supervisors as I discuss my research with them, and I start to imagine that they might see me as a researcher fuels my desire to play the role of the researcher more.

Their acknowledgement that I am at times, part of their world, drives me to want to achieve that recognition over and over until the point where I can forget those early articulations of what I am asking.

3.2.5 Language and The Other

Discourse for Lacan can be divided into two different levels: that which is intended to be said and that which is not intended. The ego uses the former and talks consciously about what we think and believe to be true about ourselves. The latter is the discourse of the unconscious, which might manifest itself in dreams, omissions, denegations or, the more well-known slips of the tongue (Fink, 2006, Bailly, 2006); this discourse comes from the other. The unconscious is structured like a language and holds within it what the subject represses. Where others have deemed this to be random, meaningless and unimportant, psychoanalysts (and famously, Freud in his well-known work, The Interpretation of Dreams) have identified this 'other' discourse as the truth; that which is truly intended to be said, albeit unconsciously.

For Lacan, language was what made us human, setting us apart from other animals, and so the fundamentals of the human psyche should be found in language; we think like we speak, and we speak as we think. It was Lacan's intuition that the unconscious was also structured like a language. In his work on language and how it relates to the human psyche, Lacan re-worked Saussure's model of the sign, which described how signifiers (words, images, sounds) cannot be separated from their signifieds (meanings, concepts, ideas). Lacan placed the signifier above the signified, with a bar separating them. In this process of signification, meaning is then produced by the act of crossing the bar between the signifier and the signified. This is an important concept in Lacanian thinking, because, as humans, we are substituting images (signifiers) for real things (Bailly, 2006).

Each signifier contains meaning which is achieved through its connection to other signifiers in the signifying chain, and its place in the signifying chain. Their coherence is achieved through the network of signifiers to which they belong. One of the roles of the psychoanalyst is to unmask the master signifiers of the discourse of the analysand. Master signifiers lead to the dominant discourse of the subject, and can be uncovered in the form of denegation and

masked opposites of the speaker (Bailly, 2006). In the context of education policy, certain master signifiers such as 'choice', 'accountability' and 'efficiency' come to represent the desired goals and values guiding neoliberal policy discourse and shaping educational practices. 'Accountability' is a powerful example of a master signifier as it emphasises the need for schools, teachers and students to be held responsible and to be ultimately answerable for their performance and results. Couched in the term 'accountability' are also the performance metrics that are used to measure, track and ultimately ensure accountability. Lacan's schema of the Four Discourses (explained in 3.4) uses the master signifier (as well as three other terms) in a rotation of positions to symbolise his theory of the four types of discourse.

3.2.6 Fantasy

Fantasy plays a significant role in Lacanian identity formation: the individual is always caught between a fantasy of herself and a fantasy of the world in which she functions, neither of which are completely real; there is a constant compromise between the two fantasies, each lacking in their wholeness and their ability to represent the full picture, but fully operational in the background, disturbing the functioning of the accounts given by the individual (Brown and England, 2005:7). In this sense, Lacanian concepts articulate the interminable desire and simultaneous inability to fully capture the reality of a situation; much like the difficulties I encounter as a researcher, in the process of trying to distinguish between different role identities of the teacher and of the SLE. Thinking beyond the individual, this concept also allows me to think about wider educational policy; when school leaders and teachers attempt to enact such policy, they are caught in the space between the fantasy that they have of how the policy should be implemented, and their role in this and the fantasy that they have of their school and its functioning; neither of which are completely real. There is also an acknowledgement that the policymakers themselves fail to fully articulate what they desire resulting in a failure of school leaders to interpret it in the desired and intended way. As a researcher, I am compelled to reflect on my own relationship with education policy at government and institutional level, and I try to understand how my own fantasy of what I am trying to achieve fits with the fantasy I have of the world in which I am working.

3.2.7 L'objet petit a – the desire for desire

Lacan's work around images, desires and fantasies cannot be understood without reference to *l'objet petit a*. Lacan's conception of the *petit a* was first mentioned in a 1955 seminar to denote the *le petit autre* (small other, lowercase 'o') as the image that the baby recognises as its own in the mirror. All small others who come into being through the child's identification with other people, and with whom the child identifies, become objects onto which the child attaches ideas and fantasies. But it was in a 1957 seminar that it seemed to take on the meaning of the object of desire. Here, the object is not a specific tangible object, but rather that which one desires which is contained within a particular object. So, not the object itself, but rather what it signifies.

The objective of the SLE and Supported Teacher working together is to achieve an agreed aim of school improvement, usually judged by public examination results. But, thinking about *l'objet petit a*, is the desire the improved exam results, or is it really that which is desirable about the exam results? Rather than the exam results themselves, it could be the praise that is bestowed upon the school and its teachers, the subsequent improved reputation in the community or a validation of the hard work and chosen methods that the school has taken on. The same questions could be asked of the school improvement agenda more widely – is it the desire for a higher place in the PISA worldwide rankings, or is it that desire is desirable in itself? This idea of the desirability of desire links to Ball's ideas about performativity culture in education. The 'regime of accountability' imposed upon teachers serves to measure and judge schools against the targets or benchmarks or certain criteria (Ball, 2013:59). This creates a culture (or as Ball has put it a system of 'terror') which results in a continuous collection of information which informs the demands and expectations placed on teachers going forward. Ball explores how desire operates within the context of neoliberal education policy, and in particular how fantasies are constructed and perpetuated within educational discourse.

3.3 Education Policy and Lacanian Concepts

Having set out certain key Lacanian concepts and how they have been used by certain educational researchers, in particular in thinking about the construction of identity and subjectivity in teachers, I now turn my attention to three further concepts, that have their origins in Lacanian theory, but have been used by educational researchers, in particular

Matthew Clarke to explore connections between neoliberal politics and education policy. This makes his contribution to this area of research essential to this thesis, which is centred on the Specialist Leader of Education, a role which typifies the presence of market-based school improvement policies today.

3.3.1 Modernity and Crisis-Impasse

Clarke describes education as being in a perpetual state (at least in the last 40 years) of crisis, which coincides (not accidentally) with the emergence of neoliberal policy (Clarke, 2019). Politicians use this state of crisis to campaign for new measures and to justify the need for change. Clarke then goes on to describe the simultaneous state of impasse; the condition of being stuck in one place without change being able to happen. He talks about these two terms as if they were two sides of the same coin: on one side, the nature of a crisis is that it requires change and action, but on the other side, the notion of impasse implies the impossibility of any change or action (Clarke, 2019:3). The result is a state of 'crisis-impasse', one of a number of paradoxes which Clarke identifies in education. Further to this, he describes the idea of modernity as a sequence of crises and moreover, that life itself is organised around crises. He suggests that this is the way we are as humans; that we generate crisis. This series of crises is not simply a side effect of modernity; it *is* modernity (Clarke, 2019).

Education, and in particular, the school improvement agenda can be understood in these terms, whereby teachers are set up as both the problem and the solution. An illustration of the framing of teachers as 'the problem' is the increased state 'control and surveillance' (Whitty, 2000:283) that were introduced in the 1970s to rectify the low standards in schools that were said to be the result of teachers' abuse of the autonomy that had been entrusted to them (Whitty, 2000). The policymakers' assumption was that the problem was teachers who had been allowed to decide what was best for their students. This removal of autonomy (Hargreaves, 2000) over classroom-based decisions (and therefore, standardisation of the experience of students in every classroom, no matter who their teacher is) signifies a mistrust in teachers' decision-making and a framing of teachers as 'the problem' underpinning school under-performance. Teachers are simultaneously hailed as 'the solution' by the system leadership agenda which encourages teachers to take on roles such as Local Leader of Education and Specialist Leader of Education in order to make improvements across a number

of educational institutions (Cousin, 2019). Furthermore, the previous reincarnations of the solution of the 'expert teacher' (such as ASTs and Chartered Teachers) have not solved the issue, leading me to question whether system leaders such as SLEs will achieve what others before them have not.

The exploration of the crisis-impasse paradox is enhanced by viewing it through the lens of Lacanian theory, which Clarke (2019:4) points out is inherently paradoxical.[10] In Lacanian thinking, by framing the issue of perpetual crisis in this way, we are perpetually producing an excess or a reject – something we are not able to include in the discourse. So, this arrangement produces its own dissatisfaction: the more we try to achieve this, the more we talk about this, the emptier it gets, and the more dissatisfaction is produced. This dissatisfaction resonates with me as a teacher and school leader, but more so as an SLE.

3.3.2 Instrumentalism and Consensualism

Clarke and Phelan (2015) argue that instrumentalism and consensualism have underpinned the depoliticisation of education. Instrumentalism involves the thinking that education is for economical purposes (namely productivity and efficiency), and frames education as a means to serve the demands of the economy. Neoliberal policy often embraces instrumentalist perspectives, as both share a common focus on economic rationality, outcome measurement and market forces. Consensualism works with instrumentalism as it requires agreement and consensus with this view. Dissent and disagreement are demonised (Clarke and Phelan, 2015). As a consequence, the dominant goal of educators becomes to improve teaching in order to enhance learning (Clarke and Phelan, 2015). In the school improvement arena, it is an unquestioned assumption that it is possible to improve a teacher's practice; that there is a way to measure how good or bad a teacher's classroom practice is. Neoliberal education reforms are very much couched in, and presented with, certainty (Clarke, 2019); assumptions underpinning this certainty are linked to ideas around performativity which showcase what is easily measured (such as GCSE grades) as valid indications of the quality of education. The SLE role therefore seems to be underpinned by the same assumptions that student attainment is

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[10] As examples of such paradoxical Lacanian theory, Clarke gives: *Extimacy* – the view of the origin of the subject as both intimate and external; and also the notion of the individual as not possessing complete agency over her own actions, but not entirely 'at the mercy of social forces' (Clarke, 2019:4)

the direct result of the quality of teaching, hence reducing the SLE role to technical solutions such as observation, modelling, coaching etc. The SLE's role is shaped through discourse around the certainty of being able to achieve the goal of school improvement. If we were to imagine the role as being underpinned by uncertainty, perhaps this would bring certain advantages: perhaps SLEs would use ethical codes to guide decision-making and enjoy the freedom this could bring, along with the broad range of options for working with Supported Schools, rather than the narrow list of prescribed tried and tested 'solutions'. But this would mean operating in an environment that welcomes uncertainty and unpredictability, which education currently does not (Clarke and Phelan, 2015).

3.3.3 Impotentiality

Clarke and Phelan (2015) consider how the concept of teacher professional development is underpinned by education policy which represents the teacher's potential as predetermined and measurable, resulting in constraint:

> The imperative that teachers 'reach their potential' and yet maintain 'the capacity to continue developing' in the direction outlined by policy constitutes a condition of unfreedom for teachers. (Clarke and Phelan, 2015:265)

Since teachers do not get to decide what teaching means in public discourse, they are constrained by the rhetoric of potential and what has been predetermined for their profession; they are denied the opportunity, or potentiality to *become*, unbounded by fixed notions (ibid). The authors use Agamben's theory of 'existing potentiality' (1999:179, cited in Clarke and Phelan, 2015:266), which refers to the idea that an individual does not have to undergo any change in order to reach his potential, but that he already has some knowledge or ability, to argue that a teacher also has the potential to *not* become that potential. That is, teachers 'must be capable of their own impotentiality' (Clarke and Phelan, 2015:266). They go on to argue that neoliberal policy has worked to define what the teacher can do, rendering teachers incapable of also recognising what they cannot do (ibid). If teacher professional development were underpinned by impotentiality, this would create a culture where decision-making and indecision were valued, where teachers regained control over the power to refuse to do, or to be (ibid).

The creation of the SLE role is a disapproval of below standard expectations or outcomes. Its existence contradicts the idea that poor teaching is inevitable or that there will always be good schools and bad schools. Yet the neoliberal agenda for school improvement necessitates that some schools are better than others, or some teachers need to improve, that competition between schools and between students and their outcomes exists. So, in my role as SLE, and increasingly throughout the duration of this project, I am attempting to negate that negation. I am trying to hold on to my own potentiality to become what I might be and resist the constraint of policy that would unconsciously compel the SLE who is outside of the zone of impotentiality. Although dissent in the school setting is demonised, Clarke holds that the ability to decide not to do something is needed in teachers. (Clarke, 2019)

3.4 Lacan's Four Discourses

In this section I bring together some of the Lacanian concepts already described in this chapter (such as otherness, and the master signifier) to set out Lacan's schema of the Four Discourses: The Master, University, Analyst and Hysteric. This discourse theory has been used by educational theorists (such as Matthew Clarke, 2012) to examine educational policy and the way that a given discourse affects and shapes such policy. For such theorists it 'offers a dynamic perspective on the relationship between discourse, subjectivity and social practice' (Clarke, 2012:50). At certain points throughout this section, I use short extracts from the data collected in this research to show how I intend to use this theory to generate different possible understandings of how the SLE, and the different positions that she takes within discourse, can reveal different possible understandings of social relations and the connections between otherness, subjectivity, truth and knowledge (Clarke 2012). I then go on to use the theory in more depth when analysing the data in Chapter 6.

3.4.1 Explanation of the Four Discourses

Lacan used the term 'discourse' to refer to how communication is organised between the Subject and the other; in particular, his theory focuses on four 'others':

The 'master' can apply to anyone when they assume a position of power, at any point in time. The SLE occupies this position in discourse when advising a Supported Teacher, but the Supported Teacher herself occupies this position in discourse in a different situation, for

example, when leading her own department; the 'university' can represent any institution, such as a school and can refer much more widely to education; the 'analyst' might be anyone who listens to the Subject and brings about revelations that the Subject themself uses to deepen their understanding of themselves - the SLE can be seen to adopt this position in discourse when coaching the Supported Teacher – and can refer to bringing about change; and the 'hysteric' questions the Subject, pushing the Subject to attempt to explain and try to show their knowledge. The Supported Teacher might assume this position in her interactions with the SLE when she resists the support offered (Clarke, 2012).

Lacanian theory can give us a unique way to understand how discourse functions between people or institutions. When looking more closely at school improvement and related policy, Lacan's Four Discourses give us a way of understanding how institutions such as schools relate to other institutions, and how the SLE and the Supported Teacher relationship functions as a particular discourse within the wider discourse of school improvement. Furthermore, whilst the theory can allow us to see the functioning of how people relate to each other, it can also help us to identify dysfunction and perhaps shed light on why a subject's relationship with another might deteriorate. Since the SLE role is dependent on working closely with the Supported Teacher and the institutions by which they are both employed, the four discourses constitute a valuable framework for exploring their relationships further.

In each of the four discourses, there are four components, each with its own symbol which represents it:

The 'knowing', or the 'barred subject' ($) – the subject is always barred, always incomplete and conscious of its lack and insufficiency.

The subject is in search of an *objet petit a* and is located in relation to its 'knowledge' (S2) – this can be a body of knowledge but also an ability.

It is also located in relation to its 'master signifier' (S1) – this is the dominant signifier, the one which in relation to all other signifiers, best represents the subject.

And the object cause of desire or *objet petit a (a)* – the unattainable object of desire that was lost when the subject was divided and therefore is the cause of desire.

Bailly (2009) adds that there is no direct relationship between the barred subject ($) and *objet petit a (a)*, since the Subject has no direct access to the object cause of its desire.

These components rotate around four different structural positions; the agent, the other, the truth and the product (or production), to result in the four discourses of the master, hysteric, analyst and university. This matheme (formulated by Lacan) shows the relationship between the four structural positions:

1) Agent   2) The other
3) Truth   4) Production

The 'agent' occupies the place of agency and is the speaker, or giver, of the discourse. The discourse is addressed by the agent to the 'other'. The 'truth' is often referred to as 'the underlying truth' as it sits beneath the message of the agent. In other words, it is what the discourse is attempting to communicate, but fails to do so, so it remains hidden. 'Production' is what has been created by the discourse. It is hidden under the other and is what the subject gets from this specific relationship. The product is never the intended product of the discourse. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, communication always results in failure and it is this failure that compels us to continue to communicate, in an attempt to successfully transfer the meaning, as intended, to the receiver (Verhaeghe, 1995). The product can, therefore, be thought of as a loss, as the meaning is retained by the Subject and never captured by the other, or as a by-product or residue, since any meaning that does emerge, although a result of the discourse, was not from the discourse.

The positions of each element are important: The top positions (agent and the other) represent conscious and manifest aspects, while the bottom positions (truth and production) are unconscious, latent factors. And the left side (comprising the agent and the truth) can be considered to be the productive factors in the discourse, so they send messages, while the

right-hand side represents the factors that the subject receiving the message is to receive (Clarke, 2012).

3.4.2 The Four Discourses in education

Lacan's theory allows us to see how discourses function, as it provides unique insights into the interrelatedness of knowledge, truth, subjectivity and otherness, and

> In the context of the predominant discourse in contemporary education policy i.e. neoliberalism, Lacan's discourse theory helps us in grasping – and hence potentially resisting – the nature and dynamics of its hegemonic influence (Clarke, 2012:51).

The role of the SLE and the implications of the work of the SLE within the school improvement agenda, can be said to be a symptom of the hegemonic influence of neoliberalism that Clarke talks of. The exchange of money for the services of the SLE has market-based implications for both schools, and these implications can be beneficial, or detrimental, depending on various factors, including the success of the SLE work and the subsequent successes of the Supported School. The success of the school (defined in many ways, but predominantly by public examination results and other comparable accountability measures) then feeds into the competition-driven school improvement agenda, which was made explicit in 2012 when Michael Gove, the then Education Secretary talked about raising standards through competition (Clarke, 2012:51). The idea that schools are in competition with each other, but yet should support each other through initiatives such as SLE support which involves schools working together, is a key issue within the discourse of school improvement in the last ten years. Further to this, the freedom and autonomy that school leaders have seems to be laced with threats of Ofsted, enforced academisation, Trust takeovers and ultimately, closure. As with all competitions, there are winners and losers, but this is the price paid for the freedom to make important decisions in areas such as the school's budget and curriculum. It is this dichotomy which is the dominant cause of the tension I feel in the SLE role, and the tension that the SLE-participants appeared to show in my focus group discussions with them, and it is for this reason that I use Lacan's Four Discourses to try grasp this aspect of educational discourse, in the ways that Clarke does.

3.4.3 The Master

Clarke looks at the discourse of the master and that of the university as the two discourses of mastery which both provide insights into neoliberal policy agendas; for the purposes of this project, this relates to the competition-driven school improvement policy. The discourse of the master is associated with self-identity, self-assurance and control of others and can be seen in the top-down nature of policy implementation, as well as representing those who make policy and shape educational reform. It is represented schematically as:

$$\frac{1) \; S_1}{4) \; \$} \quad \overset{\rightarrow}{\leftarrow} \quad \frac{2) \; S_2}{3) \; a}$$
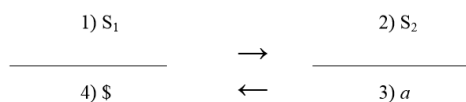
Here, the master signifiers (S1) take the place of the agent and address the other, in this case the field of discourse/the knowledge. In exploring the social relations within the realm of school-to-school support, the master's discourse would represent the establishment of the SLE, as a symbolic representative of the Outstanding Teaching School by whom she is employed and deployed, and indeed all Ofsted Outstanding Schools, as the controller and regulator of the improvement of the Supported Teacher and Supported School. The idea of a master infers the existence of a slave, or at least the obeying party who is under the control of the master.

For Lacan, the master addresses the knowledge of the other (S2) rather than the person or institution itself, or the status of the person or institution. Therefore, it is what the Supported Teacher knows, her expertise, her experience (or lack of it) and her ability in the classroom that is being addressed by the SLE. The SLE asserts herself as the master and as such, adopts an authoritative discourse.

The mastery of the SLE masks the underlying truth of the subject, since in the position of the hidden underlying truth in this discourse is the barred subject ($), which is divided. Lacan's subject is elusive and incomplete, rendering it easier to describe what it is not, than what it actually is. The ego is not the subject, since it is not what determines one's actions and words. The ego is conscious, since it is a product of the imagination, from the mirror stage where we first become aware of the image of ourselves. As described earlier, it is this subjectification which allows us to be conscious of ourselves as both subject and object, meaning that we now

see ourselves the way others see us. A major characteristic of the subject is unconscious thought, or unconscious being, and it can be described as fleeting since it is a functioning of language in the unconscious, rather than what one wants to say about oneself, for others to hear.

The following is an extract from my research diary, in which I am drafting an SLE report following a review I have carried out of a Supported School. The language I use reveals the discourse of the master:

Recommendations for SLE support
I would recommend that the head of department and KS3 lead visit [my school] to observe lessons and meet with the Languages leadership team. We can work together on a plan to address the issues below. The rest of the department could then visit too, to observe lessons with a focus on target language and lesson structure.

Planning: Schemes of work should be developed to include language learning objectives and teaching sequences for teachers to follow. I can provide training for the department on writing schemes of work, medium term planning and lesson planning.

Teaching activities: Students should be spending significantly more time speaking in the lessons so that they are just as confident in this skill as they are in writing. This will have a positive impact on progress in lessons. I will provide training on pupil speak and support teachers with incorporating this into lessons.

Tracking, monitoring and intervention: There needs to be a system to monitor the progress of all students and planned interventions and support so that students are not left to underachieve at KS3 or KS4. The head of department is then responsible for ensuring that interventions take place.

(Research Diary extract, October 2021)

This report reveals how I, as SLE, am addressing the Supported Teacher's (head of department's) knowledge, expertise in the classroom and leadership experience. During the first day of SLE support, there is an urgent need to understand what the Supported Teacher knows (and what she does not know) in order to see how I can start to support her. In this case, the main objective of the review was to find out how good the Supported Teacher's expertise and leadership was. In this extract, I am addressing the knowledge of the Supported Teacher and of her department, rather than the people themselves. The knowledge here is represented by what are commonly considered to be the main educational products: schemes of work and

lesson plans, lessons and teaching activities, and progress and achievement of students. Although I have free reign to design the structure and content of this report, nowhere do I refer to the personalities, intentions, work ethics of any of the Supported Teachers; it is confined to their professional knowledge; that is, how well they carry out their jobs.

Concealed beneath the mastery of S1 is the underlying truth of the subjective division. This is the truth that the SLE is, in fact, no more expert than the Supported Teacher and that, actually, they are equally as unqualified to know what the perfect lesson is, or how to ensure students achieve the best possible grades. Whilst on the surface, the report is full of advice, suggestions and recommendations, this is the ego speaking, not the subject. The ego is our false sense of self and in this case, my false belief that I know better. Unconsciously, I seem unwilling to show any signs of being unsure or inexperienced in any area of my role. As Fink explains:

> The master must show no weakness, and therefore carefully hides the fact that he or she, like everyone else, is a being of language and has succumbed to symbolic castration: the split between conscious and unconscious ($) brought on by the signifier is veiled in the master's discourse and shows up in the position of truth: dissimulated truth (Fink, 1996: 131).

Hidden underneath the place of the other is product of the relationship – what the subject finally gets out of this. In the case of the discourse of the master, this is *a,* the object cause of desire. The SLE-Supported Teacher relationship produces the loss of the unattainable object, resulting in the perpetuation of the desire for desire in the subject. In carrying out the recommended actions from the report, the subject (SLE) enjoys the production of knowledge *(a)* of the Supported Teachers, but this will not produce the desired object, but rather only the quality of desire itself.

In the position of agent sits the master signifiers of the subject. In this extract, we see the SLE master signifiers of 'competent teacher,' 'knowledgeable SLE', 'capable', 'confident' and so on, in sentences such as '*I can provide training for the department on writing schemes of work'* and '*I will provide training on pupil speak and support teachers with incorporating this into lessons*'. These are dominant statements which address the lack of knowledge of the Supported Teachers in these areas. These statements are designed to give the reader the confidence that, although there are some criticisms of the department and areas for development, I am also willing to support them to improve, so I must believe that they are capable of doing so.

However, the master signifiers say more about the subject, in this case me, than they do about the others. They point to the subject and do not need further explanation. You could argue that the master signifiers of the SLE are in existence well before the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship begins, since the SLE is chosen or recommended because of her capability and expertise. It is interesting, however, that the discourse of the master, with its master signifiers in the first position of agency, appears to be dominant in all forms of communication that the SLE undertakes.

Boucher (2006) writes of the master's discourse being the foundation of the social contract and of it playing a critical function in society. Lacan draws upon Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, in particular with reference to the idea that it is the inevitable result of the innate human desire for recognition. It is the struggle for this recognition that ends in one of the two giving way on desire, to become the slave. The slave then works for the master and the product of this work is to be enjoyed by the master. Lacan's master is therefore associated with control of others. This control is achieved through the master signifier (S1) organising the field of knowledge with the values that it promotes. The divided subject ($) is concealed, and the product of this discourse is a, a fantasmatic object. In addition to the knowledge produced by the slave, there is also the

> 'alienated subjectivity of the slave. *Subjectivation* by the master signifier implies the lack of legitimacy of the subjectivity of the slave and the restriction of this surplus enjoyment to a nonvocalized excess' (Boucher, 2006:274).

So, the master's discourse is not only the functioning of repression (which can result in revolt) but also of the formation of new social links, hence it playing a critical function in society. The fields of politics and governance are, for Lacan, both paradigms of the master's discourse as the inherent mastery at play risks generating hysterical revolt (Boucher, 2006).

The parallels between the SLE-Supported teacher dialectic and that of the master and the slave cannot go unnoticed. Boucher talks of the discourse of the master being inherently connected to the drawing of distinctions between inclusion and exclusion and between friend and enemy (Boucher, 2006). While the intention of the SLE role is to include, support and even befriend the Supported Teacher, the underlying truth is that the very nature of this relationship, which

is a small but significant part of a wider school improvement agenda which is driven by competition, often creates exclusion and, therefore, enemies.

The following research diary extract is an illustration of the creation of the 'enemy' in the SLE-Supported Teacher dynamic.

> *In the school carpark, as I was on my way out to speak to a student, I bumped into Amanda. Amanda was the very first Supported Teacher I had worked with on my own (before I started writing an EdD research diary) and I had forgotten that she was also a parent of one of our students. I was uncomfortable with seeing her as I felt that my SLE deployment to her school did not go well.*
>
> *…*
>
> *I remember when I first arrived at Amanda's school to meet her for the first time, we had both realised that we knew each other. I had been an NQT when she was the chair of the Derbyshire Languages Network years before. I had been at some of the meetings to represent our head of Languages when she couldn't attend, and she was an experienced head of department.*
>
> *So here I was introducing myself as an SLE who was here to support her (implication being that she needed the support and that things were not going as well as they ought to be) and she looked disappointed and embarrassed that I was there.*
>
> *The initial meeting, while pleasant on the surface, was difficult and strained. She answered all of my questions in a defensive way, claiming that any issues were other people's fault (student behaviour, sickness absence of colleagues, non-supportive line managers etc) and that the best support I could give her was to work with her NQT who was teaching her non-specialist language. In essence, she wanted me to be a Spanish tutor to one of her teachers, rather than an SLE to her. The deployment didn't go well beyond the initial meeting and all of my suggestions were dismissed and rubbished.*
>
> *…*
>
> *Seeing her again makes me realise that all of my subsequent SLE-Supported Teacher relationships were much more friendly and professional.*
>
> (Research Diary, August 2021)

Reading this extract back, I remember feeling that the SLE role I had to play in this scenario made me into the enemy of someone who was supposed to be an allied colleague during the Languages Network meetings. The two different situations in which we found ourselves playing different roles, resulted in the discourses that we engaged in being quite distinct.

Typically, during SLE deployments, the master's discourse is at work. However, in this case, the Supported Teacher does not willingly play her assigned role as the other/the slave. She refuses

this characterisation and resists agreeing to produce the knowledge required of her, thus transgressing the unwritten conventions of the SLE-Supported Teacher working relationship. In this case, the SLE's attempted mastery generates what Lacan might call a hysterical revolt. Lacan saw the discourse of the master operating profusely in the realm of politics and the events of May 1968 (students' revolt in Paris) allowed him to reflect on the idea of revolution as well as related concepts such as 'domination,' 'oppression' and 'freedom' as master signifiers (Bracher et al., 1994). The answer to the political issues of the time for Lacan, was in fact not to revolt. The reason for this

> is that any mass movement…is based on idealization, and thus reproduces, Lacan says, the resurgence of the discourse of the Master. That is, the idealized object or its attributes function as master signifiers around which a new (totalizing, imperialistic) system is constituted (Bracher et al., 1994:120).

The attempt by Amanda (and indeed any 'other/slave' in the school-to-school support system) to revolt, only results in her seeking a new master. Finding out that she had moved to a new school made me wonder if her revolt had failed in her old school too. Has she found herself in a similar situation, since she was unwilling to make any changes to herself and wanted everything else around her to change instead? In Seminar XVII, Lacan describes the master's discourse, with its inherent Revolution, as something we all directly experience:

> What I mean by this is that it embraces everything, even what thinks of itself as revolutionary, or more exactly as what is romantically called Revolution with a capital R. The master's discourse accomplishes its own revolution in the other sense of doing a complete circle (Lacan, 2007:87).

Any attempt to break away from the master's discourse is incomplete; part of what Lacan meant by 'The other side of psychoanalysis'. Ultimately, such is the dominance of the master's discourse, the revolt can only result in a perpetuation of it. The dominance over knowledge that the SLE (as the master) seeks to gain is the key cause of unease in the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship.

The resistance to the production of knowledge, through the discourse of the master, seems the main concern of the SLE when she starts to work with a new Supported Teacher. Behind this concern are questions such as 'Will what the SLE knows be of value to the Supported Teacher?' and 'Will the Supported Teacher listen and use this information to produce knowledge for the improvement of his department?' Alcorn (1994) describes how Lacan's

subject produces four types of discourse, but also how the four discourses affect the subject. He describes the conditions that are necessary for knowledge to be transferred from one subject to another:

> Knowledge passes easily when the subject adopts a passive attitude toward discourse and empties itself of any preexisting knowledge that might interfere with the new knowledge taken in. In other cases a subject participating in discourse can not only retain its awareness of its preexisting knowledge but also use an awareness of knowledge conflict to produce new knowledge (Alcorn, 1994:43).

The latter seems more typical of SLE deployments where the Supported Teacher might be more experienced and set in their ways, and potentially less open to the idea of being supported in this way. Lacan's subject can produce 'discourse in response to discourse conflict' (Alcorn, 1994:36); that is, the SLE adopts a position in discourse, which might need to shift in response to the conflict that adopting that position causes. These shifting positions are symptoms of the conflict, and are ways of navigating the situation.

While the new meanings are not ever fully mastered or entirely under control, the important thing is that they can be produced (Alcorn, 1994). So, even though resistance is inherent in the discourse of the master, the role of revolt and knowledge conflict is not as undesirable as it seems; in fact, it appears to be an essential element of the discourse, in the eventual production of knowledge.

3.4.4 The University

Although the master's discourse remains the dominant discourse of the four (Clemens and Grigg, 2006), Lacan hypothesised that the importance of knowledge in modernity gives rise to the discourse of the university as a new and reformed discourse of the master (Boucher, 2006; Zupančič, 2006). Clarke (2012) draws on other sociologists and political theorists to conclude that the failure of neoliberal and technocratic attempts at political decision making is central to the university discourse.

In this discourse, the university (being a place of knowledge) is any institution, and by extension any person (or people) who represents their institution. In neoliberal education policy this could be academic institutions, think tanks and policy experts who generate knowledge. In this research, the institution is embodied by the SLE, since she is deployed from a specific Teaching

School, which has been in negotiations to broker an agreement between the two schools before the SLE starts her work at the Supported School. In many cases the Supported School's headteacher has identified the SLE because of the school they are from. They will know very little about the SLE themselves, apart from perhaps a short bio on the Teaching School's website, stating their experience and specialism. However, they will have access to lots of information about the school: public exam results, progress measures, contextual information about students, Ofsted reports and anything else publicly available on the school's website. For this reason, when the SLE arrives to begin the deployment, she symbolises all that is known about her institution, and is presumed to know what her institution knows. It is assumed that she is a key part of the successes of her school in her specialist area, and that, at the very least, has access to her institution's knowledge and is in a position to pass it on to the Supported School.

The schematic representation of the university discourse (below) places knowledge (S2) in the first position, that of agency, addressing the object cause of desire (*a*) of the other in the second position. Beneath *a* is the barred subject ($) in the place of production, while the master signifier (S1) takes the place of the underlying truth.

$$
\begin{array}{ccc}
1)\ S_2 & & 2)\ a \\[2pt]
\rule{3cm}{0.4pt} & \xrightarrow{} & \rule{3cm}{0.4pt} \\[2pt]
4)\ S_1 & \xleftarrow{} & 3)\ \$
\end{array}
$$

In the discourse of the university, it is the SLE's knowledge (taken from the knowledge of her school) which addresses the *object petit a* of the Supported Teacher, who is like a student learning from a teacher. The underlying truth is the master signifiers which are hidden under (maybe even repressed by) the knowledge. Some of the master signifiers of my institution, for example, are 'academic', 'Ofsted outstanding' and 'leading.' These lie beneath the knowledge that I bring with me to the deployment, that I expect the Supported Teacher to listen to and use to improve their department. Beneath the object cause of desire (in the place of the other) is the barred subject in the place of production. The castratedness of the Supported Teacher (barred subject) offers some contribution to knowledge in its place of agency but is really

motivated by the master signifiers of the outstanding institution, as this feeds into his *objet petit a.* The institution (in this case the school of the SLE) enjoys the castratedness of the Supported Teacher's school (its loss and its production) but hides this under the guise of giving knowledge. So, the knowledge acts as a lure to the other's desire (Bailly, 2009); the reason the particular SLE was invited to work with the Supported School in the first place.

In the following extract from an interview with a participant-SLE, we see that the notion that the SLE's school has the knowledge that the Supported School needs, is risky and potentially flawed. At this point in the interview, Beverley is describing a recent SLE deployment during which the Supported School's leadership team had (unusually) asked to observe her teach:

> *… because you were able to make suggestions, they put some stuff in place, but it's kind of to check up on me, that's how I felt I was being used. And then after I think the last one [lesson observation], I think the head at the time felt that he'd known what was needed and then I wasn't sort of needed anymore, and I wasn't used anymore… I think that is part of the role, it's when you're there on the day doing it, you feel like, yeah, they're taking it on board, it sounds good, they've got these ideas but I never felt like I was there to see anything come to fruition. And in terms of any impact, but, is that what- that's not because of me, that's not- it's a whole host of different factors that can affect that, so, yeah, an interesting one.*
> **(Beverley, Interview D)**

In this case, Beverley feels that, rather than use her as an expert in school-to-school support, she was simply used by the Supported School who wanted to find out as much as possible from her about what makes Beverley's Home School department so successful. Rather than the SLE leading the support and deciding on a course of action to develop capacity in the Supported Teachers and help the school improve, the Supported School gleaned the information they needed from observations of the SLE's lessons, and then discarded her when they were satisfied that there was no more knowledge that they needed. In this case, the discourse of the university is short-lived. The main interest of the SLE's school in perpetuating the fantasy of itself through sending its SLEs to support others usually works by making the other (Supported School) feel castrated and helpless, at the mercy of the 'university'. This castratedness ends quickly when the Supported School realises that they can initially learn from the SLE's institution, but that their learning and growth is not restricted to the school-to-school support arrangement.

In this case, the institution does not get to enjoy the production of the barred subject in the same way that the SLE would ordinarily start to see the Supported Teacher begin to grow and change and improve through the university discourse.

The difference in how the agent operates within the discourse of the master and the discourse of the university might help to explain how the stance or approach that the SLE adopts affects the outcome of the SLE deployment. Hanley and Brown (2017) give an illustration of the difference between how an agent might operate within the two discourses:

> ...suppose I am debating an issue in public. I may decide the best way to win support for my position is being seen to assert myself with rival speakers, rather than having an informed view of the issue itself (master). Soon, the truth emerges that I do not have the necessary knowledge and cannot justify the authoritative stance I have adopted. Alternatively, I may adopt a neutral stance to the debate on the assumption that I am simply being reasonable and rational about the issues (university), whilst betraying my desire to dominate through the forms of knowledge (logic, arguments, reasons) deployed to support my position (Hanley and Brown, 2017:6).

Assuming that the SLE is always aiming to win the support of the Supported Teacher, the above illustration would seem to imply that she has a choice between presenting herself as the solution, showing how she is the best person for the job (master), or presenting her knowledge, what she knows to be the answer to the problems (university), as the solution. Both eventually reveal the underlying truth of the adopted discourse which is either the SLE's lack of knowledge in the case of the master's discourse, since there is no solution that will simply 'solve' everything; or in the case of the university's discourse, the desire for dominance (Hanley and Clarke, 2017).

3.4.5 The Analyst and the Hysteric

The discourses of the analyst and the hysteric are those most closely linked to Lacan's clinical work, and there are therefore some limitations to their application to education. However, there are also opportunities to understand how questioning, interpretation and a thirst for knowledge can be viewed as shaped by educational discourse.

The discourse of the analyst is often considered by institutions to be subversive, because the analyst does not adopt the position of knowledge, like the university does, or of power, like the master does (Bailly, 2009).

Its schematic representation shows the object cause of desire (a) occupying the dominant position and addressing the barred subject as other:

$$\frac{1)\ a}{4)\ S_2} \quad \overset{\rightarrow}{\underset{\leftarrow}{}} \quad \frac{2)\ \$}{3)\ S_1}$$

Lacan's analyst commonly has to adopt this position to become the *objet petit a* of the analysand in order to elicit disclosures from the patient. The placement of a in the position of agency (as opposed to the position of production and loss in the discourse of the master) allows the subject to produce new master signifiers (S1). This production is fuelled by the hidden knowledge (S2) of the Analyst which occupies the place of truth.

The notion of the SLE as analyst using her role as *objet petit a* to address the Supported Teacher's concerns, by luring her into revealing a master signifier for the SLE to use seems in keeping with the idea of the 'critical friend' approach to school-to-school support. Some of the participant-SLEs showed signs of acting as a coach, who is questioning and probing, revealing the analyst's discourse, rather than telling (master) or showing (university).

In theory, this approach to SLE work should lead to open discussions, collaboration and a decrease in hierarchical methods of supporting another school which might render the Supported School helpless rather than empowered.

The hysteric's discourse is developed from Lacan's direct clinical experience but in no way necessitates a hysterical person. For Lacan, this type of discourse is what leads to true learning:

> If there is one thing that psychoanalysis should force us to maintain obstinately, it's that the desire for knowledge bears no relation to knowledge… A radical distinction which has far-reaching consequences from the point of view of pedagogy – the desire to know

is not what leads to knowledge. What leads to knowledge is – allow me to justify this in the more or less long term – the hysteric's discourse (Lacan, 2007:23).

It seems, therefore, that the Supported School and Teacher would be served best by the discourse of the hysteric if what they truly want is to further their knowledge about good education, and learn from their SLE.

In this discourse, the divided subject ($) is in the dominant position of agency and confronts the master signifier (S1).

$$\frac{1)\ \$}{4)\ a} \quad \rightarrow \quad \frac{2)\ S_1}{3)\ S_2}$$
$$\leftarrow$$
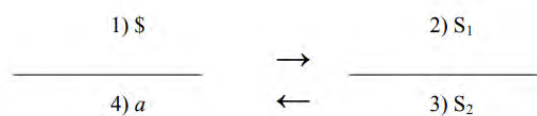
In the position of truth is the repressed *objet petit a* which reminds the subject of its divided nature and its lacking, thus serving to cause the subject to seek certainty in a new master (Clarke, 2012). In this sense, Clarke describes it as representing 'a positive alternative to the two discourses of mastery' given that

> it offers a challenge to established and authoritative systems of knowledge in education and their associated dominant master signifiers, while promoting acceptance of hitherto excluded knowledge and identities… (Clarke, 2012:56).

It seems from my discussions with participant-SLEs and from my own experience, that Supported Teachers rarely assume the role of the hysteric. The Supported Teacher who does assume this role, is someone who is not afraid to challenge the authority of the university and demand that the master signifier justify its claims to master (Clarke, 2019). As uncomfortable as this might seem to the SLE, this Supported Teacher will learn more than others, because she is not afraid to contest, critique and interrogate. The downside to this is, is that the Supported Teacher who takes on the discourse of the hysteric will never be satisfied with the answers she gets; she will only force the master signifier she is questioning to produce more knowledge, which in turn requires further unsatiated interrogation. In this sense, the Supported Teacher moves away from the hysteric and closer to the analyst's position.

Although it might be less common in the SLE-Supported Teacher dynamic for this discourse to take place, it seems that the questioning, challenging approach, if done in the right way, could make the SLE deployment more beneficial to the Supported Teacher.

Clarke (2019) talks of the wider subject of education policy operating very frequently in the discourse of the hysteric. He refers to the register of complaint which requires the incompetence and inadequacy to be identified and challenged. However, justification for challenge is not always needed. Indeed teachers, journalists and academics regularly employ the hysteric's discourse to critique policy and demand improvement, even without legitimisation (Clarke, 2019:100).

The hysteric is therefore a familiar discourse to the teaching profession at policy and government level, though less common (perhaps not common enough) in the day-to-day interactions of the school environment.

3.5 Lacanian theory in education

Generally speaking, discourse can be complex and often only understood within the subject domain to which it belongs. Each of Lacan's Four Discourses, however, despite their specific names, are not the only function of that person (or institution). For example, an analyst may function within the discourse of the university or of the master, and this would have an effect on others, in correspondence with how that discourse functions. As Fink (1996:130) describes it, 'A particular discourse facilitates certain things and hinders others, allows one to see certain things while binding one to others'.

It is Clarke, however, that has used Lacanian theory as a lens to examine the field of education policy more widely. The combination of Clarke's customised use of Lacan to explore and examine education policy and Lacanian discourse theory itself, can be a powerful tool for thinking about school-to-school support and its place within recent education policy.

3.6 Limitations of Lacanian theory

While Lacanian psychoanalysis has gained significant influence and recognition within the field of psychoanalysis and beyond, there are some important critiques of the theory which highlight

limitations in its relevance to certain groups in society. As a Black female participant-researcher, I am most concerned with feminist and postcolonial critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis, since they illuminate aspects of the theory which have not accounted for the intersectionality of my particular identity, and they highlight its Eurocentrism and its potential to perpetuate power imbalances and colonial legacies.

Spivak (2006), highlights the limitations of Lacan's theory in terms of its restricted understanding of marginalised groups in society through her analysis of literary texts; she interrogates the relationship between imperialism, gender and subjectivity, questioning the applicability of Lacan's theories around subjectivities which seem universalising rather than individuating, thus blind to the impact of colonialism and gender norms on an individual. Spivak urges us to consider diverse cultural contexts and cautions us against imposing Western psychoanalytic frameworks on subjects when this is not necessarily appropriate.

Bhabha (2004) also criticises the universalising tendencies of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and it is in 'The Location of Culture' (2004) where he develops his concept of 'hybridity' and examines the complexities of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities. While not solely focused on critiquing Lacanian psychoanalysis, Bhabha draws on Lacanian concepts to explore the dynamics of identity, power, and representation in postcolonial contexts. He questions the universalising assumptions of psychoanalysis and emphasizes the specific historical and cultural contexts that shape subject formation.

In the Introduction to this thesis, I outlined some of my personal background and educational history in order to help the reader to understand my positionality and why I am asking the questions I am asking, in the way that I am asking them. While the scope of this thesis does not allow for further engagement with the postcolonial or feminist readings of Lacanian theory, it is important to acknowledge that the limitations that Spivak, Bhabha and others highlight are significant, in particular when using psychoanalytical theory to draw conclusions around data analysis. For this reason, I return briefly to limitations of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory in the data analysis chapter (6.3.3).

3.7 Concluding Comments

Despite its limitations Lacanian theory offers a unique insight into educational discourse and has been used by Clarke and others to examine recent education policy. In particular Lacan's discourse theory, and those who have applied his concepts to education, opens up a new way of looking at the age-old, perpetual crisis – the problem of schools. In re-framing this issue to see beneath the crisis and beyond the teacher who is positioned both as the problem and the solution, we can start to see how Lacan's subject is fluid and adaptable, moving through different positions to navigate discourse as needed, depending on the shifting conditions. SLEs can be said to do the same. Their very existence is dependent on the crisis-impasse of the 'schools aren't good enough' model. However, as SLE and Teacher, the SLE is in a unique position to appreciate the constraints of (and difficulties encountered in) teaching, and the issues around school improvement. Lacanian theory enhances our understanding of how the SLE attempts to navigate the sensitivities of working in schools that are facing this crisis in an acute manner and the inevitable issues facing the Supported Teachers who work there.

4. Methodology

Having set out the literature (Chapter 2) and the theoretical framework (Chapter 3) that drive this research, I now turn to an examination of the methodological approach. However, I would first of all like to remind the reader of the aims of this research.

This research sets out to explore the experience of the Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) in secondary schools within the current political context of competition-driven school improvement and notions of accountability for student attainment that dominate educational discourse today. Driving this research is my own experience of working as an SLE, which has given me an increasing awareness of the rapid growth and prevalence of SLE (and other types of school improvement) work currently taking place in schools. While there is a growing body of literature around what school improvement looks like today, as outlined in Chapter 2, the work of the SLE is under-represented in research. I therefore aim to uncover and understand the realities of other SLEs' experiences as they support another school to improve, and the impact of this work on their professional identities and relationships, whilst also examining how school improvement policy is enacted through this work. The methodological principles outlined in this chapter are reflective of those overarching aims. It is the concern with the lives and stories of SLEs that makes the epistemology underpinning this research constructivist and interpretivist in nature.

Throughout this thesis, I regularly refer to myself as a participant-researcher. This is because I cannot separate myself and my experiences as an SLE from the research: I am a researcher who has deliberately chosen to research into the domain and specific role in which she works, which has implications for how I interpret knowledge in this research. I am also a researcher who has chosen to use her own research diary as data, alongside data from other participant-SLEs in focus group discussions and in interviews: this makes me a participant-researcher. At times I write more from the perspective of the researcher, at other times as a participant-SLE, but the two are inseparable.

The specific research aims of this thesis are:

Aim 1: To critically examine the role of the SLE and its effect on relationships within the school environment, in the light of the notions of competition-driven school improvement and student attainment that dominate educational discourse today.

Aim 2: To provide a psychoanalytical account, from the perspective of the SLE, of the formation of the SLE's professional identity.

Aim 3: To examine the wider school improvement agenda through a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework and understand how such related educational policy and discourses emerge through the SLE role.

This chapter sets out my research design and my rationale for the chosen research methods of a research diary, focus group discussions and interviews, and the implications of those choices for the nature and quality of the data. It then goes on to explain how and why I use autoethnography as an approach at the start of my research, and then how the Lacanian concepts from the previous chapter (Chapter 3) influence the research design and analysis. I will then set out each of the three data collection methods detailing exactly what I did and how I selected participant-SLEs, before going on to explore the ethical issues which I feel have played a significant part in all of data collection methods.

4.1 Overview and Rationale of Research Design

This research uses three main methods of data collection: my research diary (as participant-SLE), three focus group discussions involving participant-SLEs, and four interviews with individual participant-SLEs. Questionnaires were used to select the participant-SLEs and to understand their prior experience of SLE work, before the focus groups and interviews took place. Each method will be set out in further detail later in this chapter, but a brief timeline and a rationale for the research design and methods chosen will be given in this section.

Although the study is not longitudinal, all data collection took place over a five-year period, as shown in the image below (Figure 1). While the three focus group discussions all took place within a three-week period of each other, and the interviews within a two-week period six months later, the research diary was kept from the embryonic stages of this research project (before the research questions had been formulated) and spanned the length of the project including the writing up phase.
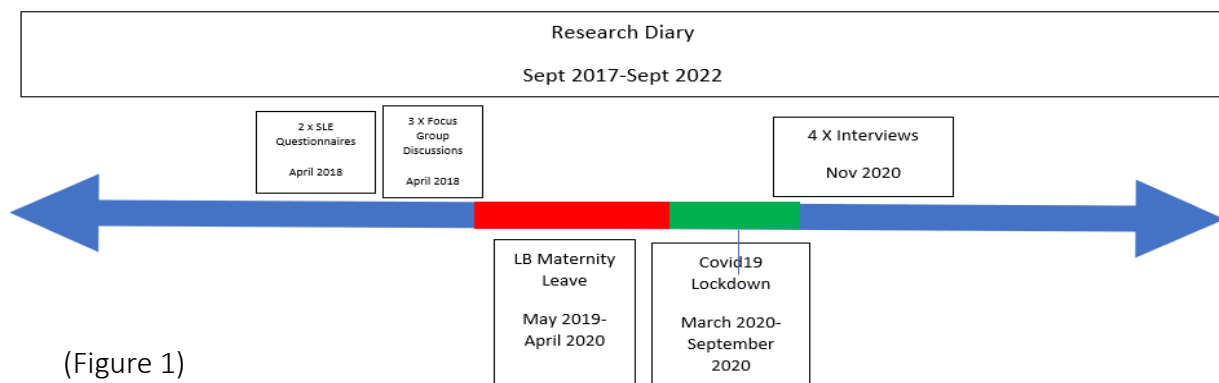
(Figure 1)

The decision to use a research diary as part of my data collection came from a recognition that my written notes and reflections allowed me to notice tensions that I had not previously been conscious of, such as the conflict between whether to prioritise my own students or those in the school I was supporting. Hyers (2018) points out the potential of the research diary to harness 'the power of immediate personal witness' as its 'unique strength' as a qualitative method (2018:27). It is from the written reflections on the day's events, or a conversation or school email, that the tensions occurring in my SLE work were brought into my consciousness, and eventually, this led to the desire to research those tensions further.

Holly and Altrichter (2011) note that research diaries ensure that 'miscellaneous entries' which document insights and ideas throughout the length of the research project do not get lost. While taking an interpretive and therefore more open-ended approach to this research project, the opportunity to note down ideas that might prove insightful and helpful to the project at a later stage has been particularly useful. In fact, my research diary reflections combined with the background reading on the context of school improvement and professional identity (documented in Chapter 2) led me to formulate the ideas and eventual research aims for this project, proving at the very beginning stages of the project that the diary was going to be invaluable to me as a researcher.

The decision to incorporate the perspectives and stories of other SLEs came out of a curiosity to know whether others experienced similar tensions to the ones I had documented in my research diary, and to understand their experiences as agents of this policy. I decided to carry

out focus group discussions to begin with, in order to uncover what the big issues in SLE work were for SLEs, as well as finding out how relevant the wider policy agenda of school improvement and its implications for autonomy and accountability was to their everyday work. Denscombe (2014) explains that focus groups are particularly good for 'gauging the extent to which there are shared views among a group of people' on a specific issue or topic (Denscombe, 2014:188). As opposed to a group interview, the aim of the focus group is that participants interact with each other, not with the interviewer and it is this interaction through which the data emerges (Cohen et al., 2018:532). Whilst my research diary and background research had already highlighted some emergent themes of the focus of this project, the focus group discussions would not only allow me to hear other SLEs' individual views on school-to-school support, but also how these views were received by others, and whether there was consensus or not over the current debates in school improvement (Smithson, 2000). I continued to write reflections in my research diary during this phase of data collection, and made specific entries relating to the focus group discussions.

At this point I took a pause from the research for maternity leave for one year and did not collect any data in this period. On returning from maternity leave, I then chose four SLEs (three of whom had taken part in the focus group discussions, and one who had not been available) to interview individually. Unfortunately, at this point, the UK was in a lockdown due to the Covid 19 pandemic and, while schools, were just returning to limited face-to-face lessons, strict social distancing rules were in place. Therefore, not wanting to delay the research any further, these interviews took place virtually through Microsoft Teams video conferencing technology, instead of face-to-face. The limitations and unexpected advantages to this change of plan are discussed below in section 4.4.4.

Cohen et al. (2018) remark that the interview can do what other forms of data collection, such as surveys, cannot; it gives room for spontaneity as well as allowing the interviewer to ask for further explanation and responses to complex issues. It is not just useful for collecting data about life, but rather 'it is life itself; its human embeddedness is inescapable' (Cohen et al., 2018:506). While the focus group discussions would allow participant-SLEs to express their views on school-to-school support and allow me to observe how those views are received or rejected by the group, the interviews would offer the opportunity for individual participant-

SLEs to elaborate on their views and experiences without the concern around how this would be received and interpreted by the others in the group.

Research diary entries were made during and beyond this period of time too, reflecting on my own continuing SLE work as well as the SLE interviews. Holly and Altrichter (2011) highlight the potential for ongoing analysis that research diaries can offer throughout the data collection process which can then be used to 'push forward the research' and 'evaluate intermediate results' (2011:44). This encouraged me to reflect on the focus group discussions and interviews soon after they had taken place.

4.2 Autoethnography

Adams et al. (2015) describe authoethnography as a combination of autobiography and ethnography: In autobiography, a researcher writes about past experiences (in my case, recent past as well as present, ongoing experiences) as well as employing other sources such as photographs or research diary entries and sometimes interviewing others. In ethnography, a culture's practices, common values and experiences are studied in order to better understand the culture (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography therefore involves selecting certain *epiphanies* (significant remembered moments which may be perceived as transformative by the researcher) to write about, as well as experiences that represent the culture she is aiming to understand and share with readers of her research (Adams et al., 2015; Denzin, 2014). At the same time, the researcher is analysing those experiences using her chosen methodological and analytical tools and using her personal experience to make features of the culture accessible and familiar to outsiders (Adams et al., 2015).

This research began as autoethnographic in nature, centring around the reflections and epiphanies in my research diary; an example being the moment I realised that my Teaching School received a lot of money for my SLE work in other schools. It then expanded to incorporate the perspectives of other SLEs through focus group discussions and interviews, but maintained an element of autoethnography throughout, by means of research diary entries and reflections. Adams et al. (2015) write about autoethnographic research projects as 'starting where we are', whether by 'epiphany, aesthetic moment or intuition' and then situating ourselves in 'our own story', but also in the stories that are told in research by others,

and in others' stories that have not yet been documented (Adams et al., 2015:49). They also suggest that most researchers will work simultaneously with their own stories, while moving outwards towards others' stories into what Madison (2020:16) calls 'interpretive communities', a collection of other researchers who are writing about the same topics and whose work may at times enlighten and critique your ideas and arguments.

Autoethnography emerged as a valuable approach for my research at the time of refining my research aims. If the research aims were born out of my own epiphanies, aesthetics and intuition (Adams et al., 2015) then it would surely enrich the ensuing project to continue to draw upon those significant moments that I had experienced and those which I would continue to experience during the length of the project. Etherington (2004) describes how understanding and analysing one's personal connection with the topic of study strengthens and enriches the research to then be able to

> '…move beyond our own story, see how it connects with the wider world, and use it to think with other people about their stories' (Etherington, 2004:106).

The process of reflecting on and analysing my own SLE experiences before listening to others', allowed me to ask better informed questions and explore certain avenues (such as the notion of hidden agendas behind a Supported School's request for SLE support, a theme explored further in Chapters 5 and 6), that may have remained unexamined otherwise.

Etherington also sees the autoethnographic research process, and in particular opening up one's stories for them to be heard by others, as critical in order to allow 'new meanings and identities to emerge' (2004:106) in the re-authoring of one's life as a participant-researcher. Embracing autoethnography as a method allowed me to self-reflect more deeply and be more open in explaining how and why I interpret things in the ways I do, knowing that this would not only be beneficial when working with the participant-SLEs, but also in re-shaping my own understandings of my role and my work as an SLE.

Adams et al. (2015) describe autoethnographic stories as 'artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name and interpret personal and cultural experience' (2015:1). Attempting to describe a human experience requires human interpretation. It is therefore

inevitable that, even when describing the stories of other SLEs, the interpretation would be framed by my own cultural experience. Autoethnography gives the researcher the opportunity to explore personal experience and reflect on this, thus allowing her to 'interrogate what it means to 'be' through reflexive consideration of stories about oneself' (Frankham and MacRae, 2011:36.

Autoethnography has its critics. According to Adams et al. (2015), those critics who reject autoethnography as *scholarship*, based their argument

> '...on the narrow view that personal, autobiographic, and aesthetic work cannot be assessed for its explanatory power, scholarly insight, or ability to cultivate social change' (Adams et al., 2015:99).

This criticism, which implies that it is self-indulgent or vain to write about yourself as a researcher and that it is not valid research (Adams et al., 2015) has, at times, prevented me from being truly reflexive in my research diary writing, and instead led me to give neutral, objective descriptions or analyses of a situation or idea. It is this 'self-disclosure' (Etherington, 2004) however, that enriches the researcher's analysis and allows the stories she tells to do more than simply describe. An example of this is my disclosure of the conflict I felt when learning of the financial implications for a Supported School when requesting an SLE's support. While the SLE's Home School benefits from the money taken through my SLE work, the Supported School pays out from what is often, in my experience, an already stretched budget, caused in part by low student roll numbers which is often a result of the vicious circle of competitive market-based school improvement – my Home School continues to benefit financially, a winner in this competition. This self-disclosure of discomfort not only reveals something about my own beliefs and values, which are important to acknowledge, but importantly enables me to notice and recognise whether the same discomforts and tensions exist in other participant-SLEs' stories.

Admittedly, what Etherington describes as a critique has been, for me, a real barrier in my research, ethically and practically: Practically because, as I will go on to describe, when writing about the methods that I used, concern about who might read my research caused me to hold back certain information (depth of feeling when expressing personal opinion that might be perceived as controversial amongst colleagues, for example); and ethically because putting

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oneself at the centre of research is exposing and revealing, and this vulnerability can be harmful enough, without the risk of it being labelled 'self-indulgent'.   Etherington (2004) explains that there is a careful balance to be struck

> '...so that I am received as genuinely open while also taking care of myself, and at the same time, trying to take care of my participants' (Etherington, 2004:83).

Although the topic of my research does not seem particularly sensitive or controversial to an outsider, reflecting on certain moments in my career that have been difficult or unpleasant can be, and has been, troublesome. There are several moments during this project, for example, when I have become overly concerned with the potential that certain comments that I have written might be seen as disloyal or worst, damaging to the reputation of the school and Trust that I work for. I have had to work through this discomfort in order to continue writing, and be determined not to consciously allow this to prevent me from writing about the original issue.

4.3 Lacanian influence on methodology

This section describes how the Lacanian concepts outlined in Chapter 3 have shaped the methodology in this project.

Firstly, Lacan's Mirror Stage theory of how the human subject is constructed has been a key influence in my treatment of professional identity in this research. For Lacan, the apperception (awareness that an individual is also an object that can be viewed by others) brought about by this new identification, is what characterises one's subjectivity, part of the Imaginary order. For this project, which is interested in how the SLE constructs her professional identity in order to carry out her role, I start with the assumption that the SLE forms her new identity, and therefore constructs her own image, in relation to other ideas, things or people in the mirror. Therefore, there is an illusory sense of self in which there is a gap between the individual subject and the fantasy she has of herself, or in this research, the fantasy of what an SLE is. My reading of this theory and related Lacanian concepts such as desire, led me to the qualitative and interpretive approach to research design that underpin the methodology of this project. It was essential to speak with other SLEs, therefore, (as opposed to other non-interactive forms of data collection, such as questionnaires, or observation) and it was important to see how the participant-SLEs generate discussion around the themes in my research aims; hence the

decision to use focus group discussions and interviews. Whilst not wishing to psychoanalyse the participant-SLEs, I hoped that what they talked about, and the nature of their contributions, might reveal aspects of how they identified with the fantasy of the SLE.

The decision to analyse the personal narrative of my own SLE work alongside those of other SLEs can be described as reflexive ethnography: while the focus is on SLE work and school-to-school support more widely, 'authors use their own experiences... reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740). Both (reflexive) ethnography and Lacanian theory value the lived experience of the individual, making the combination work from a researcher and a subject position. As well as being a 'complete-member researcher', that is, I am an accepted member of the group I am studying, since we are all SLEs working for the same Teaching School, I also take on the 'dual identity' of researcher and SLE, where *my* experience is studied alongside the participants'; and therefore, my experience of carrying out the research comes into focus at various points (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740) throughout this thesis.

Importantly, this research also aims to understand how wider educational discourse emerges through the SLE role. Lacan's schemata of the Four Discourses can be used as a means of exploring social relations, and offer an alternative and significant insight into the school improvement agenda, specifically. For Clarke (2019), it provides unique insights into the interrelatedness of knowledge, truth, subjectivity and otherness. Clarke goes on to write that:

> In the context of the predominant discourse in contemporary education policy i.e. neoliberalism, Lacan's discourse theory helps us in grasping – and hence potentially resisting – the nature and dynamics of its hegemonic influence (Clarke, 2019:51).

The intention behind moving back and forth between autoethnography and the stories of participant-SLEs is to achieve what Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe as 'multiple layers of consciousness' (200:739), where the author's gaze connects the personal (me as participant-researcher) to the cultural (other participant-SLEs). Ellis and Bochner describe that gaze as firstly through a 'wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then... inward, exposing a vulnerable self...' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:739). Lacan's discourse theory is the framework for that wide-angle lens, helping me to understand

the impact of educational policy discourse on the lived experience of the SLE, and helping me to find meaning in those experiences.

4.4 Research Methods: What I did

4.4.1 Research Diary

The first source of data in this research began as the journal I keep in my work as an SLE. I keep this journal in order to have certain details to hand when writing reports and reporting back to line managers and senior leadership teams about my findings. At the start of my research in Phase A of the EdD programme, I used extracts from this journal as data to enrich my EdD writing, and this marked the beginning of the transformation of the SLE journal into what Holly and Altrichter (2011) call a research diary. The research diary has a dual purpose: firstly, note-taking for use in SLE reports and secondly, recording significant events, conversations and observations that are relevant to my research. Since this is the source of data which spans the length of the entire research project (see Figure 1 for the timeline) I will now detail the nature of the contents of the diary and how I have used it.

From my very first deployment as an SLE, I was advised to make detailed notes, in order to have all the information I needed when writing my report. In the SLE reports, I summarise the information I have collected about the department through lesson observations, meetings with key staff, student voice exercises, book scrutiny and reviews of schemes of work. I then use this information to make some recommendations about further SLE support that I could provide, and I offer some guidance on what I think the department's priorities for improvement ought to be. The report is then sent to the headteacher of the Supported School (via my head of Teaching School) along with the invoice for the SLE work that I have carried out. The headteacher may choose to share some or all of the report with the Supported Teacher (usually the head of department) that I am working with. Once the headteacher has reviewed the report, I may be asked to undertake a longer period of support work with the department, and I would be expected to write further reports to keep the headteacher updated with my progress (if the deployment is over a long period of time, such as a term, or a whole school year), and again at the end of the deployment to summarise the progress made. For these reasons, the journal was initially very fact-based and, on the whole, I refrained from deliberately noting down any personal opinions or feelings other than perspectives which

would inform my report writing. However, when I started to re-read past journal notes for the purposes of my Phase A research, I discovered that I had in fact unconsciously described thoughts, feelings, personal perspectives, troubling observations and unanswered questions. An example of this includes notes written for a report I was putting together after an initial review of a Supported Department. One extract reads:

> *The head of department cited a good team and good subject knowledge as strengths of the department. He did not identify any weaknesses of the department, but said there were issues that affected the department that were beyond his control, for example lack of curriculum time given to the second language and lack of involvement in the year 9 options process.* (SLE Journal, November 2016, St Elizabeth's R.C. School, Day One Review).

It is clear to me (although perhaps not to another reader) when I re-read this excerpt, that there is much that I am choosing *not* to say. I do not say, for example, whether or not I agree with the head of department's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of his department. From this, I know that I mustn't have agreed, otherwise I would have said so. I am being diplomatic and non-judgemental in my attempt to keep the notes (which I go on to use in a report) neutral and professional. Re-reading this excerpt transports me back to the school and the specific conversation I had with the head of department and, although I didn't write this at the time, I remember how difficult the conversation was and how defensive the head of department came across in his refusal to admit to any weaknesses of his department. He had some very contrasting views to the senior leaders in his school about the Languages department, and blamed them for any issues that negatively affected the results, refusing to take any accountability for them in his role as head of department.

Realising that the writing in my SLE journal was interesting and contained useful information for my project, I then made the decision to consciously combine the information needed for the SLE reports with the diary entries. I began deliberately and systematically re-reading my notes in order to add layers of reflection (Cassell and Nadin, 2006). Influenced by the work of Mason (2002), I then started to practice deliberately 'noticing' more in the moment, and including descriptions of conversations and email exchanges that I thought were significant to my project in the research diary. Once the journal became a research diary, it became an interesting and rich source of data which I used alongside my focus group discussions and

interviews to illustrate and exemplify the tensions and questions that arose during the research.

Ethics of the Research Diary

Accuracy

The SLE journal aspect of the research diary had its own problems, even before being used for the purposes of the research. When working with a new school, I would always ask if it was okay that I took notes. I would mention that this would be for use in the final report, but that it was mainly to help me to remember everything that we discussed. Noting down observations from book scrutiny exercises, reviews of department schemes of work and the like was straightforward. However, the more sensitive nature of conversations with Supported Teachers meant that, sometimes, I felt it was not appropriate to make notes in the moment. On many an occasion, a Supported Teacher has become upset when describing the pressure she is under, or feeling undervalued by senior leadership, for example. It would be insensitive to continue to write whilst someone is crying, rather than making eye contact and listening. In these circumstances, I would make notes later on, but this could sometimes be hours later, changing the detail and nature of what I might have written at the time, since I will already have reflected on the day, before writing. This has led to me writing a more reflective account of the meeting, writing my interpretation of what has been said, rather than what was actually said, for example. Ellis and Bochner note that, no matter when the diary entry is written, 'events in the past are always interpreted from our current position' (2000:752). Therefore, while it is still worthwhile to try to disentangle the past from your current perspective, researchers should know that this is never fully possible. Therefore, this should be acknowledged in research which is ethnographic in nature.

Authenticity

In my experience, one of the most important factors of a successful SLE deployment is building trust and forming a relationship with the Supported Teacher. During this process, an SLE gets to know the Supported Teacher well and an empathy develops for their plight. As mentioned above, the SLE report that I write using my journal notes is read by the headteacher of the Supported School and, in most cases, the head of department and other teachers I have supported. Therefore, ideally the report needs to be honest and objective, but also

professionally written and sensitive to the context of the school and the department. It needs to clearly articulate the needs of the department and the action that I recommend the school takes in order to improve its situation. In many cases, this need for honesty can be difficult to achieve with the sensitivity required. I am aware that this has had an effect on my note taking; there are times when I write candidly, and other times (times when I am conscious of the need to use the notes in the report) when I write sensitively and with an empathy and compassion that may present a different picture. This raises issues for me as an SLE in my school-to-school support work (where I am conscious of writing the notes for different audiences), but also as a researcher who wants to capture what is interesting and significant about the experience. For Ellis and Bochner, language can never be a neutral or completely transparent medium of communication, since there is always 'slippage, inexactness and indeterminacy' (2000:747). We can therefore never rely on our field notes to tell us exactly what happened, since they are not facts, but rather 'partial interpretations' which cannot fully capture experience but instead portray meaning (Ellis and Bochner, 2000:747). The meaning attached to my research diary entries therefore is evoked when I re-read them and I re-live the experience, remembering how it looked and felt at the time; this 're-living' reminds me why I decided to note down the experience in the first place, and enriches my analysis of the written data.

As a researcher I acknowledge and value the 're-living' of the data. However, as an SLE I do have to mitigate for the gap between what I want to communicate and the limitations of written communication. To this end, I have often requested a face-to-face meeting with the headteacher with the aim of going through the report together so that I can speak with him or her about something which cannot be communicated in writing, without potential misinterpretation and the possibility of causing upset. This meeting supplements the report so that the headteacher understands the full picture and can ask any questions. As a researcher, these concerns are important to acknowledge. Since the meeting with the headteacher fills in the gaps where the written notes in my SLE journal are lacking, it was important to document some of the meetings as a diary entry reflection or memo, so that I could reflect upon this in my research. In other words, it was important that the research diary did not only reflect the experiences in the limited and restrictive way that I had to write them in at the time. Furthermore, I have had to be conscious of using extracts of the research diary for particular purposes and reflect upon the reality of the situation, given the relationship that I developed

with the Supported Teacher. For example, it would be misleading to use an extract from the research diary which seems to depict a positive working relationship between me and a Supported Teacher, when in fact I recall the relationship to be difficult and challenging, even though this this was not necessarily documented in writing.

In order to ensure that I am not inadvertently misrepresenting a scenario from my research diary in this thesis, I have avoided using extracts where notes are brief and potentially misleading and have always given a fuller extract of a few lines, rather than short words and phrases, so that the context is as genuine and as transparent as possible for the reader. However, these fears around critique of my research diary as invalid may be unfounded, if the words on the page are not an exact representation of the event. I am reminded by Ellis and Bochner (2000:751) that 'there's no such thing as orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research' and that, validity can be judged by different parameters. Whilst I am keen to work authentically and ethically, always seeking verisimilitude, I choose to judge validity and truth in my research by attempting to communicate the situations I write about authentically from my perspective as participant-researcher; I do this in the hope that my experience (like anyone else's) is found to be worthy of the readers' attention for the purposes of the thesis and the research more widely. That said, I also seek the perspectives of others through the focus group discussions, and the experiences that form these perspectives through the interviews I undertake with participant-SLEs. While the objective of the interviews, for example, is not to test the validity of the research diary, as participant-researcher I do at times, mention some of my own experiences to the participant-SLEs and this sharing of my story, however brief, is usually met with recognition from the participant-SLE(s). This signals that they recognise the situation because they have experienced something similar, or they can imagine, because of their own experience in SLE work, that something like this can happen. Either way, in a sense, this is a validation of my experiences as it can be considered generalisable to other SLEs, and potentially therefore, to a reader of this research with a background in school improvement or experience of school-to-school support.

The Master Discourse of the Research Diary

Also linked to the issue of the SLE journal and its use for the writing of the SLE report, is the fact that the report is sent to the headteacher of the Supported School along with the invoice

for the SLE's work. The report is the product (and the symbol of the service) which is offered in exchange for payment. This, I believe has a significant impact on the way I write the report and therefore the way I write my SLE journal notes. As well as a summary of their review or the work that they have carried out, the SLE also uses the report to state whether further SLE support is recommended. If the Supported School agrees to the offer of further SLE support, this means that they will continue to pay the Home School for the SLE's work. There is, therefore, an unwritten incentive to the Home School if more support is recommended. It concerns me that as an SLE (who wants to please her Home School and contribute to its successes), I might unconsciously note down more negative or unsatisfactory aspects of the department I am reviewing, in order to find more ways of offering further support. Could I potentially be focusing on the negatives rather than the positives, knowing that this is essentially what makes the school-to-school support financially lucrative for my school? Is this reflected in my research diary writing and therefore, am I writing authentically at all times?

I recently read a book on habit-changing which was recommended to me by someone who had found it useful in changing their unhealthy eating habits. In a chapter on the role of other people in shaping your habits, the author argues that 'we tend to adopt habits that are praised and approved of by our culture' because of a strong desire to fit in with the mainstream (Clear, 2018:122). Reading this, I started to question whether or not the schools I have worked with really did need all of the SLE support that I recommended in my initial reports, or whether it was the 'thing to do' among my SLE colleagues and the way I was taught to frame the first review of a Supported Department. The author goes on to say that

> ...we tend to imitate the habits of three social groups: the close (family and friends), the many (the tribe), and the powerful (those with status and prestige)
> (Clear, 2018:122).

As described in Chapter 3, Lacan's discourse theory describes four positions in discourse that one might occupy at different times. Clear's 'powerful' is similar to Lacan's 'master' which is associated with self-assurance, power and control of others. For me as an SLE, this power is manifested in my employers, and those who are more experienced in the realm of school-to-school support. When I first started in the SLE role, I shadowed and was mentored by a very experienced SLE (who was previously an AST with lots of experience in delivering school-to-school support) who showed me what the role looked like in practice. This included everything

from how to observe lessons, questions to ask in the review meetings, strategies to conduct book scrutiny exercises and student voice activities, and significantly, how to structure and write the report of the initial review. It soon became clear that the recommendation for further support was looked upon favourably by my Home School and, on reflection, I now feel quite certain that I was always more likely to recommend further support for this reason. I wanted to be praised for 'bringing in' more SLE work. Clearly this also impacts significantly on the report writing, and therefore, note-taking for the research diary. Lacan's matheme for the master discourse shows the master signifiers addressing the knowledge of the other, rather than her status for example. My knowledge and experience, or in my case, lack of knowledge and inexperience, is brought to the fore and I attempt to counter this by showing that I understand *the way things are here* and I demonstrate this by behaving accordingly.

During one particular academic year, the school timetable was designed so that I had three days per fortnight with no lessons, thus enabling me to spend full days in other schools (or invite other schools in to observe lessons, or work with me at my school), without needing supply cover for my classes. I really enjoyed the SLE work that I carried out in that year, as it meant I was fully engaged with the support and not feeling guilty or concerned about leaving classes on cover. However, on reflection, there were times when I worried that, if I did not find enough SLE work to do on those days, my Head of Teaching School would be disappointed in me. After all, I was asked to use those days to do SLE support (in other words, bring money into the school), and it wasn't always possible. Looking back, I recommended more further SLE support that year than I did in previous or subsequent years, possibly to ensure I looked busy and ultimately, to please 'the powerful': 'If a behavior can get us approval, respect, and praise, we find it attractive' (Clear, 2018:122). Again, the master discourse is at play, and I am the obeying party who is under its control.

Furthermore, I was also concerned about colleagues who were teaching a full timetable (with all of the planning, marking and admin that comes along with that) seeing how unfair it was that I had full days with no teaching. In this case, you could say that I wanted to be busy and working all of the time like my colleagues (the many, the tribe), but that I also didn't want them to see me as someone who was not fitting in to their culture. 'The normal behavior of the tribe often overpowers the desired behavior of the individual' (Clear, 2018: 123).

Professional Vulnerability

Once the SLE journal became the research diary, I was aware of the difference in the nature of my writing. I had a strong sense of telling a story for a particular audience, rather than for myself. In the SLE journal, I was writing for myself only; I would subsequently write my report for a particular audience and use the appropriate language and register for this purpose. However, for the research diary, each time I put pen to paper, or contemplated typing my reflection, I was acutely aware of the fact that others could be reading my words; I wouldn't be changing the tone or paraphrasing, but simply publishing sections of my writing for all to read. It struck me that I was deeply uncomfortable with the idea of this, probably because the research diary had become a much more personal document than it had been as an SLE journal. It was personal because, as well as recording factual information and observations, it had become a record of my mood, feelings and opinions, none of which I would ever have ordinarily shared with anyone else.

At the start of the process, there were times when my discomfort led to me to not include certain thoughts that I may have otherwise described; but as time went on, I began to immerse myself into the research diary writing process, and I thought increasingly less about who could potentially read it, and more about the questions and issues that I was grappling with. However, the same discomfort reappeared in the writing stages of the thesis when I grew more conscious of the idea of writing for an audience. This second wave of discomfort had a different cause: having been promoted to the senior leadership team at school, I felt a strong sense of betrayal whenever I wrote anything that could have been perceived as critical of my school. This concern about being perceived as disloyal had been present earlier on in the research process when colleagues asked about my research; I remember avoiding the discussion for fear of them asking to read my work, and them thinking that I was ungrateful for the opportunity to work as an SLE or to work in this school. I was aware that one of the reasons my school was so well staffed and resourced was in part, due to the school-to-school support that it offered. But the disloyalty I felt later on was stronger, probably because being part of the senior leadership team meant that my headteacher had entrusted me with upholding the reputation of the school and I was worried that my writing could be interpreted as disapproving of the some of the school's practices. These issues are pertinent to the authenticity of my writing at

various stages of the research, since my grappling with them affects how I write, whether or not I am conscious of this at the time. While these issues are an example of the intricacy of autoethnographic research and of its complex ethics, they are particularly characteristic of organisational autoethnography, where a researcher researches the organisation of which she is a member. Doloriert and Sambrook (2012) recognise that there are complex ethical considerations in this type of research, not least for protecting the identity of the participants involved, but also for the serious implications it can have more widely in the workplace. I have taken the necessary steps to anonymise and protect all aspects of the identities of the participant-SLEs in this research, as well as the people and schools and I write about in my research diary. (See 4.5 for a fuller explanation of the ethical considerations in this research.)

4.4.2 Recruitment and selection of participants

I decided to include the perspectives of other SLEs in my research. This was not only to find out whether my experiences and viewpoints were similar to others', but to help me to explore any other issues and tensions that I may have been missing, had I chosen to only use my own observations and reflections.

I decided that this was going to be a small-scale study. I was seeking more in-depth information from a small sample of people, rather than more general information from many. I was keen at this point, not to ask a specific set of pre-determined questions, but to allow participant-SLEs to talk about their work to first of all see if the ideas and issues that were important to me, were also significant to them. This led me to the idea of forming a number of focus group discussions with a small number of SLEs in each group. Denscombe (2014) suggests that focus groups, which encourage participants to discuss among themselves, can be a means of 'exploring underlying factors that might explain why people hold the opinions and feelings they do' (2014:189). I then planned to individually interview some of the participant-SLEs from the focus groups for a more in-depth examination of their experiences.

In order to find my sample group of SLEs, I first of all planned to approach other Teaching Schools, to ask if their SLEs would be willing to participate. However, I was warned that they would not want to disclose any information about money or issues surrounding the role to a 'rival' Teaching School. From the literature I had already read about the competetive nature of

school improvement, I was wary of avoiding any embarrassment or awkwardness (personally and professionally) that working with 'competitors' might bring. It made sense that any information from SLEs who worked for another Teaching School could potentially be unreliable, and put them at professional risk too, even if I managed to recruit participants. There were many more benefits and practicalities to recruiting SLEs from my own Teaching School for the study, including:

- They are conveniently based in the same Trust of schools and therefore, geographically easy to reach. The group of SLEs and I share the same Trust Headquarters which we all use for meetings regularly. This is a mutually convenient place to meet.

- No information will be shared with participant-SLEs from another Teaching School, avoiding this conflict of interest.

- I have permission from their Head of Teaching School (who is also my Head of Teaching School) to include them in the study, without any conditions attached, as might be the case if approaching another Teaching School.

- The SLEs all know me and so I do not need to establish a relationship and build trust from the beginning, in the same way that I would need to do with unknown participants. This saves time as well as avoiding any mistrust. (Of course, the fact that we know each other has other implications – see 4.4.2.)

Some of the benefits outlined above, are also explored later in the chapter as ethical complexities.

Questionnaires

In order to recruit SLEs, I emailed all 23 (at the time of recruiting for the research project) of the SLEs from my Teaching School briefly describing the research project (which was outlined in the Participant Information sheet – Appendix A) and asking for their help in participating in this research. All 23 replied to say they would take part. I then sent them an initial questionaire (see Questionnaire 1, Appendix C) to complete and return, which asked for the following information on the following themes:

- Teaching experience and number of SLE deployments they had carried out
- SLE subject specialism

- Whether or not they had been given time on their teaching timetables to carry out SLE work

The questionnaire was intended to help me to select a group of SLEs who met certain criteria outlined below:

- The group of SLEs needed to represent a variety of subject disciplines. This would help to represent a range of issues that SLEs were working with and potentially give a greater range of perspectives.

- I wanted the group of SLEs to have a range of experience as teachers and as SLEs. The group incorporated people who had been SLEs or in school-to-school support roles for a number of years, as well as those who were new to the role. Again, this would help with the range of perspectives represented in the focus groups.

- Every SLE needed to have undertaken at least one deployment as an SLE, specifically in supporting a teacher or a department in another school. Sometimes SLEs are used in a support role within the Home School or as trainer, or examination moderator in other schools. Whilst these other things are part of what the SLE can be asked to do, they do not fit with the nature of my research questions around the specific issues of school-to-school support.

While the questionnaire was not used as a research method in itself, but as a way of selecting my sample of participant-SLEs, it was still important to ensure that it was designed correctly to ensure that the questions elicited the right information, in order to generate as many SLEs as possible who were eligible to take part in the focus groups. Cohen et al. note that questions asked in questionnaires 'must be concrete, specific and focused, enabling concrete answers to be given' (Cohen et al., 2018: 472). It was important, therefore, that the questions I asked enabled me to select the participants without having to ask for further information.

19 SLEs returned the questionnaire within the time scale and, from these, I selected 12 (using the criteria set out above) to participate further in the study. I then sent the 12 SLEs a second questionnaire to complete. This questionnaire (see Questionnaire 2, Appendix D) required participants to answer questions about their three most recent school-to-school support deployments. In particular:

- Length of deployment and the total cost to the Supported School

- Objectives of the deployment

- Whether Supported Staff were happy to work with them

- Aspects of the work that SLEs found challenging

- An opportunity to include any other details about the deployment

The objective of the second questionnaire was to find out more detail about the participants' experiences of SLE support. This information would allow me to understand the broad categories of SLE experience that participants had (ranging from one SLE deployment to over ten) and therefore prepare meaningful points for discussion in the focus groups. Denscombe (2014) advises the length of the questionnaire should be considered, so that respondents do not feel burdened by the demand and potentially fail to complete it, or withdraw from the study altogether. Cohen and Manion (2018) advise that, in order to motivate the respondents, the topic of the questionnaires should concern and be of interest to them. I designed the questionnaire to simply facilitate the respondents' recall of their last three SLE deployments, and deliberately did not ask questions that would invite opinions or viewpoints on school-to-school support as a concept; this more in-depth discussion was planned for the focus group discussions and interviews. All 12 SLEs returned this questionnaire. Whilst I was pleased with this 100% return rate, I do wonder if participants may have felt pressured to complete and return the questionnaires, as they knew that I would be aware of their non-compliance if they did not.

I examined the responses to the questionnaire in order to explore some preliminary ideas for the focus group discussions. Unfortunately, the focus group discussions proved difficult to arrange. The plan was to conduct four focus group discussions with three SLEs and me in each of the groups. However, some of the SLEs found it difficult to find a time that suited all of them – many were trying to balance the demands of their Home School role (some are heads of department, and all have middle or senior leadership positions) with their SLE deployments. In the end, three focus group discussions took place including seven participant-SLEs in total.

4.4.3 Focus group discussions

As described above, three focus group discussions took place: two of the groups comprised of two participant-SLEs, and the third comprised of three participant-SLEs.

Quality of focus group discussions

While it was disappointing to have fewer participant-SLEs in my focus groups than intended, I still managed to meet my objectives of having a range of subject specialisms represented as well as a range of experience of providing SLE support, from one participant-SLE who had carried out just one SLE deployment, to another who had been involved in school-to-school support since being an Advanced Skills Teacher over twenty years ago and who had carried out multiple SLE deployments of varying length over a number of years.

The questions I asked to start the conversations were based on the emergent themes from the research diary at the time, as well as the research objectives, and took into account the information given in Questionnaire 2. The questions and prompts varied for each focus group, as the conversations took different directions.

Since the aim of a focus group is that participants interact with each other and not with the interviewer (Cohen et al., 2018:532), the smaller-than-planned size of the groups did impact on the breadth of issues the participants covered. However, it was an unplanned advantage that each participant was able to speak for longer than they would have been able to do in a bigger group, therefore going into more depth when discussing the issues that were significant to them. At the beginning of each focus group discussion, I (as researcher) spoke more than I had planned in order to get the conversations going; but once they were in full swing, I was able to sit back and listen to get a sense of how individual participants' views were received by others, and whether there was consensus or not (Smithson, 2000). For the larger group with three participant-SLEs, there was less need for me to prompt with questions, since they generated more discussion on their own.

4.4.4 Interviews

The aim of the interviews was to further discuss some of the themes and issues that arose in the focus group discussions with individual participant-SLEs. See data presentation chapter

(Chapter 5) and Appendix E for the themes arising from the focus group discussions as well as the interview questions.

I chose four SLEs to interview individually. Three of those SLEs had taken part in the focus group discussions, and one did not (as she was not able to commit to any of the dates and times offered, due to work commitments). However, I felt that she was significantly more experienced than the other SLEs and would therefore have much more to draw on the interview. The four I chose to interview had the most experience of SLE deployments and two of them had been ASTs before becoming SLEs. By this stage in the data collection, I was conscious that my research was much more significant than just the specific role of the SLE and that it was relevant to school improvement work more widely. Therefore, it would have been acceptable and even valuable for the participants to talk about AST work as well as SLE work. All four SLEs agreed to be interviewed, and whilst schools had just re-opened post Covid-19 lockdown in autumn 2020, social distancing guidelines were still in place, and so I decided to conduct the interviews on Microsoft Teams as a recorded video call. Candidates agreed to be recorded and were once again made aware of the ethics arrangements (including anonymity and use of data) via the Participant Information form.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Whilst the ethical concerns of the use of a research diary have already been considered, this section highlights some of the main ethical implications of the overall methodology, with a specific focus on the focus groups and interviews.

Procedures

The ethical procedures of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) were followed at all times throughout this research project. Specifically, ethical approval was sought and granted through the MMU ethical application process and I have followed MMU's ethical guidelines, as well as the advice of my supervisory team. Participants who were invited to take part in the research and were issued with the Participant Information sheet (Appendix A), which included information such as: an outline of the research; use of participants' data, the right to withdraw consent at any time; anonymity of participants; and contact details should they have any concerns or questions, before giving their consent. Participants were also given multiple

opportunities to ask questions or share any concerns at different points throughout the data collection schedule.

After the focus group discussions and interviews, participants were given the opportunity to read the transcripts and make any changes if they felt that what they said had been misheard or misinterpreted. There was only one participant who requested a change be made from something which he felt he had not explained clearly enough at the time. Participants were also given the opportunity to say if there was anything they had said that they did not want to be included in the research. No one asked for this to happen.

Anonymity

Participants' names, schools and other sensitive information were changed in the transcripts, so that all subsequent writing (for example in my draft and final chapters of the thesis) only contained pseudonyms. I have at times changed participants' subject specialisms, as well as their gender and the gender of the people they refer to, for further anonymity. All recordings are stored electronically in accordance with MMU's data storage guidelines, and all files, including transcripts were anonymised and password-protected.

Whilst I assured participants that I would take all steps set out to keep their identities hidden, there is the possibility that they may have still had reservations about being completely open and honest during the focus group or interview process. Just as I am taking a professional and personal risk in writing research involving the institution which employs me, so are the participant-SLEs in entrusting me with sensitive information and also each other (in the case of the focus groups). While participants agree with the ethical procedures set out before taking part in the research, they may have had moments in the conversation where they held back from fully disclosing something that they felt could put them at professional risk if they were to be identified in the research in future.

Power Relations

Whilst there were many benefits to only working with participant-SLEs from the same Teaching School and Trust as me (as detailed in 4.4.2), the fact that I knew them added a layer of complexity to what would usually be clearly defined roles as 'researcher' and 'participants.'

Firstly, knowing my participants meant that I had to be careful to stay in role as the researcher once the recording began, as I did not want to muddy the waters between friendly colleague chat and focus group discussion / interview. This was because I wanted the participants to trust me as a researcher, and be assured that I had a plan and would be sticking to the ethical procedures that they had seen. If I were to be too casual and relaxed with the procedures, this might risk losing their confidence in me as an ethical researcher, resulting in a lack of trust and them less likely to share their experiences.

Secondly, as much as I tried to perform the role of the researcher throughout the focus group and interview processes, it is inevitable that my professional relationships with the participants played a role in how I conducted the process, and also in how the participants conducted themselves. While it is impossible, and potentially not desirable, for a qualitative researcher to remain completely neutral and unbiased during the research process, my prior knowledge of the participants (their names, roles in school, their last set of GCSE results, and for some much more personal information such as the names and ages of their children) would have inevitably influenced what and how I chose to ask questions.

Importantly, there are issues of power dynamics at play, whenever people from the same organisation are involved in any activity together, since there are clearly defined roles which place us in a hierarchy. None more so than a school which has clear tiers of leadership (middle leaders, senior leaders, headteacher, executive headteacher and so on). At the time of conducting the focus group discussions, I was an assistant headteacher in school and all of the participant-SLEs were middle leaders, mostly heads of departments in their schools. By the time I had started the interviews, I had been appointed as deputy headteacher. While I was not playing the role of assistant or deputy headteacher at the time of the focus groups or interviews, this power differential may well have influenced what participants chose to say or not say to me, perhaps choose not to criticise a school policy if they thought that I would be unhappy with that, or that I might share that with the headteacher. I also reflect that, while I was happy with the 100% response rate of Trust SLEs to my request for help with my research, perhaps they felt a pressure to volunteer, that they would not have felt from someone else.

While power relationships do not seem to have significantly affected the quality of the data produced by the focus groups and interviews in this research, the professional risk remains in the analysis of the data. It is my job as researcher to ensure that participants' data is treated fairly and confidentially in this thesis, but it is also my role in my role in school, to ensure that I do not professionally or personally harm a colleague through my research. My duty as a researcher crosses over with my duty in school, and I am doubly aware of my responsibility to ensure that I work ethically and carefully with the information provided to me by participants.

Video Conferencing

Whilst it was initially disappointing not to be able to conduct the interviews face-to-face, this adaptation to video conferencing had some unexpected benefits: First of all, the interviews lasted the full length of time that SLEs had to offer (between $40 - 45$ minutes) rather than accounting for travel time between schools and in between classrooms (if they were teaching immediately before or after the interview) and subsequently being shorter than planned; secondly, the recordings were of video rather than just voice, meaning I could analyse body language and facial expression (theirs and mine) as well as actual dialogue; and finally, the SLEs were able to choose where they logged on to conduct the interview, with all of them choosing an empty classroom or their own office in their Home School. This was particularly beneficial as the focus group discussions had taken place in the brand-new Trust offices which I realised when reflecting in my research diary, 'gave a formality to the discussions which I hadn't anticipated' (Research Diary, April 2018). Furthermore, it seemed to me that the Trust offices were 'a symbol of the successes of the Trust, part of which has been its school-to-school support carried out by SLEs' (Research Diary, April 2018). I concluded the reflection by writing a 'Note to self: carry out the interviews in a different (more neutral) environment!' (Research Diary, April 2018). The participants chose where they would log on for the Teams interviews, therefore enhancing the probability of it being a neutral environment.

Other issues

Owing to the fact that there were fewer SLEs in the focus group discussions than originally planned, (there were two or three in each group) my voice and my steer on the discussions was stronger than intended. At times, the participants looked to me for direction in the discussions and I sometimes asked more questions than planned. Also, because the numbers

were low, each participant had many opportunities to speak and describe their experiences –
this sometimes led to one participant overpowering the others and taking up more time than
the others.

5. Data presentation chapter

So far in this thesis, I have explained the context of school improvement in secondary schools in England, including the competition-driven agendas which shape government policy in this area. I have also explored how the theoretical concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis open up new ways of thinking about teacher identity construction and how the SLE role is shaped through discourse. The Methodology chapter set out the research design and schedule and explained the rationale for the methods chosen. It also explored the ethical considerations as well as the advantages and limitations of each method.

This chapter aims to present some of the data collected from the research diary, three SLE focus group discussions and four SLE interviews. It will highlight the three of the main themes that emerged and the significant ideas from each of them. The other seven themes that arose are included in Appendix F for readers who would like a fuller picture of the content of the data collected and the specific experiences of the participant SLEs.

I will summarise the content of the data and remind the reader of the methodology, orienting them in the research ahead of the subsequent data analysis chapter (Chapter 6). In presenting the data, this chapter inevitably touches on the first stage of data analysis (categorisation of the data into themes) that was required in order to understand the data. However, Chapter 6 will examine the data more closely, interpreting it using the theoretical framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis, thinking alongside the literature on school improvement and teacher identity, and integrating it with other recent research on similar school-to-school improvement roles.

Whilst I acknowledge that reducing the data to themes risks an over-simplification of what is a complex context with nuanced and multifaceted stories and voices, I organise the data in this way with the intention of orienting the reader and helping them to further understand the context and workings of the SLE's role, as presented by the participants, ahead of the analysis and interpretation of data in the next chapter.

I will begin by explaining how I approached the initial categorisation of the data collected, and then I will go on to examine the approach used to identify the significant themes that were to

become central to the data analysis. I'll then set out the ten main themes that came from the data.

5.1 From voice to text

Whilst the research diary entries were mainly in the format of Microsoft Word documents, or PDFs stored electronically, the focus group discussions and interviews were voice and video recorded (respectively). I transcribed the focus group discussions and the interviews within two weeks of them taking place, listening to them again and again to decipher the words utterances of each participant-SLE. This was a long process, but a necessary one in order to have the transcripts to work from in a similar format to the research diary entries. In transcribing the data, I re-visited the content, and engaged with the participants' stories and experiences over and over, thus 'getting to know the data' enabling me to identify recurring themes, and noticing new ideas each time I listened back.

5.2 Categorisation of data: an iterative process

As Hammersley and Atkinson confirm, 'the identification of categories is central to the process of analysis' (2019:165), and, while themes might be identified early on in the process, there is commonly a shift in those categories, potentially to more abstract ones, as the research develops (2019:165). This is true of this project, as the process of analysing the data began during the early stages of the research diary compilation, before the focus groups and interviews took place. Then further analysis took place of the focus group discussions and interviews, but the research diary continued to expand and therefore required continuous analysis throughout the length of the project (see Figure 1 for the data collection schedule). The themes that were identified in the research diary before the focus groups and interviews took place shaped the questions asked in the focus group discussions; and the themes arising from the focus group discussions shaped the focus of the interviews. Therefore, the process of data analysis was iterative (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2017); that is, the knowledge gained from one part of the process was incorporated into the remainder of the research and one stage influenced the other.

5.3 Categorisation of data: content analysis and selective coding

The iterative process of data analysis was carried out by using a content analysis approach; meaning that the 'many words of texts are classified into much fewer categories' (Weber, 1990:15). In the case of this research, those categories are derived from the content of the data itself, which might be called 'responsive categorisation' (Cohen et al., 2018:668). Before being able to summarise the data into the ten main categories, a process of selective coding was carried out: this involved reading and re-reading the diary entries and transcripts to understand the main ideas that were coming through; once I understood the salient features of the main ideas being described, for example, references to (and examples of) whole school issues that were beyond the control of the SLE, I was able to start to label those ideas as categories. This was a complex process as there was much cross-over between categories; eventually this was reduced to ten categories where cross-over remained inevitable, but minimal. The iterative process continued beyond the identification of the ten themes, and I was also able to identify those ideas which stood out as outliers, or contradictory to one or more of the themes.

5.4 Main themes emerging from the data

This section examines three themes individually, clarifying the context behind some of the SLEs' comments and giving examples that the reader will understand, whether or not they are from a secondary education background. It also details the main method (research diary, focus group or interview) through which each theme emerges and where the theme intersects with other themes that arise through the data. At this stage, the themes are quite broad, incorporating different interpretations of the same idea and opposing views. In the extracts of data presented, some SLEs were answering my questions directly, while for others it came up in the focus group discussion with other SLEs, or the story they were telling in the interview.

5.4.1 The Quick Fix

"Three days isn't going to transform everything" (Gemma)

All of the participant-SLEs in the interviews and focus group discussions talked about the idea of the 'quick fix'; the idea that a headteacher takes on an SLE to quickly resolve an issue that in reality requires considerably more time, as well as the contribution of the school's internal

staff. While quick fixes might be seen as desirable in some circumstances, all but one of the SLEs I spoke to had negative experiences of this.

In this focus group (FG) extract, I ask the participant-SLEs to discuss whether they feel that SLE support works. Sharon was the first to respond:

> *I feel that, often, one of the main issues is that leadership management systems require quick fixes. They're trying to address an Ofsted report, some government initiative, and so they want quick results, quick fixes. But the reality is, when things are not going well, generally it's not a quick fix, it's something that's going to require time. And so that's where the two agendas feel slightly different. In theory, they're not different. But, in practice, they are, because the leadership is thinking, "While you've been here we have wanted X to be sorted out" and we're saying, "Well, this is going to take you at least a year, because you need to change the way things work"* (Sharon, FG3).

Sharon makes reference here to 'the way things work', implying that there are bigger issues in the school than the specific issue that she is tasked with addressing as an SLE. Participants in Focus Group 1 also talked about the fallacy of attempting to undo months of poor teaching with a few days of SLE support. Often, it was surprising if a headteacher was honest about needing to use the expertise of an SLE to put what the participant SLEs referred to as 'damage limitation' in place for an exam group, for example, as there is not much else that can be done in the few months leading up to the exams, and the students deserve to have the best chance possible to succeed. This could mean that the SLE would focus on the short term, whilst (hopefully) making important and useful recommendations for the medium and long term.

Ellen describes a 'damage limitation' scenario in her focus group:

> *I went in [to a school] a couple of weeks ago, they had their speaking exams in five days' time, had bought me in at a ridiculous cost for the day to try and undo six months' worth of, you know, unavoidable things that you think... The poor teacher had been off, she'd been ill, she'd been absent, she'd lost her voice (ha!), ironically, and she just hadn't been able to teach these students properly. You sort of think, "Why didn't somebody spot that?* (Jo, FG1)

Although Ellen blames the school for not anticipating this issue sooner, she empathises with the poorly teacher and goes on to say how willing she is to help the students, given the situation

they are in with impending speaking exams and no teacher. For Ellen, the 'quick fix' is the right thing to do at this stage.

However, the general consensus was that the quick fix, summarised by Sharon as *'Let's get someone in to sort that out'* (Sharon, Interview A), was very often used as a short-sighted solution to a long-term and deep-rooted issue. The participant-SLEs are referring here to institutional constraints that they identify as a barrier (see 5.4.4 for more on this), but this could also reveal more about the longevity and sustainability of wider educational policy; an idea that is discussed in Chapter 6.

5.4.2 Accountability

"Somebody's here to save the day!" (Sophie)

Linked to the idea of the quick fix, is the theme of who is ultimately accountable for the outcomes of an SLE deployment. While discussions around 'accountability' only featured heavily in some interviews and focus group discussions, the extent to which SLEs felt accountable or not for their work was clear in all cases. Some SLEs felt that they were too heavily relied upon by the Supported Teachers, and that if the work was going to have a long-term impact, then the Supported Teacher should take just as much accountability and work just as hard.

Some SLEs felt a great sense of accountability for the outcomes and impact of the deployment, regardless of the attitudes or involvement of the Supported Teachers in the work. The same SLEs also felt a great sense of frustration as it was often not known what the long-term impact of the work had been, since there is no built-in mechanism to review this or request this information.

Other SLEs, particularly in Focus Group 1, said that they felt no sense of accountability:

> *I don't feel any accountability. I go to help, but… they're not my classes and that's not my school* (Stacey, FG1).

There were noises of agreement from all SLEs later on in the discussion when Stacey said:

Then when those results come in, someone will say, 'what about that person that came in? Didn't it work then?' (Stacey, FG1).

Not only are they in agreement that the ultimate accountability for SLE work should not fall to them, but they also feel that Supported Schools using the SLE as a 'quick fix' are quick to blame the SLE for poor examination results.

As well as whether or not the SLEs themselves should be accountable for the improvement of the school they are supporting, participants also raised the issue of how accountable the Supported Teacher should be:

> *Ellen: I don't have any extra time on my timetable to be an SLE, I think I would find it very hard to feel accountable for somebody else's students, as well as my own... Can you be accountable if there's no time for you to be able to put the things in place that you...?*
>
> *Stacey: It is really dependent on how often you're there, isn't it? I suppose, if you do see the same people for a long period time then, naturally, I think you would pick up some accountability, or if you were doing some of the teaching of their students over a period of time, that you would feel accountable, I think.*
>
> *Ellen: Yes, it's still that short-term fix isn't it, remove you and then who's still accountable? The person who's still left there. What accountability do they feel because they're going to be the one that's there on results [day].*
>
> (Ellen and Stacey, FG1)

It is clear from their discussions, that there is no framework or mechanism for accountability; and that the participant-SLEs potentially find this uncomfortable, rather than liberating, linking to ideas of performativity that I will examine in Chapter 6.

5.4.3 Money and Payment
"Some schools have got money to buy someone to go in and support" (Stacey)

The theme of money and payment first arose in my research diary reflections when I started to realise that the schools I was deployed to were struggling with their budgets. One example of this is a reflection on an email exchange between me and a Supported Teacher:

Morning Lisa,
I hope you're well?
Sorry it's taken so long to get back to you on this but I've been awaiting confirmation from the Head. The Head has agreed to one hour but I think we sort an extra hour from our budget so if we say two hours? I am, of course, happy to come to [your school]. The best times for me are Fridays because I am free periods 1 and 2 every Friday. If this is not convenient, please let me know when would suit and I'll see what I can arrange.
Laura

(Research Diary – copy of email from Laura from St Richards, June 2018)

Laura's school is struggling to fund more than an hour of my SLE support, and so the other hour will come from her department budget. I feel really guilty about this – very tempted to tell her not to worry about payment for the second hour, but don't want to get caught out doing this. It seems really unfair.
(Research Diary, July 2018)

Supported Teachers were telling me that they had no money to buy textbooks or invest in other resources to support the students' learning, and yet their school was paying my school (which had and has a healthy budget) for my SLE work. I was interested in how this affected the participant-SLEs' work and what impact this had on their professional relationships. Stacey linked the idea of payment both to the quick fix and whole school barriers. She described how when schools have the money to pay, they assume that money is the answer and that money can quickly solve the problem, but that '*when you actually get into the schools… it's a whole bigger picture*' (Stacey, Focus Group 1). Again, linked to the quick fix, Ellen recognised that for one deployment, the school was now paying a large amount of money for an SLE to fix a problem that was avoidable: '*[the school] bought me in at a ridiculous cost for the day…*' (Ellen, Focus Group 1).

Sharon talked about the negatives of the payment system for SLEs and in particular, the vulnerability of struggling schools to SLEs who might be deliberately suggesting further SLE support just to make more money for their Home School. She also remarked that

> '…*in an ideal world, there wouldn't be a money issue… the exchange of money might not be a good thing*' (Sharon, FG3)

She reflected that a school that might need a year's worth of support, but might not be able to afford it.

I was interested in whether the fact that the Supported School pays for the SLE work has an impact on how participant-SLEs offer value for money. Despite my questioning, participant-SLEs rejected the idea that they are motivated in any way by the money being paid for their work:

> Lisa: And as an SLE, in the thick of when you're there and you're helping someone, do you have that monetary value in mind? Does that come into play when you're-?
> Khristy: I don't.
> Lisa: No?
> Sophie: No.
> Khristy: Never occurs to me.

In fact, Khristy saw a benefit to the payment system:

> They're very lucky, arguably, and that would be my way of looking at it. Not lucky because they've got me, but lucky because the school is prepared to pay to bring in some help that could actually change things' (Khristy, FG2).

5.5 Summary of data

The above summarises the three main themes that emerged through the research diary, focus group discussions and interviews with participant SLEs, and show examples of some of the situations SLEs are embroiled in and challenges that they face.[11] However, these themes mask not only a complex picture of very different deployments each with their unique backgrounds and contexts, but also an SLE who deals with each challenge differently and interprets the role individually. While this chapter has given the reader an insight into some of the practical aspects of the SLE's work and the common challenges that arise, the next chapter (6) will explore how the stories of the participant SLEs create a way for us to understand how they interpret and enact the policies of the competition-driven school improvement agenda that created their role. It will also analyse how their stories open up a window into how they position their professional selves when faced with different situations and how this affects their professional relationships and identities.

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[11] See Appendix F for the remainder of the Data Presentation Themes

6. Data Analysis

In Chapter 5 I presented an initial analysis of the data, drawing out the key themes that emerged from the three sources of data collected in this research: the research diary, the focus group discussions and the interviews. I categorised the data and described the coding process for identifying those categories, which I refer to as themes. I then presented each theme along with extracts from the data to exemplify them, drawing out significant moments in the research diary and during conversations with participant-SLEs, in order to unpick them and examine them further in this chapter.

This chapter builds on the presentation of data in Chapter 5 and analyses selected extracts of data in significantly more depth, using the Lacanian theoretical framework set out in Chapter 3. Lacanian theory provides an approach to understanding how SLEs are shaped by, but also fit into and perpetuate, discourses of school improvement and marketised competition-driven agendas. The Lacanian subject, which is understood as simultaneously rational and conscious, whilst driven by unconscious desires and fantasies, is a central concept in this chapter, as the stories and perspectives that participant-SLEs have shared will reveal aspects of their subjectivities and how they negotiate the various expectations and demands of the SLE role.

6.1   Approach to Data Analysis

This chapter uses the research aims as the organising principle for presenting and analysing extracts from the data, whilst accepting that there is some interplay between the three aims meaning that they cannot be completely separated from each other. Therefore, I aim to address the research aims by theorising the concepts underpinning the data, using Lacanian concepts. This creates a space within the research (enriched by the ideas that emerged from the literature around school improvement in Chapter 2 and the thematic analysis of the data collected in Chapter 5) to evaluate current educational practices brought to the fore by the experience of SLEs and allow for interaction between the three research aims. This space then ultimately allows for a reimagining of the practice of school improvement in the future.

Implicit in the methodological approach are epistemological assumptions concerning the lived experiences of the participant-SLEs and of the researcher, as well as the recognition of their understandings as valid contributions to knowledge. The reader of this thesis should expect a

window into the participant-SLEs' professional lives at various moments in their SLE careers; these moments are interwoven with my experiences, as documented in my research diary as participant-researcher, and this interaction allows me to try to make sense of the whole research story, with its various characters, and their interleaving plot lines and 'wicked' problems (White, 2019). Holliday, when describing qualitative research, summarises this process as 'an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact' (Holliday, 2007:122). The following section is where I attempt to make sense of this experience.

6.2   Analysis in Relation to Aim 1

Aim 1: To critically examine the role of the SLE and its effect on relationships within the school environment, in the light of the notions of competition-driven school improvement and student attainment that dominate educational discourse today.

On analysing the data from all three sources, it became a recurring theme that SLEs talked specifically about their relationships and interactions with different stakeholders (colleagues, students and others) in the school environment. Therefore, in addressing Aim 1, I will consider how SLEs position themselves in relation to others in the school environment, and to what extent these relationships are influenced by dominant discourses of school improvement and student attainment.

6.2.1   The SLE Positioned in Relation to the Supported Teacher

In all four interviews, and in two out of three focus group discussions, participant-SLEs spoke about the importance of a good professional relationship with the teacher they were supporting (the Supported Teacher), but all implied that this was, for various different reasons, challenging to achieve. In their descriptions of their interactions with Supported Teachers, participant-SLEs characterised the Supported Teacher in a number of different ways, all reflecting the tensions inherent in school improvement discourses.

Gemma is the first to respond when I ask the participant-SLEs in Focus Group 1 to discuss whether SLEs are the best way to go about improving schools:

> *It depends if the school that you're working with feels like they're working alongside you, or it's being done <u>to</u> them.* (Gemma, Focus Group 1)

A discussion ensues, and the participant-SLEs agree that when the Supported Teacher feels like you are on their side, supporting them, the improvement work they are carrying out functions better.

The notion of taking sides seems to be a feature of all the SLE-Supported Teacher relationships that are described throughout the data and is closely linked to the extent to which the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship is harmonious or acrimonious. If a Supported Teacher feels as though the SLE is on their side, there is more likely to be a harmonious and productive working relationship. However, if the Supported Teacher feels like the SLE is there to impose a new way of working, without consensus, then their working relationship is problematic and unsuccessful. In all cases, participant-SLEs say they have the intention of working alongside the Supported Teacher, but they quickly recognise that it is the Supported Teacher's perception of this intention (rather than the SLE's) that impacts on the working relationship.

Considering the literature on current notions of school improvement outlined in Chapter 2, I assert that during an SLE-Supported Teacher relationship, the SLE represents the wider agenda of school improvement to the Supported Teacher. When this relationship is going well, it is representative of the rare alignment of 'professional and government ambition' that Cousin (2019:521) described in her research on system leadership. The Supported Teacher is accepting of this new form of distributed leadership and is open to being led and supported by someone other than her line manager or headteacher, which Pont et al. (2008) described as requiring consent and cooperation. The rarity described by Cousin (2019) refers to the optimism surrounding the concept of system leadership in contrast to the hierarchical governmental control from which it has moved away, towards an approach of self-regulation for schools and educators; this had not thus far been achieved by other top-down approaches (Cousin, 2019).

In this scenario, the Supported Teacher appears to accept the notion of the SLE as expert, recognising in the SLE the subject expertise (and perhaps capacity) missing in her headteacher or line manager. She appreciates the opportunity to be supported by a subject expert and their values align in wanting the same goals of school improvement and raised student attainment

in the subject. This aligns with the current discourses of school improvement and student attainment which are pertinent to secondary education today (Smyth and Shacklock, 2003; Fuller et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the data suggests that when the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship is not going well, the Supported Teacher rejects the notion of the SLE as expert and there is a misalignment of values around the importance of student attainment and a disagreement over whether or not the school requires any improvement.

Here, Khristy, who had also been an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and had worked with a vast number of schools in a school improvement capacity for over ten years, talks about her experience of both types of SLE-Supported Teacher relationship:

> *By and large, the majority of them have been welcoming, have wanted your support, have appreciated the honesty, the occasional bluntness that there has to be about the way things, perhaps, aren't working… however… I've had a number of schools where… the member of staff themselves has not been happy about me being deployed to assist them in changing things, changing the way they do things; either be it teaching or leading a team. That is a tricky one to navigate.* (Khristy, FG2)

As discussed in Chapter 2, a criticism of the AST role was that it diminished the experience and expertise of those who chose not to apply for AST status. In the above focus group extract, we see that Supported Teachers at times reject the expertise of the SLE, potentially because they do not believe that the SLE is any more 'expert' or experienced than they are.

In Lacanian discourse theory, Khristy can be seen to be assuming the position of the master. The language that she uses referring to '*bluntness… about the way things…aren't working'* and '*changing the way they do things*' reveals the master signifier of 'change' in the position of agency addressing the knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the Supported Teacher in the position of the other. However, in the discourse of the master, concealed beneath the master signifiers, is the underlying truth of the barred subject; the ego uses the master signifiers to advise, recommend and give assurances about its expertise and competence in the SLE role, since 'the master must show no weakness,' (Fink, 1996:131); but the hidden truth tells a different story. Hidden underneath the position of the other in this discourse is the by-product of *a*, the object cause of desire. The SLE-Supported Teacher relationship produces the loss of

the unattainable object, resulting in the perpetuation of the desire for desire in the subject. The SLE can never quite manage to attain the results or the changes that she desires; they are a fantasy that she continues to desire.

However, because the Supported Teachers in the extract above resist Khristy's expertise, they do not play their role of the other, or, as in Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, the slave. They resist the master's discourse and they attempt to break away and seek a new master; but this revolt is never successful, such is the dominance of the master's discourse. Khristy goes on to describe how she manages the 'tricky' Supported Teachers and how she resolves the initial issues that she sometimes encounters.

While this research has only incorporated the perspectives of SLEs, and not Supported Teachers, to share their experiences, the participant-SLEs try to show an understanding of the Supported Teachers' situations and explain their behaviours.

Following on from the previous extract, Khristy described a particular relationship with a Supported Teacher who she found '*incredibly defensive*':

> *The teacher saw me as somebody who was criticising and her attitude was 'Well, you tell me what to do then! You do it then.' Which was a very difficult one to navigate round, in the first instance, and had to be treated quite carefully at times, but also quite honestly at times and, actually, a reminder of somebody else's responsibility that that's not the way… that's not the way we deal with a problem in teaching. It was a real defensiveness. I mean, I think the situation that existed in that school was that it was a situation that didn't have a lot of hope anyway. I think that had filtered down to some of the staff as to how they perceived themselves as failures.*
> (Khristy, FG2)

The Supported Teacher in this scenario can be said to be adopting Lacan's discourse of the hysteric. She is the barred subject and has adopted the position of the agent of discourse when she addresses the master signifiers of the other, in this case Khristy, by demanding '*Well, you tell me what to do then!*'. Khristy's master signifiers (as perceived by the Supported Teacher) are 'successful', 'knowledgeable' and 'expert', and it is those master signifiers, not Khristy as a person, that she addresses in her demands and questions. Driving the barred subject (Supported Teacher) is her object petit a, her object cause of desire. This is the unattainable object of desire that the Supported Teacher is compelled to pursue; in this case it is the

expertise and success that Khristy has. Hidden underneath the other (Khristy's master signifiers), in the place of production, is what the Supported Teacher finally gets out of the relationship; not the unattainable object cause of desire, but instead, knowledge, which is not what she desired, but is better than nothing. In the discourse of the hysteric, the Supported Teacher is on the path to knowledge, and it is by asking questions relentlessly, although never quite getting a satisfactory answer, that she compels the SLE to answer the questions, leading to knowledge.

Khristy makes reference to how in this particular school, teachers have started to '*perceive themselves as failures'*. This sounds like a defeatist attitude on the surface, but it could be the perception of (and acceptance of) herself as unknowledgeable, that fuels the Supported Teacher in her quest for the object cause of desire, in this case, the master signifiers of 'expert' and 'success'. While it is not the knowledge that the hysteric sets out to get, she does become more and more knowledgeable by adopting this position in discourse.

The acrimonious relationship could also be a symptom of the misaligned values of the SLE and those of the Supported Teacher. The notions of school improvement and student attainment that dominate current educational discourse are the very same concepts that are central to the work of the SLE, who, according to the SLE Core Training materials must 'ensur[e] there is a positive impact with measurable outcomes' (NCTL, 2014). If the Supported Teacher rejects the idea of measurable student attainment as the main way of demonstrating school improvement, or even the idea of student attainment being held as the purpose of education itself, then the relationship that the SLE tries to build with them can be inherently problematic. In this case, the values of the Supported Teacher would already conflict with those of her headteacher, since it is the headteacher who has requested the SLE support in this area. See 6.2.2 for further exploration of the role of the headteacher within SLE-Supported Teacher relationships.

6.2.2   The SLE Positioned in Relation to the Headteacher of the Supported School

The headteacher is the person who invites the SLE in to work with the Supported Teacher. By the time the SLE arrives in the Supported School on the first day, she has already had some

contact with the headteacher by phone or email in which the headteacher has described the situation and the reasons for requesting SLE support. It is the background information given in this contact with the headteacher that seems to frame how the SLE perceives the Supported Teacher, at least at the beginnings of the deployment.

Participant-SLEs in the focus group discussions and interviews describe these initial conversations with the headteacher as significant, as they reveal the headteacher's view of how well (or not) the Supported Teacher is doing her job. This in turn, often framed the way in which the SLE first viewed the Supported Teacher and positioned them within the school improvement discourse. For example, in Focus Group 1, Stacey talked about a time when a headteacher of a Supported School gave her some background information on the department in advance of Stacey starting her SLE deployment; he blamed the head of department for the poor performance of the students in the department, but did not acknowledge any of his own, or the school's, failings in this. So, the blame was placed fully on one person:

> *Like, the school that I went into more recently, the headteacher made a massive thing of saying that he was a History teacher first, told me all about his History [teaching experience], and then said, "They haven't even done their coursework because she's not done the coursework properly, and they haven't done this…" I'm just sitting there thinking "but I don't understand why you're not [helping]… you're a History teacher, so I don't know why you're not breaking up the classes…." There was just no involvement, like "I'm a headteacher, so I sit here, and I do this."*
> (Stacey, FG1)

This approach to talking about colleagues seems to conflict with Stacey's beliefs about how problems should be dealt with in schools, especially when it concerns students and their learning. While the intention of the headteacher was to blame the Supported Teacher and tell Stacey what has gone wrong, the consequence here is that he reveals to Stacey how things work in his school, which is that there is no team effort in helping to resolve an issue with a class or department. Instead, the head of department is fully accountable, and then blamed entirely when things go wrong. The headteacher has failed in his attempt to sell a certain narrative to Stacey about the Supported Teacher, and Stacey is empathetic with the situation of Supported Teacher before she has even met her. While the headteacher is driven by the discourse of student attainment (focusing on the coursework issue for a GCSE class), Stacey is

more interested in how the lack of support (inadvertently revealed by the headteacher) has contributed to the mistakes the Supported Teacher has been making.

One could assert that the Lacanian concepts of desire and otherness are inherent in the SLE-Supported Teacher relationship, since it is intrinsic to the relationship that one is positioned as knowledgeable and expert, and the other as lacking in, but desiring of, knowledge and expertise. However, in Stacey's description of the scenario above, it is the headteacher who desires from a member of his own staff (the Supported Teacher) what she can never fully achieve. The headteacher is continuously seeking to fill the void of his own lack, but what he desires (the improvement of the Supported Teacher's classroom practice in this case) is never actually what is needed. Lacan's subject never fully manages to articulate his desire which leads to a loss, a by-product consisting of what is not successfully communicated – this is desire (Lacan, 2001). This propels the subject to continue to make demands of the Other, indicating a loss which he expects to be filled by the Other, and so on.

In presenting the Supported Teacher in a negative way, the headteacher is expressing his frustration at not being able to successfully articulate his desires, whilst also revealing his own deficiency in being able to achieve what he desires.

In the same focus group, Ellen described a similar situation (described in Chapter 5) in which she was requested to resolve a situation in a Supported School where a single teacher had been blamed for not preparing the students for their exams:

> *The poor teacher had been off… You sort of think "Why didn't somebody spot that? Why didn't you change the classes around?"* (Ellen, FG1)

Again, the approach of the school clashes with the values of the SLE and the attempt to blame the Supported Teacher lands differently as the SLE sympathises with the lack of support that she has been given by her school.

The theme of the hidden agenda, as presented in Chapter 5, arose when participant-SLEs discussed their initial conversations with headteachers. Beverley expressed her frustration in her interview that her role as SLE was exploited by headteachers who had hidden agendas:

> *Yes, they wanted me to go in there and support but was I also being used as another way of – for their management and appraisal process… and that was really uncomfortable.*
> (Beverley, Interview D)

In this case, and in others mentioned by participant-SLEs, the headteacher represents the competitive nature of the school system, whereby they are looking to expediate the removal of an underperforming teacher by using an SLE's evidence. Participant-SLEs appear to recognise this as performative discourses playing out in an extreme form, and judge it as unfair, usually taking the side of the Supported Teacher. Beverley sees the Supported Teacher in one of her deployments as 'in quite a vulnerable position' (Beverley, Interview D) knowing that her review of the department would probably uncover issues that could then be used against the Supported Teacher.

There is an understanding that performative judgements are not the full story and sometimes they stem from a misunderstanding of the subject specialism, particularly if there is no subject specialist on the senior leadership team. Beverley says that it is her job as SLE to bridge that subject knowledge gap between the department and the leadership team:

> *…because each subject has their own nuanced challenges, don't they, I think… so then we become a bit of a spokesperson for that department or for that team… they're actually working within these parameters and they're trying really hard to do that.*
> (Beverley, Interview D)

Beverley implies here that reducing this department's work down to numbers does not represent accurately the difficult circumstances they are facing and the hard work they are putting in. This also suggests that there are whole school policies or conditions that are a barrier to this particular department, that haven't been recognised as such by the headteacher. The role of the SLE as 'spokesperson' would be to identify these barriers and explain to the headteacher how they present a challenge to the Supported Department or Teacher.

6.2.3   The SLE Positioned in Relation to their Home School

The coding of the research diary entries revealed a recurring theme of the impact of SLE work on my Home School. Although the majority of participant-SLEs did not seem to experience this

tension in focus group discussions or interviews as acutely as I had (and still do) in my SLE work, it was still a subtle but persistent theme that emerged across all other topics of conversation.

In the following extract from Focus Group 1, two of the participant-SLEs discuss how their SLE work impacts on their Home School. Ellen says:

> *The impact on leaving your classes is hard, especially with GCSE groups or even with year seven, because you try and often hit the classes who in inverted commas 'count less,' as in they're not as imminent and that then, potentially, means you end up with a very broken relationship with younger students that isn't good going forward. Cos if you mess up those foundation stones you're gonna just reap that problem later on. If you think of the impact of that combined with, maybe, year seven also having a trainee teacher, then you're off on cover with them, and is there a bit of instability then created?*
> (Ellen, FG1)

In this focus group, the participant-SLEs discuss the impact of SLE work on their classes in their Home Schools. Ellen talks of the idea of some classes 'counting less' meaning that her Year 7s would not be as important (or urgent) as Year 11s, for example, since their GCSE exams are five years away. Implicit in this statement is the accountability Ellen feels for her GCSE results, compared to the non-examined progress of her other year groups. Her decision-making is tied to the notion of performativity (Ball, 2003), in which, despite her appearing to make a free autonomous decision as to which class to leave on supply cover while she supports another school, she is compelled to choose according to how she is evaluated, measured and even valued. Ellen talks of 'reap[ing] problem[s] later on' and creating 'instability' illustrating the impact on her relationships with her students.

While system leaders are entrusted with the moral imperative to 'strive for the success of all schools and their students, not just their own' (Hargreaves, 2010:11), the culture of performativity within which they are operating ensures that it is the students in the school where they are formally accountable for the measurable outcomes of students' attainment, that benefit most from their expertise.

In a research diary entry that I wrote in the school summer holidays, I reflect on how the SLE work that I had undertaken that term, resulted in me catching up on Home School work in my

holidays. In the extract below, I have just agreed to take on a deployment of SLE support where I would work with the Languages departments in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) of five schools.

> *Why have I agreed to take on this extra SLE work? I felt as though I should agree to it, as I suspect that people think I don't have as many leadership responsibilities as others in SLT, and so, by saying yes, it looks like I am not shying away from work. But here I am working in the summer holidays preparing a plan for this school-to-school support because I didn't have time to do it before the end of term. I don't mind working in the holidays, and I often do, like prepping for results days or INSET days; these are all givens. But, I'm preparing a school-to-school support plan in the first week of my summer holiday, and I feel compelled to make it look detailed enough to warrant the amount of money that the MAT will pay us.*
> (Research Diary, July 2021)

In this extract, there are two decisions that I made autonomously, that I now question and examine here: the decision to agree to more SLE support and the decision to make the plan look detailed to justify how much the MAT would be charged. Wider influences and previous experiences which all belong to what Ball (2003) would call a culture of performativity, can all be said to have influenced my decision-making process. I am simultaneously complying with and challenging this culture, by questioning it. I am conscious that several SLEs from Teaching Schools across Greater Manchester submitted bids to undertake this large-scale long-term school-to-school support, and that it was me and my school, that succeeded. I felt that this was in part due to the proposal I had written, but mainly because of the reputation that my school has for its public examination results. This added to the pressure I felt to incorporate specifics relating to support activities that would ultimately improve examination results. The plan I am writing underpins the work am going to undertake over the course of the following academic year; work which will be performatively constructed to ensure that it meets the targets set out in the plan, as well as meeting the expectations of those who are paying for the support. Looking back at the plan (see extract below), the language I use is similar to the language used in Ofsted's new framework:

> *'The network will create more opportunities… for all to practise articulating the Curriculum Intent, Implementation and Impact.'*

> *'All leaders and teachers of Languages understand the principles of Curriculum sequencing, and can articulate the rationale for the schemes of work that are currently in place for KS3 and KS4. All teachers must be able to explain what they are teaching,*

why they are teaching it, and why they are teaching it at this particular point in the sequence.' (Research Diary, July 2021)

While, the plan does not mention the word 'Ofsted', the language is progressively performative, ensuring that the Supported School is convinced that I (the SLE) will prioritise preparing their staff for an Ofsted Inspection.

Furthermore, I am especially drawn to my comments around working in the holidays. It is not unusual for teachers to work in the holidays, but implicit in my comments are the fact that this work is for a Supported School rather than my Home School. The tension between the two could be said to be underpinned by a feeling of exploitation. The Home School pays my wages, and so I do not begrudge working hard, even at weekends, since I am being paid to do so. If I don't finish my work within working hours, or term-time, I am inclined to blame my own time management or allude to the peaks and troughs of the typical school calendar, as well as the abundance of holidays that we get. However, it appears that I am not so forgiving of the SLE work that seeps into non-school hours, or when I spent time in the week doing school-to-school support, and then my Home School work has to be done during the weekend. Strengthening this resentment is the suspicion that the money paid to my Home School by the Supported School is going to other areas, rather than where the deficit (my department, me) comes from.

While the marketisation of education has been widely explored, the concept of teachers as commodities (Parkison, 2016; Newman and Jahdi, 2009) might account for the personal tensions in the SLE role. Key relationships in education, such as those of the student with their teacher, and the SLE with their Supported Teacher, are transformed into customer relationships. Parkison describes the consequences of not investing in teacher training sufficiently, a description which can be extended to SLE training.

The resulting production of the commodity – teachers - becomes subject to the same drive for efficiency found in market-based commercial production. The long-term consequences of these minimally prepared teachers influence not only students, but also the economic, social, and political climate of our communities and society (Parkison, 2016:109).

The consequences of SLEs as commodities can be far-reaching and affect a number of schools, not just the Home School. Fine and Saad-Filho note that most of Marx's contemporaries and subsequent economists 'see the relationship between workers and the products of their labour… [as] a relationship between things' (2010:25). Whereas, for Marx, this reflects the social organisation of labour that has produced these commodities. So, although there are definite social relationships between workers and capitalists, these are expressed, in part, as relationships between things. Fine and Saad-Filho continue: 'These social relations are further mystified when money enters into consideration, and everything is analysed in terms of price.' (2010:25) For Marx, this perspective on the capitalist world is the fetishism of commodities. The role of the teacher comprises a number of complex relationships with students, parents, the community, colleagues, your headteacher etc. The role of the SLE involves these relationships and more, since the relationships you have as teacher with your colleagues, now take on a different facet. My relationships with my seniors in school can now be analysed in terms of price; that is, how much I am worth to the organisation and how much value for money I am. To this end, although I have been critical of the way I have had to use my own time to work with other schools, I find myself, as I mentioned in the introduction, keen to show that I am good value for money. I do this by offering to use free periods and go to schools after school has finished for the day. I tend to write unnecessarily lengthy reports to describe the support work I have done in detail in order to impress those who read it. In this way, it could be said that I contribute to this fetishism of commodities by feeling the need to over-produce reports (the product of my labour) and reduce the overheads for the school (the capitalist) therefore, expressing my role as the 'worker'. The following extract was written following a visit to a Supported School, reflecting on how unfair the payment system for SLE support seems:

> *I felt really frustrated today at the conditions of the building and lack of resources that those students had. When I recommended that they buy Vocab Express for the GCSE students to revise at home from, she almost laughed; "We've asked before, there's nothing in the budget." It shouldn't be that children end up in a lovely bright building with textbooks and technology if they happen to live near a great school, but they spend 5 years of their life in an under-resourced school where teachers are not given the resources they need to teach, just because of your postcode. I also feel guilty. I'm back at my [home] school planning lessons with an array of resources at my disposal. It can't be fair that her school pays mine for the support I give. They really need that money.*

(Research Diary, January 2019)

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The power imbalance of the Home School and the Supported School in this relationship leads to the worsening of the Supported School's economic situation, and the bolstering of the Home School's budget. In describing how Marxist theory can apply to education, Anyon (2011) explains that Capitalism is prone to crisis. Marx's Labour Theory of Value describes how crises occur because of the inherent contradictions in the capitalist system. The value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labour put in, in order to produce it; so called 'socially necessary labour'. It is as though the worker's day is split into two: the labour exerted in the first part of the day is equal to the market value of the commodity produced (that is, the amount the worker is paid for his labour is equal to the amount the product is sold for). The second part of the day, however, is surplus labour and this is not reflected in the worker's wage. So, if profit from surplus labour is the basis for the capitalist system, then the incentive for capitalists is to over-produce. My compulsion, therefore, to over-produce can be understood within this culture. Secondly, there needs to be a market for the product for it to continue to be viable. That is, there needs to be a continual supply of weak schools to become Supported Schools. Then, weak schools need to be able to afford to buy in the SLE support for the system to continue to work. If at any point there are more SLEs than schools willing to pay for their services, the system collapses. Linking back to the notion of the competition-driven school improvement agenda, it is necessary for there to be weaker schools, in order for stronger schools to exist, creating the choice needed for parents within the schools market.

6.3   Analysis in Relation to Aim 2

Aim 2: To provide a psychoanalytical account, from the perspective of the SLE, of the formation of the SLE's professional identity.

The SLE straddles two different worlds: her teacher world and her SLE world. Her teacher identity has been shaped over time by dominant discourses and institutional ways of being and doing into which she has been inducted; and her SLE identity, the newer of the two must assume different positions in discourse in order to achieve the desired outcome of that particular deployment. As the Lacanian subject is always caught between the fantasy that she has of herself and the fantasy of the world around her, neither of which are completely real,

the SLE can never fully articulate what she desires, resulting in a constant compromise between the two fantasies (Brown and England, 2005).

While the SLE is in her Supported School, she is sensitive to the plight of the Supported Teacher, and she asserts her position in discourse accordingly to assure others of her ability (through master signifiers), but also to demand their attention and commitment. Whilst aware of the specific context of the Supported School, and its unique challenges, she is dependent on her Home School success and draws on her experience there to solve problems.

And the same is true when she is in her Home School. Here she feels more comfortable and there is less need for her to take on the position of the master in discourse, for example, as she is known and respected in the workplace.

6.3.1 Conflicting Identities

Thus far, the research diary extracts that I have cited have portrayed a negativity with regards to the SLE role. They have revealed tensions, uncertainties, worries and resentment; my own and those of the participant-SLEs. And overall, the content from all three sources of data expresses mainly negative opinions and perspectives on the SLE role. However, on re-reading the data, I feel a disconnect between what I have written at the time, or the conversations I have had with participant-SLEs in the moment, and how I feel now, or at a later time. In my research diary, which is usually compiled during or after an SLE visit, I seem to choose to write about tensions and concerns, but these are not played out in my everyday interactions and my day-to-day work. Rather, I appear keen to take on more SLE work and I enjoy leaving my Home School to go to a Supported School for the first time. I often feel a sense of mission, as though I am hopeful that I will be able to help or at least be an ally to someone who is struggling. While there, I enjoy meeting staff and children, and there is mostly a positive atmosphere in meetings and training sessions that I run. When I return to my Home School later that day, or the following day, I speak positively about the people I have worked with, even if I have seen some disappointing classroom practice, or there are issues I have identified with the curriculum. Why does my data only capture the negative, and not the positive? On closer examination, there are glimpses of positive in the SLE report notes written to summarise the school visits. Although rather understated, there are encouraging signs of optimism for the SLE support:

St Cuthbert's

Although we are only four weeks into the new academic year, it is clear that much progress has been made. The new schemes of work have been implemented in all year groups and the culture of working hard and enjoying language learning, alongside purposeful lessons, has resulted in the students' attitudes towards language learning being much more positive than previously reported. The relationships between students and staff in the Languages department are more positive and students are enjoying their language learning.
(Research Diary, October 2021)

The above extract is a recent example, but there are many others where, on closer inspection, I seem pleased with the work I am doing. In my endeavour to notice where the tensions lie (Mason, 2002) and to consciously critique the SLE role, I overlooked the fact that I am happy with the SLE role the majority of the time. At no point have I considered not continuing in the role, or turning down opportunities to take on new deployments, despite the extra pressure that it puts on my workload, and despite all of the other faults I have previously articulated. The praise I receive for the work I do gives me more confidence that I might actually be making a difference:

Hi Lisa
Some really lovely feedback from JCC [school] today re your support for MFL [department].
thank you 😊
Best wishes, George
(Research Diary, November, 2021)

It is here that I recognise a conflict of identities: When I reflect on my SLE role and question the ethics of the exchange of money between weak and strong schools to the detriment of the weaker school, I question the integrity of those who benefit financially from the role as well as that of the school improvement agenda itself. I am frustrated by the lack of resources in the Supported School compared to my own, and I am sad for the students that they do not have access to the same quality of teaching as other students do. However, when I return to my Home School, I feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in carrying out the SLE role, since it makes my day-to-day work more interesting and challenging and gives me an elevated status whilst deployed in other schools. Whilst I am empathetic to the struggles of the Supported School

with regards to their finances and other barriers that prevent them from teaching in the way that they would like to, they are quite far from my mind when I return to my Home School.

It seems that I have two very different, seemingly incompatible identities. Teacher Lisa (as I shall call her) seems to identify most with her role in the classroom. This is the identity that, if questioned, I would describe as the 'me' who decided to teach for vocational reasons, even reasons of social justice and a belief that all children have an entitlement to good education. However, it seems that there is also the identity of the Lisa who carries out her SLE role successfully and adheres to the unwritten rules of the organisation she works for just like any professional team player. I shall call her 'SLE Lisa' since she is comfortable with this market-based role and enjoys its benefits such as the high status and the respect that it carries.

Lacan's four discourses provide a way of seeing how the SLE occupies different positions at different times; potentially even within the same conversation. The two discourses of mastery, that of the master and that of the university, are both associated with self-identity, self-assurance and control of others. The discourse of the master in particular resonates with the idea of SLE Lisa, as the position of power that the master occupies in the place of agency allows her master signifiers (S1) to address the knowledge of the other (S2), in this case the Supported School, Department or Teacher. Hidden in the position of the underlying truth in this discourse is the barred subject ($), masked by the mastery of subject. This internally conflicted subject allows the ego, our false sense of self and my false belief that I know better, to do the speaking. The master is unwilling to show any weakness (Fink, 1996), or give any indication that she, like others, is an incomplete and lacking subject, a product of processes of individuation and subjectification in childhood (Fink, 1996). As such, she is characterised by dominance and enjoys the production of knowledge (*a*) of the Supported Teacher. Drawing on Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic, Lacan talks of the inevitable result of the innate human desire for recognition (Boucher, 2006). SLE Lisa may get more recognition than Teacher Lisa, resulting in her drive (desire) to continue to do the role that achieves this recognition.

6.3.2   Illusory Identities

If SLE Lisa and Teacher Lisa can have different identities and occupy different discourses, then it becomes impossible to describe any one professional identity in words. As I try to do this, I

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need more and more language to attempt to explain a complex network of feelings, senses, job titles and responsibilities, accountability, operational day-to-day work, strategic thinking, ethical decisions and value judgements that are required for each role at different points in the day, week, term or academic year, as all of these elements are under constant change (Demirkasımoğu, 2010). The process of constructing a professional identity can be said to be the same as the first time as a trainee teacher as it was and is in the SLE role. Using a psychoanalytical framework and the theories of Lacan and Zizek, Atkinson (2004) argues that it is not possible to use language to gain an understanding of the self. He doubts that by using 'strategies of reflective practice the subject is able to become a more effective or enlightened practitioner' (Atkinson, 2004:380) as such discourses rely too much upon the power of language and rationality to understand the self. Brown (1994) uses the examples of teachers studying for a master's qualification in their attempt to describe the construction of their professional identities. He also describes his later work (Brown and Jones, 2001) in which the work of Lacan offered insight into how the master's students can describe themselves and how this can be reconciled with Lacanian notions of the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic.

The research diary data suggests that I am finding it difficult to reconcile the growing marketisation of teachers' skills and expertise with my own personal philosophy of education. The values which underpin the SLE role (and other roles I carried out in school) do not match my own beliefs and values about education, primarily that all children should be treated equally as importantly in the education system and that schools should not be run as competitive businesses for this reason. The two conflicting identities that I have discovered cannot both truly exist. They must both be illusory; this seems to be the only way in which I can describe how successfully I work with both identities at play. 'Teacher Lisa' who I alluded to as the 'real me', the Lisa who decided to teach for altruistic reasons and who believes that education should be protected from the emerging neoliberal political agenda is, I believe, a narcissistic construction. 'SLE Lisa' since she is comfortable with this market-based role and enjoys its benefits such as the high status and the respect that it carries, potentially because I am an accidental product of an independent school system which has served me well.[12]

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[12] As set out in Chapter 1, unlike my fee-paying peers, I gained an assisted place at the school paid for by the Local Authority

Constructing one's identity is a process that many have attempted to describe logically. Brown and Jones (2001), in their research on identity, describe how the work of Lacan can offer insight into how teachers studying for a Master's qualification construct new professional identities. They frame the construction of the new professional identities within the Lacanian notions of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. Becoming an SLE is a process that goes far beyond the recruitment process; there is an underlying process that happens unconsciously, much like the forming of your new identity when you are a child. One must imagine what being an SLE is like (have an image of an SLE in mind) in order to aspire to become one and for it to be possible to become one. Lacanian psychoanalysis might refer to this as the mirror stage. 'Teacher Lisa' and 'SLE Lisa' are, I argue, illusory constructed identities and Lacan's conception of the Imaginary and the formation of the ego might go some way in exploring these.

Just as there are stages in identity formation in children, it makes sense to assume that there are stages in the identity formation of a teacher (or any professional). Although I feel there could be many more identities at play if I chose to explore them, I will assert that, for me, Teacher Lisa was formed before SLE Lisa, since I was appointed as an SLE seven years into my teaching career. Teacher Lisa, it could be said, is, therefore, my primary identity, but I do not necessarily feel that it is the strongest or the one most at the forefront of my everyday professional life. For Lacan, the mirror stage projects the individual into history as it points the development of the ego in a fictional direction. This gives the sense that, from that point onwards, the identity is created, just as a character in a story, or the story itself is fabricated (Dor, 1997). As in the formation of the identity of the child, the teacher unconsciously needs to create a character that is suitable for the school environment and the classroom. In the case of Teacher Lisa, one with beliefs and values surrounding her career. For Lacan, although the character formed is fictional, it is a whole, evoking the concept of the 'I'. The 'I' that is formed then acts as a scaffold, holding together all of the forces at play, and keeping the character in its stable position. Teacher Lisa has formed her character from the idealistic images that she has chosen to identify with. These could have been as simple as role models; I remember that my older cousin, for example, who is a primary teacher, allowed me to spend a day with her class when I was younger and my used to talk to me about the importance of the gift of education. I feel that, even though throughout her career there are other images and other

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influences, those that helped to form Teacher Lisa at the beginning will remain and continue to conflict with other identities that are formed.

The identity of SLE Lisa, on the other hand, is more difficult to analyse. She was not there from the beginning of my career, but she now seems to be the dominating identity that drives my enthusiasm and ambition at work, although it has taken a while for me to admit this to myself. As I mentioned earlier, it seems that my own educational successes underpin the identity crisis that I am experiencing. I am a product of the very system that I disapprove of, yet enjoy. How did SLE Lisa come to be? Lacanian theory points us once again to the Imaginary phase. The 'I' forms the link between the psyche and the outside world. It could be said that the school environment, in the case of SLE Lisa, is the outside world. The school I work in, as I have described, is a successful one and a leading one due to its success with market-based school improvement policies. Lacan's theory of situational apperception, one's awareness of one's own position within the physical world and the ability to imagine that position in relation to other physical objects, could help in the exploration of SLE Lisa. SLE Lisa, through her engagement with images (mirror images, parents', or in this case, mentors' experiences), begins to realise her position in the world (the school) in comparison to others around her (colleagues, students etc) (Dor, 1997). On gradually noticing that the only way to thrive and be successful in this particular world (school) is to adapt, SLE Lisa's behaviours start to adapt as appropriate to her environment. Before she knows it, she has formed an identity that can adjust accordingly as soon as she arrives at school. On returning from an SLE deployment, the same thing happens, and she becomes Teacher Lisa, the part of me which can be critical of SLE Lisa and those like her. Furthermore, the two can exist at the same time, within the same environment or situation. It seems that I have constructed and developed both of these identities over time and that they unconsciously affect me and my professional relationships every day.

6.3.3 Limitations of Lacanian Theory

At this point it seems important to acknowledge the critiques of Lacanian psychoanalysis as Eurocentric and paternalistic from those who claim that the theory does not account for the specific cultural and historical contexts that might shape subject formation, as well as being limited in its understanding of female subjectivity. Experiences, such as motherhood, for

example, are notably largely absent in Lacan's work, while the paternal experience is fundamental to the theory. Whilst these limitations do not discredit Lacan's work, they do restrict the work that can be done to examine all influences and contributing factors to the accounts that our participant-SLEs' offer of their working lives and the analysis I have given in 6.3 of my own researcher-participant identity. However, for the purposes and scope of this research project, I have chosen not to expand my exploration of identity beyond the margins of Lacanian theory, and I am pleased that the concepts that I have chosen to focus on have allowed for an in-depth exploration of educational and professional identity which in itself is a complex area.

6.4 Analysis in Relation to Aim 3

Aim 3: To examine the wider school improvement agenda through a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework and understand how such related educational policy and discourses emerge through the SLE role.

This chapter so far has shown how participant-SLEs navigate school improvement work within the dominant discourses of competition and student attainment. SLEs, like all educators, work in a complex and shifting educational landscape, where targets and goalposts are introduced and changed frequently. SLEs' awareness of new policies, protocols and guidelines is heightened at certain times, since it is their role as system leaders to ensure that their Supported Teachers interpret policy and achieve student attainment targets. However, I argue in this section of the thesis that wider political discourses and neoliberal policy agendas also emerge through the SLE role, impacting on how she carries out her work, as she grapples consciously and unconsciously with structures, demands and expectations that have been shaped by such agendas.

This thesis has already (particularly in Chapters 3, 5 and 6) shown through use of data extracts, where discourse is influencing the participant-SLEs' ways of being and shaping how they carry out their roles. This section summarises those findings and uses the participant-SLEs' data to ask the question: To what extent does neoliberal education policy emerge through the SLE role and what impact is this having?

In her interview, Beverley expressed her frustration at missing lessons with her GSCE students in her Home School, in order to go to support another school:

> *I quite look forward to it, but I'd also be quite frustrated because I'd be missing year 11, I'd be missing year 10, and you kind of knew that they were wasted hours for those kids, but I also- how I used to validate it in my head and that, well, I'm a decent teacher, I know I make that up with them but it is still an hour that they've lost but somebody else has gained but then the question is how much did they gain, I don't know, yeah.* (Beverley, Interview D)

Returning to the concern expressed by Ellen in previous extracts, Beverley seems to only be concerned about her older students; that is, the ones who are closest to the final public GCSE exams. Beverley implies here that she is less concerned about her younger students because, presumably, any data about their progress is internal, rather than public, and therefore not scrutinised as much as her GCSE results are. This reveals something about how her school values and prioritises the public accountability measures over the internal data about students' learning, but moreover, how the school's culture has been shaped by a wider culture of performativity. The way in which teachers experience the 'terrors of performativity' (Ball, 2003) can be examined through a Lacanian lens, to explore how conscious and unconscious drives and desires shape how teachers choose to respond.

Returning to the extract above, Beverley starts to question whether or not the idea of system leadership is fair: '*it is still an hour that they've lost, but somebody else has gained*' suggests that she is struggling to feel comfortable with prioritising her Supported School students over her Home School students. This could be down to the relationship that she has built up with those Home School students, and the sense of duty she feels towards them; but I argue that the wider policy discourse of student attainment has shaped how Beverley manages this situation, resulting in her feeling uncomfortable with the idea of her students not attaining as highly as they might have done, had she not been an SLE. For Lacan, an individual's conception of who she is in life is motivated by desire (Brown, Dore and Hanley, 2019). Beverley is caught in the space between who she thinks she is (the fantasy of 'SLE Beverley') and what is expected of her ('Teacher Beverley'): she desires for both sets of students to attain highly with her support, but she struggles with the idea that this can ever be achieved in reality.

In the short extract above, Beverley expresses conflicting views, even within the same sentences, which can be explained by the conflicting positions that she takes as a subject of discourse. Her conflicting views are that:

- she looks forward to SLE work, but is frustrated at missing her classes;
- they're wasted hours for the students but because she is a '*decent teacher'*, she can '*make it up*'; and
- students have '*lost an hour'*, but other students have gained

For Beverley, being a system leader presents a quandary: *'then the question is how much did they gain, I don't know, yeah'*. The conflict that Beverley feels can be said to be a reflection of a key idea in Lacanian thinking: that the space between the divided subject and her desire creates a continuous movement allowing her to take up different positions within discourse, as described in Chapter 3. Lacanian discourse analysis can create different potential understandings of how the SLE, navigates discourse in order to carry out her role, particularly deploying different positions in different situations (Home School and Supported School, for example and when straddling her two main roles as SLE and Teacher.

I argue that the data shows that participant-SLEs experience a tension between their teacher identities and their SLE identities. They experience differing (and sometimes conflicting) demands between the two roles as the expectations placed upon them in each role are varying and complex. On the one hand, all participant-SLEs speak positively about their work and give multiple examples of where they feel they have helped, supported and made situations in Supported Schools better for students and for teachers. On the other hand, they are unable to say whether the SLE role works and functions effectively in the way that it is intended. Instead, they seem to have carved out a way of working that makes the most of the situation and allows them to be as useful as possible to the school they are supporting, and as effective as possible in the Home Schools. They are therefore not fully conscious of the tensions that are revealed through their data, and only appear to think about the issues the SLE role raises when asked during the interviews or when it arises in the focus group discussions. Like Teacher Lisa and SLE Lisa, participant-SLEs also appear to carry out both roles with a conflict of identities, which I argue is an illusion of identities, allowing them to enjoy the fantasy of both roles.

I also argue that the apparent tension between the two roles of Teacher and SLE is a symptom of the neoliberal education policy agenda which is responsible for the competition-driven school improvement agenda out of which the SLE role was created, but also out of which the tensions from the Home School arise. The neoliberal principles of competition, choice and accountability among others are revealed through the tensions that participant-SLEs discuss.

Both Beverley and Ellen raise the issue of leaving classes behind on cover in their Home Schools for the benefit of students in their Support Schools. Beneath their frustration is the accountability that they feel for the outcomes of their classes and the fear that their SLE work may impact on this: '*I would find it very hard to feel accountable for someone else's students as well as my own*' (Ellen, Focus Group 1). They are not able to see the students in the Supported Schools in quite the same way, as the accountability measures are not there in the same way. While some of the participant-SLEs (in particular Paul) were keen to express how much they took the responsibility of the Supported School's student outcomes seriously, others (such as Stacey) were happy to say that, while they did their best and worked hard for their Supported Schools, the teachers and leadership teams there were ultimately responsible for the students' outcomes. This disavowal of responsibility for student outcomes is not in line with the intended principles of SLE work, that is, that SLEs see themselves as system leaders who view students in other educational institutions as just as important as the students in their Home Schools (NCTL, 2014). This idea is publicly rejected by Stacey in a focus group discussion as she refuses to engage with notions of accountability where this is not officially mandated. In her Home School, however, where students, parents and staff will all know Stacey's classes' results, and where her appraisal and performance-related pay increases are decided, she takes fully accountability. Here we see how, even though SLEs are asked to feel as accountable for students in Supported Schools as in their Home Schools, the shallow nature of accountability measures means that test scores are valued more highly than the complex work that SLEs can do in Supported Schools for the benefit of students there. The neoliberal framework out of which the SLE role emerged paradoxically works against its intended outcomes, as the SLE refuses to acknowledge their responsibility for Supported School outcomes.

Paul, on the other hand, is keen to express how accountable he feels for the students in the schools he supports as an SLE. However, during his interview he became frustrated at the lack

of motivation from the Supported Teachers to work with him in order to improve things for their students: *'Unfortunately, things don't seem to have changed… It's frustrating. Sorry Lisa'* (Paul, Interview C). While Paul readily accepts the neoliberal notion of accountability and shows a moral purpose in wanting the best of all students in all schools, he does not recognise the ideology of competition, and its impact, working against him when he tries to collaborate with colleagues from other schools. As discussed in Chapter 2, competition is intended to incentivise schools and teachers to strive for better outcomes and be motivated to improve their performance. However, here we see the negative effects of competition between schools, where there is a mistrust of Paul as he represents another institution with which the Supported School is in competition. Whilst the Supported Teachers may not be conscious of their rejection of SLE Paul, and while they may not be consciously aware of competition, they have been shaped by neoliberal discourse to compete with other schools and to work to achieve outcomes based on hard work and merit, not help. Again, we see how the competition, which is intended to drive school leaders to be the best in order to attract the best staff and students, also works against the notion of system leadership and collaboration and can lead to a culture of secrecy and isolation, limiting the potential for SLE collaboration.

It is important to note that not all participant-SLEs were outspoken on the subject of accountability; some were reserved in expressing their views, potentially because they were conscious of the expectations placed upon the SLE that they should work in a system leadership capacity with a moral purpose for all students, but felt uncomfortable about admitting that, despite the moral imperative, they were felt compelled to prioritise their own students (Hargreaves, D. H., 2010; NCTL, 2014).

Participant-SLEs find it hard to consciously reject certain demands and expectations (such as those of system leader accountability) when they are unconsciously shaped, through processes of identification, by the dominant discourse of personal accountability which emerge through appraisal processes and publication of examination results. Giving a teacher the title of SLE does not and cannot magically remove the years of subjectification that have shaped her into the teacher she has become.

Whilst I do not claim to be able to fully account for why Stacey and Ellen are confident to publicly reject personal accountability for outcomes in their Supported School, I would argue that in doing so, they are avoiding the very real possibility of being labelled 'losers'. The neoliberal ethos of competition necessitates winners and losers, and as Davies (2017) notes, most of those in the competition are losers. Since there are such negative associations with not being a winner (laziness, inadequate talent and lack of desire, for example) Ellen and Stacey prefer not to enter the competition in the first place, meaning that they can remain as winners and maintain their association with their Home Schools. Ellen and Stacey are having to constantly comprise between the fantasy they have as themselves (as winners) and the fantasy they have of the world. They are caught between the two as each are lacking in their wholeness and, as they try to carry out their dual role, this gap functions in the background influencing their decisions and disturbing the functioning of the accounts given (Brown and England, 2005:7). Shaped by neoliberal idealisations of success, they cannot see themselves as other than winners or losers, and so they will choose to be winners in any given situation.

6.5   Concluding comments

This chapter has examined extracts of data from the stories and experiences of participant-SLEs in order to explore the three research aims and understand more about the experience of SLEs, their identity construction, and how wider political discourses emerge through their work. Significantly, Lacanian concepts have helped me to understand how the SLE role might be understood in terms of, not only reproducing discourses, but restructuring discourses by the SLE taking up different positions in order to construct her own subjectivity and sense of identity. In this way the SLE finds ways to function within the constraints of dominant policy agendas (such as performative accountability measures, and the constant focus on improving schools) and find agency in the two worlds she must straddle.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Research

This thesis draws on Lacanian theory to examine the role of the Specialist Leader of Education within the context of a competition-driven school improvement policy agenda. While the research is driven by my own experiences of the role as an SLE and participant-researcher, the project widens to incorporate the experiences of other SLEs, thus creating a picture of the lived realities of school-to-school support today, and how it is experienced by those in the SLE role.

This thesis, however, and its focus on the SLE role, is actually a microcosm of a much wider set of issues in current educational discourse, as the role of SLE encapsulates the tensions experienced many of those working in schools in England today. It is also my claim that the SLE role is simply the current iteration of a succession of 'expert teacher' roles, and that the notion of the expert teacher is problematic for relationships in the school environment, since it can be seen as conflicting with dominant discourses of collaboration.

Lacanian theory is used to examine the construction of the SLE's professional identity, since this influences how she carries out her role, but the theory is also used as a lens to examine the wider school improvement policy agenda within which the SLE role (and other system leader roles) sit.

The research finds that the question of accountability is the main theme which emerges through the data and is symptomatic of the issues and tensions that are inherent in the neoliberal competition-driven school improvement agenda affecting all areas of, for the purposes of this research, secondary education.

A structured discussion and critique of neoliberal education policy is offered which allows the data to be analysed to examine how such policy emerges through the SLE role. The Lacanian lens zooms out to examine the wider dominant discourses and zooms in to offer new perspectives on the accounts that participant-SLEs give, zooming further in again to examine the data from my research diary, as participant-researcher.

In summary, the neoliberal ideals of competition, choice and accountability (among others) are an inherent part of the structures of the education system, meaning that they emerge through all roles, and in particular that of the SLE. However, when working both within and beyond one's own institution, these principles present the SLE with a conflict of priorities. To which school is she accountable? And in the competition between the two schools, which one should she prioritise? The 'losing' Supported School that needs practical support and specialist expertise in order to improve teaching and learning for its students? Or the 'winning' Home School where her GCSE classes' outcomes will be available for professional accountability and public scrutiny? Participant-SLE data shows that this tension is present in much of the work that they do and the decisions they make.

These tensions and conflicts are, of course, not unique to SLEs and system leaders, but also to anyone working in schools, as there will always be competing priorities between classes (some closer to GCSE and A Levels than others), for example, compelling a teacher to decide where to place her efforts on any given day. The effects of the competition-driven school improvement agenda can be said to be impacting not only on system leaders, but all those who work in education and ultimately all students. The wider focus on school improvement affects many aspects of education: performance metrics and emphasis on testing, narrowing of curricula in order to improve in accountability measures, increased scrutiny leading to a negative impact on the wellbeing of teachers and school leaders, and of course, the consignment of the majority of schools, teachers and students to the status of 'loser' (Davies, 2017).

7.2 Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

I argue that this thesis makes four overarching (and interrelated) contributions to knowledge:

1. It identifies and documents the specific activities and experiences of the Specialist Leader of Education in schools, capturing the voices of a significant group of people who are currently carrying out a considerable amount of school improvement work in England.

2. It presents the complexities of the role of a system leader and identifies the tensions they can experience (consciously and unconsciously) when working beyond their own institutions within a neoliberal, competition-driven school improvement agenda.

3. It proposes a theory of illusory identities to explain how system leaders can successfully carry out two roles (of teacher and of SLE for example) with the potentially conflicting demands, expectations and values are that placed upon them in each role.

4. It establishes a framework for examining the wider school improvement agenda through a Lacanian lens to then understand how such discourses, and in particular ideas around competition and accountability, emerge through system leader roles.

To date there has been very little research examining the role of the Specialist Leader of Education, making this thesis a significant contribution to knowledge. There are estimated to be over 7000 SLEs currently working in schools in England (Close and Kendrick, 2019) and, as outlined in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), very little research on their roles or the impact of their roles in schools. This research, therefore, highlights the activities of the SLE and her experiences as she is deployed to support schools. It allows the reader to gain a sense of the multiple and complex interactions that the SLE has and the relationships that she is required to build in order to be successful in her role. While the scope of this research did not extend to capturing the voices of other stakeholders in this area of school improvement, such as those of headteachers, Supported Teachers and students, we are able to develop an understanding of how the SLE is positioned in relation to each of them through the rich data taken from the focus groups and interviews.

As the SLE is one of a number of current system leader roles (National and Local Leaders of Education, for example) which are also under-represented in literature, this thesis also works to address the gap in knowledge about the work of system leaders in education more widely. Furthermore, system-wide school improvement is increasingly part of the roles of many school leaders, teachers and school staff in all types of educational establishments, who increasingly work in networks and partnerships beyond their institutions to contribute to school improvement activities. In this research the SLE represents all system leaders in education, as well as those who carry out school improvement work outside of their organisations.

7.3 Contribution to Practice

Whilst I would encourage school leaders, policymakers and all those involved in school improvement to use this research to gain an understanding of the complexities of the work of system leaders in our schools, I would argue that SLEs themselves may wish to use this (or parts of this) research to reflect on their own experiences and understand how wider political agendas emerge through their roles, influencing them to carry out their roles in the way that they do. The participant-SLEs in this research were given a rare and valuable opportunity to discuss their work with other SLEs and with me as participant-researcher, which enabled them to consider their SLE work from other perspectives, as well as hear about others' experiences. While opportunities like this arise in the teaching profession regularly, through structured performance management reviews and well-designed professional learning opportunities, there is no structure of formalised opportunities for review and continued professional development for the SLE role.

I would encourage school leaders who employ SLEs (or other system leaders) to create a framework for supporting SLEs in their work so that they have the regular opportunity to discuss issues and problems that arise, but also so that they can reflect and consider how they might approach situations differently going forward. Within the framework, I would suggest a sustained programme of professional learning or continued professional development, that provides system leaders with leadership development opportunities that are specific to working beyond their own schools and continues after the initial introductory training sessions.

7.4 Personal Impact

The most significant impact has been on me as a researcher and as a teacher. Whilst I initially set out to explore the SLE's experience of school improvement work, I discovered a space where educators (who, it can be argued, all work in the realm of school improvement) can be re-imagined not only as reproducers of discourse, subject to the whims of top-down education reform, but architects of discourse who are able to re-position themselves in certain discourses in order to negotiate and deploy their professional identities in different scenarios.

This thesis adds to literature that presents school improvement from a policy perspective, as well as contributing to the growing body of research that uses a psychoanalytical framework

to explore the role and implications of discourse in education. I have attempted to bridge the gap between research on how to improve schools and raise student attainment, and research that focuses on teacher professionalism and identity. In doing so, I have discovered more nuanced understandings of the complexity of the roles of those who undertake school improvement work, and alternative perspectives and voices of those carrying out the work, rather than the dominant views of those who construct the policy and those who typically research it.

7.5 Further Research

Whilst the scope and length of this project did not allow it, the voices of headteachers, Supported Teachers and students are notably absent from this area of research. SLEs were able to discuss their interactions with the various stakeholders relevant to each of their deployments, however, it would enrich the perspectives that they share if we could also understand how Supported Teachers feel, for example, when an SLE arrives to work with them for the first time.

While the Lacanian theory in this research allowed me to develop a theory of illusory identities through which I developed a new understanding of how SLEs might work with conflicting ideas, values and demands, the critiques of Lacanian theory as Eurocentric and paternalistic cannot be ignored. Further research would allow for an interaction between professional identity and other elements of identity including cultural heritage, gender, and social status in order to understand how intersecting elements of personal and professional identities might contribute to how a system leader deploys herself in given situations. As a Black female mother, I cannot underestimate the significance and impact (both positive and unfortunately negative) of those characteristics in my everyday life, and therefore, inevitably in my professional life as a teacher and as an SLE.

Finally, this research paves the way for asking further questions about the impact of system leadership on our schools. Further research would consider whether, over time and on balance, there is a positive or negative impact of school-to-school support on the education system as a whole, and if so, what the metrics of success would be. In order to be able to answer this question, I would be interested in incorporating the voices and perspectives of

school staff from 'winning' and 'losing' schools to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of working in these two different contexts, and what school improvement and success means to them and their students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

**A Psychoanalytical Examination of the Role of the
Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) in Secondary Schools**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

Purpose of the study

I am in the second phase of a Professional Doctorate in Education (EdDoc) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The purpose of my research is to find out more about the impact of the SLE role in schools. SLEs are a relatively new role in schools and I would like to find out what impact your work has on your relationships with colleagues in your own schools and within the schools you support. I would like to examine how the role affects your professional identity in school and whether the purchase of your time and skills has an effect on this. I will be using the data that you provide along with my own experience of being an SLE.

Why have I been invited?

You have been chosen as you are an SLE within the same Teaching School Alliance as me and you have been an SLE for over one year. There will be approximately twenty SLEs altogether in the study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through the information sheet, which I will give to you. I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire about your SLE work, in particular your recent deployments. This should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be used to determine whether or not you are suitable for the study as I will need to use SLEs who have been undertaking similar deployments in schools.

If you are chosen to take part in the study, you will be given a further questionnaire with more questions about the nature of your recent SLE work. This should take approximately 20 minutes.

There will then be a focus group discussion (between participant SLEs) to discuss some of the answers in your questionnaires and this will take place in your school or a venue convenient to you. This should take no more than 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

Finally, for five of the participants, there will be an interview to gather your perspectives on certain issues relating to SLE work which will last no more than one hour in a venue convenient to you. The interviews will be audio recorded.

You will not be asked to give names of schools or people and your data will be anonymised throughout.

Expenses and payments?
There are no payments or expenses available but you may choose where to meet so that minimum expenses are incurred.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
Some participants will spend up to two and half hours of your time completing questionnaires and taking part in a focus group discussion and interview.
Your answers will be completely anonymous so that you are not identifiable within the research, but there is a small risk that your description of a particular event is recognised by a reader of the research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
There is no intended benefit to participants, but I feel that it will be enjoyable to share your experiences with other SLEs and to have a forum to discuss issues related to the research. The information I gather will help to increase the understanding of the SLE role and could improve how schools deploy and employ SLEs in the future.

What if there is a problem?
If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researcher, Lisa Brooks (née Grant), who will do her best to answer your questions (07706034286 / lisa.brooks@stu.mmu.ac.uk).

If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally you can do this through the Director of Studies, Dr Chris Hanley (c.t.hanley@mmu.ac.uk) who will direct you through the MMU complaints procedure.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any information about you that leaves the university will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised. Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the study.

- Your data (including answers to questionnaires, focus group discussions and interview questions) will be stored safely by the researcher.

- All data will be given a research code, known only by the researcher.

- A master list, identifying participants' research codes, will be held on a password protected document accessed only by the researcher.

- Hard paper/recorded data will be stored in a locked cabinet, accessed only by the researcher.

- Electronic data will be stored on password-protected documents known only by researcher.

- The data collected will be used by the researcher only, and for the current study only.

- Only the researcher and her supervisory team will see the data collected.

- Data will be retained until the submission of the thesis, and then disposed of securely.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?
If you withdraw from the study before the end, your data and recorded interviews can be destroyed upon request, but the data collected from you up to your withdrawal will still be used.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the study will be published in line with MMU publication procedure and participants will not be identified. Participants may request to view the publication from the researcher.

Further information and contact details:
Please contact the following people/websites for more information:
1. MMU website for information about the EdDoc:
   http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught/2016/13501/
2. Specific information about this research project (Researcher: Lisa Brooks: 07706034286 / lisa.brooks@stu.mmu.ac.uk).
3. Who you should approach if unhappy with the study (Director of Studies, Dr Chris Hanley (c.t.hanley@mmu.ac.uk)

Appendix B: Consent Form

A Psychoanalytical Examination of the Role of the Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) in Secondary Schools

Manchester
Metropolitan
University

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet
for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am
free to withdraw without giving a reason. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

I agree to the interview being audio and video recorded. ☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in project reports. ☐

Interviewee name:

Interviewee signature: Date:

Researcher name:

Researcher signature: Date:

Researcher contact details:
Lisa Brooks
Tel: 07706034286
Email: lisa.brooks@stu.mmu.ac.uk

<u>SLE Questionnaire 1</u>

Please read the participant information sheet before completing this questionnaire

Please complete the following details about you and your SLE role:

Name	
Name of current school	
Department	
When did you start teaching? (Year)	
Current role(s)	
When did you become an SLE? (Month/year)	
SLE specialism	
How many schools have you supported since becoming an SLE?	
Do you have protected time on your timetable to carry out SLE work? If so, how much?	
Have you ever had to arrange cover (supply or internal) for your classes, in order to carry out SLE work?	

Appendix D: Questionnaire 2

<u>**SLE Questionnaire 2**</u>

Name: _____

Please read the participant information sheet before completing this questionnaire

For each of the three schools that you have supported most recently, please give the following details:

Please see example:

1.	*Dates or length of deployment*	*March – June 2016 (5 full days)*
2.	*Total cost to the supported school*	*£1750*
3.	*Were there cover implications for you? Please give details*	*My lessons were covered by supply staff for two of the five days*
4.	*Objective(s) of deployment*	*To review the department: schemes of work, GCSE moderation and lesson observations* *To support the Head of Department in preparing for the new GCSE*
5.	*Did you conduct a review?*	*Yes, of the department*
6.	*Who requested the review/ support?*	*The headteacher, following a poor Ofsted inspection*
7.	*Who did you support (role)?*	*Head of MFL and 5 members of the MFL department*
8.	*Did you feel that the staff you were supporting were happy to work with you?*	*The Head of MFL was resistant and defensive at first, but became more pleasant to work with towards the end. The department were welcoming throughout and seemed to enjoy the training and support.*
9.	*Did you find any aspect of the deployment challenging?*	*Working with a head of department who was resistant to change.*
10.	*Any other details that are relevant to this deployment*	

Please start with the current / most recent deployment
SLE Support 1

1.	Dates or length of deployment	
2.	Total cost to the supported school	
3.	Were there cover implications for you? Please give details	
4.	Objective(s) of deployment	
5.	Did you conduct a review?	
6.	Who requested the review/ support?	
7.	Who did you support (role)?	
8.	Did you feel that the staff you were supporting were happy to work with you?	
9.	Did you find any aspect of the deployment challenging?	
10.	Any other details that are relevant to this deployment	

SLE Support 2

1. Dates or length of deployment	
2. Total cost to the supported school	
3. Were there cover implications for you? Please give details	
4. Objective(s) of deployment	
5. Did you conduct a review?	
6. Who requested the review/ support?	
7. Who did you support (role)?	
8. Did you feel that the staff you were supporting were happy to work with you?	
9. Did you find any aspect of the deployment challenging?	
10. Any other details that are relevant to this deployment	

SLE Support 3

1. Dates or length of deployment	
2. Total cost to the supported school	
3. Were there cover implications for you? Please give details	
4. Objective(s) of deployment	
5. Did you conduct a review?	
6. Who requested the review/ support?	
7. Who did you support (role)?	
8. Did you feel that the staff you were supporting were happy to work with you?	
9. Did you find any aspect of the deployment challenging?	
10. Any other details that are relevant to this deployment	

Appendix E: Summary of coding

Summary of Coding

Theme	Diary	Focus Group Discussions			Interviews			
		1	**2**	**3**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
Hidden Agendas The request for SLE support has a hidden agenda, such as the headteacher wanting to check up on a teacher, or wanting to appear to give support to a failing teacher, for example. Guise of support when really it was Ofsted preparation. *"She was really fixated on what Ofsted would say" (Ellen)* *"They wanted us to provide a certain message to support them with Ofsted" (Sharon)* *"They tend to be short, and more about gathering evidence than concrete development" (Sharon)* *"you kind of felt like you were going in with the person already having been set up to fail…" (Beverley)*	Y	2	3	3	1	2		3
Accountability Lack of clarity over who is ultimately responsible for the outcomes of SLE support – the SLE or the teacher in the Supported School? Some participant-SLEs expressed that there is not enough time on an SLE deployment to rectify the issues that the Supported School is faced with. Idea of a heavy reliance on SLEs without a joined-up approach.	Y	2,6,7 7,8 5,6,9 5	6	1, 8	6	5	4	2

"A head of department (once) decided that she was going to tell me what I was going to do… when (in) actual fact, I answer to my line manager back here" (Khristy) *"As an SLE out of your own school, you are quite vulnerable" (Khristy)* *"Somebody's here to save the day" (Sophie)* *"leadership trying to pass the responsibility…" (Sharon)* *"I never felt like I was there to see anything come to fruition" (Beverley)* *"Unfortunately, things don't seem to have changed" (Paul)* *"It's frustrating. Sorry, Lisa" (Paul)* *"I don't feel any accountability. I go to help, but… they're not my classes and that's not my school" (Stacey)* *"I don't have any extra time on my timetable to be an SLE, I think I would find it very hard to feel accountable for somebody else's students, as well as my own" (Ellen)*									
Professional Relationships The nature of deployment (linked to hidden agendas) impacts on whether or not SLEs are able to develop a positive working relationship with Supported Teachers. Short, achievable deployments for moderation, or a curriculum review for example usually result in a positive deployment and positive relationships built.	Y	2	2			Y	2	Y

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When the issue is identified as poor results and poor curriculum and/or teaching, this can result in a negative deployment and relationships. *"She was fairly frosty to begin with… I think she felt spied on and checked up on" (Ellen)* *"She was difficult" (Stacey)* *"You do it then" (Khristy)*								
SLE Identity Identity tied to status (of role and Home School) Feeling listened to and respected Identity linked to teacher role vs SLE role – duality of role	Y				Y			
Quick Fix The typical SLE deployment, suggested by the DfE is 3 days, but general consensus that this is not long enough to undo years of poor teaching, or to solve other more complex problems. Money seen as the answer to the problem – idea that if you pay an SLE, they will sort things quickly. Reference to "days out" – one-day deployments with unknown long-term impact. Frustration of not knowing whether SLE support has had a long-term impact. *"Well, this is going to take you at least a year, because you need to change the way things work"* *"I don't know if a full circle of SLE work actually exists" (Beverley)*	4,6,7 2,3		6	1,8	3 6	5	4	2 4

"Three days isn't going to transform everything" (Gemma) "Let's get someone in to sort that out" (Sharon)								
Whole School Barriers Issues beyond the department are a barrier to progress, for example, a school-wide marking policy that does not suit the subject and creates workload, preventing staff from spending time on planning. Senior leaders unwilling to admit that there are wider issues in the school (poor student behaviour, for example) that prevent the department from teaching well. Lack of action/accountability from senior leaders who blame the Head of Department, rather than supporting him/her and listening more carefully to the specific needs of the subject area. Senior leaders are a barrier to change as they disagree with the department's approach (to pedagogy, for example). Tensions between senior leaders and the department, sometimes arise because there are no specialists in Languages, for example, on the senior leadership team. *"That's why people get SLEs in… they're getting experts in certain fields, and I wasn't listened to really…" (Paul)* *"You're swimming against the tide" (Paul)*	Y	4,5	3,4	2,3,4 5 3	1 6	2	3 4	

"Each subject has its own nuanced challenges doesn't it, and we become a bit of a spokesperson for that department or that team" (Beverley) "So when you get into the schools… you notice that their issues aren't just the teacher, it's like a whole bigger picture" (Stacey)								
Impact on Home School SLEs concerned about classes/departments left behind when they go out to another school on deployment. Lack of progress at Home School due to high volumes of SLE work at other schools. Conflict of interests and difficulties in prioritising the needs of the Home School and the Supported Schools. Loyalty to Home School Networking can benefit recruitment in Home School – at what point is this poaching?	Y	9	Y		6 3,4			3
Money and Payment Use of money to fix the issue (links to 'quick fix') rather than taking accountability. Sense of SLEs wanting to show/prove that they have done enough high-quality work for the amount invoiced. Exchange of money – mistrust of Supported School when SLEs recommend further SLE support that SLEs are trying to make money for their school.	Y	4,6,7	10,11	5				

"When the results come in, someone will say 'What about that person that came in? Didn't it work then?'" (Stacey) *"Three days isn't going to transform everything" (Gemma)* *"[The school] bought me in at a ridiculous cost for the day to try and undo six months' worth of, you know… you sort of think 'why didn't somebody spot that?'" (Ellen)*								
Benefits to the SLE The role as excellent professional development for SLEs. Allows SLEs to experience other school cultures and widen their understanding of other contexts. SLEs learn from Supported Teachers as well as supporting them. SLEs open to learning from other schools; understanding that they are not doing everything wrong. SLE role as a way to vary the day-to-day of the middle leader. Benefits to Home School from experience and developed expertise of SLEs Networking benefits *"I used to feel quite excited about the trips out… I'd be getting a train to Stoke and it might be a different type of day" (Beverley)*	Y		2,10	7			5	2
Impact on Individual Supported Teachers SLEs talked positively about individual Supported Teachers who they worked	Y		2	2,3,7	2	3		

with and remember the journeys with each of them and the successes. Despite challenges with SLT or others in the department, SLEs were able to support individual STs, even if they were supposed to be working primarily with the HOD. SLEs seemed more able to talk about the people they had an impact on, than the results of the schools. Difficult decisions made about supporting individuals over the school? Idea or working alongside a ST vs working on an ST; ST feeling like the support is being done *to* them without their input. Is our role about supporting individuals over the establishment or vice versa? Leave to get another job, or work against ways of the leadership there?					4			
Successful deployments Feeling of success with deployments, despite lack of hard evidence of impact. Positivity that SLE role can work. Continuation of relationships with some colleagues beyond SLE deployment.	Y		8 1,2 4,5,1 1	7		4	4	1
Distinct Contexts of Schools Geographical and Economic differences in the context of Home school vs Supported school Excuse of context by Supported Teacher	Y		4,5,1 1				4	1

SLEs' respect for schools in difficult contexts									

Appendix F

Data Presentation Themes

The Hidden Agenda

"You kind of felt like you were going in with the person already having been set up to fail…"
(Beverley)

In all focus group discussions and in all but one interview the idea of the hidden agenda was alluded to. This theme first arose in my research diary when I reflected on an uncomfortable conversation between me, another SLE who I was working with and the headteacher of the Supported School. During the feedback session, after observing lessons and reviewing the curriculum, it started to become apparent that the headteacher was keen to gather evidence to build a case for the demotion and possible dismissal of the Supported Teacher (Claire):

> *The head asked quite a few questions during the feedback session at the end of the day – I felt really uncomfortable with some of them, e.g. 'Would you say that Claire is unable to lead a department if her classroom practice is below standard?' and 'Can you include in your report that she has not responded to feedback?' and 'Is her Spanish good enough to teach beyond Year 8?' He definitely wants her to go.*
> (Research Diary, June 2017)

In this case, the headteacher had lacked the subject expertise (MFL) to be able to make this assessment himself, and so had invited SLEs into school to conduct a review that he hoped would reveal what he had suspected. While this realisation had made me uncomfortable, I was absolutely honest in my report since I had observed some very serious issues in Claire's subject knowledge and classroom practice. Participant-SLEs revealed their unease in never quite knowing how the headteacher was going to interpret and act upon the report that they gave of the Supported School. They had control over the report, but not what it was used for. This can affect how they write future reports, as they are cautious about their words being used for ulterior purposes.

There is also the risk that hidden agendas can affect an SLE's professional relationships going forward. In a subsequent research diary entry, I reflected on how nervous I was about seeing Claire again, since we were part of a local Languages network together:

I arrived at the meeting … and I've been dreading the arrival of Claire, subject leader at Border High who we recommended was not doing her job properly and unwilling to learn how to improve. This resulted in the capability process and she was at risk of losing her job. (Research Diary, July 2017)

In her interview, Beverley felt that this practice was unethical:

I used to get a bit frustrated and a bit bothered by an ethical point of view with the fact that sometimes I felt that there were multiple reasons as to why I have been- well, my time has [sic] been bought in that, yes, they wanted me to go in there and support but was I also being used as another way of- from their…management and appraisal process, you know, we gave you this support and we did this and yet still I knew- I kind of feel, in a way to get rid of staff and that was really uncomfortable because that goes against the whole point of what the SLE is supposed to be set up to do. And there were a couple of instances where I did feel like you're using me as a way of… and that really…yeah, it bothers because you kind of felt like you were going in with that person already having been set up to fail because inevitably I was going to go in and find X, Y, Z probably wasn't where it needed to be, that person probably would've already been… like the woman who come back from maternity in quite a vulnerable position, and, yeah, just… I never knew any untoward outcomes that I just got a sense of it, you know.
(Beverley, Interview D)

Beverley feels empathy for the Supported Teacher who in this case she describes as 'vulnerable' and seems to feel guilty that she is supposed to be there to support her, but knows that her report will end up being used to criticise her. She also says she is 'being used' and seems to feel tricked into doing something that she doesn't want to do, but feels she has to as her time has been 'bought in'. This raises issues of the SLE as a commodity, bought and sold to carry out a service with the promise of agency to improve a school, but in fact a lack of agency in how this is done.

Whole School Barriers

"You're swimming against the tide" (Paul)

All but one of the participant-SLEs described a feeling of frustration that whole school barriers prevented them from making progress in the department they were supporting. Examples of barriers included a marking policy which did not suit the subject that the SLE was supporting (Stacey, FG1), thus creating extraneous workload and preventing staff from focusing more on lesson planning.

Another example was school-wide poor student behaviour (Paul, Interview C), which meant that any attempts to develop teachers' classroom practice were unsuccessful due to teachers dealing with low level disruption during lessons:

> *Yes, they embraced what I was trying to achieve, but whether we achieved it is something different because I was going to help with teaching and learning but we very quickly picked up on the fact that behaviour was the main barrier. And it was frustrating for the teachers there to keep focusing on teaching and learning when behaviour was a huge barrier at the school, and the behaviour wasn't tackled, wasn't dealt with in a way that I felt was satisfactory to be honest… and unfortunately we never got over that barrier. I feel teaching and learning did improve but not significantly enough…*
> (Paul, Interview C)

Paul's frustration at not being able to achieve what he had set out to achieve was echoed by other participant-SLEs in other interviews and focus groups. I also identified with this as a barrier to my SLE work.

In my research diary, I reflect on a deployment in a school where senior leaders insisted that all students in all subjects started every lesson with a silent written task. Having diagnosed that speaking was the weakest skill among students in the Languages department, I spoke to a senior leader to ask if there could be an exception for the Languages department, given that it was an urgent need for students to improve their speaking skills. However, I was faced with a lack of understanding of the needs of the department compared to others where speaking is not a priority or not assessed. In one of the reports I wrote for senior leaders, I explained that:

> *Students were reluctant to speak out loud in class beyond a phrase or sentence at a time, showing that there has been an over-emphasis on written skills and not enough speaking. Many students… were not given the opportunities to develop their conversation skills in French or Spanish* (Research Diary, January 2019).

Reading this back, I remember the frustration of having been asked to improve the results, but simultaneously being prevented from doing so, by a school policy that wasn't working for the Languages department.

Other whole school barriers related to the culture of the school. In Focus Group 3, Sharon talked about a '*blame culture'* in one school where senior leaders blamed the individual teachers for poor lessons and poor outcomes and where '*inspection was done <u>to</u> the class teachers'* and '*the structure was not supportive*' meaning that as an SLE Sharon found it difficult

to convince the Supported Teachers that she was not going to blame them and try to find fault, but instead she was there to support and help. But they were not '*open to accepting feedback*' because of this culture.

Finally, sometimes the whole school barrier identified by the SLE was not necessarily a criticism of senior leadership or of a whole school policy; it was an acknowledgement of the distinct context of the school which inevitably impacts on the department. There was a general consensus among participant-SLEs that the schools they have supported were in challenging circumstances (high levels of deprivation and high staff turnover, for example) with unique contexts. SLEs tended to appreciate the difficulties that Supported Teachers faced and had a respect for their hard work.

Professional Relationships
"*You* do it then" (Khristy)

Difficulties in achieving positive professional relationships with Supported Teachers were documented in most focus group discussions and interviews. Khristy recalled three deployments

> *where the member of staff themselves has not been happy about me being deployed to assist them in changing things, changing the way they do things; either be it teaching or leading a team. That is a tricky one to navigate*.
> (Khristy, FG2)

Other SLEs described success stories of negative starts to professional working relationships with Supported Teachers; but after uncovering the reasons behind the resistance or defensiveness, they were able to disarm them and gain their trust. In describing a relationship which ended up being a positive one, Ellen said in her interview: "*She was fairly frosty to begin with... I think she felt spied on and checked up on*". The theme of difficult working relationships often intersected with whole school barriers in that the reasons that Supported Teachers were not immediately receptive to SLE support came from either the culture of the Supported

School or a specific background to the situation. I explore the nature of SLE-Supported Teacher relationships further in relation to Lacanian theory in Chapter 6.

Impact on the Home School

"If you mess up those foundation stones, you're just gonna reap that problem later on" (Ellen)

Some of my first research diary reflections where focused on the impact of SLE work on my Home School, as I started to realise how frequently I was requesting supply cover for my classes and missing department meetings in order to support other schools. I started to reflect that there was a tension between the needs of the Supported School(s) and the needs of my Home School. When I asked participant-SLEs about this in the focus group discussions, there was some agreement that taking on SLE work inevitably had a consequence on your work in your Home School, but this depended on how much time on the timetable SLEs were given to carry out the work.

Ellen remarked that difficult decisions had to be made about which Home School classes to prioritise when choosing when to go out on an SLE deployment, and that there are consequences to those decisions:

> *The impact on leaving your classes is hard, especially with GCSE groups or even with year seven, because you try and often hit the classes who in inverted commas 'count less,' as in they're not as imminent and that then, potentially, means you end up with a very broken relationship with younger students that isn't good going forward. Cos if you mess up those foundation stones, you're gonna just reap that problem later on. If you think of the impact of that combined with, maybe, year seven also having a trainee teacher, then you're off on cover with them, and is there a bit of instability then created?* (Ellen, FG1)

Here, Ellen is reflecting on the possible long-term impact on students in her Home School, but interestingly doesn't mention that she is worried about their learning in her subject. Instead she uses the term 'count less', referring to lower year groups who are not subject to the same scrutiny as older year groups who are closer to their GCSE exams. Ellen is trying to work out how best to manage the demands and needs of her classes with her SLE work, as her GCSE classes (and her as their teacher) will be measured against internal and external assessment. This reveals the culture or terror of performativity that Ellen is trying to navigate.

Stacey agrees that longer-term, SLE work in other schools can prevent you from making progress in your role in your Home School:

> *So, I've not had massive amounts of cover for classes but, then again, taking time where I might've been, "I'm going to look at this scheme of work, I'm going to re-plan it," and then it gets to the summer and I go, "I never did that because I was doing these school visits."* (Stacey, FG1)

The theme of the impact on the Home School, and in particular time, remained a major issue in reflections in the research diary for me throughout the project. In a later diary entry, I reflected on being asked by a former Supported Teacher to continue supporting him in his new school in an informal capacity. My reaction seemed uncharacteristically bad-tempered:

> *Also in the email, he said he hoped that we could continue to stay in touch and share ideas, but then it became clear that he wanted to continue with the support that we were giving. I am ashamed to say that I reacted quite negatively to this email. I couldn't quite believe that this person expected me to continue to give up my time to support him at a new school, as if this were a role that I undertook on top of my teaching, for fun. Why did he assume that I would have the time (or the will) to do this? Did he think we were friends now, and that there was no formal arrangement needed? He clearly didn't realise that this was a financial arrangement – and why should he? He also seemed unaware that his new headteacher would have to make the arrangement formally with my Teaching School, in order to broker an agreement. I didn't reply to the email straight away as I was not sure how to write the email without sounding annoyed.* (Research Diary, July 2021)

Reading this back, I realise that there is a tension between the time I need to be able to plan lessons effectively so that I can teach my classes well ('*on top of my teaching*') and the time I need to support Supported Teachers effectively in my SLE work ('*why did he assume I would have the time?*').

There is also crossover here with the theme of money and payment, as I seem angered that he did not want to (or hadn't realised it was necessary to) pay for my support; whereas in previous research diary entries I am uncomfortable with the idea of asking struggling schools to pay for support. The research diary reveals two conflicting views on this issue, potentially due to the length of time between entries leading to a change in perspective on the marketisation of school improvement. The shift in perspective will be examined more closely in Chapter 6.

The theme of professional relationships ('*Did he think we were friends now…?*') also emerges here as, while it would be impossible to continue to support all my former Supported Teachers beyond the formal arrangement, I seem to have a strong reaction to the idea of having a professional relationship with a former Supported Teacher outside of the financial arrangement. Again, this will be explored in Chapter 6.

Benefits to the SLE

"By going out into other schools, you learn about different environments… other contexts can broaden your experience" (Khristy)

Almost inseparable from the theme of the impact on Home School is the theme of benefits to the SLE. Two of the focus group discussions and two of the interviews with participant-SLEs focused at some point on the ways in which the SLE work they had carried out had broadened their expertise and experience. Some talked about having to '*gen up*' (Sophie) on areas slightly outside of their experience, such as a different exam board's specification. Others had to undertake some significant professional learning themselves, in order to support the department in dealing with the issues outside their subject specialism that they were facing, such as student behaviour:

> *I did a lot of reading, I read for example Tom Bennett's behaviour review… Ofsted articles on behaviour… I wanted to become well up on that… I tried to become an expert as much as I [could]* (Paul, Interview C).

Others SLEs simply enjoyed having a different type of day to look forward to:

> *I used to feel quite excited about the trips out, you know… I'd be getting a train… and it might be a different type of day, I quite look forward to it* (Beverley, Interview D).

> *I've really enjoyed it because it's been variety, actually, to the job that you've done for years* (Sophie, FG2).

Sharon reflected that her impact on Supported Schools could not be easily measured, but that she felt that the experience was invaluable to her professional practice:

> *I think, selfishly, the biggest gain is that I've learned more about myself, more about interacting with other people and working with other people* (Sharon, FG3)

The SLEs acknowledged that despite the direct negative impact on their Home School ('*but I'd also be quite frustrated because I'd be missing year 11*' -Beverley, Interview D), the experience

they gained from the deployments in turn benefited the colleagues and students they were working with in their Home Schools, as Kirsty explains:

> *I think it offers the person who's doing the job a great opportunity to continue to broaden their expertise. By going out into other schools, you learn about different environments, you learn about different set-ups. It can be very easy to get very comfortable with where you are in your school, particularly if you're succeeding in some way. To go out and see other environments, other contexts can broaden your experience and can ultimately help you to improve things in your own school.*
> (Kirsty, FG2)

Finally, linking to the theme of professional relationships, some participant-SLEs acknowledged that, even though they are there to support the Supported Teacher, there is often a lot that they can learn from their Supported Teachers and Supported Schools too:

> *It was a good learning experience to be honest. And I think anyone would find it challenging but it's just something that you, you know, eventually I had to adapt and you get your learned behaviours in the two schools but it's just…they're just in a very different way, and actually it was beneficial because there's no doubt that I learned things there that work at [my Home School] as well in terms of how to deal with the students.*
> (Paul, Interview C)

Successful Deployments

"I left the departments in a much stronger position than when I found them, without a shadow of a doubt' (Paul)

Despite SLEs agreeing that there is no really way of knowing how long term the impact of SLE work can be, most of them recounted positive stories of successful deployments, where they felt they '*had a positive impact with the schools [they] worked at*' (Paul, FG3) but only where they had been deployed over a long period of term and regularly, as opposed to one-day or three-day deployments which they often referred to as '*days out*' (Stacey, FG1). When Gemma (FG1) said that '*three days isn't going to transform everything*', the others in the focus group discussion all laughed in agreement.

A common characteristic of SLEs' contribution to this topic of discussion was to start by speaking positively about SLE work, but very quickly give examples of where deployments did

not go well, or to start by talking positively about the work they had done, but then to follow this up by admitting that they have not had as much impact as they would like.

Although Paul feels that he has done some good in the departments he has worked with, he is not happy with the impact he has had:

> I think it can be [a positive thing]. In my experience, not enough… *I've never been satisfied that I've had the impact that I want to, not even close to be honest'* (Paul, FG3)

By the time Paul did his interview, his frustration around not making the impact he would like to in Supported Schools, had grown stronger:

> *I wanted to give it my all to try and improve the department… it's young people at the end of the day… And what was most disappointing for me is I went there as an expert really. That's why people get SLEs in, they're getting experts in certain fields and I wasn't listened to really, it was a case of almost doing things with one hand tied behind my back… none of the barriers were removed. I've touched based with the head of History there and unfortunately, things don't seem to have changed really. So, yeah, it's frustrating, sorry, Lisa.*
> (Paul, Interview C)

Beverley described how a deployment can begin well and start to be successful, but end abruptly meaning that the full impact is never realised:

> *'…those positive emotions never really reached any potential because it stopped, funding went out, I wasn't needed anymore, that person left... I don't know if a full circle of an SLE experience actually exists*.' (Beverley, Interview D)

There were various other reasons given for deployments not being successful which all relate to the themes identified from the data as a whole, such as whole school barriers, difficult professional relationships, not enough time given to them (senior leaders requiring a quick fix) and hidden agendas.

 Impact on Individual Supported Teachers

"I feel like I've changed individual teachers and what they do in the classroom" (Sharon, FG3)

Closely linked to the theme of successful deployments, was the common theme of having an impact on individual Supported Teachers. Five out of the eight participant SLEs described working closely and successfully with individual Supported Teachers.

The participant-SLEs described not knowing if they had had an impact on the department's examination results, or long-term changes in pedagogy, for example, but they talked with confidence about making a difference to the classroom practice or professional lives of individual Supported Teachers:

> *I've been able to work with people on a very personal level* (John, FG3)

> *I think the place where you can make most difference is if you are working with a particular teacher within a classroom* (Sharon, FG3)

Ellen talked about a Supported Teacher who was '*frosty*' to begin with, being thankful for the support of a fellow subject specialist:

> *She was quite glad there was somebody who knew what they were talking about to do with Languages* (Ellen, Interview B)

This was echoed in Beverley's interview where she described senior leaders not understanding the 'nuanced challenges' of her particular subject and therefore as an SLE:

> [becoming] *a bit of a spokesperson for that department or for that team where it's not all terrible, they're actually working within these parameters and challenges and they're trying really hard to do that* (Beverley, Interview D)