# The Social Justice Agency of

# Secondary School Headteachers

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of London Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Education (EdD) 2022**

**Illustration by Katie Bullimore (2021)**

# ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature and scope of headteacher agency for social justice within a neo-liberal political landscape and market-driven education system.  It sets out to both expand and disrupt ways in which the possibilities and limits of school leadership agency are understood by examining how headteachers discursively construct social justice and how this influences the way social justice is understood and enacted within two English secondary schools.

The findings of the study are based on qualitative research, using data collected from interviews with seven headteachers and an ethnographic study of two secondary schools.  Using a post-structuralist lens and drawing on Foucauldian understandings of power, notably theories of *dispositif* and heterotopia, the thesis interrogates how agonistic professional agency operates within a multi-paradigmatic organisational space of contradictory, nuanced and intertwined axiological discourses.

While the interviews with headteachers illustrated tensions between neo-liberal and communitarian visions of school effectiveness, the thesis argues that headteacher agency for social justice cannot be understood as a simple binary between neo-liberal work and social justice work.  The ethnographic studies demonstrated how, within the neo-liberal 'regimes of truth' that governed the parameters of their agency, headteachers' personal cultures of social justice had legitimacy and discursive power in shaping distinctive, heterotopic, educational spaces that re-ordered 'the local' and 'the global'.  Within these spaces, headteachers preserved, protected, nourished and cultivated a range of social justice practices that contributed to both the affirmative and transformative forms of agency proposed in Fraser's paradigm of social justice (1997).  Most notably, in questioning the extent to which the agency of headteachers reproduced or challenged structural inequities within education and wider society, my findings suggest that affective social justice is a pivotal discourse in refusing the dominance of market-oriented subjectification.

I hope the study will inform new conversations about headteachers' role as civic and educational leaders who are producers as well as receivers of national education discourse; structural reformers as well as system leaders.

# DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1    INTRODUCTION

The thesis explores how the social justice agency of headteachers is understood by headteachers themselves and threaded through the everyday lives of two schools.  This chapter makes the case for embarking on the study as part of a critical social research tradition that aims to promote social change, drawing on my own experiences as a former headteacher.  I begin with an overview of the research study, including the research focus, my research aim and questions, and the research design.  Following this, I explain the rationale for undertaking the study, including its origins in my professional experience and its significance in illuminating tensions between neo-liberal education policy and social justice agency.  I conclude with a discussion of how the inquiry aims to make an original contribution to the field of study.

## 1.2    THE RESEARCH STUDY

The research conducted was a qualitative, post-structuralist inquiry into ways in which socially just schooling is discursively constructed and enacted through headteacher agency in the context of contemporary English secondary schooling.  It addresses how headteachers' personal cultures of social justice influenced their leadership practice; how the material and discursive landscape in which they were located both constrained and empowered their leadership for social justice; and how they influenced the way social justice agency was understood and practised in specific school sites.

## 1.3    THE RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

My research aim was to explore the intersection between school leadership and social justice, focussing on the agency of secondary school headteachers in the contemporary English policy environment.  This was supported by two research questions.

How do secondary school headteachers understand their leadership agency for social justice?

How does the leadership agency of headteachers shape the way social justice is understood and enacted in two English secondary schools?

## 1.4    THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research study was conducted in two phases: in-depth interviews with seven headteachers, followed by an ethnographic study of two contrasting secondary schools. The qualitative methodology combined with a post-structuralist epistemology was selected in order to illuminate how headteachers drew on different axiological discourses in their discursive accounts of social justice and how these discourses intersected and coalesced in school leadership practice in specific local sites, at a specific time, within a wider policy environment.  This approach was designed to produce a nuanced, in-depth account of headteacher agency that engaged with the complexity and breadth of social justice issues headteachers encounter.  In analysing my findings, I drew on Foucauldian conceptualisations of power, and in particular notions of *dispositif* and heterotopia, to understand some of the ways in which discursive power operates through discourse to maintain or disrupt structural inequalities within and beyond secondary schooling.

## 1.5    RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Embarking on the study enabled me to contribute to a body of socially critical education research that aims to promote social change (Ross, 2021) by shining a spotlight on social justice work in headteacher agency and, thereby, illuminating ways in which an education

system both reproduces and has the capacity to transform a prevailing social order (Freire, 2014):

*Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.* (Freire, 2014, p. 34)

The research draws on my own professional experience and engages with contemporary academic and professional debates about the purpose and design of secondary schooling; regimes of performativity and professional autonomy. As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, these debates reflect different scholarship paradigms in relation to mainstream school effectiveness orthodoxies and socially critical studies.

### 1.5.1 Professional Experience

Sikes (2015) suggested that research inquiries choose the researcher. In my case, the choice of research topic offered me the opportunity to reflect on and explore the contested 'discursive truths' that shaped my professional subjectivation as a school leader: those I took for granted and those I questioned.

My career in education has been varied, beginning as an English teacher in Nigeria working under the auspices of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). After returning to England, I established and led a scheme for teaching English as an Additional Language to adults, before working with an inspirational leader of collaborative professional development in a teacher's centre. I subsequently taught English in a girls' secondary modern school before moving to a co-educational comprehensive school, first, as leader of the English and Drama Department and, later, as a member of the school's senior leadership team with responsibility for professional development. I was then promoted to deputy headteacher of an outer London secondary modern school, where I led the school's successful bid to achieve specialist arts college status. After 6 years, I was promoted to headship of the same school, a position I held for nearly five years until 2008. My career in education continued

with roles as an education consultant, peripatetic English teacher, literacy specialist, middle leadership trainer and higher education lecturer. I also took on significant leadership roles working from outside a school's hierarchical leadership structure, including leadership of whole school curriculum innovation and the reform of management practices.

During my teaching career, many significant national policy changes were focussed on the establishment of a performance oriented school improvement culture, including teacher appraisal, performance-related pay and the embedding of data-based accountability measures and high stakes testing regimes. These changes produced a radical shift in the way school leadership professionalism was constituted and performed (Ball, 2003; 2008). I was in the first cohort of deputy headteachers to study for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which constructed 'the effective headteacher' through standards that explicitly identified essential and desirable attributes and skills (Department for Education and Skills, 2004a). Throughout my headship, the repeated citation of these attributes and skills pervaded the official discourses of continuing professional development, as well as dialogue with the Local Authority and various officially appointed school improvement advisers.

I was not an uncritical agent of official policy. For example, I used my headship agency to foreground my ambitions for socially just schooling through the development of bespoke school policies (albeit framed within national policy) that enabled me to prioritise resources for special educational needs and a work-related curriculum in the interests of what I conceived, at the time, as promoting more equitable social relations in wider society. However, I now recognise that my school leadership, and specifically headship, experience was unconsciously constrained by what was 'say-able' and 'do-able' at different times and in different conditions in the context of compelling normative discourses of school and school leadership effectiveness. For example, under the regulatory gaze of Ofsted and the Local Authority, spaces for critical reflection, creativity and risk-taking opened up and closed down depending on how the school was measured against national standards. Moreover, my experience of headship vividly illuminated the fluidity of power relations between key actors in the field, including the Local Authority, the school's senior leadership team, members of staff, students, parents, governors and the wider local community.

In hindsight, as both teacher and headteacher, my understanding of socially just education was intuitive rather than fully thought through. I do not *recall* any scrutiny of links between underlying social systems and educational inequalities in the professional development provided by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), a former executive agency of the Department for Education, that I undertook to prepare me for headship. This aspect of professional scrutiny was also lacking in the training materials I was later required to deliver as an NCSL school leadership curriculum facilitator. Following my headship, teaching in the Education Studies Department of London Metropolitan University gave me the opportunity to develop a more critical stance and, ultimately, propelled me into this research project.

### 1.5.2   Headteacher Agency and Social Justice

By focussing on headteacher agency for social justice, the research explores the axiological-ethical-political dimensions of school leadership. In particular, it investigates how individual headteachers' discursive constructions of social justice agency are shaped by their personal and professional experiences and how these discursive constructions influence different kinds of social justice practice in specific schooling contexts.

Within the contemporary official education policy landscape, headteachers are assigned titanic responsibilities as exemplified in the following emphatic statement from the preamble to the "National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers 2015":

> *Headteachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of headteachers determine the achievements of schools.* (Department for Education, p.4, 2015)

With respect to both the professional and wider societal responsibilities of headteachers highlighted in this statement, not only are headteachers best placed to evaluate the 'local' needs of a particular cohort of pupils, but the complex intersectionalities of ability, class, gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity and material wealth, within and surrounding school communities, position them as key advocates for, and agents of, epistemic, affective, distributive, recognition and representative justice.

In my own secondary school headship, from 2003 to 2008, 'correcting' variations in attainment between different social groups was promoted by the Labour Government as a key means of levelling opportunity through education and thus a pivotal concern of socially just school leadership. This 'narrowing gaps' focus was, and is, embedded in normative discourses of school effectiveness, school improvement and school self-evaluation, as evidenced in the School Evaluation Framework (Department for Education and Skills, 2004b), Ofsted inspection schedules (Ofsted, 2005) and policy initiatives such as Achievement for All (see Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009 and Humphrey et al, 2020) and more recent policy statements on the education of disadvantaged children (see Department for Education, 2022).

The urgency of addressing the needs of 'disadvantaged pupils' has been reiterated in the rhetoric of different political parties as in the following statement by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education under the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government:

> *Children from poorer homes start behind their wealthier contemporaries when they arrive at school and during their educational journey they fall further and further back. The achievement gap between rich and poor widens at the beginning of primary school, gets worse by GCSE and is a yawning gulf by the time (far too few) sit A levels and apply to university.* (Gove, 2010)

Interestingly, in 2022, this 'equity rhetoric' has become declarative in tone:

> *Equality and diversity are critical to delivering the Department for Education (DfE)'s vision: we enable children and learners to thrive by protecting the vulnerable and ensuring the delivery of excellent standards of education, training and care. This helps realise everyone's potential – and that powers our economy, strengthens society and increases fairness.* (Department for Education, 2022)

This study explores how these official discourses of school effectiveness have shaped school leadership subjectivities in relation to social justice agency while also considering the

implications of critical social theory that troubles the rhetoric of *achievable* equality of opportunity within an education system dominated by market values (Ball, 2008).  In so doing, it highlights an important philosophical and ethical distinction between serving the interests of the state and the interests of the public in a society where social inequities are structural in nature and cannot be resolved by education in a transformative sense without transforming the social relations of advantage and disadvantage in wider society (Ross, 2021; Fraser, 1997).  Francis and Wong (2013) and Reay (2006; 2017), for example, have demonstrated that inequities in educational achievement based on pupils' socio-economic background have persisted and deepened despite extensive policy reform.  In Chapter Two, I discuss in more detail how critical social theory troubles the assumed social justice efficacy of mainstream school effectiveness discourses which espouse concepts such as upward social mobility without questioning the role of the education system itself in perpetuating social injustice.

In examining headteacher agency, the study recognises notions of leadership as a cultural-political construct that shifts according to geo-temporal context.  In so doing it explores how a small sample of headteachers were governed by both the ambitions of the state and their personal constructions of social justice as they used their position at the apex of a school's leadership hierarchy to create the organisational conditions, in cooperation with others, in which pupil and professional subjects were produced and nurtured.  From an *instrumental-rational* perspective, Wilkins and Gobby (2021) represent school leaders as governing on behalf of the state by presiding over universally prescriptive indicators of accountability which are designed to ensure public organisations are 'governable, answerable and transparent' (p. 321) within a so-called 'small state'.  As they point out, the political implications for social justice agency, here, are: who is served and who is excluded by 'the specific rationalities and configurations that bear upon the development of schools as organisations' (ibid, p. 311)?  Responding to *these* questions requires school leaders to apply their own professional judgement by drawing on discourses from beyond neo-liberal thinking in order to look beyond the normative, the orthodox, the rhetorical and the performative and to differentiate the ways in which similar discourses speak to different professional values.

While some socially critical scholars have posited that neo-liberal governance has virtually eliminated headteachers' independent professional agency, making them, in effect, docile actors trapped in contemporary orthodoxies of school effectiveness (Ball, 2008; Moore and Clarke, 2016; Ward et al, 2015), others emphasise headteachers' central position in evaluating the implications of various ideological and political claims in order to exercise ethical agency:

> *Headteachers are at the focal point of the translation of policy into practice and they are in a strategic position to evaluate ideological and political claims and counter-claims about the consequences of change for schooling culture and for its outcomes.*
> Hammersley-Fletcher (2013, p. 14)

Capturing some of the complexity of the agonistic struggles of socially just leadership practice through the post-structural lens outlined below, enabled me to investigate how headteachers in particular contexts do this, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions that evidence of what works in the current system, contained within normative discourses of school effectiveness, will, on its own, deliver socially just education.

### 1.5.3   A Post-Structural Lens

Researching headteacher agency for social justice through a post-structural lens enabled me to challenge perspectives that ignore systemic and structural injustice as a predominant factor in promoting equity through schooling.  Instead, this epistemological research lens treated school leadership as a debatable, fluid, discontinuous product of discourse and context, in which 'leadership' and 'leading' are viewed as a product of shifting social, cultural and political discourses, rather than a static, aggregated assemblage of competencies (NCTL, 2013) or a series of effects/ outcomes (Ofsted, 2014).  In addition, qualitative research, and especially an ethnographic approach, enabled me to open up 'the *dispositif* of headteacher agency' in order to trouble official hegemonic assumptions about social justice agency in school leadership, in the belief that things can be done differently (Foucault, 2002).  This included ontologically deconstructing the way terminology such as 'equity' and 'care' informed official constructions of socially just schooling, and examining agency and governmentality through the Foucauldian view of power as exercised through

discourse and the self-regulated, internal spaces of the individual as subject (Foucault, 2002; Gutting, 2005).

## 1.6    ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

*Gardens are not isolated entities.  They exist in a wider landscape and comprise an element of that environment.  As such, as climate change causes the environment to change, that has an effect on people, plants and gardens with gardeners themselves being potential agents of change that affect the wider environment.*
(Webster, Cameron and Culham, p. 11)

The thesis findings strengthen and augment a small body of critical literature that spotlights the axiological dilemmas of contemporary school headship operating in a neo-liberal context, where the analogy of a gardener cultivating growth is as apposite as that of a company secretary regulating conduct.  By focussing on qualitative data, it illuminates how headteachers navigate the complex terrain that surrounds schooling and engage, both strategically and in their everyday labour, with the demands of human diversity and social inequity in a rapidly changing educational environment.

The thesis contributes to debates about school leadership in relation to notions of professional autonomy and especially counter-hegemonic resistance to the neo-liberal governance of education, and demonstrates how school leadership is capable of transcending state-led ideology, leading to the possibility of the kind of people-driven social change that Freire (2014) extols.

As discussed in Chapter Two, most educational research into school leadership has been located within normative discourses of school effectiveness, on the one hand, and critiques of neo-liberal market-based education systems, on the other.  In exploring the conceptual contours and axiological soil of headteacher agency for social justice, the thesis engages with the territory between these two dominant research positions, revealing forms of school leadership where headteachers create educational communities that rise above the

limitations of a dehumanising performance culture.  In particular, by scrutinising the discourses entangled in the day to day work of schools, the thesis illuminates how headteachers resolve the antagonistic spaces between contemporary forms of governance and their personal social justice aspirations through exercising forms of agonistic and heterotopic agency that disrupt the status quo, deepening possibilities for transformative agency.

## 1.7  OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

### Chapter Two

This chapter discusses the knowledge base and theoretical lens in which the thesis is located and explains how I hope to add to current debates in the field.  The literature review begins by reviewing the national policy context in which the role and work of headteachers has been configured in the last two decades.  After this, I discuss how critical education literature troubles the relationship between the current education system and social equity, in the context of the neo-liberal governance of schools.  I then examine literature that identifies schools as sites of social justice struggle where headteachers are involved in ethical deliberation and various kinds of agonistic agency.  I conclude the chapter by discussing the theoretical framework that underpins the research study in relation to conceptualisations of social justice, power and agency.

### Chapter Three

Chapter Three explains the methodology, research design, research methods and theoretical framework of the study.  I begin by discussing the ontological and epistemological bases of the post-structuralist research paradigm I used.  After outlining the significance of reflexivity within my chosen epistemology, I discuss the ethical dimension of the study.  This is followed by outlining the research design and the two phases of the study, with Phase One consisting of headteacher interviews and Phase Two of ethnographic research in two school sites.  I explain my approach to purposive sampling and describe how I recruited seven headteachers and two schools to participate in the research.  I then appraise the research methods used, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus

group discussion and various forms of unstructured observation.  This is followed by a discussion of the use of thematic discourse analysis to interpret and theorise my findings.

**Chapters Four, Five and Six**

These chapters present my findings within a thematic analysis of the data.  Chapter Four examines headteachers' personal cultures of social justice, exploring the values and experiences that underpin their attitudes to social justice in the context of dominant discourses of school and leadership effectiveness.  The following two chapters illuminate the way that headteacher discourses of socially just schooling were enacted in the day to day practice of two very different secondary schools.  In Chapter Five, I present my findings through the theoretical lens of heterotopic re-ordering.  Chapter Six, looks at the relational work of headteachers through the lens of 'affective space' where values of care and communitarianism are cultivated.

**Chapter Seven**

In this chapter, I reflect on my research design and findings.  I argue that the study contributes to both academic and professional debates by illuminating headteacher agency as an agonistic form of critical professionalism which not only mitigates social and educational inequity but is potentially transformative, especially in relation to the affective work of school leaders that cultivates care as both an ethic within the school and an aspiration for a more just society.  I consider the strengths, challenges and limitations of the research design and the academic and professional implications of the research findings.  This is followed by recommendations for practice.  I conclude by explaining how I hope to disseminate the research findings and build on the study in post-doctoral work.

**1.8     CONCLUSION**

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the case for my thesis as a piece of qualitative, post-structuralist, critical education research into headteacher agency for social justice.  I have described the genesis of the thesis in my professional life as a former secondary school headteacher and how I believe the thesis will contribute to debates in the field, concluding with a summary of how the account of the research unfolds across each chapter.  In the

next chapter, I review how the study makes a specific and original contribution to the knowledge base.  This includes a discussion of where the study is located within both policy and socially critical literature, foregrounding perspectives on school effectiveness, the neo-liberal governance of education and empirical accounts of headteachers' agonistic agency that transcend neo-liberal ways of seeing, thinking, being and becoming.  In discussing the theoretical lenses I have used to examine and trouble binary constructions of headteacher agency for social justice, I consider how headteacher agency can be understood as a more complex personal and organisational dynamic within the Foucauldian concept of *dispositif*.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the knowledge base and theoretical lens in which the thesis is located and explains how I hope to add to current debates in the field.  The literature review provided a conceptual framework for embarking on the study that enabled an open exploration of the research questions.  After setting the scene by reviewing the national policy context in which the role and work of headteachers has been configured in the last two decades, I discuss how critical education literature troubles the relationship between the current education system and social equity, in the context of the neo-liberal governance of schools.  Having reviewed the wider critical literature, I turn to literature that identifies schools as sites of social justice struggle where headteachers are involved in ethical deliberation and various kinds of agonistic agency.  I conclude the chapter by discussing the theoretical framework that underpins the research study in relation to conceptualisations of social justice, power and agency.

## 2.2 THE POLICY CONTEXT OF HEADSHIP

This section of the chapter outlines some of the official policy discourses that shape public and parental expectations of headteachers with respect to the nature, scope and significance of their work.  In Chapter One, I discussed my own perceptions of this policy context as I remembered it, both at the time and following my engagement with critical education literature.  Here, I look briefly at ways in which school leadership scholarship was appropriated by regulatory mechanisms to shape notions of 'effectiveness', as the work and role of headteachers expanded to occupy a new position within public space.

The configuration of a headteacher's role and work is inextricably linked with mainstream discourses of school effectiveness in the context of reforms to English schooling that were

located within a global neo-liberal climate.  Judgements on secondary school effectiveness were, in turn, based on new managerial public accountability processes that relied on data derived from high-stakes testing as evidence of institutional effectiveness.

### 2.2.1   The Role of the Headteacher

At the beginning of the Millennium, the Labour Party was elected to UK government, with a large majority, in an election campaign that placed education at the centre of the nation's prosperity and commitment to social justice.  The Prime Minister, the Rt Honourable Tony Blair, is credited with developing a form of "Third Way" socialism that linked social justice with economic prosperity as synergistic national imperatives (Leathwood and Hayton, 2002).  The centralised governance of secondary schooling continued with new levels of prescription regarding the assessment of the Key Stage Four curriculum (Department for Education, 2013) under a Conservative/ Liberal Coalition, provoking considerable professional debate.

The introduction to the Department for Education's "National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers", published in January 2015, sets out the responsibilities and expectations of headteachers extending beyond the corporate spaces of their schools into society as a whole:

> *Headteachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession.  They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve.* (Department for Education, 2015, p. 4)

The document proclaims a strong causal link between headteacher leadership and the achievements of schools.  It constitutes headteachers as role models whose values and ambitions have 'a decisive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in the nation's classrooms' (ibid).  This rhetorical language is both a eulogy and a rallying call in which headteachers are presented as civic servants and public figures of local and national significance with accountability for 'the education of current and future generations of children', including securing 'a climate for the exemplary behaviour of pupils'; setting 'standards and expectations for high academic standards within and beyond their own

schools'; and 'recognising differences and respecting cultural diversity within contemporary Britain' (ibid). In short:

> *Headteachers, together with those responsible for governance, are guardians of the nation's schools.* (ibid)

The responsibilities of headteachers expanded rapidly under the auspices of the Education Reform Act 1988 (DES, 1988) including 'local financial management' and other areas formerly under the jurisdiction of local authorities. A new emphasis on the instructional leadership of headteachers was seen as promoting leadership practices that improved teacher and student performance, including creating a safe and supportive learning environment for students, and a supportive and collaborative work environment for teachers (Leithwood et al, 2006). This 'instructional leadership' was primarily linked with compelling discourses of raising educational standards, underpinned by assumptions of objectivity in determining educational merit. This period was also characterised by unprecedented political intervention in the governance of schooling, including pedagogic prescription and the development of regulatory frameworks and public accountability metrics which reflected an increasingly centralised approach to the governance of schools.

Ofsted and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), were prominent in establishing orthodoxies of best practice in school leadership focussing on areas such as quality assurance, school evaluation and improvement planning. The National College for School Leadership, established in 2000, was given responsibility for developing a national system of in-service, tiered leadership qualifications in schools, including the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), that was directly linked to delivering the government's reform agenda:

> *The National College for School Leadership (the College for short) has responsibility, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education ('the Secretary of State'), for helping to deliver the Secretary of State's reform agenda for schools, in particular the priorities and vision for school leadership set out in the Schools White Paper: The Importance of Teaching.* (Department for Education, 2012, p. 3)

In addition, the development of extended leadership structures, including National Leaders of Education and the Executive Headteachers of Multi-Academy Trusts, established groups of 'successful' headteachers who were designated as role models and 'system leaders'. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), formed in April 2012 from the merger of the NCSL and the Teaching Agency, continued this work with an emphasis on enabling and supporting 'the development of a self-improving, school-led system' (National College for Teaching and Leadership website, 2014) underpinned by a national leadership curriculum, delivered by local consortia, led by 'the best headteachers', based on competence frameworks that identified the skills and dispositions required to be an 'effective' headteacher (ibid).

An interest in school leadership as key contributory factor in school effectiveness has been prevalent from the 1980s (Horner, 1997). In a review of international literature, based on both large-scale quantitative studies and qualitative case study evidence, commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and the NCSL, Leithwood et al (2006) claimed that school leadership has a significant effect on school organisation and pupil learning, suggesting that 'One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation' (ibid, p. 4).

The characteristics of great school leaders quoted in Ofsted publications (2003, 2009, 2014) included a focus on the prioritisation of the quality of learning and teaching in the context of ethical and relational work, as well as an interest in the cultural distribution of power through variously named forms of 'shared leadership' (Brown et al, 2010; Leithwood et al, 2006; Lewis and Murphy, 2008; MacBeath et al, 2004). Theorisations of 'change leadership' (Fullan 2000, 2005, 2008), 'moral leadership' (Fullan, 2002), 'strategic leadership' (Davies et al, 2005; Fullan 2005) and 'learning-centred leadership' (National College for School Leadership, accessed 2011) were accommodated into the mantras of contemporary school leadership development programmes which set out a series of 'professional virtues' linked to normalising understandings of school leadership.

Education research policy that privileged evidence gathered through systemic accumulations of 'what works' (Oancea and Pring, 2008) played a prominent role in

establishing orthodoxies of contemporary school effectiveness. Such research was seen as producing authoritative knowledge on efficacy within the system, underpinning prototypes of the ideal neo-liberal school leader that were built into leadership accreditation frameworks and templates of pedagogical excellence, largely defining professional work within official policy discourses.

In 2011, during the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government, the Cabinet Office published the following statement by Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg:

> *While repairing and reforming the economy is the most urgent challenge facing the Government, it is not all we are here to do. This is a socially radical Coalition. Our social radicalism is evident in our decision to make social mobility the principal goal for our social policies; to create a more open society, where we loosen the links between the lottery of birth and chances in life.* (Cabinet Office, 2011, p. 3)

Schools and headteachers were presented as the primary means of securing social justice through forms of redistributive justice based on the efficacy of headteachers in equalising opportunity through schooling with Ofsted (2003, p. 3) emphasising:

> *The importance of strong leadership and good management in bringing about improvement in schools, particularly in schools which are implementing special programmes to address low achievement and social inclusion, including those facing challenging circumstances.*

Headteachers were required to enable 'all pupils to overcome specific barriers to learning' (Ofsted, 2014), with the expectation that all schools could excel 'against the odds' (Ofsted, 2009).

## 2.3    CRITICAL EDUCATION LITERATURE

In contrast to the 'what works' oeuvre of educational research, critical education research interrogates the structural underpinnings of inequity in the schooling system itself and the

societal superstructure that surrounds it.  Much of this body of literature exposes the moral purpose of neo-liberal schooling as hollow, fashioning soulless performance regimes that serve the narrow interests of the market rather than the public interest and broader notions of human development.  In problematising the theory-free innocence of the policy environment of contemporary schooling (Ward et al, 2015), it empowers and liberates practitioners to look beyond and behind normative discourses of school and leadership effectiveness.  Notably, rather than claiming evidence-based authority for generalisable knowledge as in the 'what works' tradition of educational research (Oancea and Pring, 2008), critical education literature uses a post-positivist analytical lens to understand ways in which the current education system preserves social inequalities linked to a range of socio-economic factors including class, gender, sexuality, 'race', ethnicity, ableism and age.

### 2.3.1   Neo-Liberalism

A substantial body of critical education research focusses on the rise of neo-liberalism as a dominant international ideology that has re-positioned education as a key player in a highly competitive national and global market place (Ball, 2008).  Later, Ball (2011) described the education system as a growing 'entrepreneurial enterprise' with an evolving architecture of new structures, monopolies and actors that blurred previous boundaries between business, philanthropy and state control.  As a pervasive ideology, neo-liberalism promotes an ethic of individualism focussed on risk-calculating consumer citizens who compete for advantage in various markets, including education, motivated by politically and socially legitimised rational self-interest.  Scholars such as Harvey (2005) and Plehwe, Walpen and Neunhoffer (2006), cited in Wilkins (2019), argue that neo-liberalism utilises modern forms of capitalism, including the de-regulation of labour relations and patterns of consumption and debt, to reinforce class power and serve the interests of elite trans-national groups. Nachtwey (2018, cited in Ross 2021) proposed that, far from dismantling relations of privilege and disadvantage, the primary purpose of the neo-liberal hegemony in education is related to the 'statecraft' of achieving a competitive advantage in the global market place.

Ross (2021, p. 15) argues that neoliberal ideology 'pervasively frames the action of the state in a way that it is often scarcely recognised as an ideology'.  On the other hand, some scholars caution against the uncritical use of neo-liberalism as a master narrative that offers

a diagnosis of the causes and symptoms of contemporary social malaise and forms of injustice.  Wilkins, for example, (2018, p. 4) argues that 'neoliberalism gives coherence to various grievances and discontents as well as specific objects, relations and processes to rage against'.

### 2.3.2   The Reproduction of Structural Inequity

Contrary to UK government claims that policy reform of the UK schooling system combined with improved teacher performance would drive social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2011), a report produced for the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) by Francis and Wong (2013) maintained that socio-economic gaps in educational attainment increase throughout a pupil's time in compulsory education:

> *Social class remains the strongest predictor of life outcomes, including for educational achievement, where the UK's socio-economic gap for educational achievement is among the most significant in the developed world.  Social mobility is considered fundamental to a meritocratic society, and as vital both to economic productivity and to democracy.  Yet efforts thus far to stimulate social mobility have been largely unsuccessful?* (ibid, p. 3)

Data from the OECD and work by economists such as Piketty (cited in Ross, 2021) suggest that, while neo-liberal forms of capitalism may have enabled some social and economic advances, the benefits of these are still unequally distributed with the persistence of inequitable educational outcomes for certain social groups.

Educational credentials are needed to access a wide range of 'social goods', including employment, a public voice, status and 'social credibility'.  Some scholars have argued the need to work on 'a range of political, economic and cultural sites both within and without schools, simultaneously' (Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 195), in order to facilitate the structural changes that will promote greater social justice in education and beyond.  However, the belief that education is the principal means of resolving structural barriers to equity and inclusion in society is disputed by education scholars such as Reay (1997, cited in Leathwood and O'Connell, p. 613), who argue that educational inequities are rooted in wider social and

economic inequalities which will only be resolved by 'working at dismantling and sharing out the economic, social and cultural capital which goes with middle class status'.

Critical scholarship differentiates between *equity* as building a society in which all are able to participate fully as economic, cultural, political, social, creative, critical and affective beings who share equitably in society's benefits and the assumption that *equality of opportunity* is possible in our current social and education systems (Department for Education, 2010).  For example, Ross (2021) dissected the political assumptions that underpin the notion of equality of opportunity and the meritocratic distribution of social benefits, tenets of neo-liberal social justice rhetoric.  Lynch (2012) highlighted how neo-liberalism operates as a 'justificatory regime' which produces consent to inequalities in the expectation that everyone will eventually benefit and that everyone has similar levels of choice, freedom and structural power, with the implication that such consent is based on hegemonic acceptance rather than critical analysis, research evidence and ontological clarity.  Nachtwey (cited in Ross, 2021, p. 9) argued that, 'the more a society is based on equality of opportunity, the more unequal it becomes, and the more legitimate its inequalities'.

In relation to the belief that the uneven distribution of social rewards in our society is legitimately determined by a combination of ability, talent and hard work, Ross (2021, p. 8) argues that, 'Meritocracy has turned education into a competition for accreditation' with those who succeed within the education system being 'rewarded with examination grades and access to particular higher education, that entitle them to positions of power, influence and wealth' (ibid, p. 9).  He points out that meritocracy in our stratified society is a 'zero sum game' where opportunities are finite and unevenly distributed in favour of middle and upper class families who have disproportionate access to economic, social and cultural resources:

> *It [meritocracy] is turned into a game, with the metaphor of 'a level playing field' being used to justify winners and losers. Despite the rhetoric of 'raising standards', the objective of the educational system is to identify and mark sheep and goats. The losers – and there must be losers, if winners are to emerge – become the authors of their own*

*subsequent misfortunes, and are encouraged to believe and accept this.* (Ross, 2021, p. 9)

Young, who wrote "The Rise of the Meritocracy" in 1958 as a satirical, dystopian critique of the ideology of 'rule by merit', later wrote:

*A social revolution has been accomplished by harnessing schools and universities to the task of sieving people according to education's narrow band of values. With an amazing battery of certificates and degrees … education has put its seal of approval on a minority, and its seal of disapproval on the many.* (Young, 2001).

Moreover, claims for an ethical, education-driven meritocracy that links school standards, national prosperity and individual flourishing depend on reliable, non-harmful assessment regimes.  However, both the current, prescribed curriculum and the notion that its corresponding assessment schemes generate objective measures of merit are highly contested within the teaching profession.  Indeed, a report by Hutchings (2015), commissioned by the National Union of Teachers, found that school accountability measures carry a profound affective cost in relation to teacher-pupil relationships and pupils' emotional health, well-being, motivation and interest.  Moreover, Hutchings (ibid) noted disproportionately adverse impacts on pupils who are disadvantaged and have special educational needs:

*This report has shown that accountability measures are most damaging for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and pupils with low attainment. Teachers were extremely concerned that these pupils are expected to follow the same curriculum and achieve in line with national levels regardless of their particular needs and circumstances. Those in mainstream schools often experience a narrower curriculum than their peers because they are removed from classes to attend booster sessions in literacy and numeracy. Some are explicitly labelled. Pupils in these groups may struggle more with tests and exams than other pupils. Poor test results often lead to disaffection and bad behaviour. Ongoing changes to the curriculum and to accountability measures mean that many*

*of the options that might have suited their needs and interested them are no longer*

*available.* (Hutchings, 2015, p. 62)

Hutchings' work highlights the links between the reproduction of structural inequality and affective justice with schooling itself actually expanding socio-economic gaps in students' measured attainment and achievement (Francis and Wong, 2013).

### 2.3.3    The Neo-Liberal Governance of Schools

Ong (2006) and Rose (1999), cited in Wilkins (2019), presented neo-liberalism as a way of managing populations through legitimately constituted forms of political and economic subjectivation.  In contrast to official rhetoric around school self-management and leadership autonomy (Gove, 2013), Wilkins and Gobby (2021) posit that, viewed through an instrumental-rational lens, school leadership has become a tool of governance where deeply embedded forms of regulation are used to promote the political ambitions of the state, in the absence of direct government control.  Indeed, following an international review of studies of school leadership, Ward et al (2015, p. 348) concluded:

> *Our critical stance confronts us with the perennial dilemma of critical theorists: how to act when analysis suggests little potential to do so. We have suggested that leaders and those like us who write about leadership imagine that we have agency, yet in reality we have little.*

In 2003, Ball (p. 215) argued that performativity required practitioners to 'set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation', giving rise to conflict and professional disaffection.  Later, in "The Great Education Debate" (2008), he described how a climate of performativity characterised by target setting, inspection and public league tables had produced a self-regulatory culture in which teachers had unconsciously re-constructed their professional identity to align with the economic drivers of public service reform.  Moore and Clarke (2016) referred to teachers' attachment to conceptualisations of professionalism embedded in neo-liberal hegemony as cruel optimism.

The demands of maintaining schools as 'high reliability organisations' were highlighted by Wilkins (2019, p. 521) who argued that the increasingly sophisticated data collection demanded by the modern state had produced a form of 'algorithmic governance' that dominated the everyday work of headteachers, governors and trustees:

> *Those responsible for ensuring the smooth functioning of the school as a 'high-reliability organisation' – school leaders, school business managers and school governors in particular – emerge as technicians of NPM [New Public Management]. This is particularly striking in the case of head teachers and other school leaders who face huge pressure from central government and the school's inspectorate, Ofsted (2001, 2011), to maximise delivery of quantifiable outcomes through effective and continuous monitoring and appraisal of staff and student performance.*

In higher education, Morley (2013) saw 'leaderism' evolving from 'managerialism' as 'a social and organisational technology which is being applied in support of the re-orientation of public services towards the consumer-citizen' (O'Reilly and Reed, 2010, cited in Morley, 2013, p. 117).  She appealed, instead, for leadership practices to be reorientated towards the public good rather than a narrow focus on competitive performance:

> *We need to ask how leadership practices can become more sustainable, with concerns about health and well-being as well as competitive performance in the global arena.  In other words, we need new rules for a very different game…characterised by a commitment to social equity and change and awareness of gender issues and intersections with other structures of inequality.* (Morley, 2013, p. 126)

A number of scholars highlight the affective injustices implicated in the '*costs* to the self' of the game play required by neo-liberal regulatory regimes in a decontextualised audit culture.  For example, commenting on an empirical study of UK primary school inspections by Jeffrey and Woods (1998), Ball wrote:

*What is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance, or what one might see as an 'enacted fantasy' (Butler, 1990), which is there simply to be seen and judged - a fabrication…The teacher that is inspected here is not Diane. It is someone that Diane knows the Inspectors want to see and the sort of teacher that is hailed and rewarded by educational reform and 'school improvement'. Being this 'other' teacher creates 'costs' to the self and sets up personal, ontological dilemmas for Diane. Her identity is called into question.* (Ball, 2003, p. 222)

Lupton's work on disadvantage associated with place and space (2005, 2009) also exposes affective injustice as an aspect of the neo-liberal governance of professionalism.  The impact of a disadvantaged context on professional practice is highlighted in her study of schools in socially deprived neighbourhoods:

*Lack of adequate resources is not only a problem in its own right: it is a symptom of the wider problem that quality differences between schools are currently conceptualised by policy makers only within a decontextualised and managerialist frame.  They are seen as arising from the desituated practices of managers and staff, and thus capable of change by internal managerial interventions.  This position is hard to sustain by anyone who has worked for any length of time in disadvantaged schools such as those described here.* (Lupton, 2005, p. 602)

Here, Lupton problematises the expectation by policy-makers that internal interventions alone will resolve external injustices.  The study highlights the desituated focus on giving headteachers responsibility for making the current system of education work better through extracting ever greater performances from pupils and members of staff, without due regard for school context.  Marginalising the impact of a school's socio-economic context on its capacity to deliver consistently improving results, in official narratives of school and leadership effectiveness, is seen to carry significant affective costs.

While headteachers' capacity to affect the structures that underpin conditions for competitive advantage in society is seen by some as marginal or even illusory, this study is located in a research tradition that emphasises the role of educational research in

motivating and enabling social change.  Arguments that 'a large focus of contemporary educational leadership research is becoming targeted towards short-term solutions, 'managing' change and 'more efficient' practices in the relentless pursuit of performativity' (Niesche, 2012, p. 458) require new, nuanced forms of socially critical research that explore the capacity of educational leaders to contribute to a society:

> *…in which structural inequalities are minimised; where diverse identities are valued; outcomes (educational and other) for individuals and groups are broadly equal; all individuals are valued and have agency; and all members of society are engaged and empowered.* (Ross, 2021, p. 1)

### 2.3.4   Headteacher Agency for Social Justice

The question of whether headteachers have agency and how this manifests in practice is explored in an eclectic and growing body of literature that links critical professionalism with headteachers' agonistic struggles for social justice.  These studies exist outside a bi-paradigmatic space defined by 'what works' research on the one hand and the critique of professional agency as marginal or delusional on the other, and offer insights into the ways in which headteachers engage with the moral purpose of school leadership (Fullan, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008), build a distinctive school vision, engage with ethical dilemmas and appraise pupils' best interests based on their individual understandings of social justice (Stefkovich and Begley, 2007; McGinity, 2015).

Although leadership of educational change has long been recognized as requiring work within and across school boundaries as a shared national, local and institutional responsibility (Fullan, 2000, 2005, 2008), empirical research is needed to understand how these collaborations might lead to reform of the system itself.  A number of studies call for the education system to advance new forms of professionalism (Liasidou and Antoniou, 2015; McGinity, 2015) in order to place social justice concerns at the heart of school leadership agency, thereby shifting the cognitive and moral frames through which schooling is currently understood and valued.  Achieving this systemic change in education would require a simultaneous and integrated commitment by various political, economic and cultural sites to resolving inequalities in the distribution of social goods.

The linked themes of diversity, inclusion, collaborative leadership practices and social justice are highlighted in a number of leadership studies (see Raffo and Gunter, 2008 and Ryan, 2006) on 'inclusive leadership' and 'leadership for inclusion'. For example, McGlynn and London (2013) conceptualise leadership for inclusion as building co-operative professional practice which challenges the social injustices that derive from all forms of 'difference'. Their study of two schools in Northern Ireland examined how school leaders enact their understandings of inclusion, focusing on links between leadership vision, school culture and the organizational conditions that drive responses to diversity. Jansen (2006) demonstrated the resilience of White South African school leaders in overcoming deeply rooted prejudices and power structures in order to redistribute cultural power. From a critical-democratic perspective, MacDonald-Vemic and Portelli (2018, p. 4) merged the substantive concerns of democracy with the substantive concerns of social justice, explicitly dealing 'with issues of identity, marginalization, colonialism and imperialism as issues of power and domination' in guiding professionalism that went beyond individualism and took community seriously.

Some studies of social justice leadership agency focus on minimising, mitigating and, ultimately, eradicating inequalities between the treatment of different social groups within schools. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014, p. 193) emphasised 'the role of the principal in dismantling barriers and obstacles to equity for marginalized student groups', citing the emphasis placed by Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) on recognising how individuals and groups are positioned both within the corporate space of their own schools and wider society, and acting on this knowledge by 'actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, emotional, and personal dimensions' through challenging 'policies, procedures, cultures, and histories that perpetuate inequalities' (p. 162). This form of social justice agency might be termed advocacy activism, demanding a strategic and counter-cultural approach to affect change.

Wilkins and Gobby (2021) argue that, when theorised through the lens of an 'agonistic-political' formulation of governance, educational leadership is conceptualised as a site of struggle. A number of empirical studies demonstrate how headteachers manage tensions between socially just schooling and the intensification of neo-liberal performance regimes,

unsettling notions that headteachers are merely technicians and agents of the state by addressing the way school leaders engage in forms of critical praxis that involve seeing through, behind and beyond legitimating political ideologies. For example, Hammersley-Fletcher (2013, p. 1) examined how headteachers tried to work ethically when government policies and initiatives were antagonistic to their educational beliefs and values, emphasising the need to 'continually question and re-evaluate what is happening within education rearticulating this for the benefit of pupils'.

Together, these studies represent a literature of 'critical hope' (Bozalek et al, 2014) that demonstrates various ways in which professional resistance exists as a counter-balance to state power. The final section of the chapter explains how I built a theoretical framework for the study which enabled me to make sense of how headteachers construct social justice agency and how this, in turn, shapes the way social justice is understood and enacted in particular schools.

## 2.4    THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework I am using fuses Nancy Fraser's model of plural, intersecting forms of redistributive social justice (1997) with Foucauldian understandings of the ways in which power operates within an intersecting *dispositif* of the personal, the professional and the political. This blending provides a multi-faceted lens that facilitates the capture and deconstruction of discourses that inform, constrain and activate school leadership agency in relation to ideological, systemic, material and relational matters.

### 2.4.1   Fraser's Social Justice Model

Fraser (1997) proposes three generative roots of inequality in relation to redistributive, recognition and representation forms of social justice, emphasising the ways in which plural forms of diversity and inequality are entangled with one another as both bi-valent and multi-valent intersectionalities. Fraser highlights tensions between bi-valent redistributive and recognition responses to the social injustices of material inequality and cultural subordination, respectively, and seeks a new political strategy where 'the cultural politics of difference [are] ... coherently combined with the social politics of equality' (ibid, p. 12). Within

this framework, Fraser makes a distinction between affirmative and transformative social justice remedies, arguing that an affirmative approach risks misrecognition, trapping 'despised' social groups in a perpetual cycle of perceived insatiable need and remedy. In contrast, she suggests that transformative approaches restructure the underlying framework that generates both material and cultural injustice. She acknowledges, however, that the realization of her theory - the combination of socialism and cultural deconstruction - is dependent on everyone being 'weaned from their attachment to current cultural constructions of their interests and identities' (ibid, p. 31).

Building on this framework, Lynch and Lodge (2002) highlighted the affective dimension of social justice as enabling 'a deeper appreciation of the role of dependency and interdependency in the exercise of power and control in educational relations', arguing that affective relations 'constitute people mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially' significantly influencing their ability to participate fully in society (ibid, p. 12). Together, the four categories of social justice, acting separately and in combination with each other, impact profoundly on the capacity of families, children and young people to access and participate equally in schooling, as well as on the outcomes of schooling for their life trajectories.

## 2.4.2   Foucault: Agency and Power in a *Dispositif*

> *…the centrifugal pull of dominant meanings, in their turn, provokes the creation of other cultural configurations capable of generating alternative, subversive and contesting desires and discourses.* (Hey, 1997, p. 126)

Foucauldian ideas of *dispositif* help to illuminate the political and ethical terrain of social justice agency by facilitating the interrogation of 'discursive truths' and opening up possibilities for alternative ways of seeing and being in the social world. By revealing how 'authoritative knowledge' helps to fashion normative ways of thinking and acting (Schee, 2009), Foucault enables the researcher to expose taken-for-granted governing ideas that

are assumed to be self-evident and innocent in a particular cultural context (O'Farrell, 2005).

Foucault's lens and toolkit help us to understand how agency is exercised through discourse, structure and the self-regulated, internal spaces of the individual as subject (Gutting, 2005). He first introduced *dispositif* into his conceptual toolbox in a set of lectures entitled 'Psychiatric Power' (Foucault, 2006), as a system of relations between a heterogeneous ensemble of elements. In conversation with Alain Grosrichard and others, entitled "The Confession of the Flesh", Foucault explained the meaning and methodological function of the term, *apparatus* or *dispositif*:

> *What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements.* (Foucault, 1980, p. 194)

Here, Foucault is interested in how discourses function differently depending on how diverse elements coalesce at a particular point in time and space, producing bifurcating fields of rationality. This makes ethnographic research a particularly apposite methodological approach in conjunction with *dispositif* as an epistemological perspective.

Foucault also drew attention to the strategic function of *dispositif* as a formation that responds to 'urgent need':

> *Thirdly, I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function.* (Foucault, 1980, p. 195)

In this sense, the concept resonates with Arendt's work on "The Crisis in Education" (1977). While I am not using her as a theorist in this study, her reflections on crisis are pertinent in giving a context of urgency to contemporary educational work, its internal contestations and the social problems that surround it, as well as to the realignments in human interconnection that crises bring with them.

Bussolini (2010, p. 88) described a *dispositif* as 'an interpretive key … [that] touches on Foucault's theory of history, his theory of power, and the ontological Nietzschean underpinnings of his analysis'. In this study, I am focussing on *dispositif* as a methodological device which allows organisations to be understood as 'fluid networks of elements and as permeated by ideas and practices which are assembled and deployed by various actors', in order to conduct research which transcends 'traditional analytical dualisms between micro-macro, internal-external and local-central' (Power, cited in Bailey, 2013, p. 5).

*Dispositif* is a tool for understanding the way headteachers, as subjects, work with other actors to resist, refuse and move beyond the conditioning limits in which they find themselves leading others. Within this *dispositif*, their 'power' is enacted through personal and professional relations with others as a pervasive and shifting force rather than as an entity inscribed in a professional role:

> *Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures.* (Foucault, 2002, p. 340)

However, a headteacher's role is significant in that it involves the fluid closing down and expanding of a 'field of possibilities' within a school, operating at the permeable boundary between school space and wider societal space, as professional and localised knowledge interacts with a national policy environment and neo-liberal ideology.

Within these conditioning limits, *dispositif* highlights how the agency of headteachers functions within a multitude of intermeshing discourses that compete for attention and

investment.  Sometimes such discourses are in a state of tension with each other and sometimes contradictory discourses co-exist in different 'spaces' within an organisation. Sometimes headteachers accommodate policies that are dissonant with their personal cultures of social justice and sometimes they actively resist policies that threaten certain beliefs and values.  Thus, *dispositif* illuminates an agonistic dimension of school leadership agency as relations of power shift and slide within a dynamic 'apparatus' that embraces compliance and resistance, pragmatism and idealism.

### 2.4.3   Heterotopia as Re-Ordering Cultural Space

Foucault's various conceptualisations of heterotopia (Foucault, 1984) elucidate agonistic forms of agency in relation to configurations of both physical and abstract space as discourses of justice and injustice.  As such, heterotopia illuminates how headteachers' professional subjectivities shape a corporate space in ways that disrupt a closed social order, providing an innovative way of understanding how headteachers extend possibilities for social justice through re-ordering educational space within a wider educational *dispositif*.

"Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" published by the French journal, 'Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité' in October 1984 shortly before his death, was based on a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967.  The concept of a heterotopia has been taken up by numerous scholars in various disciplines to explore the way the 'otherness' of spaces can disrupt and reassemble existing cultural and social relations.  In relation to headteacher agency, heterotopia provides insight into the way 'otherness' both subverts and confirms hidden norms, creating new spaces of transgression, transformation and emancipation that simultaneously represent, contest, and invert 'all the other real sites that can be found within the culture' (Foucault, 1984, p. 3).  Foucault's distinction between heterotopia and utopia is helpful: whereas heterotopias are real spaces, utopias and dystopias are fictional conceptualisations of other worlds, thought experiments commonly realised in art and literature.

Heterotopias are part of a headteacher's toolkit for disrupting, troubling and re-ordering cultural norms perceived to be antagonistic to equitable relationships within the school and

wider society.  Heterotopia as a concept also allows researchers to analyse axes of time, space and bodies in the context of the fluid occupancy of shared spaces, raising questions of who is permitted, welcome and excluded at different times in a space;  as well as how different bodies are expected to speak, behave and interact in hierarchical and more egalitarian configurations within the space.  Furthermore, with reference to subjectivation processes and the dominance of neo-liberal ideology within the education system, what is considered transgressive and virtuous behaviour in the space?

Foucault identified various forms of heterotopia that enable the researcher to look at schools as real spaces which are bounded and porous, spiritual and physical homes, which people join, leave and can return to throughout their life course.  He describes crisis heterotopias as 'reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis' (ibid, p. 4).  While he gives the example of a boarding school as a crisis heterotopia, arguably, all secondary schools might be considered heterotopias of crisis holding the problematic bodies of adolescents who are in a liminal state of transition to adulthood.  Pupils in secondary schools leave and return to these spaces that care for them, govern their behaviour and nurture their growing intellectual and emotional independence, on a daily basis during term-time, until they are released into an adult world.  In another sense, secondary schooling resonates with Foucault's heterotopias of 'ritual or purification' where entry and attendance is compulsory and signified by various 'initiation' practices such as induction days, morning registration or assembly, and reception protocols for visitors.  However, this emphasis on the containment of bodies is balanced by Foucault's exemplification of heterotopia as the juxtapositions of different geo-temporal realities in a single space which are manifested in a school library in a physical sense and in the multi-dimensional space of the curriculum in a more abstract sense, extending the 'thought spaces' of those who learn and work in the actual space.

Within the space of a school, there are different versions of space projecting different expectations of relationships which the inhabitants of the space unconsciously and seamlessly interpret following their induction into, and familiarisation with, the space.  Pedagogical spaces in a school, for example, are differentiated and bounded.  Crossing the internal border into the drama studio, pupils enter a heterotopic space: dark, deskless,

somatic and often transgressive of established ideas and systems, permitting the possibility of the kind of 'thirdspace' cultural encounters discussed by Greenwood (2001 and 2005). Schools are thus sophisticated, highly flexible relational spaces as pupils walk between classes, eat together, assemble, and learn together and alone.

The theoretical framework underpinning the study enabled a holistic exploration of agency congruent with my research design and intention to disrupt binary argument. Fraser's 'equity paradigm' gave me an axiological framework within which to search for examples of justice and injustice within the *dispositif* of entangled discourses operating to govern relations of power within a school system and culture. This, combined with the richness of the concept of heterotopia, allowed me to explore some of the varied manifestations of headteachers' agonistic agency within specific, localised school settings.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have reviewed both policy expectations of headteachers within neo-liberal ideology and critiques of the current education system. I have considered how configuring school leaders as merely docile agents of social reproduction (Ball, 2008; Moore and Clarke, 2016 and Ward, 2015) ignores the agency of critical professionalism illuminated in those studies where headteachers disrupt some of the conditions that sustain social inequity. In setting out my theoretical framework, I explain how Foucauldian scholarship offers explanatory tools to make sense of a nuanced and complex picture of headteacher agency within a multi-valent *dispositif* of social justice dilemmas. In the next chapter, I discuss how my methodological approach, underpinned by a post-structuralist epistemology, framed the research design and methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

## 3.1     INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodology, research design and methods used in the study.  I begin the chapter by restating the research aim and questions.  This is followed by a discussion of methodology, including the ontological and epistemological perspectives that underpin the inquiry, the reasons for choosing a qualitative methodology, the study's ethical framework and, finally, the significance of reflexivity and my complex researcher positioning.  After explaining how I designed the inquiry and outlining the chronology of the research project, I discuss how the research was conducted.  This includes defending the sampling strategy used and explaining how the headteachers and schools were recruited.  Subsequently, I move on to justify the methods of data collection used.  I conclude with a discussion of my relationships with the research participants and the choice of thematic discourse analysis as a way of presenting and interpreting data.

## 3.2     RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

My research aim was to explore the social justice agency of secondary school headteachers in the contemporary English policy environment.  This was supported by two research questions:

1. How do secondary school headteachers understand their leadership agency for social justice?

2. How does the leadership agency of headteachers shape the way social justice is understood and enacted in two English secondary schools?

### 3.3     METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological approach I have adopted in the research study integrates constructivist ontology, post-structuralist epistemology and qualitative methodology to illuminate how discourses of social justice intersect, coalesce and collide in specific local sites, at a specific time, within a specific education policy environment.  This research paradigm is founded on the belief that knowledge of the social world is plural, situated and provisional with co-existing multiple interpretations of the same data being possible depending on the theoretical lens used.  In this methodological approach, validity, credibility and transferability are secured through a transparent, reflexive and robust approach to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

In reviewing alternative methodological approaches, I considered the different kinds of evidence that contribute to a plurality of ways of understanding human experience:

> *For educational research to be relevant to policy and to professional practice, there is a need for all to recognise the provisional nature of knowledge, to recognise that in the further refinement of that provisional knowledge, there are different sorts of evidence that need to be weighed and balanced…* (Oancea and Pring, 2008, p. 33)

This view of different kinds of evidence troubles the political claim made by the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, that educational research which 'genuinely gets results' gives teachers control of 'the education debate':

> *This is a great opportunity for teachers to take control of the education debate - the profession is now being empowered to demonstrate what genuinely gets results and generate the data which will determine what evidence-based policy really looks like. The future of education is being written, right now, by teachers - and we would like all of you to be a part of it*. (Gove, 2013).

The official preference for generalisable explanations as to 'what works' in education that are derived from cumulativeness, coherence and convergence in the systematic accumulation of evidence, as exemplified in large-scale comparative studies, marginalises

'modes of research that embrace non-cumulative, divergent, or non-teleological views of knowledge' (ibid, p. 21). Instead, I argue that the research methodology chosen contributes to an inclusive, democratic and creative model of research practice designed to stimulate professional debate by opening up new ways of perceiving and conceptualising the social world in the context of the continuous breaking and renewal of professional knowledge (Oancea and Pring, 2008).

### 3.3.1　Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

My choice of a post-structuralist epistemological approach and perspective is predicated on both the purpose of the research study and my ontological assumptions as a researcher. While an interpretivist approach offers the opportunity to explore how people make sense of their experiences 'within a cultural framework of socially constructed and shared meanings' (Hughes, 2010, p. 41), post-structuralism adds an important political dimension that resonates with the struggle to understand and address social justice issues. Post-structuralist research enables us to view speech and language as 'action and performance' involving relations of power and producing unstable meanings and 'subjectivities'. It views people's accounts of experience as both situated and textual rather than uncomplicated statements of events to be 'triangulated' against other versions of similar events, or deep 'authentic insights' into people's inner world (Silverman, 2001).

I argue that dominant research epistemologies that claim to produce replicable and generalisable knowledge and 'authoritative' accounts of effective school leadership practice are located within positivist research paradigms which, far from being neutral, objective and theory free, are allied to particular ideological views of research, education and, indeed, social justice. The ontological lens that underpins this study positions social reality as a human construction that is constituted historically, politically and culturally through the subjectivities, values, beliefs and experience of human beings, rather than as an external, objective, universalist 'truth'. In choosing a post-structuralist epistemological approach, I am studying the interplay between discourses at a particular point in an organisation's history, illuminating what is happening and, at the same time, opening up 'alternative ways of understanding and theorizing' the object of study (Niesche, 2012, p. 458).

A post-structuralist epistemological lens enables the study of ways in which school leadership agency works through discursive truths that are fabricated through discourse (MacLure, 2003). At the time of my own headship, the dominant theorisations of effective, and by implication socially just, school leadership were located within a static, homogenous, neo-liberal conceptualisation of schooling. A post-structuralist lens predicated on a belief that 'knowledge' of the social world is framed by different self-serving ideologies, promised a means of destabilising some of these governing certainties.

From a post-structuralist perspective, all discourse is a 'fabrication' that constructs rather than reflects reality. In this epistemological landscape, discourses can be seen to act as the grammatical units of a constituted reality (Bailey, 2013; O'Farrell, 2005). MacLure (2003, p. 175) argues that, within post-structuralism, discourses involve much more than verbal language: 'They can be thought of, rather, as practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions, at particular historical times.' Such meaning-making 'practices' embrace visual signifiers of ideology such as school buildings as well as the discourses of institutional ritual and routine, and the everyday interactions between the inhabitants of and visitors to an organisational space.

Foucault suggests agency is a process of continuous self-formation and self-regulation, encompassing possibilities for refusal and resistance that have the capacity to outgrow and transform current configurations of power by refusing the external determination of the self as subject:

> *…all these present struggles revolve around the question: Who are we? They are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition that determines who one is.* (Foucault, 2002, p. 331)

By exploring how intermeshing historical, political and cultural discourses are at work beneath the surface of taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in the current education system and troubling practices that are presented as self-evident, neutral and 'innocent', I hope to open up new ways of seeing the world, enabling rethinking in ways that 'traverse

the boundaries between research, policy, activism and theory construction' (McDowell, 2001, p. 95). This way of interrogating the social world has the potential to be transformative and emancipatory in its reach.

### 3.3.2   Qualitative Study

Qualitative study produced knowledge that was drawn from the reflexive and inductive analysis of highly situated data in which the interpretation of data was shaped by the subjectivities of the researcher, the research participants and the research audience. This provided a way of understanding why the social actors in the ethnographic study accepted, yielded to, refused and resisted particular discourses of social justice in relation to the leadership agency of the headteachers. Moreover, qualitative methodology enabled access to the details of the social and cultural aspects of individuals' lives (Geertz, 1973, p. 10, cited in Agee, 2009, p. 431). This generated in-depth, nuanced and diverse accounts of headteacher agency for social justice which illuminated how each organisation's 'discursive truths' privileged particular understandings and enactments of social justice.

### 3.3.3   Reflexivity and Positionality

I embraced the importance of reflexivity as both an epistemological perspective and a methodological approach rooted in understandings of how 'positionality' affects relationships with research participants and, thus, knowledge production. In short, paying attention to researcher reflexivity and positionality was significant in securing the validity and integrity of the inquiry at all stages of the research process. This included making my reasoning processes transparent in the production and representation of knowledge about others (Adler and Adler, 1994, cited in Mertens, 2005; Skeggs, 2002) through clarity regarding the research paradigm and theoretical frame within which I was conducting the research as well as my understanding of how I was located in the study as a whole and present in the interview and ethnographic spaces, in particular.

MacNaughton (2001, p. 122, cited in Osgood, 2012, p. 27) discussed how 'classed', 'raced' and 'gendered' identities are constituted through social and power relationships in everyday life, emphasising the inextricable links between the individual and the social:

*Individuals are born into already-existing social worlds consisting of social structures, social processes and social meanings. The individual does not and cannot exist outside of the social, nor can the social exist over and above the individual.*

My own multiple subjectivities as a White, middle class, female teacher, headteacher, higher education lecturer and doctoral researcher were stitched into the research, throughout the whole process, influencing my relationships with others as well as my interpretation of data. As Bauman (1978, p. 224) argued, a researcher's past both illuminates and obscures understanding:

*Any intellect, however powerful, sets about its work loaded with its own past; this past is simultaneously its liability and its asset. Thanks to its past, the intellect is able to see; because of it, it is bound to remain partially blind.*

Seeing qualitative, and especially ethnographic research, as reflexive relational work is, thus, significant in mitigating this limitation and, conversely, enhancing the capacity of researcher self-knowledge to elucidate meaning. This is exemplified and discussed later in the chapter when I consider 'Relationships in the Field' (3.7), including ways in which the brought self, the researcher self and the situationally created self (Reinharz, 1997) affected the relational dynamics of interviews, conversations and observations, requiring the researcher to be alert to tensions, contradictions and surprises in the data (Osgood, 2012).

Throughout the research process, I reflected on ways in which my own life and career history, as well as age, gender, class, 'race' and ethnicity might be influencing my assumptions, behaviour and relationships with research participants. In particular, studying headteacher agency as a former headteacher heightened the need for reflexivity in the way I recognised affinities and divergencies between my own headship experience and that of the headteachers in the study.

### 3.3.4 Ethnographic Study

Ethnography enables an evolving, iterative understanding, over time, of the situated meanings of different discourses and practices, focused on the 'microscopic' details of the

social and cultural aspects of individuals' lives (Agee, 2009). Hammersley (2017) pointed out that ethnography encompasses a multiplicity of approaches that are rooted in the divergent ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of researchers. My approach to ethnography was characterised by an attempt to understand the complexity of agency through:

> *…the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location.* (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p. 16)

Qualitative research, and ethnography in particular, are relational forms of research which demand higher levels of ethical reflexivity in the collection and analysis of data. Occupying ethnographic space allows the researcher to build relationships with research participants and the site itself. Simply by spending time in two contrasting school sites with the people who inhabited them, I was able to gather detailed, complex and, sometimes, surprising data through a multitude of informal, as well as formal, social interactions (Conteh et al., 2005). Immersion in the day-to-day life and various significant events of two schools enabled me to experience the heart and pulse of a school, using 'thick description' (Geertz, 1971) to communicate the deeper rhythms and meanings of the school's life. Moreover, as Hammersley (2017) argued, the multi-method approach of the ethnographer, including the ability to observe and explore a complex web of relationships through which headteacher agency was enacted, comes closer to understanding what people do, how, and why, than relying on a single method of inquiry.

The unfolding, evolving and iterative nature of ethnographic inquiry requires researcher openness and vigilance. As the ethnographic study evolved, I encountered the unexpected, understood issues more clearly, explored new theoretical frameworks and continuously examined my own position in the project. Throughout this process, I used journaling as a tool to reflect on both my experience as a researcher and emerging findings. This heightened my alertness to shifting subjectivities (Osgood, 2012) and prompted me to question what I thought I knew and how I came to know it, at each stage of the research project (Watt, 2007).

**3.4    ETHICAL MAP**

In this section of the chapter, I consider how the ethical dimension of the research study permeated all stages of the process of collecting, recording and analysing data, as well as writing the thesis.  This included the a priori development of ethical tools, such as information sheets and consent forms, as well as the ongoing deliberative work involved in recognising and responding to ethical issues in the field in relation to respect for people, knowledge, democratic values and academic freedom (BERA, 2011).  Examples of such ethical deliberation are discussed in section seven of this chapter.

Before commencing data collection, I gained ethical approval from London Metropolitan University, in 2013, following submission of the Research Ethics Review Form (Appendix One).  The form sets out the risks posed by the study to researcher and research participants, the ways in which I intended to mitigate them and the ethical principles I would use to govern my conduct in the context of my methodological approach.  My ethical conduct was directed by London Metropolitan University's Code of Good Research Practice and Research Ethics Policy and Procedures (London Metropolitan University, 2013; 2019).  I also followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011).

As researcher, I was responsible for reconciling two central ethical goals, avoiding harm to research participants, on the one hand, and benefit to public understanding, on the other, as captured in the quotations below:

> *The rights of individuals should be balanced against any potential social benefits of the research, and the researcher's right to conduct research in the service of public understanding.* (BERA, 2018, p. 20)

> *Researchers have to take decisions about how to carry out research that makes the research as ethical as possible within the framework of the project, including the budgets and times they have available to them.  These decisions include considering whether it is worthwhile … by weighing up the harm and benefit to participants and*

*to society that may arise if the research is or is not carried out.* (Busher, 2002, cited in Pole and Morrison, 2003, p. 151)

As McDowell (2001, p. 98) pointed out, ethical codes are 'no substitute for respect for and empathy with the participants of any social research project'. This meant striving to be 'ethically alert' in the moment (Skanfors, 2009), in order to treat all members of the school community:

*…fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference.* (BERA, 2011, p. 5)

In executing this ethical principle, I paid particular attention to issues of researcher power and answerability in the representation of others. My intention was to conduct the research without causing harm to any of the people involved in the project, including through the unintended consequences of my actions, and, if possible, to make a positive contribution to the headteachers and schools in the study. In each ethical decision in the field, I considered the possible consequences for those directly and indirectly involved and endeavoured to avoid any detriment to them, while preserving the rigour required in knowledge production.

### 3.4.1   Informed Consent and Confidentiality

I invested extensively in information transmission as the basis of informed consent, by securing research participants' understanding of the purpose of the research, the nature of the inquiry, the methods proposed, how data would be used and my reporting intentions, emphasising the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw from the research process. In the event, no-one withdrew their consent. Before interviewing headteacher participants, I sent them written information about the project (Appendices Two and Three) and spoke on the telephone with them. I also met four of the headteachers in their schools. In the ethnographic study, I provided information about the research

project through a variety of communication channels, seeing *all* the members of each school community as 'research participants'. Examples are provided in Appendices Five, Six and Seven.

Three main forms of ethnographic consent were given: written, verbal and 'affirmative action'. Written consent was obtained for formal interviews and focus group discussions. Consent forms were carefully constructed as important transactional and relational texts (Appendices Eight to Ten) designed to invite, inform, record consent and protect participants' interests, while showing respect and appreciation. Participants were informed of the right to withdraw consent to the use of any interview or focus group data collected from them. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (ICO, 2018), which came into force in England on 25 May 2018, were incorporated into research protocols and documents, following consultation with Erasmus School.

Research participants' awareness of my researcher positioning in their community was significant in relation to ethical consent. I was particularly conscious of their vulnerability during times of observation when written consent had not been individually requested. I provided information by speaking about the study in a number of staff briefings. I also circulated written information through emailing members of staff, collectively and personally, offering further opportunities to discuss the research. I disseminated information to pupils via assemblies and lessons, and the Student Bulletin in Erasmus School (Appendix Six, p.183). In informal situations in the field, consent for ad hoc conversations was obtained by 'clear affirmative action' (ICO, 2018), for example by checking that people knew who I was and were happy to speak with me. Ethical reflexivity was also significant in reading the 'flow' of a situation and judging intrusiveness in the moment.

The research participants gave their consent knowing that I would try to anonymise identities, although due to their distinctive nature, the schools, particularly Erasmus, might be recognised. I protected the anonymity of the school and individual research participants by using pseudonyms and avoiding other identifiers such as school location or job title. All electronic files containing personal information including interview transcripts were

password protected.  In pupil focus group discussions, I established ground-rules regarding confidentiality with respect to the disclosure of attributable views.

### 3.5    THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research inquiry was designed in two phases: firstly, in-depth interviews with a small sample of headteachers and, secondly, ethnographic study in two contrasting secondary schools.  The phases and dates when the research was conducted are published in Appendix Fourteen.

I began by conducting in-depth interviews with headteachers to illuminate their discursive constructions of socially just schooling.  This enabled me to identify some commonalities and differences in constructions of social justice agency, providing a context for Phase Two, the ethnographic study, although interviews with two of the headteachers were conducted after completing research in the first school, reflecting the difficulty I experienced in recruiting headteacher participants.

### 3.5.1   The Sampling Process

The seven headteachers who were interviewed constituted a diverse purposive sample. Five of the headteachers were male and two were female.  All the headteachers were in their first headship, with four of the seven having been promoted from the role of deputy headteacher within the same school.  Two of the headteachers had served as headteachers for over twenty years; one for over ten years; and four for under five years.  Their schools were located in urban, inner-city and rural settings, and included a non-selective boys' school; a non-selective girls' school, a co-educational Roman Catholic school; a boys' grammar school; a co-educational comprehensive school and a co-educational inner city academy.

**Figure One: Headteacher Sample**

*The shaded area of the table indicates the headteachers involved in the ethnographic study.*

| PSEUDONYM | SCHOOL | GENDER | HEADSHIPS | PROMOTION | YEARS AS HT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Karen** | Wren | Female | 1 | internal | +10 |
| **Michael** | Erasmus | Male | 1 | internal | +20 |
| **Penny** | Erasmus | Female | 1 | internal | +3 |
| **Luke** | Roosevelt | Male | 1 | external | +2 |
| **Steve** | River TCG | Male | 1 | external | +1 |
| **Paul** | St Mark's | Male | 1 | internal | +1 |
| **Jim** | Corby Grammar | Male | 1 | external | +20 |

**Figure Two: School Sample**

*The shaded area of the table indicates the schools in the ethnographic study.*

| SCHOOL | LOCATION | DESIGNATION | PUPILS | JURISDICTION |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Wren School** | urban | boys' secondary modern | 1,000 | LA |
| **Erasmus School** | rural | mixed comprehensive | 1,300 | LA |
| **Roosevelt Academy** | inner city | mixed comprehensive | 900 | Part of large MAT |
| **River TCG** | urban | girls' secondary modern | 900 | LA |
| **St Mark's** | urban | mixed comprehensive | 1,300 | LA/ Roman Catholic |
| **Corby Grammar** | urban | boys' grammar | 1,200 | Lead in small MAT |

*LA: local authority.     MAT: multi-academy trust.*

### 3.5.2    Recruiting the Headteachers

Recruiting the headteachers and ethnographic schools was a time consuming process with long lead-in times before headteachers agreed to participate in the study.  I had previous professional connections with four of the seven headteachers.  I had delivered NCTL leadership courses to middle leaders in Wren School, River TCG and St Mark's School.  In addition, I had worked as a literacy specialist in Wren School, where I had also liaised with the then deputy headteacher, now the headteacher of River TCG, when my post-graduate students spent a day in the school researching curriculum leadership.  I approached two headteachers directly.  Two co-headteachers were recruited by a national teaching association I approached and three responded to a general invitation to a local professional development consortium.

Committing to the research was a significant decision that the headteachers considered carefully.  They were investing time in an activity that was of no direct instrumental value to themselves or their schools and fell outside the 'what works' research epistemology.  Moreover, the nature of the research questions exposed their values and beliefs in both a personal way and professional way.

### Figure Three: Recruiting Headteachers

*The shaded area of the table indicates the schools in the ethnographic study.*

| SCHOOL | ACCESS |
|---|---|
| **Wren School** | Direct invitation to headteacher.  Prior professional relationship with the school and the headteacher. |
| **Erasmus School** | Recruited through a national teaching association.  No prior professional relationship with the school or the co-headteachers. |
| **Roosevelt Academy** | Direct invitation to the headteacher, following national newspaper article. |
| **River TCG** | Invited through a local professional development consortium. |
| **St Mark's** | Invited through a local professional development consortium. |
| **Corby Grammar** | Invited through a local professional development consortium. |

### 3.5.3 Recruiting the Ethnographic Study Schools

All three headteachers of the two ethnographic schools expressed a strong history of commitment to socially just schooling; positive attitudes to educational research; and a belief that the research process would contribute to professional development in their schools. I held preliminary discussions with the headteachers to discuss the purpose of the ethnographic study and how it might work in practice, as well as ethical and operational issues. Both schools had a distinctive ethos, one being a non-selective boys' school with a predominantly local intake and the other an international, co-educational, state comprehensive school that drew pupils from a wide regional and, indeed, global catchment area. The two schools in the sample afforded an interesting counterpoint that presented some analytical challenges, which are discussed in section eight of this chapter. A detailed description of each school site is given in Chapter Five.

### 3.6 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The main method of data collection in Phase One of the study was in-depth interviews with headteacher participants. In Phase Two of the study, I collected data through a range of methods (Appendix Eleven), in order to gain an overall picture and 'sense' of each school, as well as an insight into particular aspects of headteacher agency. The different conditions of research in each school influenced the collection of data. For example, the high visibility, open plan nature of Wren School facilitated observation of learning, social and administrative spaces by just walking through the site. In contrast, observing lessons in Erasmus School involved obtaining consent in advance, due to its building design of traditional enclosed learning spaces, enabling teachers to prepare for the observation.

The dataset I collected in each school was also influenced by pragmatic factors. For example, I was able to visit Wren School on different days of the week due to its proximity to my home, in order to further explore specific issues as they arose, whereas, in Erasmus School, I was restricted to a schedule that was negotiated with the school at the beginning of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, the opportunistic nature of ethnographic inquiry in both schools led to iterative bifurcations of thought that produced a depth and breadth of situated local knowledge. This

led to the collection of a wide range of data in each school that illuminated a range of aspects of each school's work, providing rich soil for the later analysis of emerging themes.

Formal research tools included semi-structured interviews with members of staff in different roles, pupil focus groups, shadowing staff and year groups, and tours of each school site.  I also observed lessons, staff and school council meetings, assemblies, staff briefings, specific spaces, meal and break-times, circulation between lessons, professional development sessions and parents' meetings.  Serendipitous conversations and observations, when moving through the school site or occupying a space such as a corridor or Staff Room, provided interesting data that I recorded in both written and audio fieldnotes.

### 3.6.1    Phase One: The Headteacher Interviews

The collection of data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with headteachers enabled me to gain detailed accounts of practising headteachers' perspectives of ways in which their personal values and beliefs had influenced their constructions of socially just schooling.  While I formulated a series of topic areas and guide questions to structure the discussion (Appendix Twelve), I adapted the sequence and wording of my questions in order to follow the direction of the conversation.  I maintained eye contact with the headteacher, which enabled me to immerse myself in an 'intimate professional encounter' where tone of voice, gesture and spatial choreography contributed to producing both the research relationship and the research data.

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**Figure Four: Headteacher Interview Topic Areas**

- School context
- The headteacher's career narrative
- Biographical influences on the headteacher's social justice values and beliefs
- The headteacher's social justice vision for his/ her school
- Constraints on professional agency for social justice

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The material circumstances of the interview, including its length, location and the seating arrangements were significant in encouraging reflection and openness rather than 'performances of leadership'. Each interview was over an hour long, which gave time for a conversation to unfold in a relaxed manner. All the interviews were conducted in the headteachers' offices, in an informal area of the room, sitting around a low table on 'soft seating', rather than the headteacher speaking from behind a desk. In some of the interviews, there were interruptions, including a fire alarm evacuation, but the flow of conversation was quickly restored in each case.

Understanding the way knowledge is co-produced by an interviewee and interviewer within a qualitative interview is important. MacLure (2003) posits that research interviews are fabrications which are affected by perceptions of the researcher's positionality in relation to the interviewee. There was an interesting social dynamic within the interviews between a former headteacher researcher and a serving headteacher research participant. I felt welcomed as an equal with 'insider credentials' by all of the headteachers. On listening to the interview transcripts, I noted my own tentative, reflective approach, as well as some bursts of spontaneous enthusiasm. Frequent headteacher interjections such as 'as you know' suggested that my personal understanding of the headteacher role was helpful in building rapport. In one of the interviews, a headteacher who I was meeting for the first time invited me to stay in the room during a senior leadership team meeting, explaining to his team that I had been a headteacher and, therefore, could be trusted. This took me by surprise and, although I felt awkward in terms of the ethical implications of gaining informed consent from members of the team, I deferred to the headteacher's professional judgement. The example was indicative of the headteacher's approach to leadership and illustrates the extemporaneous navigation of researcher/ research participant relationships. In hindsight, and perhaps with the benefit of more research experience, I would have asked to leave the room for the duration of the meeting.

### 3.6.2   Phase Two: The Range of Ethnographic Methods

I made 24 separate visits to Wren School over a period of six months, spending an average of one day a week in the school, from October 2017 to April 2018. During this time, I conducted in-depth interviews with 29 people in different roles within the school's staffing

structure and held four pupil focus group discussions. I observed a variety of meetings, including the daily morning staff briefing, a senior leadership team meeting and a professional development session. I shadowed a senior and a middle leader for a day each, as well as a Year Seven and a Year Nine class. In total, I observed 20 complete lessons, plus many more partial lessons. I had two personal tours of the school site, one led by two Sixth Form students and one led by the headteacher.

I made 23 separate visits to Erasmus School over a ten week period, spending an average of two days a week in the school from September to December 2018. During this time, I conducted in-depth interviews with 26 people in different roles within the school's staffing structure and held seven pupil focus group discussions. I observed a variety of meetings, including the daily morning staff briefing, a senior leadership team meeting, a professional development session and three student council meetings. Evening events included a Sixth Form recruitment meeting at a local university, an 'open evening' for prospective pupils/students and a Year Ten parents' meeting. I also attended the first staff training day at the beginning of the academic year. I observed 40 lessons in total across different subject disciplines. This included shadowing a Year Seven class and Sixth Form lessons, as well as two whole day Year Eight Citizenship events. I was given two accompanied tours of the school site, one led by two Sixth Form students and one arranged for primary school pupils and their parents during a school 'Open Day'. I also observed multiple places and spaces in each school, for example circulation spaces, informal and formal communal spaces, as well as entrances and exits. See Appendix Eleven for a tabulated summary of the research tools.

### 3.6.3   Ethnographic Observation and Fieldnotes

Observation of each ethnographic site was largely informal in the sense that I did not use any written guides to structure my observations. I was open to what I saw and felt. I wanted to capture the kaleidoscopic flavours of the school, allowing ideas to strike me and recording them as reflective fieldnotes. While I noticed a cumulative effect in the building of knowledge of each school space, I remained alert to surprise and new ways of 'seeing' until the fieldwork was completed.

Some observations were informal including being in spaces in and around the school and moving through the school; others were more formal, such as shadowing pupils and members of staff. The latter offered the opportunity to view the daily life of the school through the perspective of, for example, a Year Nine pupil or a subject leader. When in lessons or meetings, I adjusted my behaviour to context, primarily observing but contributing and responding when invited to. Perhaps paradoxically, I saw this as less intrusive than sitting away from research participants in a detached manner.

The various tours of each school site that I engaged in provided opportunities for both observation and interaction with pupils and parents. In addition, I asked the headteacher of Wren School to select five places that illustrated her vision for social justice. I found this ethnographic method a vibrant way of collecting data in which conversation was prompted by the immediacy and materiality of shared observations of the school environment on a working day.

I made written fieldnotes during lesson observations and following informal conversations with research participants. I reviewed the notes later, sometimes extending them with additional details recalled in the relative tranquillity of my personal workspace at home. I sometimes used the fieldnotes to write more detailed reflective texts. Audio-recordings also proved helpful in capturing immediate impressions of activities and spaces.

### 3.6.4   Ethnographic Interviews

Across the two schools, I audio-recorded interviews with 55 members of staff, including administrative staff, teachers, pastoral staff, middle leaders and senior leaders. Although I serendipitously acquired a governor perspective in interviews with teachers who had formerly been on the school's governing body, I decided not to extend the sample of stakeholders to parents or governors, even though this would have been interesting and informative, due to a need to keep the inquiry within manageable limits. This practical constraint also applied to the selection of interview data for examination. While only a small proportion of the extensive interview dataset collected and transcribed was used as evidence in the thesis, all the interviews were significant in the identification of key themes

as well as in shaping the analysis and interpretation of findings, especially in validating the generally positive responses to the headteachers' agency for social justice.

The self-selected sample of interviewees evolved through a mixture of formal approaches to research participants, for example via general and personal emails to staff and speaking in staff meetings, as well as placing myself in spaces like the Staff Room where staff could easily approach me.  Interviews focussed on interviewees' roles in the school structure, their understanding of social justice practice in secondary schooling and how the headteacher's agency influenced the enactment of social justice in a particular policy and organisational climate.

I experienced qualitative research interviews as both professional performances and private encounters.  In order to generate detailed, reflexive data, I needed to create a safe relational and physical space where mutual dialogic inquiry might flourish.  In relation to interviewees, I tried to mitigate the risks of obtaining sanitised performances that avoided inferring criticism of the headteacher or moving unconsciously towards what they saw as my own ideological position on an issue (MacLure, 2003) by engendering a relaxed, conversational encounter, that allowed for tentative reflection within the interview space. This, in the majority of cases, produced a form of 'negotiated text' (Gubrium, 1997) that extended beyond new managerial or ideological scripts and, often, encouraged professional discovery:

> *You're getting me to be a little bit meta and to think about what I do every day and it's so instinctive. This is why this is interesting.* (Sally Wren School Middle Leader)

### 3.6.5   Pupil Focus Groups

I held nine focus group discussions with pupils across the two schools which contributed significantly to 'knowledge of the school'.  These were conducted in private spaces without the presence of another adult.  Pupils chose to participate and, in addition, written consent was given by a parent/ carer, except in the case of Sixth Form students who were 18 years old.  The initial discussion guide (Appendix Thirteen) provided a framework for structuring discussions and facilitated exploration of specific issues and experiences as they emerged.

The interaction between group members generated interesting and, often, reflexive discussion, especially in the Sixth Form groups.

In each school, I negotiated the timing of the focus group discussions with teachers and the Sixth Form students in order to avoid educational detriment, for example loss of scheduled learning.  However, the focus groups were generally regarded positively by the school, participants and parents as learning opportunities in themselves that were congruent with each school's ethos and curriculum goals.  Following the discussion, Sixth Form students commented on the positive experience of being listened to and feeling valued.

## 3.7    RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIELD

Understanding the complexity of relational work in ethnographic research is highlighted by Albon and Rosen (2013).  While their focus is on early childhood research, the relational ethics of answerability and social justice, inspired by the work of Bakhtin, they propose is a fundamental principle of the approach I have taken in this study.  Fawcett and Hearn (2004, p. 215) emphasised the need for the reflexivity of the researcher in navigating inter-related forms of 'otherness', including otherness emanating from the structuring of power in society and otherness emanating from 'the structuring of power/knowledge in specific research projects'.  In my case, this involved acknowledging the potential influence of multiple subjectivities, including adult student and former teacher and headteacher, that were embedded within the 'framing role' of 'researcher'.

My own headship of four years and two terms in a large urban, outer London co-educational secondary modern school of 1,600 pupils meant I was entering the field of ethnographic inquiry with both 'insider' professional knowledge and a deep emotional connection with the issues being studied.  Ongoing reflection on the substantive affinities with, and differences between, myself and the research participants in the study, as well as the nuances of connection and dissonance that emerged in the process of conducting the research, was significant in adding validity to the research.  Like four of the seven headteachers in my sample, I had been promoted from deputy headteacher to headteacher of the same school.  Like the headteacher of Wren School, one of the ethnographic sites, I

had overseen a major building programme that transformed the school's physical environment.  However, unlike her, I had marginal input into the building design.  Like two of the headteachers, my school was located in a local authority with a mixture of selective and non-selective secondary schools.

The reflective text below captures how I saw myself in the research space and highlights the 'multiple forms of social relation involved between researchers and researched' (Fawcett and Hearn, 2004, p. 202).

> *A mysterious, extraneous presence, both observer and observed, moving through the physical and emotional spaces of the school, slightly disturbing the normative rules of engagement.  Working skilfully within the rhythms of organisational life, placing myself in spaces: staff room, classrooms, assembly hall, offices, playgrounds, school meeting room; and moving through liminal spaces: corridors and the edges of pedagogic space in an open plan building.  Interacting within role as researcher, sometimes being invited to step into the role of fellow practitioner, occasionally forced out of role into intervening in a safeguarding issue.  Solo, ad hoc and choreographed performances, and intimate encounters.  Polishing a repertoire of set pieces (interviews and focus groups) and experimenting with new techniques. Reading 'space' by respecting invisible boundaries.  Highly attuned to paralinguistic cues in initiating and receiving contact with others.  Recognising how I am influencing others in a complex, iterative way.  Retreating to safe spaces for reflection and introspection.  High visibility **and** blending into the background.*
> (Author, 2018)

In both schools, I was given wide access to members of staff, pupils, lessons and events and, most significantly, allowed to 'wander' through each school.  The mandate for the research to take place, which was given personally by the headteachers, in a Staff Briefing in Wren School and at the beginning of a staff training day in Erasmus School, at the outset of each ethnographic study, was significant in legitimising and encouraging participation by others. While the focus of the study was clearly on headteacher agency, each headteacher located the research more widely in the context of the school's contribution to an understanding of

socially just schooling.  This was significant in encouraging reflective participation in interviews and conversations which was distanced from any scrutiny of the headteacher's competence in role.

In building relationships over time, I was particularly concerned to disassociate ethnographic research from managerial surveillance, in order to avoid adding additional pressure to participants' professional lives.  This positionality was also important in encouraging open dialogue that extended well beyond curated responses, sanitised or 'best' versions of experience and new managerial 'soundbites'.  My previous experience as a teacher (as well as headteacher) was an important resource in developing these connections.  Over the course of the ethnographic fieldwork, while I gained familiarity with the physicality of the sites, their internal management systems and relational cultures, I never felt like an 'insider researcher'.  From the perspective of the research participants, I may have become a less visible presence but my ongoing appeals for participation in interviews, up until completion of the fieldwork, refreshed their awareness of my distinctive research role.

Most people in both school communities demonstrated ongoing interest in the research and engaged enthusiastically in interviews and pupil focus groups.  Indeed, the openness of both pupils and staff to exploring the meaning of their educational and professional experiences through a social justice lens was striking and humbling.  There were, of course, individual differences of response, but the sense that a research participant felt threatened by my presence was rare.  Many pupils seemed to welcome the research, as the following reflections on an Upper Sixth Form history lesson illustrate.

> *I introduced myself to the students and explained my research project.  Joy* [a Sixth Form student] *asked me what literature I was using and if I was going to produce a paper they could read.  After the lesson, she remained behind to discuss her own research on identity from the perspective of a young British woman of colour.*
> (Author)

The following email from one of the headteachers of Erasmus School reflected sentiments conveyed to me by all three headteachers at the end of the study.

> *Thank you Christine - it was a pleasure being part of this. You'll be pleased to note that during our training day today we identified the key foci for our curriculum aims and "Social Justice" was up there on the slide!*

> *You've put this agenda to the forefront of our minds much more sharply as a result of your questioning - thank you.* (Penny Erasmus School Headteacher (2019) Email to Christine Jefferys, 15 February.)

The 'humanity' of the researcher is particularly significant in ethnographic research. While I, generally, felt comfortable and increasingly confident in each site, I also experienced discomfort, awkwardness and vulnerability, on occasion. This often coincided with feelings of ambivalence about my complex position in the school and how this was perceived by others or simply the fatigue experienced in 'research labour', expressed in this reflection:

> *I feel like an increasingly irrelevant 'extra' in a fatigued school. This sense of being 'alien' comes entirely from me not the research participants, as I squeeze more from the school.* (Author)

As researcher, I was reaching a saturation point emotionally. Empathically, I was responding to a familiar, deeply-rooted professional memory of end of term exhaustion, use of the word, 'squeeze', suggesting tension between the ethics of knowledge production and relational work.

I welcomed informal affirmation, for example friendly enquiries from staff as to the progress of my research and smiles of recognition on passing people in the playground. My somatic presence as I 'hung out' in, and wandered through, the spaces of each school, occasionally feeling awkward and, at other times, projecting cheerfulness and enthusiasm, transcended the simplifications of social categorization, making each formal and informal social encounter a unique human encounter. I needed spaces of respite and retreat; places to

hide and be alone.  I recall feeling awkward in 'liminal moments', as if I was hovering, even lurking in the space.  On one occasion, for example, I was recording audio fieldnotes as I was analysing leadership posters on the walls of the Training Room, when site staff came into the room to rearrange furniture.  In that moment of immersion in the 'other-worldliness' of research, I felt like an impostor, awkwardly trying to account for my presence.

My experience of ethnographic work in this study could be described as an intricate, ethical dance in which researcher and researched move rhythmically within a shared space according to mutually understood and evolving rules of engagement that encompassed both intentionality and spontaneity; the ad hoc and the planned; structure and free flow; intuitive exploration and choreographed set pieces.  The dynamic of cohesion and harmony, as well as occasional tension and awkwardness, reflected the way energy flowed through each organisation at particular times of the day, the week, the term and the school year.  I was part of this flow of energy, whether participating in it or as a detached observer.

> *My researcher position within both school communities evolved over the course of each study.  I was initially welcomed as a trusted guest into confident schools that were proud of their social justice work.  As a former head-teacher, I was viewed as a fellow professional.  The hat of doctoral researcher also added credibility capital and was seen to represent commitment to life-long study.  Over the course of each placement, I became a familiar face.  While the head-teachers' initial mandate was always significant in gaining access to participation, I began to build a relationship with the school community based on my own form of 'research professionalism'.*
> (Author)

Moving with the school's flow and energy included occasionally contributing to lessons, for example discussing my recent visit to Rwanda in an Upper Sixth Form Politics lesson, giving my response to a literary text in an English lesson and critiquing a drama student's essay and an art student's painting.  In hindsight, these opportunities and way of being in a school's space added significantly to my understanding of each school's rhythms and meanings.  As an ethnographer, I became part of the space I was researching without ever assuming that it belonged to me or I belonged to it.

There were two occasions when I intervened in the schools' work for safeguarding reasons. When a pupil was jostled in an unruly queue of pupils, I stopped and waited with the pupils until a member of staff arrived. I also filed a formal safeguarding report when I was concerned about a conversation with a pupil regarding his experience of racism and religious prejudice outside the school. Reflecting on these interventions illustrated the ethical complexity of the ethnographer's work, requiring in-the-moment judgements, as well as discernment in determining whether or not to pass on information gathered as a researcher and to whom.

## 3.8 THEMATIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
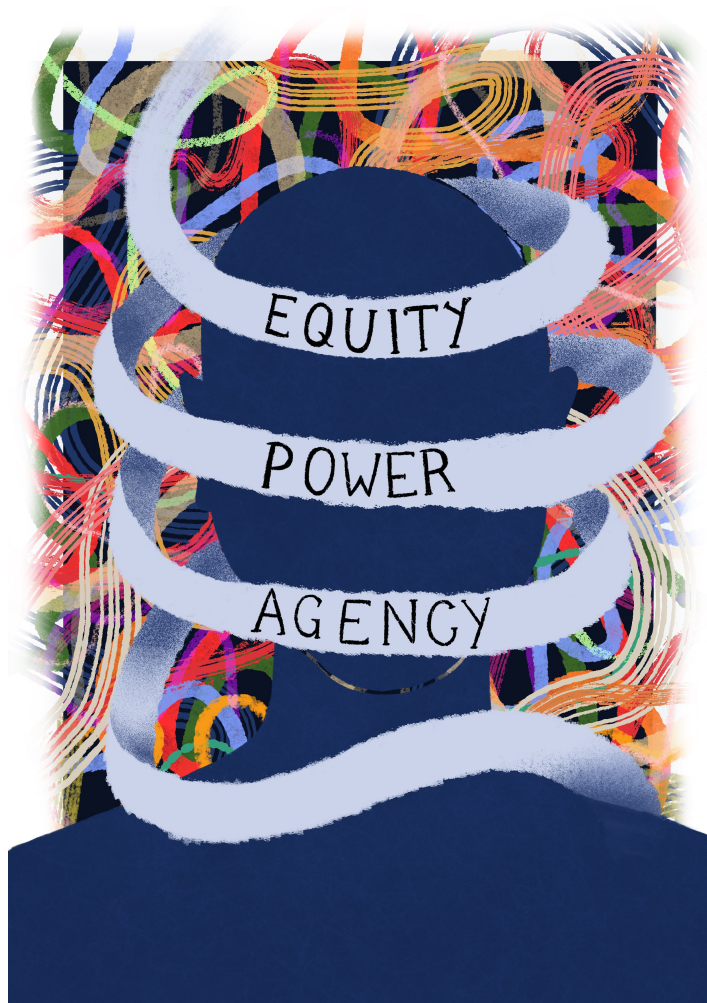


Figure Five: "Headteachers' Agency for Social Justice in a *Dispositif*"[2]

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[2] Original illustration by Bullimore, K. (2021), shared copyright Jefferys, C. and Bullimore, K.

Braun and Clarke (2020) have pointed out that there are numerous iterations of thematic analysis that differ paradigmatically and procedurally. By using a form of reflexive, critical, thematic discourse analysis, I was able to illuminate a number of vivid threads that emerged as dominant patterns within a complex local *dispositif* of configurations of the purpose and practice of secondary schooling, in particular, and education, more generally. In line with a post-structuralist approach, I was interested in the ideas informing the semantic and semiotic meanings of 'texts', including interview transcripts, buildings and captured observations.

Within the colourful, enmeshed tapestry of discourses represented in Figure Five, thematic organisation gave structure to ways in which the conceptualisations of 'equity', 'power' and 'agency' in my theoretical framework animated the intersections between the socio-political discourses of neoliberalism, the governing discourses of new managerialism and a headteacher's distinctive internal *dispositif*. Rather than a systematic, comparative approach, for example comparing how each headteacher delivered an assembly, the inductive approach to data collection in the ethnographic studies generated purposive, thematic categories that provided points of conceptual cohesion. In exploring the theme of 'an ethic of care', for example, in Chapter Six, I analysed different examples of care practice in each school to illuminate the distinctive discourses of social justice that were cultivated by distinctive kinds of leadership agency.

To ensure rigour and avoid researcher bias (Silverman, 2000 and 2001), I immersed myself in a systematic exploration of the data, allowing discourses to emerge from close and multiple readings of transcripts and fieldnotes, moving between 'bird's eye view' and 'microscopic lens'. The process of writing extended this meaning-making work as I remodelled, chiselled and polished my work to achieve greater precision and rigour of interpretation, paying attention to how 'nuance, contradiction, ambiguity and areas of vagueness' (Osgood, 2012, p. 35) in the data revealed different meanings, noting whispered as well as overt resistances to neo-liberal subjectivation.

I used the software program, NVivo to store, organise, code and recode data, including interview transcripts and fieldnotes, in a kind of 'trial and error sense-making'. I found myself reviewing, rethinking and finessing the evolving thematic structure in order to

capture significant threads and patterns that addressed my research questions in the most salient way. Allocating and reallocating data to categories was an ontological task in which I considered the ways in which:

> *…discourses 'produce' phenomena, and how a phenomenon's meaning and significance are associated with the particular discourse(s) within which people encounter them.* (Hughes, 2010, p. 53)

The post-structural analysis of data required a distinctive alertness to interpretive context (Gill, 2000) by looking outside the discourse itself and asking, 'Just how [was] it possible to know that, to think that, to say that' (Threadgold, 2000, cited in MacLure 2003, p. 178). Critical social theorists argue that a major aspect of interpretive context is the hegemonic grip of neo-liberal ideology on professional subjectivity. Indeed, Ball (2003, p. 215) has suggested that 'individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrication' as a consequence of a market-driven, performance-based education culture. Within the data collected, I found that while discourses of social justice embedded in the policies and orthodoxies of neo-liberal schooling systems, such as the importance of data in tracking pupil progress, were seen as defining the current work of teaching, there was also substantial evidence from interview data of professional criticality that challenged the efficacy of government policy in relation to both social justice processes and outcomes. In addition, there was also congruence between the discursive accounts and practice of a wide range of adult actors in each ethnographic school with the values of the school's headteachers. I will argue that this indicated the active and discriminating ethical agency of headteachers in shaping the conditions in which neo-liberal policies were enacted, resisted and refused.

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## 3.9    CONCLUSION

Having discussed the methodology, research design and methods through which I conducted the study, I now turn to the analysis and discussion of empirical data. My findings are set out in three analytical chapters which address my two research questions. In Chapter Four, I explore how interviews with secondary school headteachers revealed various understandings, concerns, aspirations and constraints informing discursive constructions of leadership agency for social justice in the contemporary English policy environment. In Chapters Five and Six, I discuss the way the leadership agency of three headteachers gave legitimacy and discursive power to distinctive ways of thinking, saying and behaving which, in turn, shaped conditions for professional engagement with social justice concerns, including the refusal of neo-liberal subjugation.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# HEADTEACHER CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AGENCY

## 4.1    INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how different headteachers spoke about their social justice agency in an in-depth qualitative interview.  I discuss how their understandings of social justice interacted with their personal narratives, with organisational context and with various forms of government regulation, reflecting both the internal and external *dispositifs* of their professional agency.  The chapter is organised in three interlinked thematic sections.  The first, "A Private and Public Good", discusses headteachers' general orientations towards social justice agency.  Following this, "A Fortified Castle" examines how the headteachers of two schools with socio-economically disadvantaged cohorts configured notions of equity and aspiration in addressing the political dimension of classed disadvantage.  The final thematic section, "Curriculum Reform", explores how recent reforms of the Key Stage Four curriculum were in varying degrees of alignment with headteachers' personal vision of socially just education.  The interviews begin to show different professional subjectivities emerging through discussion of social justice as a private and public good which are further explored through ethnographic study in Chapters Five and Six.

The diversity of the institutional contexts the headteachers had chosen to work in was significant in both reflecting and producing their constructions of social justice agency.  To recap, four of the schools were located in urban locations bordering London.  These included a boys' secondary modern school (Wren) led by Karen; a boys' grammar school (Corby) led by Jim; a girls' secondary modern school (Riverview Technology College) led by Steve and a co-educational Roman Catholic school, led by Paul.  The sample also included a state international school (Erasmus), situated in a rural, village location, led by male and female co-headteachers, Michael and Penny, and an inner city academy (Roosevelt), situated in an area of high social deprivation, led by Luke.

**4.2     EDUCATION AS A PRIVATE AND PUBLIC GOOD**

In this section, I consider the experiences and values headteachers identified as informing their agency for social justice as both a private and public good (Ross, 2021).  Within this 'internal *dispositif*', the headteachers were committed to using their leadership agency to contribute to both the flourishing of individuals (Rogers, 2004; hooks 1994) and to the public good in relation to promoting greater social equity through socially just secondary schooling.

Headteacher reflections highlighted a deeply personal commitment to school leadership as a vocation.  For example, Luke, the headteacher of Roosevelt Academy, reflected on 'something core that will feed into whatever you do in your life … instead of living your life through social structures or a position in society'.  Karen, the headteacher of Wren School, highlighted 'the internal belief, that makes you make things work', contemplating the heavy burden of an internal conflict between self-doubt and conviction:

> *Well, it* [headship] *carries a heavy burden because when you're driving forward with the school and you believe in something, there is self-doubt in that belief.  There is a feeling of, 'Is what I'm doing really the right way?'  We've got a school that operates in a very different way to other schools and you have to be absolutely focused in that is the way you are going and, when you hit difficulties, you've got to keep moving in that direction, because that is what you believe in, but it's very easy, sometimes, to doubt.  …it's the belief, the internal belief, that makes you make things work, isn't it?*
> (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

This personal vision encapsulates the tenacity required to sustain commitment to 'heterotopic agency', where things happen 'in a very different way to other schools'.  Paul, headteacher of St Mark's Catholic Comprehensive School, explained his aspirations to become a headteacher as connecting with 'the soul' of the school he had taught in for his whole career.

Religion and 'secular faith' were cited by some of the headteachers as underpinning their choice of a career committed to serving others.  The headteacher of St Mark's Roman

Catholic School, Paul, reflected that 'so many of the Jesus parables and stories from his life are about him trying to support the people who have been put down upon'. He was proud:

> *…that we serve the community of H, not just the Catholic children…ensuring that the children that come to St Mark's get the very best holistic support to become fantastic citizens of the world really.*

The headteacher of River Technology College for Girls, Steve, also spoke of the importance of his Christian faith in steering him towards a career in teaching:

> *I have a Christian faith and I think some of it comes out of that. … And I think you see what makes a difference and you see how it feels good to make a difference. Yeah, I think that's, I think, sort of, the combination of your sort of faith and then your belief that you build up through life generally and you put those two together and you think, "Now, this is what I want to do with my life. And, sort of, try and make a difference in that area.* (Steve River Technology College for Girls Headteacher)

The co-headteacher of Erasmus School, Michael, described himself as, 'an atheist, a humanist…so I will describe this school as akin to a faith school, but the faith is a secular internationalism'. In exploring the roots of his commitment to education as a form of public service, Michael highlighted the significance of both family and politics:

> *I was instilled with a sense of responsibility and commitment and duty. My parents were never involved beyond their own family, but my wife, she was brought up, in her own way, in a very…with a strong sense of duty and public value. My children epitomise that as well…*

> *…I think, probably, being politicised at college to the Student Union, and then starting to teach geography and looking at the way the world was, and then that catalyst which was being asked to join the United Nations…and then coming here and being introduced to the International Baccalaureate. It all just fused together; made me what I am.*

The agonistic challenge of developing 'a school as you wish it to be' within an external *dispositif* of finite material resources and divergent values was articulated by Steve, headteacher of River Technology College for Girls:

> *Of course, there are limits that you work within but there's things that you're passionate about, that you're excited about that, as a headteacher, you can get on and do.  And that's fantastic.  That's the best bit of the job.* (Steve River Technology College for Girls Headteacher)

Words such as 'passionate', 'excited' and 'fantastic' convey an enthusiasm that spills beyond Cartesian rationalism (Lynch, 2007), demonstrating confidence in personal and professional agency.

Like the ten English headteachers in a study by Hammersley-Fletcher (2013), headteachers in this study found themselves in an educational policy climate that was antithetical to their personal constructions of socially just education.  Their accounts reveal dissonance between their own social justice values and both neo-liberal values of atomised individualism, self-interest, consumption and competition (Mau, 2015, cited in Lynch, 2021) and new managerial secondary school performance and accountability cultures dedicated to securing favourable examination outcomes (Hutchings, 2015).  Michael, the co-headteacher of Erasmus School, emphasised the encouragement he received from within the school not to capitulate in a performance ethic that over-ruled 'values'.  He saw the use of data as subordinate to 'values' in a generic sense, asserting, 'this is a value-driven school.  Data will inform it, but it's values that drive it':

> *…values appeal, not only to professional people like teachers, but also to young people…I think young people, they don't like being seen as a number, and they're much more prepared to engage in discussions about values and so on…staff and students alike are more interested in values, and that itself is a bit of an antidote to what the government is pushing and pushing and pushing on to schools at the moment...* (Michael Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

In this statement, the repetition of 'pushing' implies the need for determined, continuous agonistic resilience in a war of attrition. However, Michael regards the internal axiological *dispositif* of the school, where the gaze of 'staff and students alike' is on values, as an antidote to a contrasting government agenda, citing young people's antipathy to 'being seen as a number'.

Steve, the headteacher of River Technology College for Girls, problematised school league tables as having the potential to 'sell kids out', presenting headteachers with ethical dilemmas around a conflict between a school's public success and 'doing the right thing':

> *Well, I wouldn't be able to go home and feel happy with myself if we'd gone up the league tables, if I felt I'd sold kids out in the process. I think it's just about going home and feeling happy in yourself that you've done the right thing.* (Steve River Technology College for Girls Headteacher)

Steve makes a strong connection between his professional self and his 'home' self, emphasising that congruence between his school leadership agency and his personal values was fundamental in 'feeling happy in yourself'. The focus on schooling as creating opportunities for all pupils to achieve something amazing, 'regardless of background, starting point, barriers, boundaries, whatever', resonates with discourses of human development and flourishing as driving forces within education (Rogers, 2004). In this context, Steve saw his leadership agency as ensuring his school helped individuals to excel by recognising and nurturing individual talent:

> *Social justice is all about, to me, everybody achieving something amazing regardless of background, starting point, barriers, boundaries, whatever. So what I often talk to parents about at open evening is every single student comes in with an ability to be amazing at something. For some it's dance, for some it's caring for the others, for some it's maths. It could be anything. And what I really want to do is that the students come into the school and we help them to find that talent, nurture it, develop it and send them on their way in a career in that.*

Steve's argument here engages with notions of 'affective equality' (Lynch and Lodge, 2021) and represents a challenge to neo-liberal discourses of social justice which rely on a perceived fair meritocracy that approves the differential rewarding of talent and ability in the context of a stratified curriculum where some subjects and career pathways are accorded greater economic and political value than others.

Karen's social justice vision reflected her belief in the capacity of schools to remake the world through summoning discourses of collective belonging, equality of worth and entitlement to 'the same opportunities as each other':

> *The logo we use for the school is about being together and working together as the collective and how do we do that. Our logo is a circular logo and it is about that and when the children come in, that's what I communicate with them. This is us and we are the collective. We are the school and we take people into our school and they become part of the school and then they move out of the school and, hopefully, they're moving out of the school with the beliefs and the ethos that we share that everybody is important and that everybody deserves the same opportunities as each other.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Like Karen, Steve linked his vision of school effectiveness with a school's impact on changing the society around it:

> *If this school is really, really effective it will change the society around it...By the people leaving with the sets of values, the confidences, the aspirations, the social skills to actually impact the community around it. … This mental image that the students walk through that door into 'culture again', which is going to help develop them into someone who's going to walk out and make a difference in the community. That's how I see it.* (Steve River Technology College for Girls Headteacher)

Penny, the co-headteacher of Erasmus School, spoke of her joy on 'results day' in seeing children realise 'that they have qualifications and they can do something with themselves, and they can influence the world in some way'. Penny wished to emulate the influence of

her own teachers on her in nurturing young people who were empowered through schooling to change the world:

> *I had amazing teachers and I can see the difference those teachers made to me and made to my friends, and I think there was a driving ambition to replicate that, to be a part of that, where we are changing the lives of people and changing the world a little bit in terms of bringing up young people who will, in their own right, change the world if they're steered in the right direction.* (Penny Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

Although the language used by these headteachers in discussing their beliefs and values is abstract and imprecise by new managerial standards, it conveys a passionate, independent and authentic professionalism.  While these beliefs and values do not necessarily supplant the market values which legitimise and cultivate the development of self-interested, risk-calculating pupil subjects, they indicate the potency of a substantial counter discursive antidote to a 'factory-oriented' model of education (see Hutchings, 2015).

## 4.3    A FORTIFIED CASTLE

> *…we can certainly transform people's thinking, much evidence of that. Transforming their social condition, transforming their position in society is something I can contribute to, but it's not in the palm of my own hands.  That begs many other social factors in terms of social stratification, austerity and so on.* (Michael Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

In this section, I explore how some headteachers engaged directly with issues of equity and aspiration in the context of wider societal structural inequities of income and wealth, which have a profound impact on pupils' experience of secondary schooling and the social rewards, in the form of examination outcomes, they gain from it (Francis and Wong, 2013). I focus on two of the headteachers, Karen and Luke, examining how their personal cultures of social justice were influenced by childhood experiences and how the localised classed

vantage points of the schools they had chosen to lead shaped their approaches to headship. Their stories illuminate how the discourse of education as an equalising force is troubled by the way spaces of privilege are colonised by elite social groups who maintain their advantage by excluding others from 'the fortified castle'.

Karen, headteacher of Wren School, a non-selective boys' school, saw her leadership agency as explicitly addressing classed social and educational disadvantage. Here, she reflects on the combination of influences that guided both her choice of school and her vision for social justice within that school.

> *I think my history is... I reflected on this the other day and I absolutely saw how my early life shaped who I am today. I was brought up in rural Herefordshire. In rural Herefordshire, there are very poor people (when I was young) who worked the land and had very little and then there were very rich people who were farmers - very rich…and I sort of fell in the middle of those two groups of people…As I grew older, living in an area where there were very wealthy people and very poor people, I started to associate myself more with the poor people, or wanting to help the poor people, and not understanding these rich farmers who sent their children to public school [fee-paying schools], who were totally detached from the difficulties of everyday life for people that were a lot poorer than me. (Karen Wren School Headteacher)*

Describing the discomfort she felt in encountering social privilege as a child, she cited her experience of attending primary school with pupils from wealthy and poor backgrounds as influencing her social justice values. At six or seven years of age, she remembered:

> *…sitting in school and thinking, in that little naive way when you first go to school, that everybody is the same as you and then, you know, when you come to the realisation that people are different and they don't all think the same as you…and even at that very young age, thinking, 'This is wrong, Sally hasn't got those opportunities because she hasn't got a mum at home who makes her pretty clothes and ties her hair in ribbons. She hasn't got that.'*

This discomfort with inequity was strengthened when she was in the Sixth Form:

> *So I studied psychology A level and human biology A level and those sorts of things and, more and more, I thought, 'Wow, we're made from the same basic stuff. Why are we all so different?'.*

Karen had chosen to work in a boys' secondary modern school in 'quite a poor demographic area', because she felt that there was 'quite a lot of injustice for children who come to these schools'. Her vision was to support children 'to have the same opportunities and to move outside of themselves' by looking beyond the locality where many families had lived for generations and were employed 'in quite low level work'. To do this, she saw her social justice agency as using secondary education to extend opportunity for her pupils in an area where 'twenty-five to thirty percent of primary pupils went to grammar schools' by helping them develop the social confidence to seek opportunity beyond their home environment:

> *I think education is a key driver for how we develop social justice…I work in a boys' secondary modern school because I feel that there is quite a lot of injustice for children who come to these schools. I mean this is 'H'. It's quite a poor demographic area and, for me, it's about working in these schools and supporting these children to develop that social capital that they can take with them in their future lives. That's very much about what our vision is and part of what we say in our school is that we talk about our vision of going beyond and giving children opportunities to see beyond the locality.*
> (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Karen foregrounded the need for her staff team to work very hard in order to provide pupils with the same opportunities as more privileged school cohorts:

> *We give a lot of our time to the students. We work very hard for the students and the staff here, because this is a secondary modern school and we've got to achieve very high standards to just be on the same footing as other schools, have to work incredibly hard. You don't do that unless you have committed part of your… inside,*

*you know, your belief to it, do you?  You wouldn't do it; you'd go to another school.*
(Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Jim, the headteacher of Corby Grammar School, referred to the opportunities he had personally acquired as a result of attending a grammar school.  He believed that economic status should not exclude pupils from an academic secondary education as a platform for social mobility:

> *So I think that, actually, anything that stops individuals prospering on the grounds that they can't afford it, is an anathema to me which is actually why, oddly enough, I think why I work in a selective school. More to the point, why I work in this one.*

Originating in the Education Act 1944, as part of the fundamental reform of post-war education in the UK, selective education occupies a deeply contentious space in the landscape of English secondary education.  Grammar schools became the elite segment of tripartite secondary schooling, reserved for the most able pupils identified through a test taken in the final year of primary school at 11 years of age.  The number of grammar schools in England has significantly declined since the 1940s and selective education only exists in a small number of local authorities.  From very different vantage points, both Jim and Luke, Headteacher of Roosevelt Academy, saw removing money and class as barriers to accessing an academic education and elite professions as forms of leadership agency that disrupted the exclusivity of elitist socio-cultural structures.

Luke's educational philosophy and social justice vision were closely aligned with both his childhood experiences and his school's position as an inner city school serving an economically disadvantaged community.  Building on a semi-professional career in football, a first degree in social science and politics and a successful career as a teacher, Luke enrolled in Future Leaders, an 'accelerated leadership programme' for aspiring headteachers.  Luke emphasised the lasting significance of this programme on his professional thinking, 'And, to this day the people that I met on that programme in 2008, they are some of my best professional friends and, erm, we meet up frequently'.

Luke believed poverty played the most significant part in determining individual opportunity within society. From an ideological point of view, he was deeply critical of what he perceived to be an increasingly ruthless form of neo-liberalism that had supplanted a social democratic contract between capitalism and labour:

> *What's happened recently, because of the flexibility of international finance, is that - and international markets and liberalisation of international markets - there have been a group of elite that have made an extraordinary amount of money out of failure, out of communities, countries failing, markets failing...And what has happened now is we've become more divided but that doesn't mean that we need to rip up the template of what..., how we organise ourselves in Britain. It just means we'll just be better at it and to be better at it we need to be more inclusive.*

Growing up as a mixed-race child on an inner city housing estate in a poor single parent family, had informed Luke's belief that social disadvantage could be mitigated and overcome through 'hard work and resilience and a positive attitude to failure' that was underpinned by emotional support. Emphasising the importance of the love he received from his mother as the bed rock of his career achievements, he observed, 'I had a mum that loved me and, you know, overtly so, and believed in me and, no matter if I failed, I was still her son and would be given that unconditional love'.

Reflecting on how his own experience of overcoming life challenges had shaped his school leadership philosophy, Luke explained:

> *And I recognise that my journey to being a principal has been as a consequence, yes, of some self-agency and efficacy, without a shadow of a doubt, because other people are given some of the opportunities that I had, but not everybody takes them. So there is something about your mindset and your own resilience and determination to be successful. But, also, I recognise, [laughter] I'm only here because people have helped me develop and have put time into me…*

Within this context, he saw personal ambition as significant in forging opportunity, 'I genuinely just set out to be the best football coach, the best teacher, er, the best Head of Year that I could be. And I firmly [believe], if you just do that, everything else eventually comes.'

Luke viewed his headship of an inner city school as making 'a contribution to the community, all types of community that I've come from' through a process of empowerment:

> *…too many of our communities let other people make decisions for them.  They don't empower themselves.  So there is something about empowerment in that statement and not only yourself but empower others around you…*

Central to his social justice strategy as a headteacher was to encourage his pupils to have the same aspirations that 'any professional family would have for their child' with respect to a life that brought personal happiness:

> *So social justice means that, regardless of your, er, starting point, financially, gender, ethnicity, er, sexual orientation, erm, that you have an opportunity to be the best person that you can possibly be and pursue a career or activities that, yeah, that make you happy.*

Significantly, Luke's aspirational ethic for his pupils, empowering both yourself as an individual *and* others around you, was underpinned by a vision of contributing to a more inclusive society, in the longer term.

Government aspirations to achieve upward social mobility through promoting higher levels of performance by social groups identified as underachieving nationally permeate many policy documents such as the Pupil Premium resource-based initiative (Department for Education, 2022, p. 1) designed 'to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in schools in England' based on evidence that 'disadvantaged children generally face additional challenges in reaching their potential at school and often do not perform as well as other

pupils'. The view of education as a passport to greater social justice through the levelling of opportunity is underpinned by political discourses focussing on the virtues of a 'meritocratic society' with its linked construct, 'equality of opportunity', as emphatically expressed in a speech by former United Kingdom Prime Minister, Theresa May, in 2016:

> *I want Britain to be the world's great meritocracy – a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow.*
>
> *I want us to be a country where everyone plays by the same rules; where ordinary, working class people have more control over their lives and the chance to share fairly in the prosperity of the nation.*
>
> *And I want Britain to be a place where advantage is based on merit not privilege; where it's your talent and hard work that matter, not where you were born, who your parents are or what your accent sounds like.* (May, 2016)

While the political goal in this speech is clear, the concept of meritocracy itself is widely contested and viewed as a construct that disguises and deflects attention from relations of privilege and disadvantage within society that perpetuate significant, embedded and intractable inequalities in education (Ross, 2021; Young 2001).

Luke saw accessing the educational and career opportunities currently enjoyed by privileged social groups as an achievable *entitlement* for his whole pupil cohort. While he was fully aware of the wider structural barriers that invalidated notions of within school equality of opportunity, he was dedicated to using schooling as an instrument for producing leaders who would 'lower the castle drawbridge' and encourage others to enter. His strategy for achieving greater societal equity depended on ensuring his pupils were positioned, indeed groomed, to both compete for 'elite' places in a highly competitive higher education marketplace and, subsequently, to succeed in gaining access to elite professions. A central tenet of this strategy was to address the competitive advantage of more privileged pupils by replicating the role of an aspirational, knowledgeable, confident and social-network-rich middle class parent:

*So professional families, you know, you'll be hearing university and Uncle Timmy and Uncle this and, er, Aunty so and so went to this university.  You'll be hearing that from a very young age.  Our families don't hear that.  They'll be the first people to go to university in their families.  So we have to put it into the lexicon of language and expectation, and so being explicit is really important, if nothing else to legitimise that as an objective or goal for them.*

The aspirational climate in Luke's school was underpinned by structured opportunities that harnessed the resources of the local, city environment, such as mentoring and coaching by city professionals, to support pupils who lacked the family resources available to the children of privileged social groups.  This included building 'expertise and knowledge and networks' for both staff and pupils and explicitly teaching the social and cultural knowledges required to enter, survive and flourish in the classed environment of elite universities and professions (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003).

Based on his personal experience, Luke believed in personal agency combined with both affective and practical support.  He presented himself as 'a role model for people who haven't had, through their family, er, connections and networks to the professions'.  His exhortations to his pupils were emphatic, 'show them that you are entitled to that route too and you can and should expect to be in those professions' and 'The only reason you can't is because you're not working hard enough or you've not reached out and used the networks that we provide explicitly at school'.  More generally, Luke argued that expecting less of his pupils than young people being educated in the independent sector was a form of injustice:

*…if you work in the independent sector…the expectation is that 99% of their young people will go off to university.  But why do they expect that?  And should we all expect that?  Well, if it's good enough for a certain group in the top 7% that can afford to pay for education, then surely that's got to be the expectation for everybody because, if it's not the expectation for everybody, well, that's unfair and unjust in my view.*

However, he also noted that achieving these goals represented a kind of 'super-agency' requiring additional effort from pupils, members of staff and families, in order to do better than schools where pupils were exposed to aspirational discourse 'in their informal networks or through their families or their community'. His approach to social justice could be described as the colonisation of elite structures achieved by 'knocking on the door' rather than standing outside throwing stones at a 'fortified castle'. While Luke's approach was about playing by the rules of the game rather than redefining them, his longer term vision involved re-ordering social relations by promoting a more inclusive society in which currently marginalised social groups gained access to social and cultural influence through occupying positions of leadership in society. In short, while the language he used in this comment was antagonistic, his leadership agency was agonistic:

> *…you need to be in it to shift it. You can't stand outside of it and throw stones at a, you know, a fortified castle. The stones are just going to come back and hit you in the face. You have to knock on the door and be invited in and be part of the change from within.*

While their engagement with classed and economic disadvantage emanated from very different life experiences, both Karen and Luke saw social justice agency as promoting discourses of legitimacy and entitlement as an aspect of educational aspiration. In this sense, their leadership work was less about neo-liberal subjectivation, except as a means to an end, i.e. entering the fortified castle, and more about redistributing opportunity. Deploying different strategies to achieve their social justice goals, both were using their professional agency to interrupt 'the reproduction of various kinds of social advantage and disadvantage' (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2002, p. 504) in order to promote a more equitable society.

## 4.4    CURRICULUM REFORM

The deepest divide in headteachers' constructions of social justice agency concerned their views on the recent reform of the Key Stage Four curriculum leading to a narrower academic curriculum and an examination-based assessment system that limited pupil and

teacher choice in favour of centralised prescription (Department for Education, 2013).  The divergence of headteacher views in the sample reflected different views about pupils' capabilities and the value of particular subjects, all of which are ongoing contestations in the educational landscape.  Most headteachers in the sample saw the tightened prescription in the curriculum reforms as squeezing out professional judgement while, at the same time, significantly disadvantaging pupils with practical aptitudes and learning styles suited to coursework, as well as depriving all pupils of an entitlement to a vibrant arts curriculum.  However, one headteacher welcomed the reforms as a form of classed entitlement in a deeply stratified society that offered socio-economically disadvantaged pupils the opportunity to compete with educationally privileged social groups for places in elite higher education institutions.

**Figure Six: National Curriculum Terminology (2014)**

| EBacc | A performance measure for English secondary schools based on an approved list of GCSE qualifications |
|---|---|
| FSM | Free School Meals |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education: Examinations taken by 16-year-olds. |
| KS1 Key Stage 1 | Years 1-2 for children aged 5-7 |
| KS2 Key Stage 2 | Years 3-6 for children aged 7-11 |
| KS3 Key Stage 3 | Years 7-9 for children aged 11-14 |
| KS4 Key Stage 4 | Years 10-11 for children aged 14-16 |
| Progress 8 | A type of value-added measure that aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. Pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with similar prior attainment. |
| Pupil Premium | Funding allocated to schools to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, defined as those who have been eligible for Free School Meals at any point during the last six years and looked after children. |

Some of the headteachers saw their social justice agency as mitigating the adverse effects of government policy by protecting subjects, especially the arts, that had been marginalised by the recent curriculum reforms.  Interestingly, the arts was an area that emerged in the ethnographic study as contributing to pupils' engagement with social justice issues, as well as the affective dimension of school life, as discussed in subsequent chapters.  Jim, the headteacher of Corby Grammar School was confident that his school's strong examination results empowered him 'to make sure we don't lose the things which are important':

> *…I'm not too worried about our accountability. We'll cope with that. But, yeah, you can say that, when you've got a record of doing well, you can afford to be a bit blasé about these things.* (Jim Corby Grammar School Headteacher)

Jim commented, 'our curriculum looks a lot more sterile than it used to'.  However, by delivering music, drama and art through a non-examination based curriculum, he believed that more pupils were, in fact, benefitting from access to creative arts subjects:

> *We do it differently.  We've now got more people doing music in the school and that happened by taking away the exam requirement.  So we teach music in Key Stage 3 as part of what we call CREXS, creative exploration.*

In relation to government policy on secondary school accountability measures (see Department for Education, 2016), which attribute greater value to traditional academic subjects in calculating a school's success in public league tables, Paul, the headteacher of St Mark's Catholic Comprehensive School, saw every subject as important but spoke of the 'very difficult balance' in ensuring that:

> *…students are given the best chance of hitting that measure [Progress 8] as well as our school, but we've also got to make sure that our offer is there to allow pupils to pursue the subjects that they care the most about…It might change their life.*

> *As a Catholic school, all of our students do RE up to Year 11 but it doesn't count within the Progress 8 measure. Ridiculous. Or the EBacc measure, okay. So it's not*

*seen as an EBacc subject; it's not important. But history and geography are more important than RE? Well that's ridiculous. …the fact that they've made these decisions and imposed them on the school and schools nationally and they've side-lined the arts, side-lined PE, even though we've got an obesity crisis, and the contribution sport makes to our society. How many people watch sport and participate in sport? These are absolutely dreadful decisions that have been made by government with a real lack of awareness of the intrinsic value of say the performing arts, or religious education, or PE.* (Paul St Mark's School Headteacher)

This commentary on political hierarchies of value in the curriculum, contrasting government agency ('they've') with public interests ('we've'), was delivered with insistent vigour. Paul saw marginalising subjects with 'intrinsic value' as 'absolutely dreadful decisions'. His emphatic language as he spoke about these subjects having the potential to change lives emanated from his personal experience, 'Music and sport saved my schooling'. His leadership agency in response to this hostile *dispositif* was to enlist the support of parents, 'we don't go chasing after the EBacc measure and we do what's right for the students':

*When we have our open evenings, we say that there is a government measure. Government have hinted down the line that EBacc subjects and having your EBacc might be important to get into university. My own opinion, and I say this to parents, I don't actually think that's true. And I feel that if you've got A's and A stars, whatever subject you're doing, universities and the top universities will want you anyway whether you've got an A star in geography or whether you've got an A star in art. As somebody on an interview panel, I'd probably far prefer somebody who's creative and found a real passion in their life that they've pursued because the range of skills that one is actually developing through, say, a love of music, drama, dance and art are just as valuable, if not more valuable, than the range of skills that you might develop through studying geography.* (Paul St Mark's School Headteacher)

While geography teachers might disagree with him, Paul's emphasis on linking passion with career success is a further example in the headteacher accounts of a school's affective sensibilities.

Karen, the headteacher of Wren School, who believed that schools were 'very hindered by the Government's notion of what a good education is', saw the new 'one size fits all' curriculum in Key Stage Four as disadvantaging her pupils.  She advocated a 'personalised curriculum' in her school believing her pupils should be given the opportunity to study subjects they found interesting and relevant, placing emphasis on developing the capacity to learn, especially through the collaborative, inquiry-based approaches to pedagogy used in Key Stage Three.

Karen felt that all subjects should be valued equally at Key Stage Four, without political interference, to allow schools to meet pupils' needs as individuals, privileging the professional understanding of a pupil's 'best interests'.  For example, Karen saw the requirement for all pupils to take a GCSE in a modern foreign language as a social injustice in so far as it defined success according to essentialist views of a 'good' curriculum offer:

> *…because there are going to be children in this school, due to their needs and their experiences as young children, who are not going to be able to come in and do really well in French and then that creates a negativity and a failure.  That's when I think you start to see people feeling that there is injustice in the way they are being treated.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

The construction of some pupils as being unable to do really well in a subject because of 'their needs and their experiences as young children' is an area of professional debate.  For some this is a realistic point of view at secondary school level, while for others the discourse incorporates deficit assumptions of pupils that limit their aspirations and achievements in a well-intentioned but deeply discriminatory way.  For example, Penny, co-headteacher of Erasmus School, believed that learning languages was not only cognitively feasible but gave pupils a competitive career advantage:

> *All children can learn languages and do very well at it, two languages in fact. That's going to stand them out from the crowd. It's going to give them opportunities, open doors for them that perhaps other children might not have access to.*

However, Karen's point of view exposes the implications for affective and recognition justice of a national curriculum policy that prioritises traditional forms of academic knowledge and, in the process, constructs pupils as failures, denying them the opportunity to achieve according to personal strengths and aspirations:

> *There are going to be a lot of children going out there [into society] who feel that they haven't achieved what they can and that they are failures.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Within 'best interests' debates about the secondary school curriculum, some headteachers' belief in parity of esteem between subjects was challenged by the current 'conservative' policy of according variable currency to different subjects in giving access to higher education and, by implication, social status. Reay (2012, p. 588), for example, argues that political and societal 'revalorisation of vocational and working class knowledges and a broadening out of what constitutes educational success beyond the narrowly academic' is a structural prerequisite of redistributive justice.

The headteacher of River Technology College for Girls, Steve, saw current curriculum policy as limiting his professional agency:

> *So there's things that I'd like to do with regards to teaching and learning that wouldn't necessarily suit government curriculum requirements, exams. I would like to focus far, far more on skills that are going to be useful for the students in their future careers. They leave here with successful skills but the curriculum is becoming increasingly content led.*

Steve spoke of the discriminatory effect of recent curriculum reforms in privileging middle class pupils:

> *The focus on EBacc does not suit a wide range of students and many of those from more disadvantaged backgrounds. A lot of our students want to go into areas and will be excellent at areas, which are not suited to the EBacc. So, as a result, we are*

*being pushed into a curriculum, which is actually going to make it more difficult for these students to excel in their talented area. Yeah. So it's putting up an unnecessary barrier.* (Steve River Technology College for Girls Headteacher)

As well as issues of subject choice, he believed that terminal examinations advantage pupils from middle class backgrounds whose parents know how to help them or can afford private tutors. He was worried about pupils failing, 'not because they're not talented, not because they can't do the subject, but because the barrier of just exams to assess is making it more difficult'.

In Steve's school, additional resources were directed to support pupils who were, 'not achieving what they could be achieving'. This contrasts with the tactical distribution of resources within a school to support borderline pupils who are seen to be critical in enhancing a school's performance metrics (Hutchings, 2015). Steve articulated his philosophy as follows:

*…we can't change the exam system but we can target more support for those that might struggle with it…we have intervention sessions where students come out to base time or some lessons and they will go in and have specific interventions in maths or English or science or whatever. And we will focus those on people who are not achieving. We will also deliberately weight it towards certain people. So we've got quite a few SEN students who have really targeted interventions. Our PPG [Pupil Progress Group] students are really targeted for interventions. So you identify the groups that are likely to have the biggest barriers or are having the biggest barriers 'cause their grades aren't good enough. And you give those that additional support others might not have.*

Steve's approach to allocating resources within the school's remit gave weight to context and individual need rather than accountability measures aligned with market metrics. I argue that these ethical deliberations represent significant strategic threads in the *dispositif* of a headteacher's social justice agency.

A very different view of the curriculum reforms was articulated by Luke, the headteacher of the inner city academy, who believed that only a curriculum directly linked to university and professional success, in the here and now, would provide justice for his pupils. Luke welcomed the reforms, seeing non-academic curricula as a form of 'soft bigotry' that 'dumbed down' expectations and denied socio-economically disadvantaged pupils opportunities to compete with children from privileged families. He argued, 'Anything else for me is selling the kids short', citing the over-representation of privileged social groups 'in politics, in government, in the law, in medicine' who were 'hoarding' opportunities for themselves. Luke viewed the 'personalised curriculum' espoused by Karen, Steve and Paul as impoverished. The suggestion that working class pupils were not capable of studying academic subjects made him angry:

> *And who is decided at 11? That's outrageous!...You're saying, literally, that these 11 year olds - are just 11 when they come into secondary school - that they don't deserve that opportunity to be a doctor.…until Ministers' children and the children of the elites are doing those qualifications, I'm not going to dumb down my expectations for our kids because they're the ones who are making decisions and, until our children from these communities are accessing those opportunities, then they're going to keep hoarding them for themselves.*

The mainstream curriculum in Luke's school was supplemented by an enriched informal curriculum that provided pupils with the social and cultural resources to compete with more privileged pupils, before entering the next phases of the game:

> *…the extended curriculum is around social and cultural capital, so giving them experiences that you could expect to have if you were born into a professional family. So, going to the theatre, going to museums, going to great universities, getting great companies to come in and speak to our students, our students going out to great companies.*

Luke argued that, prior to the curriculum reforms, 'too many schools in our scenario would play the game and just do lower level, less robust qualifications, less rigorous qualifications

in order to make the institution look good, instead of, you know, giving qualifications, skills and knowledge that will benefit them [pupils] in the professions'. Interestingly, Luke refers to schools playing a game to boost their position in public league tables. In contrast, he is, arguably, playing a longer game in order to dismantle class as a barrier to social mobility.

The headteachers' responses to national curriculum policy reflected their notions of the best interests of pupils and society and their conceptualisations of 'powerful knowledge' in the context of who defines powerful knowledge and on what basis. For some this included protecting the arts as occupying a central place in both an individual's personal development and a society's cultural development. Others argued for a personalised curriculum that foregrounded individual choice as a form of affective justice and one headteacher defended recent curriculum reform as critical in extending classed opportunity. Each of these approaches was transformative in intention and agonistic in execution within neo-liberal space, demonstrating, even in this small sample of headteachers, a diversity of professional subjectivities within the terrain of social justice agency.

## 4.5    CONCLUSION

This phase of the research study was helpful in demonstrating how forms of agonistic agency were anchored in headteachers' internal *dispositif* of values and beliefs. The three themes addressed in the chapter provide an understanding of the way headteachers' personal cultures of social justice animate their responses to an external *dispositif* in challenging dominant discourses of school effectiveness and rejecting the market as the primary source of educational logic and value. While aspects of the headteacher accounts conform to a neo-liberal view of school effectiveness, there is also substantial evidence in the data of discourses of school effectiveness being reconstructed as enabling individual pupils to both flourish and make a contribution to society based on subjectivities in which individuals are seen to develop within relations (Noddings, 2013). Most notably, the agonistic struggles in these accounts illuminate headteachers' ability to resist the discursive power of neo-liberal 'truths' embedded in government policy and create a third, heterotopic space. The following two analytical chapters look at how this shaped the way social justice was understood and enacted in two secondary schools, beginning with a

discussion of how each headteacher contributed to the creation of a distinctive educational space.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SOCIAL JUSTICE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE

## 5.1     INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates links between headteachers' social justice agency and the development of a 'corporate' educational space.  I examine how both the physical and symbolic dimensions of place and space produced educational meaning in relation to the way each school was designed, imagined and experienced (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 2010).  In particular, I explore how notions of 'moving beyond the local', in Wren School, in relation to disrupting classed containment, and preserving a liberal form of internationalism in Erasmus School draw on discourses of place and space.  Using ethnographic evidence collected in two very different secondary schools, I discuss the way headteachers occupy and shape these spaces in relation to their 'internal *dispositif'* and how they use their 'positional power' at the apex of an organisational hierarchy to influence the way the space is co-constructed in collaboration with the other social actors within and orbiting around it.

## 5.2     PLACE, SPACE AND HETEROTOPIAS

The headteachers in the study used social justice agency in developing corporate, heterotopic spaces in which plural conceptualisations of social justice and shifting relations of power produced a matrix of intersecting discourses which collided and coalesced in a multi-paradigmatic space to produce a school's social justice knowledge and practice.  While the term 'corporate' is associated with a business organisational model, with 'corporatized' spaces characterised by brand homogeneity and bureaucratic, new managerial compliance processes, the word's etymology unlocks other possibilities, focussing on its Latin origin in the word 'corpus', meaning a body.  This meaning encompasses notions of community and collegiality - many bodies within one space.  In this study, I am using the term, corporate space to suggest how a school is 'assembled' through particular discourses, beliefs and values that shape the work of the school, including the way external policies are absorbed,

accommodated and resisted, in order to explore how the headteachers in the study choreographed socially just education and how this manifested in particular understandings and practices.

I argue that both ethnographic study schools were counter-sites (Foucault, 1984) where the headteachers had fashioned heterotopic educational spaces that both echoed and inverted normative discourses of secondary schooling with both schools representing alternative modes of ordering secondary education.  However, whereas in Wren School the visual iconography of the physical site was central to heterotopic re-ordering, the social justice gaze in Erasmus School was centred on what *happened* within the physical spaces of the school and how this was projected beyond the school site into international space.

## 5.3    THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SITES

Both the ethnographic sites were state secondary schools located in the south east of England.  Both schools were founded in the 1940s and were a similar size with learning communities of about 1,200 pupils and 100 adults.  Wren School, was a boys' secondary modern school, led by a single, female headteacher, Karen, while Erasmus School was a state comprehensive, international school, led by co-headteachers, Michael and Penny.  The location, pupil composition, material environment, curricula and approaches to pedagogy were very different in each school.  However, both had a very strong sense of 'value-based identity' and all three headteachers valued a whole school approach to the education of children and young people as central to providing a socially just education, as opposed to a narrower focus on examination results.

The appearance and materialities of each school were very different.  While Erasmus School was an assemblage of two-storey buildings of varying ages, dispersed across a pleasant green site and located in a quiet residential cul-de-sac, Wren School was an 8 year-old, light-filled, corporate physical space, unified by colour schemes and spatial symmetry that had been designed to 'meet the needs of 21st century learners' through 'a new social architecture' (Mahony et al, 2011).

Each school saw its distinctive values as central to recruiting both staff and pupils, and thus as key to their economic and educational survival, above and beyond the performance metrics of 'good' examination results and a 'good' Ofsted performance.  Wren School promoted itself as a welcoming and aspirational space for boys considered to be unsuited to a grammar school education, while Erasmus School promoted its broad and balanced 'liberal' curriculum as an ethical option for pupils of all abilities and aptitudes.  In other words, in the context of a competitive neo-liberal schooling marketplace, the survival of both schools depended on 'distinction' within a values-based niche.  In both schools, most interviewees whole-heartedly embraced the headteachers' corporate vision as a good or better way of doing English secondary schooling.  A few participants expressed reservations, but all had, at least, found a niche within the organisation that was congruent with their professional values.

Whereas the Wren School physical site represented a reification of the headteacher's aspirations for her pupils, her commitment to a distinctive pedagogy and her view of ethical schooling, the socio-spatial significance of material space was absent from the discursive accounts of the Erasmus School co-headteachers.  Nevertheless, the material space of both schools was endowed with symbolic and cultural meanings, linked to the headteachers' investment in particular social justice discourses, creating a 'thirdspace' where the abstract and the concrete, the human and the material coalesced (Soja, 2010).  In Wren School, the headteacher, Karen, used architecture as emblematic of an aspiration to move beyond local space, while the co-headteachers of Erasmus School, Penny and Michael, embraced international space as an extended learning environment and reification of a United Nations ethic of justice based on a universalist, human rights approach to social justice.

In both schools, 'place' was significant as a geo-political dimension of each headteacher's social justice agency.  Wren School was located in the urban housing estates bordering a town on the fringes of outer London.  In contrast, Erasmus School was located in an affluent rural village in a relatively affluent borough.  While most Wren School pupils arrived on foot, travelling from within the neighbourhood, two-thirds of Erasmus pupils travelled to the school from outside the local catchment area, with railway links attracting 'commuter pupils' from contiguous London boroughs.

Wren School, which was located in one of the most deprived boroughs in England, drawing pupils from wards with high proportions of absolute and relative child poverty (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).  Erasmus School, on the other hand, was located in a borough with no recorded indices of social deprivation or child poverty, in one of the most affluent wards in the county (ibid).  The rail links between Erasmus School and B made it possible for pupils from the city to access its distinctive brand of liberal education, while  the symbolism of its proximity to Europe positioned it to look beyond national boundaries.

The diversity of Erasmus School's intake was an outstanding feature of its unique character as a state school.  Its pupils came from homes dispersed across a very wide geographical area encompassing city, urban and rural locations, with only 300 of 1444 children originating from three local village primary schools.  Penny, co-headteacher of Erasmus School, spoke of 'earning' the other children:

> *…children come here particularly because they want to embrace internationalism and they want to learn languages… Or they come here because of the Sixth Form, because we offer the International Baccalaureate qualification…*

While 49% of the cohort spoke English as an additional language (EAL), most were fluent English speakers with only 18 students having been identified as needing EAL support. Penny described the ability profile of the school as above average 'but that encompasses a very, very wide spectrum, so we take children of all abilities and all backgrounds'. Highlighting the multiple diversities within the school's cohort, Penny commented:

> *…we have children who are coming here from parts of 'S', who live in extremely deprived areas, who are living in very poor socio-economic circumstances, and we have children living in P who live in mansions and gated communities on private roads.*

> *So, there is a vast spectrum of economic, social background and ability range too, so the world is here really, we are extremely diverse, and we have some children who have very*

*different lives to the lives they come to at school. School is their safe haven. School is their place to come to, this lovely leafy suburban district of 'E', every day. They go back to a very different environment in their home lives where they live, so, it is a very broad spectrum of children we have here.* (Penny Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

### 5.3.1 Wren School Physical Space

The following description of the Wren School site is based on field notes and recorded observations made in the data collection phase of the project. It is a reflexive portrait, revealing the way I attributed meaning to my experience of the school site.

The imposing two-storey, glass-walled Wren school building dominated a quiet residential street. Set well back from the street with a spacious car park on one side and asphalt sports pitches on the other, the configuration of this 'entrance', separating the interior space from the school's physical street boundaries, created a generous, leisurely setting reminiscent of approaching a grand historic building, except this was bold contemporary architecture.

Pupils, members of staff and visitors walking into the school through the single, spacious, shared main entrance were greeted by a display of vibrant, life-size photographs of pupils. These visually bold, rhetorical statements signified youthful energy and the school's emphasis on an exciting, motivational curriculum, as this fieldnote captures:

> *Along one wall, there are some high-quality posters with a student looking into a microscope… three photographs representing science. The next one is very dramatic -fire shooting up with three students looking at it. And then, finally, some students engrossed in another kind of experiment... Looking to my left, there is a big photograph of three relaxed, happy students with the caption 'respectful'. …Then you have a poster of two pupils leaping into the air, and the grey and the orange caption, 'motivated'.* (Author fieldnote, 17 January 2018)

Moving inside the building, the large entrance foyer combined several functions as a single pupil/ adult entrance, a community space, an 'Internet café', a Sixth Form 'chill out' space and the school reception area. Light flooded in from huge glass walls. Circular tables filled

the community/ café space with easy chairs in a corner usually occupied by Sixth Formers socialising.  The headteacher's glass-walled office was located in this space and was also visible from the school's outdoor circulation space.  A trophy cabinet celebrating historic sports victories and a large screen with a rotating PowerPoint presentation, positioned above the long reception desk, communicated a sense of the school's past and present achievements, the space as a whole conveying the sense of a caring, vibrant, confident, outward-facing, successful learning community.

The school beyond flowed visually from this reception area into contiguous segments occupied by a sports hall, five community 'Learning Zones' and a 'restaurant' with specialist drama, music, art, science and engineering rooms leading from these spaces.  Within the visually fluid architecture, entrance and egress to different areas was controlled by card technology, a feature of new managerial design.  Throughout the building, bold corporate, colour-branded posters proclaimed the rubric of the school's rendering of 'growth mindset', that was reiterated in assemblies, staff interviews and lessons.

The functions of traditional school spaces such as an assembly hall, a library and a staff room, that were significant in the life of Erasmus School, were incorporated on a smaller scale within the 'Learning Zones', which were multi-purpose shared pupil/ adult hubs of pedagogic, pastoral and communal activity used for teaching, pastoral work, pupil assemblies, morning staff briefings, staff meetings and professional development sessions. Each Learning Zone consisted of a large, open-plan space filled with fixed hexagonal tables, each with a central power source to facilitate the use of lap top learning.  The majority of pupils were taught by teaching teams in groups of 80 in this space and met with their Learning Coaches here.  In addition, each Learning Zone included smaller classrooms, a kitchen, toilets, a small library and glass-walled subject offices.

### 5.3.2   Erasmus School Physical Space

In contrast to Wren School's heterotopic spatial configurations, the Erasmus School site, located in a quiet cul-de-sac, was a more traditional version of schooling space, with large assembly and dining halls, a staff room, a library and traditional classrooms, each accommodating around 30 pupils.  Its layout was distinctive, consisting of a collection of

low-level buildings that had been added to the school as need required and financial resources permitted, over the school's 60-year history.  The exterior space consisted of two large playground blocks, across which pupils travelled to lessons, together with sports pitches and a popular new multi-use games area.

Corporate identity as an international school was conferred by the European flag flying from a tall flagpole at the school's site entrance, which framed the whole school space.  However, unlike Wren School where there was an abundance of corporate messaging enacted through the display of high-profile, commercially produced posters, the international ethos of Erasmus School was simply 'understood' throughout the building without additional material representation.  There was almost a sense of 'we don't need to advertise'.

The unprepossessing staff and visitor entrance to the school buildings led into a long, dark corridor of the original 1940s building.  Beside the entrance, was a prominent display of photographs of members of the school's staff and pupil leadership teams.  Visitors, including new pupil admissions, reported to a small reception window close to the entrance and were asked to sign in.  Opposite reception was a small waiting area where newspaper articles discreetly celebrated the school's international ethos and association with the United Nations.  This building contained the headteachers' and deputy headteacher's offices, the business and administration team offices and the staff room in a 'private' adult area, with entry controlled via electronic 'gates'.  The staff room had one glazed wall that opened onto a playground making adults and pupils visible to each other, so that the enclosure of adult subjects was not as stark as in some architectural configurations in both new and older school buildings.  The school library, two drama studios, the dining hall and various subject-based classrooms were also located in this building.  At right-angles to the staff room, physically connected to the entrance block but accessed separately, was a large, multi-use traditional school assembly hall with a stage.  An Honours Board of previous headteachers and student leaders conveyed a sense of pride in the school's history and the worn wooden floorboards evoked the spiritual footprints of generations of pupils and their teachers.  The high-ceilinged, 'redundant' vertical space was significant in conveying a kind of grandeur to this communal gathering space and the glass 'fourth wall', providing the main light source, added to its stage-like visibility and prominence.

Other buildings of various ages, including some hutted accommodation, were dispersed across the site in a patchwork arrangement, the latest addition being a new two-storey Humanities and Technology Block where the school's pastoral offices and a staff/ student meeting room were located.  A modern sports hall was sited near to the school's playing fields.  Near the exterior entrance to the school was a single-storey building, known as The Chapel, that served as a meeting space and art gallery of pupils' work.

## 5.4     RE-ORDERING THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

In Wren School, the headteacher's heterotopic reinvention of physical and symbolic space represented a form of redistributive spatial justice.  By creating a place of architectural distinction in the locality that symbolised ambition, social value and confidence, she was, arguably, refusing the classed containment of aspiration implied by policies of academic segregation.  In Erasmus School, heterotopic space was constituted through distinctive admissions and curriculum policies as well as the culture and core activities of the school, that reified international communitarian values based on the ideology of the United Nations, thus extending 'care ethics' from the local into a global arena (Noddings, 2013).

### 5.4.1   Local Space and Wren School

Karen's social justice agency was conceived as an act of redistributive justice (Fraser, 1997) built on encouraging each pupil in a cohort of predominantly working class boys to move beyond the 'thought boundaries' of the school's local environment and the limitations of its 'non-selective' designation.  Given the opportunity to redesign the physical site of the school, as a serving deputy headteacher, much of her strategic vision for social justice was discursively embodied in socio-spatial constructs, in which 'the heart' was a potent metaphor for both the school's disruptive energy and for her own affective leadership agency:

> *The head designed the school….So the head is at the heart…* (Jack Wren School Senior Leader)

Before receiving promotion to headship of the school, Karen had taken the lead role, as deputy headteacher, in designing the new school.  This opportunity was provided through the school's successful application to participate in New Labour's 2004 Building Schools for the Future Programme (BSF), which undertook to rebuild or renew every secondary school in England by 2020.  This ambitious political project, which aimed to replace old building stock with 'inspiring, innovative and flexible' educational spaces (Mahony and Hextall, 2013), was central to Labour's transformational agenda for education and society.  The strong and direct association between Karen's educational philosophy, incorporating her vision for social justice, and the physical school site was embodied and reflected in every aspect of the new school building, from its soaring glass horseshoe shape and large, open-plan Learning Zones to the choice of furniture, unifying colour palette and wall posters.

Replacing a 1940s building, originally located on the opposite side of the road, the new site signified social investment enacted through the education of children and young people.  The ambitious architecture defined the school as a 21$^{st}$ century learning environment in opposition to architectural spaces previously associated with more traditional forms of schooling.  Its futuristic visual iconography was linked to discourses of social mobility and heterotopia in the sense of:

> *…a constructed social space that seeks to address the inequalities and injustices of a society, rejecting the values and perceptions that these spaces were constituted by, instead seeking to develop new values based on equality and justice.* (Baroutsis and Mills, 2018, p. 3-4)

Karen had created 'a place of distinction' within the local environment that severed a connection between elitism and space in a classed sense.  She saw Wren School's new building as encouraging both personal and collective ambition from a safe space of belonging, expanding pupils' sense of self by inviting them to think beyond local horizons and, by implication, other socially imposed limits such as class.  Karen's emphasis on how material space conveys status and value is encapsulated in this comment where she uses the word 'important' four times in relation to investment in education in general and the individual pupils and staff members occupying the space in particular:

*We wanted people to come in and think this is really important, education is really important, and I'm involved in something that's really important and people are investing in me, because I'm important. So that's what this space is about.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Karen believed that the new school building cultivated social confidence, 'a lot of our students don't think outside of [the local area] and this is something that we want them, when they come in here, to feel, when they go into other buildings, they don't feel intimidated by it.' In this statement, Karen recognises the power of spaces to welcome or intimidate. Her use of the word, 'it', is ambiguous but could be read in a metonymic way as exclusionary barriers of age and class in the form of who is considered worthy of occupying different spaces. In this sense, 'buildings' is symbolic of new horizons generally. Karen saw the building as, 'inspirational on the inside, as well as the outside', a beacon, 'where children can come in and understand that they can move forward'. Making a dramatic physical statement towering above its suburban environs, it represented a visual reminder of significant social investment, signalling hope and confidence in the future as a portal to opportunity (Mahony and Hextall, 2013), perhaps even to a renewed social world.

The physical condition of the eight-year-old building indicated that it had been valued by both pupils and adults over time, conveying the feeling of an 'enduringly new' building. Here, Sally highlights discourses of pride and respect associated with both the beauty and newness of the building and the way it was cared for by the headteacher and pupils.

*…it makes the boys feel proud of their environment, and respect their environment, and that is another thing coming down from Karen [the headteacher] but, if we don't have graffiti and rubbish, then they're not tempted to graffiti and litter. So that's why you'll see her pick it up as if to say, "I, I am the headteacher, but I will pick up the rubbish. Therefore, that's an expectation of you. If you see the rubbish you should pick it up." So, so the, the beauty and the newness of the building has really helped that.* (Sally Wren School Middle Leader)

The sense of the building itself as commanding and producing respect was also emphasised by Julia, an Assistant Headteacher, who contrasted the clean, tidy, light and welcoming building with other schools she had visited, 'where they're darker. They're, they're dirty. There's rubbish on the floor', noting that, 'The litter here is minimal. The boys tend to respect the building a lot more, and I think that engenders respect in all other areas as well.' Julia personified the building as 'very trusting in its, um, in its openness', believing it generated an expectation of respect for both the physical environment and the human beings who inhabited it:

> *I think that you will respect the building and that you will respect each other, and there is that level of expectation, as soon as you come into the school, which I haven't seen necessarily in other schools.* (Julia Wren School Senior Leader)

The strategic location and glass-walled design of the headteacher's office contributed to a physical connection with pupils, staff and visitors, making this a porous office space that facilitated both supervision and social interaction:

> *One, I'm right at the front of the school, so I'm accessible, so I can nip out and see the children. Two, I've got really good supervision of what is going on in the school. The children knock on my window when they go by and wave and, if…the other day a child had a problem and he knocked on my window, because he wanted me to come and help him. That's important…There's lots of things I don't get a chance to do, but one of the things I do, make sure I do, is that I'm accessible to the children.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

In many ways, the design of the Wren School site exemplified a contemporary form of neo-liberal 'panopticism' (Foucault, 1980). The horseshoe shape, combined with a mezzanine area overlooking 'The Restaurant' and the school's transparent walls, facilitated surveillance of the school community as a means of governing both pupils and members of staff. However, the Wren School building was also a multi-generational community space where blurred generational boundaries extended to joint 'ownership' of the toilets and the

school's shared entrance.  In this account, Karen emphasises the flattening of differential status between adults and children as a tenet of her personal social justice vision:

*So, if you take toilets, there was lots of bullying and vandalism in our toilets.  I know this is a small part of life but children didn't want to go to the toilet.  In our school, we have mixed toilets.  The staff and students use the same toilets because that's the message.  When people come into this school, they come in and they are with the children.  The children don't get a lesser entrance or, as visitors, you are not put in a box.  We want you to see the school.  We want the school to be visible and we want the children to see you and realise we are all part of society and we are all working together.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

There was a synergy between Karen's creative leadership agency as principal designer of the new school building and her commitment to social justice in the 'everyday' practices I observed in the school.  This was evident when Karen described her annual practice of addressing new Year Seven pupils, as we were standing together looking at the school's horseshoe-shaped outdoor courtyard:

*But I do talk to the boys about, 'You're coming in here. You're part of the heart.' And I talk about the opening at the end being there - it's like their life in school. They're going to come in; they go.  Work as part of the community, but then they're going to leave and that's their route and what legacy are they going leave for Wren School and how are they going to leave and live their lives, as they move on? What are they going to contribute to society? What type of people are they going to be? And, because it's open, they're always welcome to come back.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

Karen built a narrative of belonging, social contribution and individual agency from the architecture, that linked the material world to human discourses of value and meaning, using a heart metaphor to signify the centrality of the affective dimension of schooling within her headship agency.  The courtyard was, moreover, an open space that allowed pupils to leave and move on into the world, while also welcoming them back to the physical

school site should they chose to return later in their lives.  This conveyed Karen's belief that pupils' relationship with the school should be open and ongoing, suggesting the continuous fluidity of social relations in the context of human beings as always both being and becoming (Hey, 1997).  Moreover, while Karen spoke of the pupils collectively as 'they', there was a strong sense of individual agency in the rhetorical questions she posed concerning the legacy pupils would leave behind at the end of their school journey, as well as the contribution they would make to society, which emphasised character rather than academic achievement and economic status.

Karen's emphasis on enacting social justice agency through the total experience of school life was illustrated as we toured the school together during a morning break.  Here she summons discourses of commensality manifested in the configuration and governance of spaces for eating and socialising:

> *This is called 'The Restaurant'…we try and make it look like a restaurant, so there are none of those horrible tables with those little round 'stooly' things round, which aren't comfortable to sit on and which don't encourage social interactions with the students. And in Year 7, 8 and 9 children aren't allowed to use their 'phones in these spaces, because, again, that's about us modelling children having conversations, children interacting with each other and the importance of that, you know, the importance of getting to know people...* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

The friendly, relaxed energy in the same space was palpable, on a different occasion, as I looked down on 'The Restaurant' from a mezzanine area:

> *Some pupils are looking at their 'phones. Some are just eating, talking. There's a lively buzz. …It's a lovely winter's day, cold, but bright… There are a couple of tables, three table football machines and two table tennis tables in the space immediately outside the restaurant. A member of staff is picking up litter outside. Three members of staff are wandering round tables inside, picking up litter. The furniture is clean. It's the kind of furniture you'd find in an Internet café. I would enjoy eating here. Pupils*

*are absorbed in their conversations, showing each other what's on their 'phones and laughing about it.* (Author, extracts from a fieldnote)

While the naming and design of 'The Restaurant' in the Wren School building were consistent with the neo-liberal re-imagination of contemporary urban and school social space, they were animated by the headteacher's discourse of dignifying pupils, enacted by unobtrusive adult supervision of the space in what was represented by the headteacher as an environment fit for aspirational young adults.

Over the course of the ethnographic study, I observed Karen stitched into the everyday life of the school, enjoying conversations with pupils and staff while she was on break and lunch duty, in the foyer greeting pupils at the beginning of the day and saying goodbye as pupils left the site.  The discursive power of her somatic presence in the school's *dispositif* of social justice discourses generated an axiological climate in the school associated with her professional conduct and practice, giving weight, substance and authenticity to the values she articulated.  In particular, the visual iconography of the Wren School site was congruent with both the discourses of dignity, belonging and aspiration at the centre of the headteacher's social justice vision and with new managerial discourses of governability by surveillance.  I argue that this seeming binary between a physical architecture of Foucauldian panopticism and the school's emphasis on caring child/adult relationships was resolved through agonistic leadership agency.

### 5.4.2   Global Space and Erasmus School

The co-headteachers of Erasmus School saw their social justice agency as leading a distinctive heterotopic space in the landscape of English mainstream secondary education, inhabited by a highly diverse community of pupils and characterised by unique practices and structures that configured the school as a porous global space.  Their social justice leadership agency focussed on cultivating pupil subjects who would both thrive within and contribute to the development of a harmonious international community.  These aspirations were enacted in the daily life of the school as axiological and ideological imperatives that co-existed with neo-liberal policy.

The social justice leadership of Michael and Penny was demarcated by five 'pillars', co-designed by Michael, that constituted a governing ethic for the school, its regimes of truth and signifiers of social and educational value:

> *Retrospectively we, Rebecca* [the school's previous co-headteacher] *and I, came up with this notion of five pillars, and those are the pillars that you had before you in a briefing paper. We didn't invent them, we just felt that looking back when people say, "What is this Erasmus School, the fancy name? Is it a private school? Is it a language school?", the same questions I asked myself before I applied here, our default response is, "This is a state comprehensive school for boys and girls through to the age of 18/19, but what makes us different is those five pillars.* (Michael Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

In summary, the pillars in Figure Seven represented the school's commitment to: a broad and balanced curriculum; the centrality of languages in the curriculum; links between Citizenship Education and Political Education; an extensive international visits and exchange programme; and the philosophy of the International Baccalaureate. They were both descriptive and figurative, encapsulating the key structures that underpinned the organisation of school life while also denoting the strength and endurance of treasured values over time in the context of decades of education policy change. Michael proposed that the distinctiveness of Erasmus School was attributed to 'the fact that each of those pillars exists in a form that I think you'd find it very difficult to find in any other school, the way we approach Citizenship, the way we approach visits and exchanges, the way we approach languages'.

**Figure Seven: "A Distinctive Education"[3]**

Virtually all of the children from our local primary schools come here... They are all entitled to a place. This amounts to about 300 students. A small number may choose local grammar schools or private schools. In one very important sense this is a local comprehensive school. So what is it that draws over 1000 students to this school every day from beyond P?

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[3] Copyright held by school.

We have a reputation for high academic standards, our exam results are very good and we are a values-driven school.  There are five particular features (pillars) which enshrine these values and attract parents and their children in large numbers.

1. A commitment to a broad and balanced (baccalaureate) curriculum:  Every student studies the humanities, the Arts, technology, languages, Citizenship and PE as well as Mathematics, English and Science until Year 11 (age 16). In the Sixth Form they study either one of two International Baccalaureate (IB) courses or a 4 A level programme.  All students in the Sixth Form study a language and the IB course Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS).  We have Artsmark Gold status recognising the commitment we make to arts education. (A former student recently played Robert Oppenheimer in the West End stage play Oppenheimer).

2. Languages:  We offer Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish as well as English as an Additional Language and Latin.  Up until age 16 most students study two languages other than English and in the Sixth Form they have to study at least one. We are a Confucius Classroom supporting Chinese teaching in this school and in other schools and we host the 'R' Jiangsu Resource Centre for the teaching of Chinese.  The school is one of two state schools in the UK to be part of the government's Mandarin Excellence Programme which seeks to develop fluent Chinese speakers.  We are also developing (2016) our own Lingua Centre for the teaching of languages including English to adults.

2. Citizenship:  This is both a taught course for all students as well as an applied course.  All students take part in a Model United Nations and work experience.  With regard to the latter a significant number choose to do their work experience abroad. Political education is a key part of this programme.  Applied Citizenship develops the importance of giving, volunteering and service above self.   Citizenship manifests itself in the curriculum, culture and community of the school.

3. Visits and exchanges:  Every year between 6-700 students travel abroad, most of them on family exchange.  All of our full-time teaching staff agree to support this programme which takes them away from their own families for up to 10 days every year.  We have a network of partner schools throughout Europe as well as in India, South Africa (Lesotho) and China some - 23 schools altogether.  The school maintains a "scholarship fund" to support students who are not able to afford the costs of the programme.  The school also has a long-standing link with the United Nations and the United Nations Association: UK.

4. The International Baccalaureate:  Whilst we run the IB Diploma and Career Programme and our main school curriculum is inspired by their Middle Years Programme, it is the IB philosophy and ethos which makes the school tick.  Whether students follow IB programmes or not, they are all influenced by its philosophy.  (See Mission Statement

and Learner Profile).  We were the first state school to establish the IB Diploma in 1977 and the first to introduce their Career Programme in 2010.

In our view, none of the 5 'pillars' can be found in any other school in the country in quite the same way as the Anglo, and certainly not altogether.

You can see that it is a school with a difference and from those early days we are very proud of what we have achieved as a comprehensive school.  Ofsted have referred to us as 'distinctive', others refer to us as 'quirky'.  Either way, we are different and we feel it is a very special place to be.  In some ways it can be likened to a faith school except that we are secular and our 'faith' is internationalism which permeates all aspects of what we do.

Succeeding generations of young people have been inspired by this distinctive ethos and will continue to be so.

Headteacher (Michael)
January 2017

While the metaphorical pillars offered constancy and stability, the boundaries of the Erasmus School space were always fluid as human experience flowed back and forth into and out of the school in an ongoing, iterative social and cultural exchange.  This was enhanced by the International Visits and Exchange Programme, which gave all pupils and teachers access to diverse geo-political and cultural landscapes, beyond the school site, offering unique opportunities to enlarge understanding of 'difference' in a post-colonial world.

The political dimension of 'difference' and inequity in the extended global pedagogic space of Erasmus School was evident in the following examples in relation to human rights and safety in a totalitarian regime.  Here, Charles, a humanities teacher, speaks about visiting China, noting 'if you're going to be a global, open school, that includes going over and interacting with regimes you don't feel are necessarily that savoury'.  He describes talking to Year Eight students before the visit:

> We talked briefly, I seem to remember, about the way that China, as a dictatorship
>
> has different expectations in terms of the role of the police. I made it very clear, I

*think, to them, that you'll be very safe there, but partly that's because the Government has so much control. Whether they grasp that yet, I don't know, but I think through the school they will, eventually.* (Charles Erasmus School Teacher)

Noddings (2010) argues that care ethics should be extended to global relations and supports the idea of increasing cultural exchanges in education, and other areas of common ground between nations, in the interests of keeping communication open:

*The idea is to saturate the other with our presence, to establish relations of care and trust as part of preparation for diplomatic negotiations aimed at reconciling our difficult political differences.* (pp. 92 - 93)

The risk of international visits to less affluent countries perpetuating attitudes of cultural superiority was noted by Sian:

*…I'm extremely concerned about making sure that we never see this as the white man going to the poor colonial countries and helping the black man by going to Lesotho and doing them the honour of digging there for a couple of weeks. This is reciprocal.  So, we are going and experiencing, I would like to think, in humility and respect for what we're learning, not what we're giving and allowing, but what we're able to get back…It is mind blowing for the students, and it changes things massively for them…But we hear the same kind of hyperbole…when they go to the UN in Geneva, which completely blows their mind…because the UN Geneva visit shows them what they can do about these issues* (Sian Erasmus School Middle Leader)

The school's commitment to language teaching (most pupils studied at least two languages from the nine offered) was seen to contribute to social justice by nurturing understanding of the way others think, prompting 'a different way of looking at the world':

*I think bringing languages, particularly unusual languages into state schools is really, really worthwhile.  Because if you live in a small village like this, in a county in the UK, when English is the dominant language across the world, there's no impetus, there's*

*no cause to make you think outside of that village. And, if we can bring the world through a language, a different way of looking at the world, into their lives, and in this school in a very meaningful way, it's a huge part of their curriculum…I tell parents, when they ask should their child learn Mandarin, I say that they should for three basic reasons. A utilitarian point of view that their child will have more access to jobs and the economy, and be more employable, and they can travel more - that's utilitarian. Cognitive view of it will actually increase the number of brain cells and the speed of connections of things in your brain. It's a pattern-based language with ideographs and it's a different way of using your mind. In a personal way, it will change their lives by they get to go and live abroad…And, ideally, the ultimate aim I suppose for all of us is that the more people speak more languages, the more you can understand the world, ideally, the less racism there will be, the less international conflict there'll be.* (Chrystal Erasmus School Language Teacher)

Chrystal's detailed reflections exploring the cognitive benefits of language learning for cultivating understanding of the way others think in order to counter racism were a significant social justice practice woven into the fabric of professional work in the school (MacDonald-Vemic and Portelli, 2018).

How the hyper-diversity of the school community was experienced and understood by pupils in relation to their individual identities was explored in a focus group discussion between four Sixth Form students. Here, Amir and Katy speak about difference in relation to the school's "International Day":

*…it's really just a day of like celebrating everyone's cultures and like coming together and just…It's just a really fun environment. We come and dress up. We share stuff with each other...We wanted to include everyone in it to, sort of, sort of celebrate our diversity…'cause here you feel different but not out of place like, if that makes sense, 'cause like your differences are like sort of celebrated but not like, oh, like all the time so loud about it but it's just like you know everyone's different and everyone's happy to be different* (Amir Erasmus School Student Leader)

*Being proud of like who you are…And like being accepted as well...Like bein' who you are 'cause sometimes, I don't know, when you end up in another environment that's maybe not comfortable, it, maybe it's not home, it's not all your friends who you know, like when you come together like that and you, and everyone's accepting, you just feel, you feel better about yourself, I guess.* (Katy Erasmus School Student Leader)

While the format of the day resembles critiques of multi-cultural tokenism, these students emphasised being proud of who you are; feeling accepted, comfortable and better about yourself, as well as fun, sharing and celebrating 'our' diversity.  The key word here is 'our'.  'International Day' has a particular emotional meaning for Erasmus students as a validation of lived experience rather than a theoretical celebration of 'diversity'.  Later in the discussion, tokenism was addressed by Amir who reflected on his own leadership election campaign where he had promised to re-introduce Black History Month.  Reflecting on this manifesto promise, he commented that the issues spotlighted in this one month should be integrated into the curriculum throughout the year, 'it shouldn't have to be a Head Boy's policy to go out and say, 'I want to learn about Black history'.

Pupils spoke of resolving identity conflicts and tensions over time.  For example, Amir, who lived in a city environment, reflected on the dualism of his school and home identities:

*Erm, I feel like, in the past, I definitely felt like a sense of, I guess, duality...between like me here...and like me in B [home] 'cause we just, I don't know like there's points where I realise that we just think kind of differently...Like I guess the whole like accepting nature that we have, erm, in, in Erasmus isn't always the same like...I'm not always received in the same way in B but like that's how I felt in the past...and I felt a sort of pressure to sort of try and understand which one I'm gonna fit into more...But then, as I've sort of grown, like now I feel like I'm at a stage where I, I can, I'm like comfortable having these things that I've picked up from like Erasmus and still having these like sort of values that I have from B as well.* (Amir Erasmus School Student Leader)

Hannah compared her experience of being herself in Erasmus School with that of changing herself in order to belong in her previous school where she was the only Black girl in her year group:

*…here I could [can] be myself like I could be that similar self that I am at home and when I'm with friends in my own area. 'Cause like here there are people from everywhere so, even if there are people who aren't the same as me, I'm able to relate with them.* (Hannah Erasmus School Student Leader)

John, emphasised the importance of dialect as a signifier of his identity when speaking in School assemblies in a leadership role and felt vindicated in making a stand on this issue.

*Another thing is in assembly like in the early days of this like head boy stuff, head girl stuff, like I'd talk in assembly and Mr Johnson would pull me aside and be like, don't talk like that, like, and I said to him, 'Okay' but I knew full well I wasn't, I wasn't gonna change 'cause what I, how I was speaking wasn't necessarily disrespectful...I did not back down and now, after every assembly, he goes, 'That was a good assembly' and I'm like, 'Okay, thank you, sir!'.* (John Erasmus School Student Leader)

While national, racial and ethnic differences were seen as a community norm in Erasmus School by these focus group students, they were also aware of being perceived as 'other' by peers from other schools. Katy explained, 'It's not their norm, no, and it scares them', while John reflected that, during sports fixtures, 'it feels like just everyone's watching you'.

The issue of how the school explored Black British identity was raised by Amir when he reflected on a proposal to re-introduce Black History Month in a student leadership election campaign. Amir felt that Black and Asian heritage should be integrated into the curriculum throughout the year, 'It shouldn't have to be a Head Boy's policy to go out and say, I want to learn about Black history'.

Within the heterotopic space, that was protected and nurtured by the Erasmus headteachers, the focus group students were engaging with issues at the intersection

between recognition justice and affective justice (Fraser, 1997) in the context of both the curriculum and the social and knowledge benefits of an embodied global corporate space that was seen and felt as 'other'. The discussion encapsulated dilemmas and signalled debates around the development of post-colonial curricula in education generally that, I argue, should encourage the school to push its global communitarian agenda even further into the local and national spaces beyond its physical borders, validating its very 'otherness' as exemplary practice.

## 5.5    CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have used Foucault's notion of heterotopic space to examine how the 'otherness' of some spaces can disrupt and reassemble existing certainties in ways that subvert hidden norms and assumptions, creating new spaces of transgression, transformation and emancipation (Foucault, 1986). It would, perhaps, be possible to find elements of heterotopic agency in most schools. However, in each ethnographic study school, I argue that heterotopic work was a substantial, developed and established aspect of leadership agency. Although neo-liberal meanings were deeply entangled within each headteacher's vision of a distinctive educational space, the horizons of their agency looked beyond the prevailing social and educational order towards a fairer and less competitive society, making their schools spaces of choice for many parents and pupils in the current education market. In both schools, headteacher agency for social justice involved extending pupils' imagination beyond local geographic space. In Wren School, the design of the physical school site challenged the classed appropriation and colonisation of 'places of distinction', while in Erasmus School, an ethic of internationalism represented a form of disruptive and creative otherness within the English state schooling system. The next chapter looks at how the affective work of social justice leadership animated each organisational space through practices of love, care and solidarity.

# CHAPTER SIX

## THE AFFECTIVE WORK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

*For love…possesses an unequalled power of self-revelation and an unequalled clarity of vision…precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with what the loved person may be, with his qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings and transgressions. Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others.*

Hannah Arendt, "The Human Condition", 2018, p. 242

### 6.1    INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed how headteacher agency produced different heterotopic educational spaces in two contrasting English secondary schools.  This chapter explores the relational dynamics of each space in more detail, focussing on links between the affective and axiological work of school leadership as core social justice practices.  The chapter builds on the argument that, since human beings are affective as well as rational actors, affective work enables school leaders to engage with the part played by dependence and interdependence 'in the exercise of power and control in educational relations' (Lynch, 2001, p.252) with the correlate that practices of care, love and solidarity (Lynch, 2007) are central to socially just schooling.

Nussbaum, an egalitarian, feminist philosopher foregrounds the affective dimension of being human as a central component of ethical life in a pluralistic, democratic, liberal state and asks:

*Given that there is reason to think that compassion gives public morality essential elements of ethical vision without which any public culture is dangerously rootless*

*and hollow, how can we make this compassion do the best work it can in connection with liberal and democratic institutions?* (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 403)

In her book, "Upheavals of Thought", Nussbaum (2001) proposed that, rather than viewing intellect and reason as binary paradigms, emotion can be thoughtful, is deeply cognitive, closely linked to judgement and, thus, a core component of ethical behaviour.  For example, she saw the nurturing of empathy in schools as enabling an *alliance* between rational thought traditions and 'thoughtful emotion':

*First of all, public education at every level should cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings.  The abilities that Dickens's Mr. Gradgrind denigrated as useless "fancy" and "wonder" will not displace the calculative and fact gathering uses of intelligence that he favored; but they will form an alliance with them, enabling our pupil to see the human meaning of facts that might otherwise have seemed remote. This means giving the humanities and the arts a large place in education, from elementary school on up, as children gradually master more and more of the appropriate judgments and become able to extend their empathy to more people and types of people.* (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 426)

Noddings (2001) also offers a feminist counter-hegemonic critique of the profound ethical limitations of education systems dominated by a Cartesian rationalism that favours masculinised subjectivities, imagined as the emblematic rational autonomous subject, pointing out that people's individuality is realised in relation to others.  In her seminal book on caring (2013), first published in 1984, Noddings explored different dimensions of the ethics of care as a relational approach that speaks persuasively to our understanding of contemporary, socially just forms of school leadership.  For example, she offers highly developed, nuanced conceptualisations of 'the one-caring' (p. 30) and 'the cared-for' (p. 59) which explore, for example, notions of 'asymmetry and reciprocity' in 'caring-giving' (p. 48).  In the third edition of "Caring" (2013), Noddings argues that affective work is, by definition, relational work that applies to all genders.

Seeing people as both affective *and* rational political and social actors, in which the blending of reason and affect, Logos and Eros are viewed as being fundamental to the nurturing of critical and creative subjects within liberal democracies, has profound implications for the leadership of schooling systems, raising questions of who we are and who we wish to be. For example, by creating an environment where the relational work of *care-in-practice* is central to *leadership-in-practice*, the headteachers in the two study schools were promoting a heterotopic shift that challenged the dominance of neo-liberal performance culture in the making of subjects. Specifically, rather than privileging the neo-liberal objectivation of the subject as an economic unit, a risk-calculating individual in competition with others, pupils were encouraged to build caring relationships with others as the most meaningful aspect of being human.

Within my empirical research, I observed a pervasive commitment to affective work as a dimension of the everyday life of both study schools, that was evidenced in relationships between headteacher and teacher, teacher and teacher, teacher and pupil, pupil and pupil, and researcher and research participants, providing a 'web of care' (Noddings, 2013, xvii). Indeed, although there may have been a bias towards women taking leading caring roles within the staffing structures, both schools exemplified Lynch's proposition that 'the nurturing work that produces love, care, and solidarity operates under principles of other-centredness, even when it fails in this purpose' (Lynch, 2021, p. 117). All three headteachers cultivated affective equality, distinguished by communitarian values and an emphasis on relational humanity (Boltanski, 2012), where 'ties of sympathy and commitment' bound 'people to one another in defiance of self-interested calculation' (Nussbaum, 1995, p 380). I argue that this work was more substantial than 'the excess or surplus that often exceeds neoliberal capture' (Wilkins, 2018, p. 5) or professional 'wriggle room' in a neo-liberal corporate culture where the responsibilities of the practitioner have been narrowed to exclude '"extraneous" issues that are not directly related to performance outcomes' (Ball et al, 2012, p. 34). In these study schools, care-giving went far beyond the 'add women and stir' care tradition discussed by Noddings (2001, p. 29) by elevating care, love and solidarity to a central status in configurations of professionalism for everyone, as opposed to gender-specific care-giving.

## 6.2     PROFESSIONAL SOLIDARITY

In this section, I argue that the professional solidarity evident in both study schools was a form of co-leadership in which there was a close connection between headteacher agency and the everyday axiological and relational work of each school.  I examine what professional solidarity looked and felt like in each school and how it was shaped, cultivated and sustained through headteacher agency.  I begin by exploring how professional solidarity in the study schools differed from new managerial models of 'power-sharing'.

Many school leadership studies have explored the benefits of collaborative power-sharing cultures, for example MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse (2004, p. 8) argued that:

> *Distributing leadership across the whole range of potential contributors to a school's effectiveness and improvement has become a central tenet within NCSL.  This includes not only teachers' involvement in leadership but that of other staff and students too.  This is what is suggested by Murphy and Forsyth (1999) in their characterisation of leadership as exercised not 'at the apex of the organisational pyramid but at the centre of the human relationships'.*

Leithwood et al found that, 'There is no loss of power and influence on the part of headteachers when, for example, the power and influence of many others in the school increase' (2006, p. 13).  Viewed through this lens, a headteacher's individual agency becomes part of, and harnesses, the collective agency of the organisation.  In 2010, a literature review, conducted by Jarrett et al, identified a consensus amongst scholars that widely dispersed, shifting sources of leadership and the co-construction of meaning through interactions based on equality of standing, dignity and respect were key characteristics of effective leadership.  However, a review of 121 leadership studies in the USA (NCPEA, 2007, p.20, cited in Jarrett et al, 2010, p. 638) found that, although the leadership models which emerged conceptualized power as 'devolved, shared, dispersed, or distributed', they operated within a framework of hierarchical power relationships.  Arguably, in a neo-liberal schooling system, such models provide an illusion of professional empowerment which may be disrupted when more directive styles of leadership are deemed appropriate by those at

the apex of the organisation hierarchy or, indeed, by external agencies, for example following an Ofsted inspection.

'Leadership-as-practice' is a way of conceptualising egalitarian forms of leadership produced by multiple relationship networks within and across organisational boundaries where people work together in collegiate ways to support the core purpose of a school (Youngs, 2009, 2018a and b).  These configurations resonate with earlier theorisations of 'a cultural distribution of leadership' that operates through networks of social exchange and a shared sense of agency rather than status and position:

> *'Distribution' as a conscious process is no longer applicable because people exercise initiative spontaneously and collaboratively with no necessary identification of leaders or followers.* (MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse, 2004, p. 331)

Likewise, in developing the notion of the school as an ecosystem, Bristol (2020) emphasises the significance of sharing the emotional labour of 'leading', drawing oxygen from 'healthy' relationships within the school community to both increase organisational capacity and continually renew energy.  She argues that this involves everyone sharing the moral obligations of a collective 'service leadership', where each member of a school workforce 'dares to act' and 'contributes to the conversation' to protect the best interests of pupils (ibid).  Included in this collective responsibility is Bristol's view that, 'learning must be disruptive' and 'schools must be disrupted' by those who inhabit them.

In both study schools, professional solidarity moved beyond notions of collegiality and power sharing to embody a form of internal governance based on accountability to the individual pupil and one's peers.  This was achieved through the congruence of professional values, deep-rooted relational work and the refusal to configure school leadership as a commodity serving the needs of the neo-liberal market place.  In Erasmus School, Headteacher, Michael spoke of professional solidarity as an 'esprit de corps':

*…it's almost as simple as this, every member of staff is appointed to this school is asked if they will support the school's visits programme, which means travelling abroad, and when they're abroad, when other colleagues are abroad, you'll support, you'll cover their lessons at home, and they say yes to that. I think part of it goes back to that, but there is a genuine esprit de corps in the school, which is challenged every day by government initiatives, bureaucracy, etc, but it's because we have that overriding sense of values that I think we have an advantage over other schools in terms of maintaining the morale of staff…"* (Michael Erasmus School Headteacher)

Michael believed that an 'overriding sense of values' in the school sustained morale, despite a hostile external environment of 'government initiatives' and 'bureaucracy'.  In this sense, the school's metaphorical pillars (Figure Seven, p. 109) represented the defence of a heterotopic corporate space under siege in counterpoint to the equally determined stealthy 'invasion' of the external 'fortified castle' described by Luke, headteacher of Roosevelt Academy, in Chapter Four.

In each school, a similar corporate spirit produced what was seen as exceptional staff commitment.  Judy, a Wren School teacher, explained, 'The amount of work I do here is far, far more than I did at my old school, far, far more. But the rewards you get are a million times more'.  Penny, co-headteacher of Erasmus School, speaking about the school's international visits programme, referred to members of staff going 'the extra mile' and giving up '10 days of their life away from their families' to ensure pupils 'have the most amazing experiences'.  Both co-headteachers saw the staff team as demonstrating the kind of communitarian subjectivities and 'solidarity' described by Boltanski (2012) and Nussbaum (1995), both cited in Lynch (2021):

*…there are many negatives in education at the moment, and we can't turn them all into positives, so, therefore, you hang on to the fact that we are all in this together. We're all signed up to the same set of values in the school and it all goes back to the question that everyone is asked, "Will you commit to the school's ethos?" and, of course, in a philosophical sense, "Yes, of course" but, in a practical sense, it means*

*covering for each other rather more than you would do because your colleagues are abroad, but it also means travelling abroad.* (Penny Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

The practical examples of covering colleagues' lessons and travelling abroad could not be separated from the 'love' and 'care' work underpinning social justice agency, where school, as a caring corporate space, was discursively constructed as a family through both the ideological and practice discourses of the school.

Professional solidarity was demonstrated and strengthened when headteachers and other senior leaders shared the routine affective work of the school, as opposed to assuming the role of 'care commanders' (Lynch et al, 2007):

> *It doesn't matter what position or what level you're paid at. Actually, she [the headteacher] would get down and she will sweep the floor in the restaurant; she will wipe someone's bloody knee; she will get a tissue out of her pocket and give someone a hug if they need it. So, you know, she's very hands-on* (Judith Wren School Inclusion Team)

Penny, co-headteacher of Erasmus School, also evoked corporeal aspects of leadership, emphasising the importance of standing next to and alongside staff in order to make it easier for them to do their jobs. The example Penny gave, below, vividly reminded me of the numberless similar occasions in my own headship that I also stood vigilantly on a cold playground, on my own and with colleagues:

> *…in a similar way, I'll be out there standing next to a midday supervisor for an hour, in the cold, on the playground, because I'm asking her to do that and there's no reason why…it's my job to serve the staff here as well and to get alongside them. I can't do their jobs for them, but I can be there and support them and sometimes, it just is, I'm making her job easier if I'm standing next to her; she's doing it but I'm standing next to her while she does it, and that makes it easier for her to do…That's really, I think, the ethos that Michael and I are trying to achieve here…We're here to*

*support you [to] do the best that you can do for these children* (Penny Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

Judy, a Wren School teacher, emphasised the importance of senior leaders seeing pupils outside 'containment mode', as an aspect of co-leadership solidarity.

*…they lead by example…at my old school, none of the senior leaders did any duties.…it was all put on the teaching staff…that to me conveys that it's not important because if you, as a senior leader, are not going to be prepared to stand in the canteen, to patrol the corridors, to do all of those things…[you are] burying your head in the sand because you don't want to see the thing, the truth about your school. Because if … but if you go and stand with, you know, a member of the support staff and you're seeing the real behaviour because the social times are probably the times realistically that the kids are going to behave the worst….Yeah because they're not in containment mode….There's a lot of the managers are walking round the school, not in a confrontational way but just to see what's going on.* (Judy Wren School Teacher)

The following accounts exemplify the same relational ethics underpinning solidarity:

*People care about each other, even if it's not your speciality, even if it's not your department, people genuinely go out of their way to make sure you're okay, and will support in any way, and I certainly try to do that…we pull together and people do care genuinely about each other here. And I think that also is very obvious to the students. I think they know that we all care.* (Judith Wren School Inclusion Team)

*It's very much like team ethic, team ethos…You know, I'll happily walk through a zone. I'll see a science lesson happening, and there's a little issue in there, I've got things to do, but I'll just divert slightly to see, can I support any way? If not, not a problem, I'll carry on. If I can, I'm happy to support. And I think that's across the school with anyone, anywhere you go to, if people can help, they will. If they can help*

*a colleague, they will do. If they can help a student, they will do. It's all about that*
*'we're in it together ethos'...* (Sally Wren School Middle Leader)

In both schools, affective labour was involved in teaching 'in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students…to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin' (hooks, 1994, p. 13). Here, Sian, a middle leader in Erasmus School, explains how her headteacher helped her to 'see the greatness and the sublime' in professional work:

> *He [Michael, co-headteacher] is extremely good at taking a situation and seeing the greatness and the sublime in that situation, and feeding it to you, so that you also feel the weight of that greatness that is in that moment. It's not corporatized. His first question, when I interviewed, when I went for this job, "How do you feel about being the gatekeeper of the school's ethos?" And I was like, "Sorry, I'm just here to run the visits programme!" [laughter] But he took the greatness of what this role is for me, and he gave it to me, and I took it.*

In Wren School, headteacher Karen, described how she communicated 'the passion you have for how everybody should be treated and how everybody should feel valued and part of society and important to society…continually, all the time':

> *That's really important. So, it's in the way you talk to people, in the way you talk to the children, in the way you work with parents and all of that, and the way you model that sort of behaviour to the people that you are in charge of, or that you are above, in that sort of way.* (Karen Wren School Headteacher)

The part played by 'immersive language' in Karen's agency, as described above, reflected a whole-hearted commitment to a personal social justice vision. Judy described her as 'like a mother that you want to please' with 'passion' eliciting commitment from others, 'because she feels so passionately about things, they don't want to let her down. They really do not want to'. While words such as 'soul' and 'passion' are intangible and unquantifiable, in defiance of Cartesian rationalism, they were felt and articulated as part of the lived

experience of multiple members of staff in both schools, exercising discursive power within and across relationships.

The congruence between the headteachers' vision of a good education and the internal dispositif of beliefs of members of staff in each school was significant in producing professional solidarity that was part of a landscape of mutual trust.  For example, in Wren School, Naresh felt no 'battle' between the teacher he wanted to be and the teacher he was expected to be.  He compared this with the pedagogical culture in his previous school where he felt constrained in responding to pupils' curiosity about social justice issues by performance imperatives which privileged instrumental knowledge acquisition linked to examination success:

> *…in my previous school…the students had to get the grade, they had to get the grade and, at the point of almost forcing that I wouldn't be able to do those lessons of taking further, sort of, social justice. And I remember my class that I had at the time, the Year 11 class, they could see that there was a battle being fought. … There was a battle of me not wanting to conform [laughter in voice] to that…and the students questioned, and they said, 'So why are they coming in and watching this?' And I said, 'Because they're checking that we're doing such-and-such.' And they went, 'Well, why would they need to check it?' I said, 'Because they feel that we should be doing such-and-such.' 'So, are you going to get told off?' I said, 'Well, probably, I will get told off.'* (Naresh Wren School Middle Leader)

Naresh's use of the word 'conform' signals his awareness of the agonistic conflict embedded within his experience of teaching, as opposed to teachers being caught in a 'hegemonic trap' where the insidious invisibility of new managerial governance has led to a reconfigured, marionette professionalism (Thrupp, 2003, cited in Armstrong, 2010).  In Wren School, Naresh was confident in his own professional judgement, 'If this is a debate that I think is important, then I think, 'Let's have that debate and let's give the time for it, not just move on, move on, move on, move on.'  The repetition of 'move on' conveys his emphatic refusal of discourses that legitimise the shutting down of conversations with pupils that are conceived of as moving outside the parameters of examination coaching.

In Erasmus School, Sian spoke of 'the Erasmus way' and also felt safe in refusing to compromise her core values of making 'a moral and purposeful difference to somebody's life', in the context of a continually changing external policy environment:

> I've lived through several exam changes, [laughter] syllabus changes. I've lived through several schools. I've lived through several management style changes and I've lived through school being corporatized. I've lived through all sorts of different things with teaching. I haven't been in it that long, 13 years, but I've seen a lot. But I refuse, and I will continue to refuse, to allow what is happening in the corridors of Downing Street, or those extraneous factors that I can't control, to tell me how I can make a moral and purposeful difference to somebody's life.

> …if something happens at Erasmus that you don't think is right, you say it's not good enough for Erasmus, because you expect better…and there'll be points where you say, "That's not Erasmus; that's not Erasmus," and everyone knows what you mean.
> (Sian Erasmus School Middle Leader)

In Wren School, headteacher Karen was clear that professional practice in the school was framed by the school's distinctive social justice vision, 'People who don't see children as being central leave because they are not happy here, because they don't understand'. To protect this vision, Karen emphasised the importance of working with a staff team of like-minded individuals in which those with dissonant views 'moved on':

> …the people we've gathered around us are the people who share that vision and the people we promote are the people who share that vision and so then it's much easier to move that forward.…It's an evolved vision and it's a shared vision and, as I said, people on my Senior Leadership Team are people who've come into the school who you recognise share your vision and work towards the same goals as yourself and then they've become promoted. We don't promote people who don't share that vision. It would be at odds with us.

Karen's repeated use of the inclusive pronoun, 'we' and the final emphatic statement, 'It would be at odds with us' suggests a collective custodial agency that protected the school's social justice vision from within.  For Karen, this collective vision surpassed an ideological commitment to 'democratic leadership' as a social justice goal.  This resonates with the critique posited by Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) that dispersed models of leadership may result in discriminatory policies and practice if based on consensus forms of governance.

While a framework of discursive truths produced cohesion and unity in each school, this did not lead to uncritical homogeneity.  The importance of headteachers listening to and considering the views of members of staff was a prominent feature in both schools.  Sally, a middle leader in Wren School, endorsed a common view, 'we listen to Karen, but Karen also listens to us'.  In Erasmus School, Sian was also confident that her headteachers would listen to her and engage with what she said:

> *I know that Michael and Penny will take on board what I've said.  They will look at the global picture.  They'll put it in the pot, and they'll give me an answer, and that's good enough for me. I've had my say.* (Sian Erasmus School Middle Leader)

In each school, the headteachers' axiological direction nurtured professional solidarity as a form of lateral co-leadership agency where professional standards were predicated on 'peer answerability'.  The recurring discursive motif in the research data of positioning children as the teleological centre of all aspects of each school's work gave collective meaning to adult work, making this a shared labour of love (Boltanski 2012; Cantillon, 2017; hooks 1994, 2000; Sayer, 2011)**.**  In the next thematic section, I explore, in greater detail, ways in which practices of 'love' and 'care' manifested in the relational climate of both schools as a dimension of social justice agency.

## 6.3 AN ETHIC OF CARE

> *We're learning and understanding that alone we're lost but when we… the moment we connect with one other person, we are bigger, we are better, we are supported and the more we can do that with other individuals, the stronger we become. To do that, we must have the skills of listening, empathy, sympathy. We must understand that, being very self-aware, that I don't possess everything that… when we're doing something together, that that person is, for whatever reason, more skilful at that. I can learn from them but, for this moment, they do that. I don't need to do it. I can do something else. I… Very much, it's about recognising other people's skills, appreciating other people's talents and skills because, when we do that, we grow ourselves because we watch, and we listen, and we learn from others.* (Jack Wren School Senior Leader)

In each study school, I found a pervasive ethic of care which was deeply rooted in 'otherwise work' based on 'the claims of others' and ways in which people 'act from a sense of justice, from friendship, loyalty, compassion, gratitude, generosity, sympathy, family affection and the like' (Midgley, 1991, p. 5, cited in Lynch, 2021). These enveloping, rather than merely therapeutic or corrective practices of care, entailed highly emotionally invested work focused on the relational aspects of safeguarding, advocacy and cultivating a sense of belonging.

Within neo-liberal schooling systems, intensified performance regimes have repositioned teachers as producers of educational commodities in the form of skills and dispositions that serve market values and needs (Fitzgerald, 2009). In this context, so-called care practices can operate in an instrumental way as forms of incentivisation and remediation used to motivate compliance with 'target-getting', or repair the affective damage illuminated by Hutchings (2015) emanating from new managerial accountability measures. Examining an ethic of care through a social justice lens enables headteachers to critique the normalising of care interventions that might seem to be self-evidently positive. For example, singling out particular groups for emotional attention may produce insidious forms of inequity that

act against an individual's best interests by creating deficit identities of pupils and their families:

> *…emotional well-being and engagement become civic attributes, particularly for those deemed as disaffected or unengaged or vulnerable… [and] discourses and interventions around themes of emotional well-being enable governments to draw private spheres of life into the realm of public power.* (Ecclestone, 2007, p. 463)

Moreover, the argument that children who are uncared for, within and outside school, experience both an affective loss and indirect costs in relation to their capacity to flourish economically and politically in society, made by Lynch (2002, 2007, 2009, 2021), gives additional meaning and political force to the notion of 'duty of care' in the context of a headteacher's social justice agency.

### 6.3.1   The Individual Pupil

In each school, 'aspiration' for individuals encompassed much more than examination success.  Discourses of the inherent worth of individual human beings framed each school's work as opposed to an institutional ethic that focussed on the school's overall performance or the value of individual pupils as future economic actors.  Instead, each school tried to nurture individual pupils' development and growth by helping them to acquire the qualifications, confidence, emotional and social resources to achieve a personal pathway to self-defined success.

In Wren School, the headteacher's empathic engagement with young people and emphatic focus on their needs was reflected in her practice, at the beginning of each academic year, of asking members of staff to write a letter to an individual student as a way of emphasising the covenant between adults and children in the school.

> *…I'll always remember I went to a SLT [Senior Leadership Team] meeting and on the board she had put a picture of a particular child and she said that… and I remember this a long time ago, and she said, "This child…and we all knew who it was. …this child is who we are running this school for. This child is who we are looking at making*

*this vision work and this child will benefit in this, this, this and this way and this," and that child was very successful with us as it happened and went on and did great things. But I think that when she did that and made it very personable and made it very believable, that that is a moment when you start to think that it is…that we can all do it.* (Rose Wren School Senior Leader)

The practice of personalising professional commitment by focussing on an individual child emphasises the idea of service leadership, '…this child is who we are running this school for', while the use of the inclusive pronoun suggests a collective commitment to a unifying philosophy.  Within the interview, Rose's reflection appeared as a 'recovered epiphany', as if she was tracing back through memory to identify a moment that had directed her subsequent professional agency within the school.  Later in the interview, she reflected:

*Karen cares very much about every single boy at this school and every single boy in this school is treated as an individual…* (Rose Wren School Senior Leader)

Linked to the focus on the individual pupil was the refusal of teachers in each school to be defined by discourses that equated professional and pupil value with examination success. This was evident in Judy's distinction between 'passing' and 'doing' mathematics and Naresh's focus on happiness in striving to 'create' people who understand the world, voice opinions in a meaningful way and make choices that are right for them as individuals:

*We're creating people that have the ability to converse with people outside of the school, that they have the ability to voice their own opinion in a, in a meaningful way, that they have a deeper understanding of what's going on in the real world…and go to whatever job or career that they wish to do and not feel that they should all have to go to university or all have to go to a particular further education, because, actually, that's not right for everybody and they're… The sort of the guiding of getting them to choose what's right for them and what makes them happy in the long run; and how that betters who they are and how that makes them happier.*
(Naresh Wren School Middle Leader)

*…last year I taught bottom set Year 11 maths. Okay, there was not a Scooby chance of a single one of them getting a four right or whatever it is for the government tables, right, okay. …They were not going to get it right because when I started they thought they were rubbish at maths. If I managed to get them to do one question in the lesson I was doing well, yeah, alright. That is the class that I got the most reward from last year because not one of them failed, not one of them got a U, no one and every single person in that class, by the end of the year, believed that they could do maths. Not that they were going to 'pass', but they could do maths.* (Judy Wren School Teacher)

Mark, a senior leader in Erasmus School, expressed the same ethic when he asserted, 'This school is bigger than exam results'.  He saw social justice as 'doing the right thing' by giving pupils a chance, even if that impacted on the school's examination results.  From his career experience before entering the teaching profession, Mark valued 'skills which are non-academic, which, probably make up 80% of the job, rather than how academically bright you are to work out lots of nice spreadsheets for me and trading positions and algorithms'.  While he saw examination results as really important because 'they get you in the front door', they were, for him, 'part of the picture'.  Implicit in the account below is the congruence between Mark's leadership practice and the axiological decision-making climate created by the co-headteachers regarding 'fairness' and 'opportunity':

*…you couldn't think of a colleague* [Michael, Headteacher] *who is more in-tune with social justice and fairness and opportunity and doing the right thing from that perspective.  That doesn't always tie-in with league tables, it doesn't always tie-in with lots of other things, in terms of some of the kids we give a chance to in this school have no chance anywhere else, absolutely no chance.  The fact we take kids here, for example, in Sixth Form, who've got no GCSEs.  Who've come from a completely different country with qualifications which are quite difficult to decipher sometimes.* (Mark Erasmus School Senior Leader)

Speaking about a conversation with the parents of a prospective Sixth Form student with chronic fatigue syndrome, Mark emphasised that people liked working in the school

because it did not allow potential examination outcomes to determine decisions about inclusion.

> *…they wanted to come and have a chat with us because they'd heard that we'd looked after a student in similar circumstances.  Again, that's nice to hear, and I said, "Look, it's not her fault."  Therefore, again, why should her life opportunities be limited by the fact that she was unlucky enough to end up with a health condition?  So, again, that's maybe another reason why lots of people like working here, because that will hit our results, no doubt.  So, if she comes, and doesn't make it, or she ends up only doing a part of the year, that 100% will hit our results, but is that what we're here for?  Or is it about her life chances and her opportunities?  That's why I do this job, not because of a league table.  I feel that's a shared philosophy amongst the school.* (Mark Erasmus School Senior Leader)

In a Sixth Form focus group discussion in Erasmus School, Katy spoke of the school giving pupils unique opportunities:

> *If you're, if you're not academic they don't just push you aside…So, if you are going for Oxbridge you get given a, erm, tutor or a mentor who knows Oxbridge.  If you're going for sociology you get given a sociology mentor.  So you get given something that's gonna help you.  So, if you want to go and do carpentry or something and you've chosen to get your A' Levels first, then you'll go to, go and speak to a technology teacher who knows the industry….You're definitely supported all the way throughout and you kind of get the impression everyone here is to help you, everyone wants you to go far.* (Katy Erasmus School Pupil)

John felt 'the school just push you to be like the best that you can be… They really believe about putting your best interests first rather than the school's':

> *They don't hold you back, depending on whatever you are like. If you're, erm, lacking in ability but you wanted to do medicine, they'll find a pathway for you. They'll show you that you can go through biomed first and then push through to medicine… And it*

*works both ways. If you...and you wanna go up, they'll push you. If you're high in ability and wanna do something that doesn't necessarily reflect that, they're not gonna hold you back.* (John Erasmus School Pupil)

Commenting on the significance of care in secondary schooling, Jack, a senior leader in Wren School, emphasised the affective dimension of learning, making a distinction between 'important' and 'urgent', with support, love and care being 'important' to children and examination success being 'urgent' for the school:

*So, it is about support and about love and about care. It's not about passing a test. It's about being told that you are okay. You are growing and being given the tools in that supportive environment to grow because growth can accelerate. Learning is an emotional experience... I think we forget that, in the daily rush to achieve higher results, and that the answer to this question is about providing what those children need, what's important to them, not what's urgent [examination success].* (Jack Wren School Senior Leader)

Arguably, in a healthy education system, there should be no conflict between the interests of pupils and the interests of the school, let alone a conflict that pupils and teachers seem to take for granted as embedded within the way schools are governed by the state.

### 6.3.2  'Care-Full' Relationships

In both study schools, the headteachers nurtured conditions of care in which 'care-full' relationships were seen to produce conditions within which people could thrive, feel safe and overcome very personal challenges.  This is qualitatively different from organisational conditions where '*care commanders*...delegate essential care and love work to others' (Lynch et al, 2007, p. 2).

In both schools, affective work, and care in particular, were associated with the persistent discursive reiteration of the school as 'a family'.  For example, in Wren School, the Learning Coach role was celebrated as being 'that sort of parent, loving, you know, support, support, support' (Naresh Wren School Middle Leader).  The view of professional care in a school as

resembling that of parents who know their child 'inside out' was emphasised by Kim as a being a corporate strength of the school associated with the headteacher's agency:

> *I think, I think the relationships between teachers and students here is our strength. Everybody knows everybody...They're [Learning Coaches] the parent of that child. That's what Karen [the headteacher] says Learning Coaches are. They are the parents of that child. They know that child inside out...* (Kim Wren School Senior Leader)

The recurring motif of 'passionate professionalism', discussed in Chapter Four, was apparent in these adult child relationships. Candice identified this form of professional dedication as 'caring':

> *It's not just a, a turn up 9 to 5 job and you, you go again. It's actually, really get emotionally involved with the boys, erm, and care what happens to them. That's, that's, that's what I see is that quality. I suppose it's caring.* (Candice Wren School Senior Leader)

Here, Judith recalls the 'massive love' she felt for Year 11 pupils on the day they officially left school:

> *That last day when the Year 11's go and they come and they say goodbye, you know, you have that massive love, even for the one that's plagued you day-in and day-out for the last X amount of years.* (Judith Wren School Inclusion Team)

Working harder to provide 'enveloping care' to compensate for systemic economic and affective disadvantage outside the school was seen as part of the professional labour of the adult workforce. Kim linked this to her personal narrative, contrasting her experience of being a working class girl in a secondary modern school where, 'if you were failing, they just left you, and they left you to wallow in your misery' with Karen's view that, 'it is all of our responsibility to make it better':

*…when I see children that don't have a stable background, that are poor, their parents are letting them down, they can't read or write, they've got dyslexia, there are all these struggles, I suppose I wanna make it better for them because there must have been people along the way that made it better for me. And I think that's what I've got in me, and then I met Karen and she's just finished me off really, because she's got this drive, and this determination, you know, where you can ask her that question of, 'Why do you want everyone to be successful?' I've seen her give talks, you know, when we go off on senior leadership trips to 'C' and whatever. She has tears in her eyes when children come and they come with nothing, and they've got nothing in their world that's going to make it better. And I've seen her very tearful about that and she's stood in front of us and she has told us that it is all of our responsibility to make it better.* (Kim Wren School Senior Leader)

Sally, Judith, Pat and Candice represented a shared staff view that Karen's high profile physical presence, as she moved around the school interacting with staff and pupils in personal, caring and curious ways - as opposed to a detached surveillance of the school's work - was a form of social justice agency:

*She, herself, the way she treats the students and the way she comes out of the office, the way she'll do lunchtime duties, the way she'll pick up litter in front of the boys. She doesn't…she doesn't see herself as above anybody else. She's obviously got that position of authority, but I don't know if she'd mind me saying this, but when we had the building designed, she wasn't the Head at that time, and the Head's office was not where it is now, and she purposely put herself where it is now, so she was in the middle of the school, so she could see what was going on in the school, so she wasn't out on a limb…* (Sally Wren School Middle Leader)

*You'll pass her in the corridor - she's always mixing. She's not someone that just sits in the office and just points or dictates. She's very much a people person. She's very much for staff and for the students.* (Judith Wren School Inclusion Team)

*She leads us into caring. Jane leads us all the time in caring about the children.* (Pat Wren School Senior Leader)

*…she's always there for the kids, she's always out and about talking to them. And, you know, showing what it is to be fair and firm and approachable and not stuck away in an office like some headteachers are.* (Candice Wren School Senior Leader)

Jack talked about care infusing every interaction between adult and pupil, suggesting that, in a cumulative and iterative way, it fostered self-belief, personal growth and learning, and was, in this sense, synonymous with social justice.

*…it can be a warm smile one morning when a child walks in that could be the start, the first step in a child changing their belief in themselves because somebody else recognises something in them. And that, that then builds into something else…I think that, for me, it is: everything a teacher models has the potential to impact on the growth or development of a child and so, at that heart, it's [care's] everything because the relationship the child has with the teacher, or with any adult, is the potential to create growth and learning, and provide the necessary support for that child who will become an adult, that will become a parent, that enables them to grow. That to me is social justice.* (Jack Wren School Senior Leader)

Penny, co-headteacher of Erasmus School, explained how the school's international visits programme contributed to building close relationships with children:

*I think there's a huge commitment to children in this school. There's a huge commitment to building a very close relationship with children. …we spend 10 days abroad with these children in very close contact with them, so we build very strong relationships. Therefore, because relationships are strong, you have a natural commitment to that child and you know that child very well, and you know perhaps a little bit more about them than other teachers do in other schools, maybe. You form a very strong bond with children in this school and, therefore, you feel that*

*commitment to making sure they get what they need to be successful in whatever pathway they choose.* (Penny Erasmus School Co-Headteacher)

The relational climate of the schools was nurtured by 'small' acts of personal care, with food as a signifier of family, including cooking breakfast for Year 11 pupils attending pre-school revision lessons; the Wren School headteacher baking a cake for a senior leadership team meeting; and regular 'Friday cakes' in the Erasmus staff room, as well as personalised Christmas cards and Year 7 tea parties:

*…we all get a personalised Christmas card at Christmas, handwritten, and it's not just a squiggle, it is, thank you for doing this or I appreciate when you did blah, blah. You get letters. You'll get a message.* (Judith Wren School Inclusion Team)

*There'll always be an end of term barbecue in the summer.  There'll always be a Christmas meal that she'll provide for us…and the boys, her presence is, is always there, and the tea parties she has for Year 7.  So, when they join, she'll take time out of her diary to have small tea parties for all the Year 7s, so she gets to know who they are, and they can see her as someone that they can talk to and as someone that cares about them…* (Sally Wren School Middle Leader)

William painted a vivid picture of ways in which *time* was given as an act of care within leadership practice in Wren School, making him feel valued, as both a member of staff who has just taken on new responsibilities and as a human being with family commitments.

*…whenever you go to one of their doors, they're never too busy for you, never too busy for you, and that, for me, has been fantastic. I've had so many questions about… particularly taking over new subjects in new areas. I've had to go to a deputy head or an assistant head, or someone. They're never too busy for me. The laptop lid goes down: "What d'you want? How can I help?" Every single time and, again, that's amazing…whenever I go and see the head for anything at all, and I've been to see her quite a lot recently with family things, straightaway, yeah, "Have you got a minute, Karen?" "Bill, I've got two for you. What d'you want?" Straightaway, no questions*

*asked, that's it, and I think that, like I said, that's sort of cascaded down.* (William Wren School Middle Leader)

## 6.4    CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have considered how ethical and affective practices intersected with each other to configure distinctive organisational conditions and forms of professionalism that resisted the neo-liberal commodification of people, values and leadership itself.  I argue that, in each school, social value was focused on individual worth, irrespective of a pupil's background or contribution to a school's performance metrics, with members of staff consciously balancing pragmatism and idealism guided by the headteacher's explicit and implicit axiological direction.  This, in turn, produced forms of professional solidarity where answerability to peers, rather than hierarchical surveillance, was, arguably, the dominant form of internal governance.  In the following chapter, I reflect on the findings of the study in the context of its contribution to academic research and professional practice.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# CONCLUDING DISCUSSION: HOPE AND RENEWAL

*Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token save it from that ruin which except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.*

Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education", 1977, p. 192

## 7.1    INTRODUCTION

This study was informed by my experience as a headteacher and inspired by my commitment to educational research that both highlights and promotes social justice.  The study was designed in two research phases: initial in-depth interviews with seven headteachers followed by an ethnographic study in two secondary schools.  I wanted to find out how secondary school headteachers in an English policy environment understood and articulated their social justice agency and how this shaped the way social justice was understood and enacted in two secondary schools.  In this final chapter, I reflect on the limitations, challenges and strengths of the research design before summarising key research findings and making recommendations for policy and practice.  At the end of the chapter, I discuss the dissemination of findings and the implications of the study for further research as well as how a global pandemic may influence responses to my findings.

## 7.2    REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH DESIGN

My research aim was to explore the intersection between school leadership and social justice, focussing on the agency of secondary school headteachers in the English policy environment. This was supported by two research questions.

> How do secondary school headteachers understand their leadership agency for social justice?

> How does the leadership agency of headteachers shape the way social justice is understood and enacted in two English secondary schools?

The theoretical framing, qualitative methodology and post-structuralist epistemology of the study provided a way of illuminating the complex agentic space occupied by headteachers, who are both receivers and fabricators of discourse. The research highlights the agonistic complexity within which headteachers navigate social justice issues, through both individual and collective agency, in the multi-paradigmatic ideological spaces within and surrounding contemporary English secondary schools. By using *dispositif* and heterotopia as explanatory tools alongside Fraser's social justice taxonomy and Lynch's work on affective justice, I was able to analyse degrees of compliance and defiance in headteachers' relationship with neo-liberal governmentality, illuminating how they responded to axiological tensions around social justice.

One limitation of the study, from a positivistic point of view, could be seen as the lack of conclusive evidence produced. This would be a misunderstanding of its epistemological basis. As discussed in Chapter Three, qualitative methodology does not set out to provide causal explanations or generalisable solutions. Instead, I am offering the reader rich descriptions of the agentic space of headship, in relation to ways in which social justice was understood, constructed and articulated by particular headteachers and enacted in particular schools. This approach to research makes the inter-relationship of discourses in a specific place, at a specific time, visible and thus open to scrutiny, harnessing the reader's own reflexive experience in the interpretation of resonant and dissonant findings. Likewise,

understanding both the power and the limitations of the hegemonic discourses that had governed my former professional life was 'liberating'.

The openness of the enquiry, which allowed issues to emerge inductively from headteacher accounts and ethnographic study rather than pre-conceived lines of investigation, presented a considerable challenge in delivering the thesis on time. Distilling the substantial amount of qualitative data and organising the many intersecting and diverse strands of socially just schooling into a cohesive thematic framework was demanding. However, overall, I am confident that the themes highlighted reflect substantive concerns that unlock original ways of examining headteacher agency.

## 7.3    THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings foreground the significance of critical professionalism in headteacher agency for social justice and demonstrate that, rather than working at the edges of social justice by mitigating neo-liberal excesses, headteachers place social justice concerns at the heart of their leadership work as central to a school's moral purpose. I hope the professional reader will recognise features of the tapestry and be curious enough to unravel the threads in their own practice.

Analysis of data is organised in relation to three broad themes: 'Headteacher Constructions of Social Justice Agency'; 'Social Justice Agency in Heterotopic Corporate Space' and 'The Affective Work of Social Justice Leadership'. Chapter Four focussed on the first research question, 'How do secondary school headteachers understand their leadership agency for social justice?' Based on the analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews with seven headteachers, this chapter discussed how constructions of leadership agency for social justice reflected the relationship between personal cultures of social justice and contemporary discourses of secondary schooling. Chapters Five and Six addressed the second research question, 'How does the leadership agency of headteachers shape the way social justice is understood and enacted in two English secondary schools?' through ethnographic study of two contrasting secondary schools. Throughout these chapters, I discussed ways in which headteachers' regard for, and understandings of, social justice

influenced their leadership practice, which, in turn, shaped adult work and students' learning experiences.

### 7.3.1 Headteacher Constructions of Social Justice Agency

A number of empirical studies within critical education research literature have argued that the intensity and high stakes nature of examination success in contemporary English secondary schooling occupies a disproportionate investment of time and energy which substantially narrows, or indeed obscures, the professional gaze. However, in Chapter Four, I found that headteachers' discursive constructions of socially just school leadership were influenced by personal cultures of social justice that animated their leadership agency. For example, while promoting examination success constituted a large part of the school's work, headteachers also protected their schools as sites of care and community in the face of tightening performance regimes. In other words, headteachers' personal constructions of socially just education produced subjectivities of discursive resistance to direct and indirect manifestations of neo-liberal governance that they saw as undermining their professional judgment with respect to acting in the best interests of their pupils. The ethnographic study demonstrated how these discursive constructions shaped an axiological corporate space and were enacted in the day to day practice of two English secondary schools.

### 7.3.2 Social Justice Agency in Heterotopic Corporate Space

Headteachers' personal cultures of social justice contributed to the way their agency shaped distinctive axiological corporate spaces, in conjunction with the physical characteristics of the school sites; dominant contemporary discourses of secondary schooling and the historical narrative of each school. The distinctive 'social justice ethic' apparent in each school corresponded with each headteacher's personal and professional values, keeping a spirit of independence and, indeed, resistance alive. While it might be possible to find elements of heterotopic leadership agency in many schools, the heterotopic work in the study schools was a substantial, developed and established aspect of leadership. I argue that, in each school, headship agency was effective in building value-oriented communities where market-based ideologies of schooling as a 'ladder' to personal and school success were balanced by social justice practices that emphasised both inherent individual worth

and possibilities for social change.  In both schools, headteachers used agonistic leadership agency to manage political and ethical tensions within the 'apparatus' of secondary schooling.  Inside these educational spaces, they rejected performance metrics as primary indicators of social value, leaning away from an ethic of competitive individualism towards communitarian principles which placed attention to human development and well-being at the centre of the school's work.

In both schools, heterotopic agency involved 'moving beyond' established, limiting and elitist ways of thinking about classed and national identities.  In Erasmus School, this social justice ethic was built around a commitment to internationalism whereas, in Wren School, it was constructed as moving beyond the horizons of the locality.  I argue that cultural pluralism embodied in the hyper-diverse cohort and extensive international visits programme of Erasmus School created a heterotopic, or distinctively other, corporate space within state education.  In Wren School, heterotopia was manifested in the way the symbolic value of a new building was used to re-order the school's historical identity as a 'non selective' school.

### 7.3.3   The Affective Work of Social Justice Leadership

By illuminating the affective work of social justice leadership, my findings drew attention to aspects of headteacher agency that cannot be measured in a quantitative sense.  In both ethnographic study schools, headteacher agency was active in cultivating pupil subjectivities predicated on 'care-full' relationships with others, that transcended and challenged market values.  In both schools, headteachers shaped conditions in which practices of love, care and solidarity acted as a significant counter-balance to neo-liberal individualism.  Professional solidarity around this ethic enabled the co-construction of an affective corporate space where headteacher agency for social justice was pivotal in cultivating forms of 'lateral answerability', axiological energy and an 'ecological synergy' between systems and everyday relationships; individual and collective well-being.

**7.4     IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

Social justice can be seen as a 'sleeping discourse' that is buried within neo-liberal rhetoric, in professional dialogue about school effectiveness, something we assume we do by virtue of being a teacher.  Perhaps this is, in part, because social justice practices are dispersed across the multiple dimensions of a school's work and embedded in neo-liberal assumptions that schooling is a key contributor to equalising opportunity and, thus, to promoting social mobility.  As such, by investigating ways in which social justice agency in school leadership is agonistic and active rather than merely delusional, passive or antagonistic, the study opens up some divergent spaces of criticality and creativity.


The thesis locates school leadership for social justice in a more complex agentic space than one that suggests that headteachers are powerless to promote social justice through secondary schooling given structural inequities in wider society, or its corollary which sees social equity as realisable in an individualistic neo-liberal world.  In this sense, the study disrupts a dialectical view of social justice discourses, illuminating how headteachers address axiological paradoxes and tensions in their work through agonistic agency.
The study exposes active, reflective and courageous forms of leadership agency for social justice, using a post-structuralist epistemology to make visible what is invisible, by looking beyond and behind the surface meaning of a text.  By recognising a wide range of social justice practices as well as the organisational conditions in which they flourish, the study illuminates what is of value in secondary schooling that cannot be 'counted'.  The findings also provoke and disrupt by troubling some of the core assumptions of the English education system.  This suggests the need for academic, professional and public dialogue concerning how the education system might advance new forms of professionalism that are unambiguously aligned with social justice outcomes.


**7.4.1   Recommendations**

The recommendations below address the need to expand the voice of critical professionalism in school leadership practice, academic research and the development of national education policy.  Engaging critically with the systemic roots of injustice in wider society would shift the teleological concerns of school leadership away from hegemonic

market values towards education as a private and public good, placing a social justice lens at the heart of organisational and policy critique as a key driver of systemic change.

The Government should encourage the commissioning and funding of research projects that contribute to understanding how structural inequalities in society are reproduced, mitigated or transformed through secondary school practice, giving greater weight to the professional judgement and experience of headteachers as sources of expertise in the development of national education policy on initial teacher training, continuous professional development, leadership accreditation frameworks, governor training schemes and the work of Ofsted.

Headteachers should seek opportunities to work with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop ways of deepening academic and professional understandings of socially just forms of school leadership that promote optimistic views of the capacity of schools and school leaders to influence transformative change in society.

Headteachers should promote social justice practices in their schools by nurturing spaces for reflective practice that enable exploratory and divergent thinking to flourish as an aspect of critical professionalism.  This should include cultivating ways of integrating understandings of distributive, recognition, representation and affective justice into the development of the curriculum in its widest sense as part of school consultation, evaluation and improvement planning processes.

Headteachers should encourage the reflexivity of the school community, welcoming disruptive ideas and dissent emanating from different perspectives.  This would involve:

- regularly examining the school's collective vision and the values and principles that underpin it in relation to a changing policy environment and society;
- self-reflection concerning how personal cultures of social justice interact with dominant policy discourses;
- developing critical understandings of practices of care within a social justice framework by investigating how pupils feel they belong to the school community;

- deepening professional understandings of how class, 'race', ethnicity, sexual identity, body shape, level of family income and other forms of difference affect pupils' capacity to access opportunity in, and through, schooling;
- giving all pupils and adults agency in developing the school.

Headteachers should participate in, and support, the development of 'thinking tools' related to the concepts of *dispositif* and heterotopia in collaboration with HEIs, for example how physical space and the materialities of a school site shape relational work in a school. Rather than a luxury within the hyper-busy world of the school, this process should be viewed as a creative and productive way of reimagining the possibilities of schooling.

## 7.5 THE STUDY FINDINGS AND COVID-19

The global COVID-19 pandemic occurred after I had completed my fieldwork and did not affect the processes of data collection or analysis. However, as a momentous global event, arguably a rupture in the social order that is also a catalyst for change, it will affect the way my findings are viewed and used. The pandemic has changed the way schools have operated in the short term and has, arguably, enhanced public understanding of the role of schools, across the age range, as sites of care as well as education, that have been working at the centre of local communities on the 'front line' of the response to a social, health and economic crisis. Speaking of the school workforce in "The Guardian Online", Sweeney commented:

> *From nursery schools to further education colleges, colleagues have entrenched themselves in their communities, caring for the children of key workers and those at risk of harm while becoming distributors of food and providers of essential social care services.* (Sweeney, 2020)

UNICEF recently published a report on education in a post-COVID world (UNESCO, 2020, p. 6). Of the nine ideas for public action advocated by the report, two particularly resonate with my findings regarding affective justice, communitarian ideals and physical space:

*Protect the social spaces provided by schools as we transform education. The school as a physical space is indispensable. Traditional classroom organization must give way to a variety of ways of 'doing school' but the school as a separate space-time of collective living, specific and different from other spaces of learning must be preserved.*

*The Commission calls for renewed commitments to international cooperation and multilateralism, together with a revitalized global solidarity that has empathy and an appreciation of our common humanity at its core.*

A recent article by Mann et al (June 2021), commenting on schooling in the USA, argued that post-pandemic conversations between policymakers and educators about the 'best interests' of children should focus on affective justice in order to maximise learning by meeting 'human needs':

*Hopefully, the illusion that schools should only deliver academic content to students has been permanently destroyed by the COVID-19 pandemic, while revealing what society really hopes and expects for schools to do for children.….the pathway to students recovering academically is not one that doubles down on standards-based curriculum and testing, attempts to hurry learning, or exerts pressure to quickly rebound to prepandemic norms. Instead, the correct pathway to maximizing student learning meets the whole child where they are in the present moment and makes time to meet all of the precursors required for learning and growth, including activities that reinforce children's sense of safety, belonging, and self-worth.* (Mann et al, June 2021)

In relation to system reform, there has been speculation that the pandemic has deepened public engagement with the deep structural inequities in society across a range of areas from food security to educational disadvantage.  The hope that permeates my thesis is that this will inform the development of a more socially aware context for policy development, with schools continuing to play their part in reifying 'levelling up' political rhetoric, while taking greater control of the agenda for educational change in the context of revitalised

civic cultures where communities, families and schools work proactively together. Schools and headteachers may, therefore, be positioned more favourably, post-pandemic, to act in accordance with a critical professionalism that challenges the systemic roots of educational and societal injustice within both individual schools and our national schooling system. In particular, the differential classed impact of the pandemic on children's learning has sparked debate about the distinction between affirmative 'recovery' strategies for those 'left behind' and transformative remedies linked to systemic and cultural change in the 'superstructure' of education systems.

## 7.6    DISSEMINATING THE FINDINGS

I intend to disseminate findings from the thesis by publishing articles and book chapters as well as presenting to various professional and academic audiences. Firstly, I will send a summary account to the research schools and headteacher participants and offer to present it in their schools. I hope to further contribute to London Metropolitan University's Inter-Disciplinary Research Forums and Research Showcases as well as BERA events and conferences. During the study period, I engaged with various academic networks including BERA special interest groups concerned with social theory and educational leadership. I will offer to present aspects of the thesis as well as my overall argument to these groups and to guest lecture at various universities. I would also like to disseminate my experience of the research process including reflexive work on navigating research ethics in ethnographic study. I am especially interested in co-presenting with education and care practitioners.

## 7.7    FURTHER RESEARCH

In conducting post-doctoral research, I would like to focus on the experiences, voice and agency of young people. For example, I would like to make a more detailed study of how pupils experience care-giving in relation to who feels welcome and who feels safe in a school community, as well as how the voices of different groups of pupils are 'heard'. For example, are there hierarchies of pupil voice within schools, with some voices less 'acceptable' to the school's view of itself than others?

I am currently developing a joint research proposal with Dr Delia Baskerville, senior lecturer in the School of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, that explores the perspectives of young people on belonging and 'mattering' in relation to educational, cultural and social inclusion.  The project will focus on the use of ethno-dramatic political theatre and post-performance Talanoa (an open, post-performance conversation where actors and audience members share stories, ideas and feelings) to communicate young people's experiences of care, love, solidarity and exclusion to school and other civic leaders. The project, currently entitled 'Spaces of Care', builds on Dr Baskerville's doctoral thesis on truancy in Aotearoan secondary schools, in which she developed a grounded theory of 'mattering' (Baskerville, 2019a and 2019b), as well as my findings positioning affective justice as a pivotal dimension of socially just leadership agency.

In addition to this project, the thesis is a launching point for further studies of school leadership agency viewed through a social justice lens.  As well as delineating the broader landscape of headteacher social justice agency, I have gathered much additional data that would contribute to more focussed studies of the affective and ethical labour of headteachers.  This includes exploring how headteachers' personal cultures of social justice interconnect with value systems embodied in national policy such as the non-statutory guidance on promoting fundamental British values (Department for Education, 2014).  I also propose to further investigate the conceptualisations of 'space' explored in the study, for example the cognitive and moral framing of the drama studio as a heterotopic relational space within a school site.  In addition, I hope to embark on auto-ethnographic study of my personal experience of an evolving education system as a pupil, student, teacher, headteacher, higher education lecturer, parent and grandparent.

## 7.8    CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This study has given me the opportunity to review and reimagine headship through the lens of social justice agency.  I argue that headteacher agency for social justice cannot be understood as a simple binary between neo-liberal work and social justice work.  Rather, it exists, agonistically, in a complex landscape of contradictory, nuanced and intertwined discourses that together, at different times, produce different conditions of justice or

injustice. The headteachers in the study brought complex subjectivities to their role, led complex corporate spaces and were social justice protagonists in various significant ways, notably in their heterotopic creativity and the affective work that underpinned the development of a communitarian ethic in their schools.

Headteachers operate in a rhetorical context which expects them to resolve seemingly intractable social problems at a strategic level and complex ethical dilemmas in every day practice, simultaneously striving to: ensure a school's survival in the current education system; help all pupils to thrive within that system; and contribute to the evolution of more equitable social conditions in wider society. They are required to implement government policy, presented unproblematically as promoting social mobility and social cohesion, using schooling as an instrument to transform opportunity, despite deeply embedded inequities beyond their direct control. However, headteachers also have opportunities to promote a more equitable society by challenging taken-for-granted discursive accounts and practices that reproduce structures of privilege and disadvantage. Thus, the hope underpinning this thesis is that, while the agenda for schools is set by government policy within an assumed consensus around the best interests of pupils and society, English secondary school headteachers also exercise significant personal and professional agency as they navigate multi-paradigmatic axiological terrain with conviction, resilience and courage. The thesis aims to both expand and disrupt ways in which the possibilities and limits of headteacher agency are understood, strengthening the professional voice and changing how we understand and respond to the ways in which our professional lives are governed through both self and external regulation. It is only from a place of critical hope that the depoliticisation of the schooling system can begin to evolve, dispelling equity myths embedded in the ideological rhetoric of neo-liberalism and embracing the latent capacity of the education workforce to take greater charge of a re-ordered education agenda. Hopefully, this thesis will both prompt and inform new conversations about headteachers' role as producers as well as receivers of educational discourse; system reformers as well as system leaders.

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# APPENDIX ONE

## Research Ethics Review Form

**LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

**LONDON MET RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW FORM**

**For Research Students and Staff**

**Postgraduate research students** (MPhil, PhD and Professional Doctorate): This form should be completed by all research students in full consultation with their supervisor. All research students must complete a research ethics review form before commencing the research or collecting any data and no later than six months after enrolment.

**Staff:** This form should be completed by the member of staff responsible for the research project (i.e. Principal Investigator and/or grant-holder) in full consultation with any co-investigators, research students and research staff before commencing the research or collecting any data.

**Definition of Research**

Research is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship*; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research."

Scholarship is defined as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases."

London Met's *Research Ethics Policy and Procedures* and *Code of Good Research Practice*, along with links to research ethics online courses and guidance materials, can be found on the Research & Postgraduate Office Research Ethics webpage:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-ethics/

London Met's Research Framework can be found here:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-framework/

Researcher development sessions can be found here:

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/researcher-development-programme/

This form requires the completion of the following three sections:

**SECTION A: APPLICANT DETAILS**

**SECTION B: THE PROJECT - ETHICAL ISSUES**

**SECTION C: THE PROJECT - RISKS AND BENEFITS**

| **SECTION A: APPLICANT DETAILS** |
| --- |

| A1 | **Background information** |
| --- | --- |
| | Research project title: **Leadership for social justice: investigating head-teacher agency in English secondary schools.** |
| | Date of submission for ethics approval: 4th February 2016 |
| | Proposed start date for project: 24th February 2016 |
| | Proposed end date for project: March 2018 |
| | Ethics ID # (to be completed by RERP chair): 406316 |

| A2 | **Applicant details, if for a research student project** |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------|
| | Name: Christine Jefferys |
| | London Met Email address: christine.jefferys@londonmet.ac.uk |

| A3 | **Principal Researcher/Lead Supervisor** |
|----|-------------------------------------------|
| | Member of staff at London Metropolitan University who is responsible for the proposed research project either as Principal Investigator/grant-holder or, in the case of postgraduate research student projects, as Lead Supervisor |
| | Name: Professor Carole Leathwood |
| | Job title: Emeritus Professor |
| | London Met Email address: **c.leathwood@londonmet.ac.uk** |

**SECTION B: THE PROJECT - ETHICAL ISSUES**

| B1 | **The Research Proposal** |
|----|---------------------------|
| | |
| | Please attach a brief summary of the research project including: |
| | |
| | Background/rationale |
| | Research questions/aims/objectives |
| | Research methodology |
| | Review of key literature in this field & conceptual framework for study |
| | References |
| | |
| B2 | If you plan to recruit participants, be sure to include information how potential participants in the study will be identified, approached and recruited; how informed consent will be obtained; and what measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Research Ethics** |
| | Please outline any ethical issues that might arise from this study and how they are to be addressed. |
| | *NB All research projects have ethical considerations.  Please complete this section as fully as possible using the following pointers for guidance. Please include any additional information that you think would be helpful.* |
| | Does the project involve potentially deceiving participants?  *No* |
| | Will you be requiring the disclosure of confidential or private information?  *Yes* |
| | Is the project likely to lead to the disclosure of illegal activity or incriminating information about participants?  *No* |
| | Does the project require a <u>Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)</u> check for the researcher? *Yes* |
| | Is the project likely to expose participants to distress of any nature?  *No* |
| | Will participants be rewarded for their involvement?  *No* |
| | Are there any potential conflicts of interest in this project?  *No* |
| | Are there any other potential concerns?  *Yes* |
| | **If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.** |
| **B3** | **Will you be requiring the disclosure of confidential or private information?** |
| | A pilot study indicated that the interviews with head-teachers are likely to elicit the disclosure of confidential and sensitive information regarding the way they respond to government policy as well as private details about their personal lives and career struggles. |
| | In the two ethnographic studies, views on the professional efficacy of head-teachers and other staff, while not the focus of the research project, may be disclosed or inferred. |
| | **Does the project require a <u>Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)</u> check for the researcher?** |
| | The project requires an enhanced DBS check to facilitate the ethnographic phase of the research where I will be moving freely around the school, as well as talking with and interviewing pupils. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **B4** | **Are there any other potential concerns?** |
| | The in-depth nature of the one to one interviews with head-teachers may evoke memories of personal and professional struggle, as the pilot study revealed.  It is difficult to predict whether recounting past events will be distressing, cathartic, or a mixture of both for participant head-teachers.  My own participation as a sole researcher who is a former head-teacher could also be both distressing and therapeutic. |
| | Eliciting children's perspectives in ethnographic research is ethically complex in the context of wider discourses of child safeguarding and the differential status between children and adults. However, excluding pupil perspectives from the overall dataset, would be inconsistent with my view of the centrality of this group of social actors to illuminating research objective two: |
| **B5** | "To investigate ways in which head-teachers influence the enactment of social justice in two school sites". |
| | **Does the proposed research project involve:** |
| | The analysis of existing data, artefacts or performances that are not already in the public domain (i.e. that are published, freely available or available by subscription)? *No* |
| | The production and/or analysis of physical data (including computer code, physical entities and/or chemical materials) that might involve potential risks to humans, the researcher(s) or the University? *No* |
| | The direct or indirect collection of new data from humans or animals? *Yes* |
| | Sharing of data with other organisations? *No* |
| | Export of data outside the EU*? No* |
| | **If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.** |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Will the proposed research be conducted in any country outside the UK?  If so, are there independent research ethics regulations and procedures that either:**<br><br>Do not recognise research ethics review approval from UK-based research ethics services? *No*<br>and/or<br>Require more detailed applications for research ethics review than would ordinarily be conducted by the University's Research Ethics Review Panels and/or other UK-based research ethics services?  *No*<br><br>**If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain.** |
| | **Does the proposed research involve:**<br><br>The collection and/or analysis of body tissues or fluids from humans or animals?  *No*<br>The administration of any drug, food substance, placebo or invasive procedure to humans or animals?  *No*<br>Any participants lacking capacity (as defined by the UK Mental Capacity Act 2005)?  *No*<br>Relationships with any external statutory-, voluntary-, or commercial-sector organisation(s) that require(s) research ethics approval to be obtained from an external research ethics committee or the UK National Research Ethics Service (this includes research involving staff, clients, premises, facilities and data from the UK National Health Service (NHS), Social Care organisations and some other statutory public bodies within the UK)?  *No*<br><br>**If you answered yes to any of the points above, please contact your faculty's RERP chair for further guidance.** |
| B6 | **Does the proposed research involve:**<br><br>Accessing / storing information (including information on the web) which promotes extremism or terrorism? *No*<br>Accessing / storing information which is security sensitive (e.g. for which a security clearance is required)? *No* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **If you answered yes to any of the points above, please explain. To comply with the law, researchers seeking to use information in these categories must have appropriate protocols in place for the secure access and storage of material. For further guidance, see the Universities UK publication [Oversight of Security Sensitive Research Material in UK Universities](#) (2012).** |

| SECTION C: THE PROJECT -  RISKS AND BENEFITS |
|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| **C1** | **Risk Assessment** |
| | Please outline:<br><br>the risks posed by this project to both researcher and research participants<br>the ways in which you intend to mitigate these risks<br>the benefits of this project to the applicant, participants and any others<br><br>In considering and mitigating risks posed by the project, I will follow the BERA ethical framework (2011), taking account of researcher responsibilities in relation to 'an ethic of respect' for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom (BERA, ibid, p. 4).  I am also mindful of the view that ethical codes are '… no substitute for respect for and empathy with the participants of any social research project' (McDowell, 2001, p. 98).<br>Ethical considerations will be addressed through careful planning based on the identification and weighing of risk, and vigilance in the field with primacy given to the avoidance of any kind of harm.  I am mindful of the complex and nuanced nature of ethical decisions and the risks of unintended consequences in a qualitative research project, so while it is important to be pro-active, I will also need to be 'ethically alert' in the moment.  I will, therefore, consider the potential impact of my actions, at the time and subsequently, on those directly and indirectly involved and endeavour to avoid any possible detriment to them. |

I will work to build rapport and trust with all research participants, by maintaining a position of heightened reflexivity in identifying and responding to emerging issues, including insightful understanding of the power relationships involved in the research process and sensitivity to the evolving 'contract' between researcher and researched.  Noting and reflecting on ethical decisions, the rationale for them and their impact, in a research journal, will enhance the ethical rigour of the research study (Watt, 2007).

I will, now, consider specific risks presented by the research project, together with ways of mitigating them, under the following headings:

negotiating access;

informed consent;

maintaining confidentiality;

detriment to the research participants and researcher;

research relationships;

quality of the data and findings.

**Negotiating Access**

Access to the Institution

In phase one, I will use networking from a wide range of professional contacts to identify a diverse, purposive sample of head-teachers, including head-teachers who are both known and unknown to me.  I will, then, invite head-teachers to participate in the research project in face-to-face meetings or via email before formally requesting an interview.  An information sheet (Appendix One), clarifying the purpose and scope of the research will be provided at this stage.  A formal written request will then be sent to six head-teachers, who I assume will need to gain permission from relevant parties, including the governing body and any executive head-teachers, before proceeding.

In phase two, access will need to be renegotiated as the ethnographic nature of the research will be far more intrusive, involving a wide range of social actors including children. The relationship I have established with the two head-teachers concerned, as well as the school's capacity to participate in a more substantial study, will be critical in obtaining access.

Access to Individuals and Groups

In the ethnographic phase of the project, I will approach staff directly to request participation in interviews and focus groups (with the prior permission of the governing body and head-teacher). For example, I would write to the convenor of a meeting in advance in order to give members of a group/ team an opportunity to discuss the request. This will help to demonstrate independence and avoid being seen as the head-teacher's 'ally', a scenario which is likely to adversely affect the quality of data produced.

I believe head-teachers would support the goal of accessing pupil voice, especially in the context of the active culture of seeking pupil voice prevalent in many UK schools, where pupils are regularly called on to talk with adults about their school. Indeed, harnessing pupil voice is seen as a positive feature of school organisation in dominant discourses of school regulation such as the Ofsted Inspection Framework as well as in universal value frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**2. Informed Consent**

In order to obtain informed consent for the head-teacher interviews in phase one of the research project, I will provide an information sheet outlining the purposes and nature of the study, ethical considerations and relevant contact details (Appendix One), prior to the collection of any data. I will, then, ask head-teachers to sign a consent form at the beginning of the interview (Appendix Two).

In phase two of the research project, I will provide a second information sheet outlining the above and explaining how the ethnographic study will be conducted (Appendix Three) for members of staff, the governing body, parents and pupils. I will discuss appropriate methods of dissemination for the different audiences with the head-teacher. In addition, I will request permission to briefly explain the research project at a staff meeting and follow this up with opportunities for staff to pose questions at a convenient time. To include any non-attenders, I will use staff communication media to offer further briefings.

During the ethnographic phase, I will need to be particularly sensitive to the vulnerability of research participants during times of informal observation when consent has not been individually requested. For example, I will not engage pupils in 'formal conversations' unless consent has been previously formally requested and permission granted by both parents and the pupils themselves (Appendix Four).

Interviewing pupils will involve complex ethical considerations, embedded in discourses of safeguarding, status and authority. I anticipate interviewing three groups of pupils from Key Stage Three, Key Stage Four and Key Stage Five respectively during a relevant lesson such as Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) or Citizenship, depending on the school curriculum, so that the interviews are framed as having pedagogic value. I would negotiate the specific classes and the configuration of the pupil groups with heads of department to avoid the construction of 'compliant' groups and reflect diversity within the school in relation to gender, ability and 'race'/ ethnicity. Informed consent would be sought from all individuals in the relevant classes and their parents (Appendix Four) prior to the selection of the actual group. This would allow for flexibility in case of absentees.

The opportunity for schools and individuals to withdraw consent must be real rather than tokenistic, however disruptive this might be to the research project. The clarity and comprehensiveness of the information provided and the researcher's demonstrable respect for the work of the school, pupils, staff, governors and

parents will help to avoid withdrawal of consent.

**Maintaining Confidentiality**

I will develop secure systems for managing and storing data by using passwords to protect electronic files and storing confidential printed material in locked filing cabinets.  Audiotapes of interviews will be transferred to a password protected computer file and deleted from my mobile device.

Data will be disposed of in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.  Any printed duplicate material, such as essay drafts, will be shredded to a commercial standard.  Similarly, redundant computer files will be deleted.

As sole researcher, I will need to remain vigilant in the care I take with the data in my custody, especially in transit, and report any significant loss of data and inadvertent breaches of confidentiality to my lead supervisor at London Metropolitan University, immediately.

Participants in the group interviews may disclose opinions that are critical of others, leading to the risk of breaches of confidentiality.  I would mitigate this risk by establishing ground-rules regarding confidentiality prior to the interview, through signed formal consent forms, as well as at the outset and closure of the interview. My responsibility as researcher will be to emphasise this aspect of the research process.

I will take all possible reasonable steps to ensure that any published and disseminated data and findings from the research study protect confidentiality, by using pseudonyms and ensuring that no other personal identifiers such as job title and school location are included/ linked.

**4. Detriment to the Research Participants**

The British Educational Research Association (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research state that:

Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference. (BERA, 2011, p. 5)

Risks of unfair treatment of research participants and causing unintentional offence will be mitigated by paying scrupulous attention to issues of equality of worth and social diversity in the school context with sensitivity to how others perceive research interventions, including observation of practice, conversations and interviews, whatever my intentions as researcher. I must be alert to the impact of my behaviour on others and be prepared to rethink and, if necessary, change my approach. Conversely, there may be situations where a research participant risks causing potential offence to others, for example by making a racist remark. My response would depend on the situation, but there may be circumstances in which I would challenge prejudice to avoid being tacitly complicit in the sentiments expressed.

**Research Relationships**

I propose to use an approach Albon and Rosen (2013) describe as 'relational ethics' (p. 14) that pays attention to the embodied nature of fieldwork activity, as well as the significance of the specific places and spaces within which the research takes place, generational inequities in which adults are able to set and evade rules, and the active agency of children and young people. This will influence my behaviour as an adult in general in the school, for example not 'jumping' the dinner queue, as well as the conduct of interviews, for example agreeing ground-rules at the start. In negotiating research relationships, in the ethnographic phase, I will be mindful of 'the answerable act[s]' (Albon and Rosen, 2013, p. 13) that constitute the everyday

nature of giving meaning and value to others in ways which avoid 'domination and exploitation' (ibid p. 15). In so doing, I will focus on the inter-relatedness of the way a conversation or interview is experienced, the interpretation of its meaning and how it connects with wider discourses within and beyond the school. Negotiating the time and location of the interviews is, therefore, significant in 'relational ethics'.

The blurred and shifting boundaries between insider and outsider positioning as researcher in this study may give rise to ethical dilemmas. For example, in phase two, I may witness unacceptable or dangerous pupil behaviour, such as a fight, where I decide to intervene. Though unlikely, I will discuss the school's expectations in such an event with the head-teacher prior to commencing the ethnographic fieldwork and follow his/her direction in the context of school policy. I will also be careful not to be drawn into any professional debates within the school, as this would compromise the researcher identity on which I am basing my 'covenant' with each school.

I would prefer to interview the pupils in a separate room without the presence of another supervisory adult. Enhanced DBS clearance and my position as a former head-teacher may make this more acceptable to each school. However, where a school requires an adult to be present, I will need to consider the possible influence of adult supervision on pupils' responses, taking account of the adult's role in the school and relationship with the pupils concerned.

### 6. Quality of the Data and Findings

The importance of adopting rigorous approaches to data collection and analysis addresses the ethic of researcher responsibility to the research participants, the general public and those who may use the findings from the research, with respect to the authenticity and reliability of the knowledge produced. In this sense, firstly, the coherence of the whole research process is critical in ensuring the integrity of the data and analysis within a specific, acknowledged epistemological and theoretical framing. Secondly, the risk of misrepresenting others when reporting

the research will be mitigated by rigorous and systematic analysis of the research data through close and multiple readings of multiple, cross-referenced data sources 'in order that hegemonic, counter and unanticipated discourses be unearthed and interrogated' (Osgood, 2012, p. 35). I will pay particular attention to 'nuance, contradiction, ambiguity and areas of vagueness' (Osgood, ibid), interpretative context (Gill, 2000) and my own reflexivity (Skeggs, 2002). I also propose to give head-teachers and others the opportunity to read, comment on and discuss their own interview transcripts.

Since a key aspect of the research is to explore how head-teachers discursively construct social justice in the school context in relation to regulatory/ dominant discourses of school effectiveness (research objective one), the risk of diluting the relevance of the qualitative data to the particular time period in which it is collected, given a wider context of volatile policy change, will be mitigated by adhering to the tight research timetable outlined in the RD1.

**<u>BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT</u>**

The research study represents the major component of a professional doctorate. Successful completion of the study will therefore be of significant benefit to the applicant in terms of personal learning, informed criticality and career capital. However, as Busher (2002) cited in Pole and Morrison (2003, p. 151) points out, any researcher needs to weigh up:

… the harm and benefit to participants and to society that may arise if the research is or is not carried out.

The structural role of head-teachers is of central interest to educational policy-makers, politicians, practitioners, parents, pupils, governors and the public at large:

Headteachers are at the focal point of the translation of policy into practice and they are in a strategic position to evaluate ideological and political claims and counter-

claims about the consequences of change for schooling culture and for its outcomes. (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2013, p. 14)

I believe that the research project has the potential to make an original contribution to knowledge, theory, policy and practice within the context of a dramatically changing, increasingly diversified architecture of schooling in which market-based discourses (Ball, 2011) may be seen to collide with the political rhetoric of social justice.

Niesche (2012, p. 458) argues that the research agenda on educational leadership is dominated by 'the 'performative turn'':

In line with recent moves to school rankings, high-stakes testing and new managerial and accountability regimes, it seems that a large focus of educational leadership research is becoming targeted towards short-term solutions, 'managing' change and 'more efficient' practices in the relentless pursuit of performativity.  (ibid)

In this climate, a post-structuralist research inquiry into school leadership agency is, arguably, a timely contribution to a growing body of research into what a more socially just system of schooling might look like (Francis and Mills, 2012).

*Please ensure that you have completed Sections A, B, and C and attached a Research Proposal before submitting to your Faculty Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP)*

Please sign this form and submit it as an email attachment to the Chair of your faculty's Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP) and cc all of the staff and students who will be involved in the proposed research.

http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/current-students/research-ethics/

Research ethics approval can be granted for a maximum of 4 years or for the duration of the proposed research, whichever is shorter, on the condition that:

- The researcher must inform their faculty's Research Ethics Review Panel (RERP) of any changes to the proposed research that may alter the answers given to the questions in this form or any related research ethics applications.
- The researcher must apply for an extension to their ethics approval if the research project continues beyond 4 years.

**Declaration**

**I confirm that I have read London Met's *Research Ethics Policy and Procedures* and *Code of Good Research Practice* and have consulted relevant guidance on ethics in research.**

**Researcher signature: Christine Jefferys**

**Date: 4th February 2016**

**Feedback from Ethics Review Panel**

| | *Approved* | *Feedback where further work required* |
|---|---|---|
| **Section A** | x | |
| **Section B** | x | Feedback refers to all sections:<br>**Reviewer 1**<br>This application looks exemplary to my eye.<br>**Reviewer 2**<br>I think this sounds like a very interesting and useful research project. The researcher has completed all the necessary documentation and mitigated against all risks. I think it is good to go. |
| **Section C** | x | |
| **Date of approval** | | 08/02/2016 |

| NB:  The Researcher should be notified of decision within <u>two</u> weeks of the submission of the application. A copy should be sent to the Research and Postgraduate Office. | |
|---|---|
| **Signature of RERP chair** | Klaus Fischer |

# APPENDIX TWO

## Invitation to Participate in Headteacher Interview Wren School

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**Investigating the Social Justice Agency of Secondary School Headteachers**

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### Invitation

You are invited to participate in an independent research project that will contribute to understandings of the way headteachers use their leadership agency to promote different forms of social justice in and through mainstream secondary schooling.

### Participants

I am looking for head-teachers who are willing to participate in an in-depth, one-hour, audio-recorded, one to one interview in their school.  I would like to emphasise that:

- participation is entirely voluntary;
- participants are free to withdraw from the process at any time;
- individuals and schools taking part in the research will not be identified.

### Project Information

I am gathering data through qualitative, in-depth interviews with head-teachers and ethnographic study in two secondary school settings.  Findings from the study will be published in the doctoral thesis itself and disseminated in other academic and professional publications and through conference presentations.

The study is regulated by London Metropolitan University and adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), together with the University Code of Good Research Practice and the Research Ethics Policy and Procedures of London Metropolitan University.

**Contact Details**

Contact details are provided below, should you require clarification of any aspect of the research project.

**Researcher**

Christine Jefferys

Doctoral Candidate

Institute for Policy Studies in Education

London Metropolitan University

166-220 Holloway Road

N7 8DB

Tel: 01322 221874

Mobile: 07896 947199

christine.jefferys@londonmet.ac.uk

**Lead Research Supervisor**

Emeritus Professor Carole Leathwood

London Metropolitan University

166-220 Holloway Road

London N7 8DB

Email: c.leathwood@londonmet.ac.uk

**CONSENT**

**I am willing to contribute to the study as outlined above.**

Name (please print): _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____

# **APPENDIX THREE**

## **Invitation to Participate in Headteacher Interview Erasmus School**

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH PROJECT**


**INVITATION, INFORMATION AND CONSENT**

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### **Research Purpose**

The research study will contribute to an emerging body of international research into leadership for social justice by exploring how head-teachers' views of social justice shape their ambitions for a school within a wider societal context. The distinctive character of Erasmus School and its commitment to education for democratic citizenship make it a particularly interesting case study.

### **Research Findings**

Findings from the study will be published in a doctoral thesis and disseminated in other academic and professional literature, in order to contribute to discussion, debate, policy and practice related to social justice and schooling.

### **Ethical Regulation**

The study is regulated by London Metropolitan University and adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.

All data collected is confidential and will be stored in password protected files on a single use computer. Any data recorded on mobile devices will be transferred as soon as possible and erased from the device. No data will be disclosed to a third party and every effort will be made to protect the identity of individuals in any publications. While the researcher will not reveal the name of the school, its distinctive character may make it difficult to disguise its identity and, as such, the identity of the head-teachers.

Research contributors have the right to withdraw consent to the use of any interview data collected from them in the study, in which case such data will be erased.

**Interviews**

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service. You will be provided with a copy of the transcription on request.

**WRITTEN CONSENT**

**Consent**

I agree to take part in the research study as outlined above.

Role: Head-Teacher

Signed: _____

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

# APPENDIX FOUR

## Invitation to Participate in an Ethnographic Study

**Leadership for Social Justice**

**Investigating Headteacher Agency in English Secondary Schools**

"Headteachers occupy an influential position in society and shape the teaching profession. They are lead professionals and significant role models within the communities they serve. The values and ambitions of headteachers determine the achievements of schools."

National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (2015), Department for Education 2015

I am conducting a small-scale, qualitative study into the way head-teachers use their leadership agency to promote social justice in, and through, mainstream secondary schooling, in England.  As part of the study, I would like to spend one day a week in your school over the course of six months, gathering data through observation, discussion and interviews.

The study will contribute to an emerging body of international research into social justice leadership in secondary schools by exploring how leadership for social justice is shaped by different policy discourses, at a particular time, and how this plays out in different contexts.

Findings from the study will be published in a doctoral thesis and disseminated more widely in both academic and professional contexts, contributing to understandings of how head-teachers engage with social justice as part of leadership agency.

The study is regulated by London Metropolitan University (London Metropolitan University, 2016) and will adhere to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research

Association (BERA 2011).  In accordance with these ethical standards, the school would have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage in the process and confidentiality would be robustly protected through anonymising the school and individuals.

**Christine Jefferys**

Doctoral Researcher

Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE)

London Metropolitan University

166-220 Holloway Road

London N7 8DB

Email: christine.jefferys@londonmet.ac.uk


**Lead Research Supervisor**

Professor Carole Leathwood

Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE)

London Metropolitan University

166-220 Holloway Road

London N7 8DB

Email: c.leathwood@londonmet.ac.uk


**References**

London Metropolitan University, Code of Good Research Practice (2016), available from http://student.londonmet.ac.uk/your-studies/course-and-module-information/mphil--phd-professional-doctorates/research-framework/

BERA (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.  Available from: http://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011

# APPENDIX FIVE

## General Information for Staff

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH PROJECT**

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### The Study

I am investigating the social justice agency of head-teachers through qualitative research in two secondary schools.

### Research Purpose

The research study will contribute to an emerging body of international research into leadership for social justice by exploring how head-teachers' views of social justice shape their ambitions for a school within a wider societal context. The distinctive character of Erasmus School and its commitment to education for democratic citizenship make it a particularly interesting case study.

### Research Methodology

I will be spending 2 days a week in Erasmus School from 24th September to 21st November, as well as attending some key events such as Open Day. During this time, I will observe the everyday life of the school; shadow some departments; study key school documents and talk with members of the school community.

### Research Findings

Findings from the study will be published in a doctoral thesis and disseminated in other academic and professional literature, in order to contribute to professional discussion about social justice and schooling.

**Ethical Regulation**

The study is regulated by London Metropolitan University and adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.  All data collected is confidential and will be stored in password protected files on a single use computer.  No data will be disclosed to a third party and every effort will be made to protect the identity of individuals in any publications.  While the researcher will not reveal the name of the school, its distinctive character may make it difficult to disguise its identity and, as such, the identity of the head-teachers.

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**INVITATION TO ALL STAFF**

I am very interested in your views.  Please email me at: christine.jefferys@londonmet.ac.uk, if you are willing to be interviewed, as part of this study, so we can arrange a suitable time to talk.  If you have any available time on 28th September, please let me know.

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Christine Jefferys, Doctoral Researcher

# **APPENDIX SIX**

## **Student Bulletin Erasmus School**

**Social Justice Research**

I am very happy to be spending some time in your school as part of a doctoral research project looking at how secondary school head-teachers promote social justice.  Examples of social justice are treating each other with respect, listening to each other's views, valuing diversity, understanding how the world works economically and politically, and protecting freedoms and rights, in order to make communities, countries and, indeed, the world as a whole a fairer and happier place for everyone.  Many people believe that education is the main way in which greater social justice can be achieved.

Although schools have much in common with each other and have to follow national policies, each school is unique and Erasmus School is distinctive in many ways.  I am interested in how this distinctive vision for education shapes the way people think and talk about social justice and how this is reflected in what they do and what they achieve. Through observing the day-to-day life of your school, as well as some key school events, and by talking with members of the school community, especially students, I hope to build a picture of the ways in which Erasmus School, in particular, is contributing to social justice. Thank you for this opportunity!

Christine Jefferys

# APPENDIX SEVEN

## Email to Erasmus School Pastoral Leader

As part of my research on social justice at Erasmus School, I would like to interview a group of about 6 Year 9 students, during their lunch-time (P4) on Tuesday 20th November for about 40minutes.  I would provide lunch.

I hope the process will contribute to their citizenship education by exploring ideas about social justice and enhancing their awareness of a research process.  I am trying to discover:

- How students understand the term "social justice".
- What social justice issues matter in their lives.
- How this relates to their experience of Erasmus School.

Ideally, I am looking for students who represent different backgrounds, personalities and experiences - they could be from one tutor group.

# APPENDIX EIGHT

## Interview Consent Form

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### SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH PROJECT


### INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

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### Researcher

Christine Jefferys, London Metropolitan University, christine.jefferys@londonmet.ac.uk.


### The Study

I am investigating the social justice agency of headteachers through qualitative research in two secondary schools.


### Research Purpose

The research study will contribute to an emerging body of international research into leadership for social justice by exploring how headteachers' views of social justice shape their ambitions for a school within a wider societal context. The distinctive character of the Erasmus School and its commitment to education for democratic citizenship make it a particularly interesting case study.


### Research Findings

Findings from the study will be published in a doctoral thesis and disseminated in other academic and professional literatures in order to contribute to public and professional discussion about social justice and schooling.

**Ethical Regulation**

The study is regulated by London Metropolitan University and adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association.  All data collected is confidential and will be stored in password protected files on a single use computer.  No data will be disclosed to a third party and every effort will be made to protect the identity of individuals in any publications.  While the researcher will not reveal the name of the school, its distinctive character may make it difficult to disguise its identity and, as such, the identity of the head-teachers.

Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service.

**Consent**

I agree to take part in the research study as outlined above.

Role: _____

Name (please print): _____

Signed: _____

      Date:_____

Signed (researcher): _____

      Date:_____

# APPENDIX NINE

## Sixth Form Focus Group Invitation and Consent Form Wren School

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**RESEARCH STUDY ON SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**Invitation to Sixth Form Students**

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You are invited to participate in a doctoral research study on social justice and secondary schooling, by taking part in a confidential discussion with other Sixth Form students.  Your views will contribute to understandings of the way schools promote social justice.

I will lead the discussion, which will take place on **Wednesday 21st March**, during Community Hour, **8.50am to 9.50am**, in a confidential space.  The discussion will be recorded to assist with my analysis.

The study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and is regulated by London Metropolitan University.  Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the process at any time, if you wish to.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is very important.  I will give the school a summary of my general findings from all the focus group discussions I conduct in the school, but I will not identify who said what.  Also, no school or individual will be identified, directly or indirectly, in anything I subsequently publish, including the doctoral thesis itself.

**Christine Jefferys** (Independent Researcher, London Metropolitan University)

**WRITTEN CONSENT**

**Student Consent**

I agree to take part in the research study as outlined above.  I understand that all contributions to the discussion are confidential, except where any safeguarding issues may be disclosed.

Signed:_____      Name (please print): _____

Date:   _____      Age: _____

**Parent/ Carer Consent (if under 18 years old)**

I agree to my son/ daughter taking part in the research study as outlined above.  I understand that all contributions to the discussion are confidential, except where any safeguarding issues may be disclosed.

Signed: _____ Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

# APPENDIX TEN

## Pupil Focus Group Invitation and Consent Form Erasmus School

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH PROJECT**

**INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM**

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You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study on social justice and secondary schooling by taking part in a confidential discussion with other students. Your views will contribute to understandings of the way schools and head-teachers address and promote social justice. The discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed to assist with my analysis.

The study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and is regulated by London Metropolitan University. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time should you wish to, by informing the researcher or your form tutor.

### Confidentiality

I will give the school a summary of my general findings from all the discussions that are held, but I will not identify who said what. Moreover, no individual will be identified, directly or indirectly, in anything I subsequently publish or report, including my doctoral thesis.

**Christine Jefferys** (Independent Doctoral Researcher, London Metropolitan University)

**WRITTEN CONSENT**

**Student Consent**

I agree to take part in the research study as outlined above.  I understand that all contributions to the discussion are confidential, except where any safeguarding issues may be disclosed.

Name (please print): _____

Age and Year Group:_____

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Signed (researcher):_____ Date: _____

**Parent/ Carer Consent**

I agree to my son/ daughter taking part in the research study as outlined above.  I understand that all contributions to the discussion are confidential, except where any safeguarding issues may be disclosed.

Name (please print): _____

Signed:_____ Date: _____

Signed (researcher):_____ Date: _____

# APPENDIX ELEVEN

## Overview of Research Methods

| RESEARCH TOOLS | WREN SCHOOL | ERASMUS SCHOOL |
|---|---|---|
| Interviews | 29 adults | 26 adults |
| Pupil Focus Groups | 2 with mixed Years 7 to 10<br>2 Sixth Form | Year 9 and Year 10<br>3 Sixth Form |
| Site Tours | 1 with Sixth Form guides<br>1 with Headteacher | 2 with Sixth Form guides |
| **OBSERVATIONAL WORK** | | |
| Meetings | 1 senior leadership team<br>Multiple staff briefings | 1 senior leadership team<br>Multiple staff briefings<br>2 Student Council (KS3 and KS4)<br>1 Sixth Form Council |
| Professional Development | 1 on school behaviour policy with whole staff and English Team | Staff training day<br>English as an additional language workshop |
| Assemblies | Various | Various |
| Lessons | 20 and 'drop-ins' | 40 |
| Shadowing for a Day | English subject lead<br>Senior leader<br>Year 7 and Year 9 | Sixth Form<br>Year 8 Citizenship Day<br>Drama; Humanities; Languages |
| Evening Events | | School Open Evening<br>Sixth Form Recruitment Evening<br>Year 10 Information Evening |
| Places and Spaces | Entrance/exit<br>Reception, foyer, café<br>Restaurant<br>Staff offices<br>Circulation areas<br>Learning zones and classrooms | Visitors' entrance<br>Reception, visitor waiting room<br>Dining halls<br>Staff room<br>Corridors<br>Classrooms<br>Assembly hall<br>Library |

# **APPENDIX TWELVE**

## **Headteacher Interview Guide**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Do you have any further questions about the research or my background?'  Please feel free to stop the recording or interview at any time.

### **Headteacher's Story**

Tell me the story of your pathway to this headship.

*Chronology; number and type of schools.*

*Becoming a teacher?*

*Becoming a headteacher?*

### **Social Justice Values**

What does social justice mean to you?

What has shaped these values/ views?

How do they influence your ambitions for the school?

### **Leadership Agency**

Tell me about your school and its intake.

What is distinctive about the leadership agency of a headteacher?

Where is your social justice agency most apparent in the school?

How does the wider policy environment shape your social justice agency?

What things could the school do better to promote social justice?

# **APPENDIX THIRTEEN**

## **Pupil Focus Group Discussion Guide**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this discussion. Do you have any questions about the research or my background? Please ask me to stop the recording, at any time, if you feel uncomfortable.

### **Context**

Age, when joined the school, Sixth Form subjects, aspirations/ what next?

Where do you live now?

Where have you lived?

### **Understandings of Social Justice**

How do you understand social justice?

How does Erasmus School promote social justice?

What would make the school more socially just?

Tell me about relationships between adults and children in the school?

Are students given a voice in how the school works? How does this happen?

# APPENDIX FOURTEEN

## Research Phases and Dates

| Academic Year | Main Activity |
|---|---|
| 2015 to 2016 | Research design and ethics approval. |
| 2016 to 2017 | Phase One: Interviews with headteachers. |
| 2017 to 2018 | Phase Two: Ethnography One, September 2017 to March 2018. |
| 2018 to 2019 | Ethnography Two, September to November 2018. |
| 2019 to 2021 | Analysis and writing up. |
| Final Submission | 11 October 2022 |