Sheffield Hallam University

A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT IN TWO HIGHLY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Stephen Christopher Jones

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Fighting the Alienation

There is so much that excites us
We agreed
"A lovely little school" that's so calm,
So peaceful.
Parents in photos to celebrate their children's learning
Whilst artwork is a buzz.
A kid, "no bigger than a dot", tore down the bookcase,
Kicked the teacher and ran into the road
And almost out of school for good.

There's now a lot to build on
The industrialist agreed
"A secondary school that's going places"
So improved.
Arts work to die for and children really learning
With community outreach a plus.
A teacher, "at the end of her tether",
So committed, so passionate,
Burst into tears at the frustration and the loss in her life.

The best fresh start school in the country
The Queen agreed.
She acknowledged the smiling faces of everyone
So proud.
The kids and the community can't believe their luck
A school that's theirs that works.
A place so deprived, frustrated and angry
Has hope like a whisper in a crowd.

Steve Jones
25th June 2003

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Abstract

This thesis outlines issues and theoretical outcomes from two case studies conducted in similar yet contrasting highly disadvantaged communities in the north of England, UK, comprising a secondary school and its feeder primaries in each community. The methodological approach was essentially interpretive/phenomenological, aiming to make a contribution to knowledge through the use of qualitative methods.

The research outcomes encompass both dilemmas and extremely problematic practical issues concerning leadership and practice in these schools/communities, particularly:

- The nature of leadership required;
- The fragility of leadership;
- The need for idealism and pragmatism;
- The difficulties associated with adopting child-centred approaches;
- The difficulty yet leadership necessity of working with parents and the surrounding community;
- Raising horizons and expectations;
- The political leadership task involved in work with other agencies locally; and
- Raising and maintaining a school's reputation.

The thesis also reports noteworthy differences between the approaches to the education process in these two similarly deprived communities, and then outlines examples of perceived effective practice in context, with potential wider application to other similar contexts.

Finally, aspects of a *Subversive School Leadership* approach are explored. This way of working involves boundary crossing, building networks and operating in a complex micro-political environment. These networks, it is argued, need to operate for the benefit of local people, especially children attending school, with child-centred values being essential to providing a positive response to their needs. School leaders are viewed as most effective where they feel able to *subvert* external policy imperatives to meet the needs of local children in a way that meets colleagues' collective values.

Contribution to knowledge is claimed for the "reality check interviews" employed in the research and the *Subversive School Leadership* concept.

Key Words

Acknowledgements

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Participants in research fieldwork have provided a challenging input. Their skill and commitment have been an inspiration for my work and the disadvantaged communities they work within have also been full of strengths and possibilities that can potentially inform other similar situations. I am full of admiration for these practitioners and community members: their courage and their values.

Finally, there are many people who have shown a positive attitude to my academic work, who are colleagues in other areas of my life. So I'd like to thank Jan Wilson and other colleagues associated with my local government work who have been totally supportive, often in difficult circumstances.

Statement

This PhD thesis is all original work. The objectives and purposes of the research are outlined in Chapter 2. The assistance received from supervisors and other colleagues has been according to accepted standards of academic research and ethics. References are outlined in the Bibliography and the nature of the input from these academic writings is outlined throughout the thesis.

Published work using material from this thesis research is contained in three books:

- "Making Education Leadership Count: at the School/Community Interface" in Buchberger, F. and Berghammer, S. eds. (2003) *Education Policy Analysis in a Comparative Perspective.* Padagogischen Akademie des Bundes in Oberosterreich.

- "School Leadership in Highly Disadvantaged Communities: What Next?" in Kiefer, S. and Peterseil, T. eds. (2004) *Analysis of Educational Policies in a Comparative Perspective.* Padagogischen in Akademie des Bundes in Oberosterreich.

- "School Leadership in Highly Disadvantaged Communities: The Reality and What Next?" in Kiefer, S., Michalak, J., Sabanci, A. and Winter, K. eds. (2005) *Analysis of Educational Policies in a Comparative Educational Perspective.* Padagogischen Akademie des Bundes in Oberosterreich.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Summary

This introductory chapter summarises the major issues dealt with in this research thesis. Firstly, there is a consideration of the background matters impacting on schools and their leaders operating in highly disadvantaged contexts. Secondly, the policy context for these schools is briefly outlined. Thirdly, the purposes and process of the research project are set out, with a summative box outlining the time-frame involved. Fourthly, the approaches adopted for both the initial *Scoping Study* and the main *Case Studies* are outlined, related back to the research question/ areas of inquiry. Fifthly, the outcomes from the studies are outlined: major similarities and differences, examples of perceived effective practice, and major policy/practice ways forward. Sixthly, researcher stance and personal hypotheses for the work are examined, linked to the ways in which these approaches potentially impacted on the process and outcomes of the project. Lastly, a summative chapter outline is made of the thesis structure.

Background

This research project examines the role of school leadership in effecting positive educational outcomes in highly disadvantaged contexts. The research was carried out in a sub-region of the north of England. The European Union designated this area as one of the most economically and socially under-performing sub-regions in Europe at the end of the twentieth century, giving it Objective One status.

This underperformance was caused largely be the catastrophic decline in its traditional manufacturing industrial base and the closure of the mining industry in the 1980s. As a result, levels of unemployment were relatively high, particularly in its deprived communities. In turn, the number of these areas of poverty was also higher than average. In these deprived communities, the everyday experience of local people is of poor health, housing, local facilities, environment, access to public transport and

underperformance educationally. These challenges taken together represent a considerable and daunting task, particularly for schools and their leaders.

Highly disadvantaged communities are by their nature "different" in the sense that social conditions in these neighbourhoods are of a different order from much of the rest of society. Poverty and deprivation tend to set a context of hopelessness and anger that are difficult for schools to grapple with and turn around. This applies to the task of all agencies seeking to address issues and problems in such communities. Schools providing an effective and uplifting experience in these settings are truly achieving "against the odds". Particularly, schools in disadvantaged communities face major barriers to engendering positive attitudes to learning and the process of education generally.

High ideals of moral strength for school leaders are a requirement in these circumstances and great realism is also required to apply these effectively. Schools in these situations have often to grapple with inadequate resources, and leaders may face resistant cultures inside and outside school, challenging behaviour of pupils, as well as obligations and imperatives imposed externally. Clearly, though, leaders have an important role in addressing the huge challenges faced by schools in highly disadvantaged circumstances and schools themselves have a potentially pivotal role in assisting community development in extremely poor areas.

The reality of inner city school leadership in present circumstances is that of working in a partnership context. This is a situation that involves working with local stakeholders, other agencies, and with neighbouring schools and their leaders, sometimes through structures such as Education Action Zones (EAZs: see Glossary) or other partnership bodies involving local people and workers. But the task is a major challenge in the context of a more individualist modern environment, where trust in institutions is harder to engender. This lack of trust is likely to be particularly the case in poorer communities, where both perceptions and personal experience tend towards negativity, anger and cynicism that is extremely hard to break down. So, encouraging participation and co-operation from sceptical local people, let alone the fostering of inspiration and aspiration is likely to be extremely difficult for everyone associated with the educational task.

However, in spite of these difficulties, failure to effect change in these circumstances means that inequality and underachievement of individual children persists in a highly negative way, not only for those individuals and their families but for society as a whole. So the issue of how to foster school improvement and community development in highly disadvantaged communities is a pressing one, raising as it does major issues for everyone connected with this area of work, including policy-makers.

The Policy Context

The New Labour government that was elected to office in 1997 has retained much of the 1980s marketising reforms of the previous Conservative regime. This body of reforms introduced the national curriculum, formula-driven school budgets of a devolved nature, testing and school league tables. However, the new government was very concerned to make a "step change" in standards, particularly in inner city schools as well as to increase funding and the quality of buildings incrementally, from a low base.

Certainly, a degree of "shock" was injected into the school system from the outset of the new government. By proclaiming that poverty was not regarded as an excuse for educational failure (Byers, 1997), and through the setting of ambitious targets for LEAs and individual schools to achieve in national test scores, it was the intention to make positive change over time for all children and to arrest the perceived "flatlining" of educational outcomes. To underpin this set of standards benchmarks, the threat of closure was introduced for schools defined as "failing" and that subsequently did not make necessary improvements to their performance. At the same time, new demands were made of teachers through the vehicles of performance appraisal linked to pay and the setting-up of regular Ofsted inspections. Headteacher failure was blamed for some of the difficulties in specific and problematic inner city schools (Ofsted 1998). These measures were regarded as necessary "challenges" for the education service by ministers keen to drive up standards to a more acceptable level. This process was seen by New Labour as a key element in restoring the nation's competitiveness economically in a global context.

On the other side of the policy equation, the new government set up sources of "support" to complement these new "challenges" (Barber and Dann, 1996). As well as increased funding for individual schools, an ambitious school building programme aimed principally at secondary level was funded largely through the private finance initiative (PFI: see Glossary). In addition, various programmes of curriculum innovation and support, particularly for inner city schools, were set up. These programmes initially used EAZs to target programmes and resources at specific children and areas of work (e.g. behaviour), with groups of schools being expected to co-operate at local level. These organisations sought to take a partnership approach involving private sector employer input, although this dimension to the work was not always successful in practice. Developing alongside this initiative were "Excellence in Cities", "Behaviour Improvement Programme" (BIP), "Extended Schools" and a plethora of other schemes to encourage curriculum innovation and effective school operation (see Glossary re. these government programmes).

On the employee side, a large increase has taken place over the course of the Labour government in the employment of support staff to work alongside and support teachers and to address special educational needs in the broadest sense. These have included mentors to provide personal guidance to pupils with specific difficulties, as well as support staff of different levels of expertise, some of whom have been used recently to exercise quasi-teaching functions in the classroom. At the same time, support staff have also been utilised in a number of other ways, including: to give guidance to parents, to assist pupils with behaviour management and to provide pre- and after-school support. Both teachers and support staff have also been expected to take part not only in specific school-based in-service training but other specifically funded training opportunities linked to initiatives, to increase the level of staff skills across-the-board. Specific support for head teachers and school managers, too, has been targeted through specific grant aided programmes provided by LEAs, universities and nationally co-ordinated leadership programmes. At around the time of the election of the Labour government, too, a national college was established (The National College for School Leadership: NCSL). This has aimed to provide school leadership training and consultancy support as well as leadership research capacity in this crucial area of work.

These school-focused initiatives have been promulgated at the same time as other government programmes targeted at inner city areas for regeneration and anti-poverty purposes. The current round of interventions in poor communities (e.g. Health Action Zones, Surestart, Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Renewal Funding: see Glossary) tend to run the risk of missing out schools or missing opportunities to view project working in a more holistic way. Similarly, the modernising agenda for local government seeks to encourage partnership and "joined-up" working to maximise service delivery, but the effectiveness of this process so far is arguably patchy and lacking linkage to school-based initiatives.

The Purposes and Process of the Research

The aim of the research was to explore the role of school leadership in contributing to the raising of educational achievement in disadvantaged communities. The specific context for the work was seen as including:

- The low levels of educational achievement locally
- A range of government initiatives aimed at schools in highly disadvantaged communities impacting locally
- The government agenda of raising standards in all schools
- The current emphasis on school leadership
- The imperative for Local Education Authorities (LEAs: see Glossary) to challenge and support their schools in a more effective way.

The specific purposes for the research were:

1. To consider how those holding leadership positions conceive the concept of educational success;
2. To identify key sources and processes of leadership associated, in particular, with the effective management of the school's role in the community; and
3. To identify key leadership capacities and competencies and to derive guidelines for good practice.

The three particular focus issues for the work were defined as: *educational achievement/success, the management and development of the school's role within the*

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community, and *leadership.* Given that these were acknowledged to be "problematic" in terms of the literature and in practice terms, the purpose of the research was conceived as being to unpick each of these terms to increase understanding and develop proposals for action.

The choice of this set of purposes for the study grew out of my personal experiences and stance. My work/life experience involved teaching at secondary level in the sub-region since 1974, giving "insider" experience of the task professionals face in dealing with pupils from disadvantaged communities. I have combined this role since 1980 with that of elected member of one of the local councils, latterly representing one the most deprived wards locally and nationally, with a significant ethnic minority population. Through my community leadership role in this capacity I gained experience of the workings of community groups, an appreciation of the importance of schools playing a role in neighbourhood renewal, and some understanding of the major challenges facing individuals and groups in areas of deprivation.

This range of activities grew organically out of my own perceptions, beliefs and orientations. Certainly, the issue of justice related to schooling and society generally loomed large in my thinking following my personal experiences at age eleven. I developed a strong desire for greater fairness and pathways to fulfilment for as many young people as possible as a result of my observations, experiences and thinking around the issue of school selection at age eleven and the subsequent comprehensive schooling debate during the 1960s. In short, I found the "eleven plus" process to be divisive, often cruel, unnecessarily rigid and wasteful of human potential. I saw the development of comprehensive schools as a way of addressing some of these stark inequalities, and education itself as a way to address some of the inequalities in wider society. This issue had similar effects on the thinking of many of my generation, but led me in the direction of democratic socialist views across-the-board and towards political involvement of one kind or another from my early teens onwards.

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Box 1:1

Research Time-Frame

2001
Stage One

Formulation of Stage One Research Questions

5th March- 3rd May: *Pilot Study*

22nd October- 18th December: *Scoping Study*

2002

17th April: Paper summarising outcomes from the Stage One work

15th May: Meeting with two LEA advisers to agree possible case study school communities

24th July: Revision of Research Questions

Stage Two

3rd September- 7th November Initial planning meetings with LEA advisers, EAZ co-ordinators and head teachers in the two proposed case study areas

19th November: Writing of "Final Case Study Design" paper

4th December: Start of Burntake and Thurlby *Case Studies* fieldwork (six critical issues and six key respondents)

2003

13th March: Review and focusing-down of the study (two critical issues and three key respondents)

31st July: Finish of *Case Studies* fieldwork

1st September 2003 – 31st July 2006:
Thesis Writing and Dissemination Stage

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Certainly, I have come to recognise that political action through conventional political parties is one way only of effecting change in this crucial and pressing area. By its nature, there is a limit to what realistically can be achieved through the party political process, given the necessary trade-offs in policy-making that take place, partly in the light of perceptions of what can realistically be achieved practically and electorally.

Given my continued commitment to there being a radical and sustained effort to address the inequalities and negative life-experiences endured in highly disadvantaged communities, I believe that every means needs to be employed to this end, including the mainstream political process. So, this set of beliefs about the pressing needs of highly disadvantaged children and their communities underpins the choice of research topic, as well as other aspects of the project. The implications of this researcher stance at various stages of the project are spelt out below.

The research project fieldwork was essentially undertaken in a two-stage process (see Box 1:1). The first stage was a substantial *Scoping Study* with associated fieldwork, whilst stage two involved two *Case Studies*. The *Scoping Study* explored not only the general area being researched but also specifically examined the extent to which the school/community interface was a pivotal issue. In effect, this was a working hypothesis for the first stage of the study. Stage two focused down more specifically on school leadership's role in raising educational outcomes in a disadvantaged context. The school/community interface was treated as an important but not pivotal issue, in amongst other pressing matters that had emerged from the initial fieldwork. A third *Thesis Writing and Dissemination* stage also involved the development of theoretical and practice/policy outcomes, potentially applicable nationally and internationally in these types of situations.

The Scoping Study

At this stage, the research questions were formulated as follows:

Central question:
What is perceived to be successful school leadership in the context of school/community interface in highly disadvantaged communities?

Areas of inquiry:
1. How do different groups of workers and community members frame "community"?
2. How do different leaders conceive of the school/community interface?
3. Who play the key roles at the school/community interface?
4. Do different groups of workers and community members frame leadership success differently?

5. How far are the community/school influenced by leaders' values?

The *Scoping Study* involved the examination of pertinent literature in the areas of *leadership* and *school improvement*; and two pieces of qualitative fieldwork. A pilot study took place in the early months of the project and involved a series of open-ended interviews with a small cross-section of local authority advisers and of practitioners in a small Education Action Zone in a highly disadvantaged part of the sub-region. The fairly substantial *Scoping Study* involved semi-structured interviews with school leaders, LEA advisers, EAZ. co-ordinators and council heads of social inclusion. The fieldwork employed open-ended and semi-structured interviews as well as a small number of observation studies. Both pieces of fieldwork sought to establish what constituted "success" for participants and stakeholders in highly disadvantaged communities.

The pilot study effectively began the exploration of leadership and school improvement in relation to the broad range of issues impacting on schools in highly disadvantaged communities. As far as the working hypothesis for the first stage of the research was concerned: (the potential crucial importance of the school/community interface) although there were differences of view about the nature of community engagement required in these contexts, it nevertheless was generally regarded as an extremely important element in their way of working. At the same time the following issues strongly emerged: the challenging nature of the educational task in highly disadvantaged communities, the sheer weight of external initiatives and challenges, the difficulty and concern caused by the "failing school" label, the positive aspects of shared aims across a family of schools afforded by EAZ working, the strong imperative on all concerned to increase attainment outcomes and the challenge posed by pupil behaviour.

The *Scoping Study* further explored the situation facing practitioners and ways in which school leaders and their colleagues were tackling the issue of school improvement. Certainly, joining-up of effort at the school neighbourhood level, the need to influence local attitudes to schooling in a positive way, getting the educational "basics" right, and the nature of effective school leadership all came through as major issues. Of particular interest at this stage were some points of difference that also emerged. The government

policy framework of intervention in inner city schools got a mixed reception from respondents, with less faith in its potential effectiveness at the service delivery end. There was a difference of view about the capacity of schools to be central to neighbourhood regeneration efforts. A tension emerged between "bottom-up" and "top-down" discourses and potential ways of working. The relevance and centrality of national testing benchmarks for pupils and schools was also a contested area. The extent to which the school/community interface was crucial to improving the quality of schooling for highly disadvantaged pupils was a further strong point of difference.

The Case Studies

In the light of the *Scoping* study fieldwork, the research questions were modified for second stage of the work to reflect the reduced centrality of the school/community interface issue, and to increase the focus on the school leadership issue, as follows:
Central question:
What is perceived to be successful school leadership in highly disadvantaged communities?
Areas of inquiry:
1. Where is leadership located?
2. How do those in leadership positions carry out their roles and how are they influenced by their values?
3. What is perceived to be successful leadership and why?
4. What happens in initiatives and what are the consequences?

Based on information about highly disadvantaged communities and their schools in the sub-region gathered during the *Scoping* stage, a set of criteria was formulated to establish two likely families of schools (a secondary school and its feeder primaries) as case study candidates. These criteria included: socio-economic circumstances; the presence of initiatives; inter-agency working; and specific issues concerning the local situation, of research interest. A problematising stance was adopted throughout about terms such as "successful" and the nature of leadership, particularly given the strong central policy push about these issues (with mixed results), and the range of views about the efficacy of this situation amongst school staff and others. Looking at how leadership

is perceived to work best in two similar yet contrasting communities and how leaders tackle similar sets of "critical issues" in different situations, communities and local authority areas was felt to be a potentially advantageous approach for the case study. Given that a number of issues were being tackled in families of schools or across EAZs, it was felt that looking wider than a single school to track leadership processes in dealing with "critical issues" would be advantageous.

"Critical issues", for the purpose of the study, were defined as major projects or day-to-day realities impacting on schools where examination of their ramifications had potential for displaying underlying intentions, values, and leadership issues in a potentially revealing and informative manner. Following an exploratory look at a number of issues across a secondary and a primary school in each case study community, the fieldwork focused on two critical issues. These were a Behaviour Improvement Project (BIP) in a secondary school and one of its feeder primaries in Burntake, and a Pathway Scheme (see Glossary) for disaffected pupils in the secondary school in Thurlby. The methodological issues and methods adopted for the study are examined in detail later, but the study adopted three triangulated methods: semi-structured interviews with individuals associated with these "critical issues", informal interviews with key respondents at regular intervals, and a small number of observation studies. The case study design aimed to build rather than to test theory and to establish "fuzzy generalisations" through plausible accounts of events and phenomena.

Out of the case studies emerged both theory and policy/practice outcomes. The theoretical outcomes below arose from both case studies' data and represent some major common issues impacting on schools in these types of highly disadvantaged communities. The similarities are powerful and demonstrate the massive pedagogical and leadership task involved in these types of situations. The differences are equally instructive, demonstrating the considerable professional dilemmas involved in working in tough contexts. The perceived effective practice examples and potential ways forward, however, aim to make a positive contribution to pedagogical and leadership practice in these types of situations, in spite of the challenges. These issues and examples seek to demonstrate that educational provision in such contexts can be innovatory, effective and a positive experience for pupils and their teachers.

Theoretical Outcomes

These involved seven common issues impacting on both families of schools in Burntake and Thurlby, and major perceived differences of approach and outcomes.

The Seven Common Issues

- The nature of leadership required in these situations;
- The political leadership task involved in local partnership working;
- The fragility of leadership and school progress, yet the extreme need for hope;
- The dilemmas and difficulties associated with adopting child-centred approaches in these schools;
- The leadership imperative of raising and the maintaining a school's reputation, often from a low base;
- The transformational potential of school investment in highly disadvantaged communities; and
- The difficulty, yet leadership necessity, of working with parents and the surrounding community.

Major Perceived Differences of Approach and Outcomes

- How people dealt with the behaviour issue;
- Ways in which idealism was balanced against pragmatism in practice;
- The different impact of parental choice between the two secondary schools; and
- How community engagement was handled.

Policy/Practice Outcomes

These were, firstly, examples of perceived effective practice, which were particularly evidenced at Thurlby secondary school. The tougher context of the Burntake situation may explain this outcome, in spite of the similar socio-economic indicators between the two case study neighbourhoods, as well as the nature of the response adopted to critical issues in the two contexts. Nevertheless, the Burntake schools did provide particularly strong contributions in two crucial areas (Chatsworth primary: parental/ community engagement; Burntake secondary: future planning) as well as providing examples of

positive features in the other areas. Secondly, potential implications of the research/ways forward for schools in highly disadvantaged communities are examined.

Examples of Perceived Effective Practice
- Outstanding school leadership;
- The fostering of positive parental/community engagement;
- Schools being agents of local regeneration;
- Overcoming pupil disaffection;
- Raising reputation of schools in poor areas; and
- Future planning of viable educational provision locally.

Aspects of a "Subversive" School Leadership Concept
1. Networking and micro-politics; and
2. Meeting local needs and aspirations.

Researcher Stance

The history and motivation for the personal political stance I have taken during most of my life was outlined above. This led to a particular way of looking at people and their motivations/needs and to a pragmatic path to political and social action to address the issues I regarded as requiring attention. From my "insider" knowledge of political parties, political activity and the policy-making process, with its trade-offs, networks and judgements about what can realistically be achieved, I believe I recognise the limitations of relying on this process alone to achieve societal change. Nevertheless, I remain committed to there being a more radical and sustained effort than at present to address the inequalities and negative life-experiences endured in highly disadvantaged communities and believe that every conceivable means needs to be employed to this end, including the mainstream political process, if possible. As part of this approach, I feel strongly the need to advocate on behalf of schools in highly disadvantaged communities in the future.

In addition, my perspective on life is essentially a "people-centred" one where I tend to adopt a dogged "faith in people" approach, linked to a pragmatic realism. Certainly, highly disadvantaged communities and their schools can often be environments low on trust and human capital of various kinds and this can make a people-centred approach a tough task for school leaders and others. Nevertheless, this people-centred perspective is ultimately more likely to yield positive outcomes in these contexts, in my view, as long as participants possess strength of purpose and character.

So this interlinked set of personal orientations, rooted in a range of life experiences, led me from the outset of the research project to explore what can best be described as "personal hypotheses" about the processes of school leadership and improvement (in addition to the "working research hypothesis" concerning the school/community interface pursued during Stage One). These hypotheses were checked-out through reference to relevant literature and in the light of fieldwork outcomes. Together with the research questions, they formed an underpinning framework for the research.

Personal Hypotheses

1. Exploring Shared Leadership

As will be demonstrated in the literature review, the preferred school leadership model for government in recent years has tended to be "leading from the front". So the extent to which alternatives involving shared leadership can be made to work was an interesting area to explore. Clearly educational leadership at all levels is crucial to addressing the needs of young people in highly disadvantaged communities. Head teachers of schools have the potential to be a key element in encouraging colleagues in their work and also children to succeed educationally. At the same time, weak head teachers are likely to be a disabling and undermining presence in tough situations in challenging communities. However, it is important to bear in mind that leadership is wider than headship, and can extend to many roles within school, particularly amongst middle managers but also beyond the school boundary to others in the youth service, health provision, community work and so on. Potentially, the attitudes of a wide range

of individuals and of LEA officers can help to shape schools' responses to the educational challenge in poor neighbourhoods.

Head teachers particularly need to have the ability to harness the skills of everyone involved with a school's task, creating and disseminating a shared vision about what needs to be done to maximise the children's potential, and to lift individual workers' spirits, as well as the aspiration in the community generally. This is arguably best undertaken as a common enterprise with as much shared leadership as is workable and sustainable in these tough circumstances. So, models of leadership that stress variants of "leading from the front", rather than more collegial and shared ways of working may run the risk of failure educationally. Such ways of working may crucially fail to engage the commitment and dynamism of individual teachers and pupils in contexts where almost extraordinary efforts are required to effect change on a daily basis, to shift often-embedded practices and attitudes. In addition, successful school head teachers of this variety may demonstrate leadership effectiveness in terms of school outcomes over a sustained period, but this performance may not be sustainable if the individual leaves for any reason.

2. *Exploring the Role of Values in the School Leadership Task*

Establishing a school identity and sense of direction is an outcome linked to the area of values in leadership. If a school has a moral purpose centred around the needs of pupils, this can act as a constant reference-point for staff throughout the school's work. However, day-to-day experience of working in a highly disadvantaged community is likely to be characterised by frustration, constant stress and great concern at the weight of issues and problems being grappled with. To maintain a values focus centred around children's needs in these circumstances is likely to be a challenge for staff and therefore a huge leadership issue.

A child-centred approach on a range of issues is likely to present difficulties, yet also potential solutions to wider disaffections and pedagogical problems in challenging contexts. Such an approach can mean staff being prepared to make radical changes to educational practice and organisation on behalf of young people. If the focus for teaching and learning in an inner-city school is the building of pupils' self-esteem

through enriching the experience of pupils, linked to high expectations of what can be achieved, then arguably a school can move ahead on firm foundations.

Solidarity, too, can be a value that can be used to enable staff to work effectively as a supportive unit, as well as reaching out effectively to the local community. Engendering local pride in what is being achieved by young people, bottom-up working and a common purpose can possibly lead to major progress being made by schools in inner city contexts. In a climate of trust and openness, staff may be more prepared to try new ways of working, and to look outwards to examine how innovatory solutions can be applied locally.

Inclusion is a potential key value in these challenging contexts. Potentially, great time and energy can be expended tackling the educational and social requirements of the most disaffected and marginalized pupils, possibly to the detriment of the majority, with negative knock-on effects to national school test results. The extent to which this dilemma can be addressed effectively in these situations, and how, is returned to later on.

3. *Exploring the Nature of the Micro-Political Task Faced by School Leaders*

School leaders in highly disadvantaged areas are likely to be contending with a challenging job day-to-day, as well as aiming for coherence in local initiatives involving the school. Breaking out of previous patterns of working to address a more complex partnership context is likely to require considerable strength of purpose on the part of school leaders. Capacity to respond effectively to a plethora of programmes and funding streams targeted at inner city schools under New Labour is likely to be limited and stretched at school level. However, the enabling role of the LEA can be a source of help for hard-pressed professionals. Nevertheless this relationship can be problematic if viewed as bureaucratic or unresponsive to local needs. So inundated school leaders are likely have to foster the most helpful and supportive relationships they can in a highly political environment.

School leadership in these circumstances, particularly where schools are required to work with a range of agencies and to assist in the joining-up process, is likely to be an

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increasingly complex process. Not only do leaders have to maximise their position financially and in educational terms, but increasingly they are required to work with a wide range of partners. These can include: local business partners, partnership boards in regeneration programmes, co-ordinators of local programmes, community forums, elected representatives, parents, other educational workers, partners in new Childrens Service directorates, the police, health workers and a range of other agencies and groups. Crossing boundaries effectively to make the most of these opportunities is likely to be a key competence for school leaders, as is the ability to make connections with people in a way that encourages positive outcomes in a range of ways.

Structure of Thesis

Following this first *Introductory* chapter, Chapter 2 is a *Literature Review* structured according to the main areas of the research project:

1. The nature of the challenges in disadvantaged communities;
2. School improvement; and
3. School leadership.

Whilst providing a critical overview of the different perspectives in these areas, nevertheless the focus has been on evidence and pointers to effective ways forward for schools and their leaders in highly disadvantaged contexts, linked to the research questions and hypotheses.

Chapter 3 outlines the philosophical/methodological basis for the fieldwork conducted during the *Scoping* phase of the research. The fieldwork and its outcomes are described in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, the methodology adopted for the *Case Studies* is outlined. As well as the underpinning philosophical/methodological basis for this phase, an explanation is given of the case study design and a justification for this approach, together with a description of methods used.

Chapters 6 and 7 describe the results from the two case studies conducted in "multicultural" Thurlby and "white working class" Burntake. These results chapters are followed by two discussion chapters. Chapter 8 deals with *Case Studies Commonalities,*

Contrasts and Examples of Perceived Effective Practice, and Chapter 9 examines suggested *Implications of the Research* for similar highly disadvantaged contexts. Chapter 10 presents a brief *Conclusion,* weighing-up the major findings of the work, setting-out areas where a potential contribution to knowledge has been made, and outlining possible follow-on research work.

Highly Disadvantaged Communities, School Improvement and Leadership

Introduction

The challenge for educationists wishing to see progress for students from highly disadvantaged communities is truly one of "complex hope" (Thrupp and Tomlinson, 2005). This educational task requires not only optimism but also a realistic recognition of the historical and structural barriers that these children need to overcome to succeed. The present Labour government has recognised the need for intervention in the inner city to address issues of social justice and social inclusion, but firmly within a marketised system of school provision. It is certainly debatable whether such an approach is adequate in its scope or indeed consistent or logical in policy terms. Harris and Ranson (2005:573), for instance, acknowledge the substantial investment and interventions made in highly disadvantaged areas in recent years but regard the results as "variable and patchy". Certainly, the challenges facing schools in highly disadvantaged communities are complex and deep-seated, with structural aspects to them, emanating both from the policy framework of education and of society as a whole.

This chapter examines relevant issues from the literature in three major areas impacting particularly on highly disadvantaged communities. These are:
1. The nature of the challenges in these communities;
2. School improvement; and
3. School leadership.

A summary of themes and issues from the literature is outlined in the Box below. These broad areas deal with the major issues raised in the final version of the Central Research Question/Areas of Inquiry, also outlined in Chapter 1. The Central Question concerns the whole issue of "perceived successful leadership" in the context of "highly disadvantaged communities", and Sections 1 and 3 consider these issues. The Areas of Inquiry specifically focus-down on the school leadership issue in context, again the

subject of Section 3. The fourth Area of Inquiry is about what happens in initiatives and their consequences, and this closely relates to section 2.

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<div align="center">**Box 2:1**</div>

<div align="center">**Summary of Themes and Issues Covered by the Literature Review**</div>

1. The Nature of the Challenges in Highly Disadvantaged Communities

Definition of highly disadvantaged communities

What deprivation does to disadvantaged children/communities

The policy context for poor schools/communities; the marketised system, regeneration initiatives, lack of joining-up, external and internal accountabilities

Context needs to be addressed in school improvement policy: attacking material poverty, the fostering of social capital, co-operation between schools locally

2. School Improvement

The context: poor behaviour and attendance and ways to overcome this, increasing social capital
What can schools do alone and to what extent does context need addressing?
Managerialism versus a more inspiring vision of education
Definitions of school improvement and effectiveness
Prescriptions of school effectiveness: factors for effectiveness, schools as learning organisations, pressure and support, being wary of cause and effect for school improvement/effectiveness, measures to improve context, creating genuinely comprehensive schools in balanced neighbourhoods
Maximising inclusion: the complexity and the dilemmas (particularly in a marketised system), paying attention to teaching and learning

3. School leadership

The importance of values
The importance of leadership in teaching and learning strategies
Different models of leadership: constructivist, instructional/pedagogical, educative, participative/distributed leadership/democratic/shared/concertive action, postmodern, transformational/transformative
The positive and negative aspects of transformational leadership and how this relates to current policy context of "superheadship"
Values and the dissonance with the current managerialist environment. The importance of moral purpose
The leadership task in poor contexts: weighing dilemmas and contrasting claims, generating social capital, promoting staff togetherness and shared leadership (a people-centred approach), the need for management and leadership
The contested issue of leadership agency, particularly in poor areas
Linking to the local community
Working effectively with other agencies
Sense-making
The micro-political task of school leadership

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1. The nature of the challenges in highly disadvantaged communities

Introduction

This section begins with a general definition of "highly disadvantaged communities" and related terms. A description is then given of the type of context and the effect of this set of circumstances on inner city schools. The impact of the current policy context is then considered, particularly as it relates to the marketised system, school league tables, and the numerous government initiatives impacting on these schools.

Possible ways to address the impact of context is next examined, both across society in policy terms and also at the local level. School improvement issues are also examined, taking into account a school's potential role in relation to its surrounding community and the potential significance of this. Potential models of educationally advantageous school links and service provision at local level, particularly as they relate to tough situations, are also examined.

Themes and Issues

A number of terms are applied to schools in highly disadvantaged circumstances. These terms are used interchangeably in the literature and in government reports, but the most common at present is "Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances" (or "SFCCs"). These schools are where "25% of students or fewer achieve a minimum of five grades A*-C at GCSE or 35% or more are entitled to free school meals" (Ansell, 2004:6). Other similar terms are: "urban schools", "inner city schools" and "schools in the poorest neighbourhoods". The term used in the present piece of work is "schools in highly disadvantaged communities", specifically referring to establishments serving the top 5% of deprived areas in the country (according to government statistics). However, all the above terms broadly describe similar phenomena.

The context being faced by these schools is extremely challenging for all concerned. Professionals have to deal with many pupils who have additional learning needs, who suffer from material poverty, experience family trauma and violence, have disturbed behaviour, and are extremely reluctant to participate in school (Lupton, 2004). Social deprivation also creates a related lack of educational opportunities for pupils outside

school, high crime locally, very challenging behaviour, low parental expectations, poor attendance and punctuality, high pupil mobility, cultural complexity, and resultant staff recruitment problems (Englefield 2002). So the urban high school has to deal with a level of complexity far beyond that in most suburban or rural areas, with some children trailing so much baggage "that there's only so much we can do", according to one head teacher (Rustique-Forrester 2002:52).

Deprivation provides an extremely fragile foundation for educating children. Social class with its attendant features is "a major discriminating factor in the distribution of success and failure within the school", according to Ball (1981:xv). In addition, child poverty and economic polarisation in society are resistant to remediation, in spite of stated Labour government programmes and policies with this purpose in mind (Oppenheim, 1998). Indeed, tough and challenging life-experiences of a potentially damaging nature "form track-lines" through poor people's lives, calling for a stepping-up of efforts to stop this happening in future (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000:43). Certainly, the cumulative nature of deprivation on individuals requires joined-up responses as well as dramatic action of a policy nature (Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). However, a difference of view exists between critical theorists and school improvement writers about what is possible to achieve educationally in inner city schools, given existing policy and societal parameters.

Critical theorists like Ball are much more likely to regard almost any government initiatives to address school underachievement as ultimately doomed to failure, given what they regard as a lack of commitment to tackle the underlying causes. School improvement writers are more likely to examine what in-school measures can be adopted to maximise pupil achievement whilst recognising the challenges posed by surrounding poverty. The position adopted for this research work is between the two, recognising that poverty is disabling at both a personal and a societal level" (Maden, 2001), but nevertheless looking for in-school solutions to pupil underachievement that can realistically be pursued in these contexts.

For many writers across the spectrum, encompassing critical theory and school improvement, it is the current government policy context that is also providing challenges and difficulties for those seeking to redress these almost crushing social

disadvantages in the inner city. A marketised system of schooling is viewed as incapable of evening-out school intakes in an equitable manner (Lupton, 2004). In fact, parental choice and the market has the effect of potentially further depressing pupil performance where schools in inner city contexts end up with large concentrations of disadvantaged pupils (Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001). In fact, there is a general criticism that context is inadequately taken into account when devising strategies for school improvement under the present government.

Hierarchies of schools in terms of their public esteem and their attainment, through the operation of league tables, tend to undermine efforts to pursue equity and fairness through the education system. Furthermore, attempts to regenerate struggling urban communities partly through school improvement and positive action are constantly undermined by the operation of the housing market on schools and vice versa, as well as through negative school reputations held locally (Schoon, 2001). Arguably, then, greater school autonomy, parental free choice and the publishing of league tables may continually be causing deterioration in the position of underachieving pupils, rather the opposite.

The challenging policy context at the present time also involves numerous initiatives, creating a complicated task for schools, particularly in highly disadvantaged areas. These numerous initiatives may be actually preventing school improvement, rather than the reverse, according to Harris and Chapman (2002). Fullan (2001:109) refers to this situation as one where there are "too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects". Certainly, joining up initiatives in a coherent way is not just a desirable feature of organisational life, but an inescapable element of it. Its current absence therefore, wherever it occurs, simply makes the job of hard-pressed professionals all the harder.

School leaders in complex urban environments increasingly find that they have both external and internal accountabilities and pressures to contend with too, complicating their overall task. This situation carries a danger that teachers' personal values may end up being sacrificed to political expediency of the day-to-day situation (Day et al, 2000). In addition, headteachers also may find themselves facing in two directions at once in terms of accountabilities. Not only do they have to demonstrate to government and the

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LEA/Children's Service that they are carrying out required policy, but the school community and its parents also require accountability back to them.

So the task facing teachers and their colleagues in highly disadvantaged communities is complex and extremely challenging. Various actions are suggested as possible ways forward in the literature. For Lupton (2004), a school's context is certainly a major issue. She agrees with Thrupp and others at the critical theory end of the spectrum that context needs to be addressed in school improvement policy and research if a difference is to be made to schools in the most disadvantaged areas. Certainly, context needs to be taken into account when judging a school's effectiveness, since one school cannot simplistically be compared with others (Englefield, 2002). For the school in tough circumstances, the publishing of comparative data can be viewed as an added burden, making positive reputation-building all the harder. As Ouston (1999:17) argues, "value added analyses using school level data which include a wide range of measures demonstrate the powerful impact of individual factors on achievement". But even a value-added approach to published comparative school data can disadvantage schools serving disadvantaged communities if an inadequate number of background factors are included.

An important issue is teaching and learning in context, so that forms of teaching and learning can be identified that are appropriate and effective for the populations they serve (Leithwood and Reihl, 2003). Schools require entirely new thinking to be really successful in the future, with context being a major issue and a new learning environment being created (Gibbons, 2002). But the major contextual issue for many writers is poverty and what can be done to address this. Anyon (1995) believes that the only solution to educational resignation and failure in the inner city is the ultimate elimination of poverty and racial degradation. Further, government should address the considerable amounts of income, wealth, and power inequality that exist in society, which undermine attempts to bring about community regeneration (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000). Policies need to be enacted that attack material poverty (Whitty, 2001, Gamarnikow and Green, 1999), as such actions stand a better chance of boosting attainment and literacy than modest interventions in schooling. It is likely, however, that attention to context and school improvement measures are both required to bring about positive change for school children in highly disadvantaged areas.

Specific measures to alleviate poverty and promote social inclusion are also put forward in the literature. The fostering of "social capital" (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000) is one strongly emerging issue. This involves the development of social networks, reciprocities that arise from them and the achievement of mutual goals. They quote Bourdieu's (1984) definition of social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a desirable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (op.cit. p.4). Since social capital is incompatible with high levels of social inequality (Putnam, 1993), it is likely that fostering of educational capital amongst young people from poor backgrounds must involve a good school system free from gross disparities of provision and status.

In addition to the above "macro" measures to correct gross societal disparities to assist highly disadvantaged communities and their schools, various local solutions are also put forward. Regardless of the extremely pressing contextual issues raised so far, the school improvement literature points to evidence from research demonstrating that what goes on in the schools themselves matters greatly and has a major effect upon children's development (Harris and Bennett, 2001; Reynolds and Creemers, 1990). But the focus for change and activity needs to be not only within the school itself but also beyond to the wider context. For instance, co-operation between local schools can make a major positive difference in a tough environment (Ansell, 2004), Initiatives such as sharing of specialist teachers, provision of literacy/numeracy tuition, easing of transition, more effective tracking of pupil performance and a more personalised approach to education programmes can make a real impact at the local level (ibid).

The processes of school-level change and improvement strategies necessary to achieve such change are also explored extensively (Harris and Bennett, 2001; Fullan, 1992). Of major importance is the building of organisational capacity for change and growth (Hopkins et al., 1994), both locally and at the individual school level. Building of collaborative cultures in schools is also regarded as a crucial strategy for school improvement (Harris and Bennett, 2001). Competences are also regarded as important for schools, along with the possession of constant clarity of purpose. For "without strategy, vision has no momentum [and] without vision, strategy leads to a mundane

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place" (MacBeath and Myers, 1992:6). It is likely, therefore, that utter realism is required by practitioners who work in tough contexts, as a lack of community/social capital can act as severe brake on optimism and school improvement.

The scale of the task facing inner city school leaders who want to make positive progress is recognised to be considerable and potentially daunting. Staff resistance to change in these situations is an issue that leaders need to be able to deal with in an effective manner (Fullan, 2001). School leaders and their staff need to pay close attention to internal processes to make positive progress, as well as to inter-school relationships where possible. School success is also intimately bound up with a school's interaction with its wider community (Maden, 2001). For, when staff and pupils feel positive about their work, and this is linked to achievement more generally across a neighbourhood, community pride centres around educational achievement of local young people.

Social mobility, combating inequality and economic investment for the future of individuals and society are three relevant aims for education identified by Ouston (1999). These potentially have major local community significance when considering the role of schools in a highly disadvantaged context, given the disempowered nature of such areas. However, purposes such as these are likely to lack meaning educationally and in wider senses, unless something can be done to lift up the surrounding community itself.

A tool for facilitating school co-operation and community engagement in the early years of the current Labour government was the Education Action Zone (EAZ). Chitty (1998:81) was critical of this initiative at the time, believing that they "could become Trojan horses which could destroy LEAs as we know them". However, it has not always been the case that EAZs have operated outside LEA democratic control and these EAZs have arguably been a relatively small step on the road to new forms of local accountability and partnerships for schools. Chitty and other critical theorists may reject this model of intervention but nevertheless support some of the features of EAZs. They contend that a local focus and set of accountabilities are the key to greater achievement in schools in highly disadvantaged communities but firmly within a policy context of equity and social justice. Similarly, Harris and Ranson (2005) support the idea of

systems of local governance for schools being developed to enable young people in disadvantaged communities to be recognised, heard and supported. The exact form of this intervention clearly requires further elaboration in policy terms. However, it may be that the EAZ model was an interesting one where it sought to enhance schools' co-operation, local accountability, levels of funding and LEA/Children's links, in highly disadvantaged contexts.

Ofsted (2001) commend EAZs for helping to bring about enhancement and intensification of provision in highly disadvantaged communities' schools, particularly in numeracy and ICT. They also point approvingly to the contribution made by EAZs to encouraging shared action by schools and other partners, good communication and consultation between teachers, as well as with other agencies. Certainly, schools need to work with partners at the local level to jointly tackle the deprivation that pervades the local scene (Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). As a model of partnership working where agencies come together to share a vision and a set of actions at local level, EAZs may therefore have provided a basis for other similar local initiatives in the future and a potential way of lifting up hard-pressed local communities.

Finally, more lifelong learning opportunities beyond the years of compulsory schooling at the local level, can enhance social and cultural capital in disadvantaged areas (Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). They further suggest "four clusters" of action to give inner city schools a better chance of making positive progress, that touch upon wider issues of local social regeneration. These are: better coordination of the work of support agencies, early interventions, reconsideration of the approaches used with disadvantaged pupils, together with extra support for pupils through school improvement programmes. So this issue of "joining-up" of local effort to assist children and their families in a sense wider than just the school is a major one in the literature when it comes to prescribing possible ways forward for highly disadvantaged communities.

Summary

The issues surrounding the current government's policy context, both for schools and for highly disadvantaged communities are all greatly contested as has been shown.

Critical theorists tend to concentrate on the contexts that schools in poor areas work in, seeking to argue that only massive and radical change to lift up these communities can make the changes required for children to fulfil their potential educationally. School improvement writers tend to concentrate on the in-school measures being prescribed by central government with a view to examining their efficacy in these situations and possible ways of improving the situation. Both broad points of view touch on the local school's role in a community context, and the community's role in relation to the school. However, the stance taken in the current piece of work lies in between the two broad perspectives. The view taken by critical theorists that major societal change is required to combat poverty and to transform highly disadvantaged communities is generally supported, but not the contention that school improvement can only have marginal effects in the inner city. At the same time, the school improvement view that much can be done through school pedagogical and leadership practice is also supported, even in extremely challenging circumstances, but only if major attention is given to transforming the context itself and if a joined-up approach is taken to service provision locally wider than the school.

2. School Improvement

Introduction

This section begins with a brief overview of some major school improvement and effectiveness issues in inner city schools. The extent to which school success depends on context is next looked at, together with issues concerning the current *managerialist* policy environment. An overview is then given of outcomes from the school improvement and effectiveness traditions. The school as a *learning organisation* is then considered, bearing in mind the need for each school to work out what is best suited to its circumstances. The issue of which contextual factors require attention if schools in tough circumstances are to achieve major improvement, is next examined. Finally, the issue of *inclusion* in tough contexts and its associated dilemmas are looked at.

Themes and Issues

As we have seen, the context facing professionals working in schools serving highly disadvantaged communities is very challenging and can be of a different order compared to schools in less poor areas. Attendance and behaviour are particular issues for these schools. A variety of factors are associated with poor behaviour, particularly: poor basic skills, limited aspirations and opportunities, family difficulties, poor relationships with other pupils, parents or teachers, and pressure from others to behave in a way that conflicts with authority (Ofsted: see Glossary, 1995-6). Other influential factors include: the inability of parents or carers to exercise control, physical or sexual abuse, and racism. These issues clearly relate to the kind of environment young people in these communities experience day by day. Various strategies regarded as effective in tackling poor behaviour, even in challenging environments, include well-designed efforts to improve attitudes to learning and attainment, and good teaching that provides an incentive for school attendance (Ofsted, 2001). Key features of improving schools in these contexts are: provision of clear behaviour expectations, consistent application of policies and procedures, a well-designed rewards and sanctions, special provision for pupils with difficult behaviour, and vigilance about bullying (op.cit.).

Certainly, context is virtually ignored in Ofsted's (1999:64) assertion that "disruptive behaviour results from weak teaching, poor school management, inconsistent approaches to discipline by staff and a lack of knowledge about behaviour management". Effective schools in tough contexts are characterised by: strong management, focused curriculum, good teaching, effective personal support of pupils, good links with parents and high expectations" (op.cit.). Despite the challenging context, school/pupil progress is believed to be possible through having clear goals which are shared with learners, maximising time on task, creating a secure environment; and having high pupil expectations of pupils.

The extent to which context can be overcome by the school alone, and which additional measures are required to make headway with young people in challenging contexts is a key issue running through the literature. For instance, according to Ouston, 1999), since the social exclusion experienced by pupils from highly disadvantaged communities results from a lack of social capital, this needs to be developed by increasing trust,

social networks and collective action. In inner city schools, teaching often involves contact with a substantial proportion of damaged, unmotivated, withdrawn or disruptive children. Thus schools serving deprived areas are harder to run, leading to staff recruitment and retention problems, further compounding the school's difficulties (Schoon, 2001). Not only do challenging contexts require an empowering school community to enable pupils to learn (Wrigley 2000) but cultural and societal circumstances need to be addressed together with those of under-achievement, rather than in isolation from each other.

So, this issue of what schools can achieve alone, particularly in highly disadvantaged communities, and what further needs to be done to maximise these young people's educational opportunities is utterly central here. Also crucial is what is likely to foster school improvement most effectively in these circumstances: a managerialist approach or something of an arguably more inspiring nature. Simkins (2004:7) characterises the present policy/practice dilemma by quoting Wilkins' (2003) circus rider metaphor:

> "Under her left foot the *white horse* of educational enlightenment tosses her mane to rejoice at Michael Fullan, reflective practice, teacher-led reform, evidence-informed professionalism, creativity, networks and the lateral spread of innovation. The rider's right foot perches on the flare-nostrilled *black horse* of competition and managerialism, hierarchies of status, residual Woodheadism, central direction and blame culture."

The managerialist agenda, he characterises as involving: "the replacement of public sector values by those of the private sector ... the establishment of an impoverished conception of purpose within education ... the imposition of models of leadership and management that emphasise individual ... accountability [and] ...the authority and autonomy of professionals over their work being qualified or replaced by the power of managers" (p.8). Ball (1990) similarly criticises a "managerialist" approach that is currently and consciously adopted at policy level to fit a marketised model of school provision:

> "Management is clearly and unproblematically presented as the best way for schools to organise and compete. Other models of organisation, based on collegiality or professionality ... have no place in this vision of schools ... The classroom teacher becomes an off-stage subject of management, the to-be-

managed, most often referred to in relation to schemes of appraisal, the to-be-appraised" (p.122).

Notwithstanding this massive current tension concerning approaches to the management of schools and the marketised system of schooling, there is a huge body of literature dealing with wider issues of school effectiveness and school improvement. This provides a source of evidence for how schools might maximise young people's life chances in challenging contexts, in spite of the kinds of current perceived professional and policy constraints.

The literature defines a way of working for schools when considering the meaning of *school improvement*. It is "a systematic, sustained effort at change in learning conditions and other related conditions in one or more schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively", according to Van Velzen et al. (1985:34). For Hopkins et al. (1994:3), it is "a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change". Mortimore (200:1) emphasises school improvement as the process of *improving* the way the school organises, promotes and supports learning, involving "changing aims, expectations, organisations (sometimes people), ways of learning, methods of teaching and organisational culture". Others emphasise the importance of focusing on changing the culture operating in a school.

The school effectiveness tradition tends to focus on outcomes, and the identification of effective characteristics of schools, and tends to employ qualitative research methods. The tradition, according to Hopkins et al. (1997:26), concentrates on "identifying areas of change and correlates of improvement" such as: efforts to raise pupils' exam performances, modifications to management structures and planning procedures, more coherent policies for teaching and learning, changes to curriculum organisation, refurbishment of the school environment and facilities, involvement of parents and the community, more active marketing of the school, and more attention to teaching and learning processes.

School improvement and effectiveness clearly occupy a similar terrain, with evidence and issues from both having the potential to maximise educational opportunities for

young people in challenging contexts. For Mortimore (1991:9), an "effective school" is "one in which students progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake". Also, schools with high levels of attendance and good behaviour tend to have high levels of exam success (Mortimore, 1999). Positive features of school life regarded as particularly important include: teacher expectations, clear classroom strategies, rewards and punishments, and opportunities for participation and responsibility (op.cit:40). For him, "schools do make a difference and the difference is substantial" (op.cit:60). Amongst his key factors of effectiveness are: purposeful leadership, involvement of teachers, teacher consistency, intellectually challenging teaching, maximum communication between teachers and pupils, parental involvement and a positive climate (op.cit:62). Particularly, effective learning should be active rather than passive, overt rather than covert, complex rather than simple" (op.cit:164). These findings from school effectiveness research are based on examples of schools where practice and organisation clearly make a difference to pupil achievement in some of the most challenging contexts.

The literature also characterises effective schools as *learning organisations.* According to Fullan (1999:15), such schools should aspire to be "continuously acquiring and using new and better knowledge". A learning organisation is also characterised by teamwork, collaboration, and creativity. Gray (2000:17) stresses the importance of schools creating conditions for change, through teachers accepting the need for change, involvement of parents and acceptance of outside support. Emphasis is also made of paying attention to surrounding context, particularly conditions of extreme social deprivation.

There is no one version of change that can be adopted by a school or individuals within a school. According to Stoll and Fink (1996), people need to work out their own meaning, as change is different in each school. They regard conflict in change situations as inevitable, requiring a mix of pressure and support. For them, both top-down and bottom-up solutions need to be employed, with the real agenda once again being one of changing school culture. Similarly, Wrigley (2000) is wary of an over-optimistic and mechanistic view of how school improvement operates in practice, and particularly of school improvement studies which identify a list of inputs which contribute to successful outcomes. This is methodologically hazardous and misleading since cause

and effect is difficult to establish directly in complex school situations where a great number of factors are in play at the same time and one context is different from another.

Effective schooling in highly disadvantaged communities is likely to involve taking account of the external context as well as what goes on internally. Barber and Dann (eds.1995) point to the importance of high-quality daycare and parental involvement, as well as the internal issues of special programmes (e.g. reading recovery) and class size. They regard progress in these contexts as requiring: loose collaboration rather than formal structures involving partner agencies, a need for clarity about success criteria in projects, clear measurable targets, the targeting of small amounts of money for maximum effect, and getting right the in-school factors. Ideas such as these from the mid-1990s formed the basis of New Labour policies for inner city schooling during the early part of the new government from 1997 onwards, including the development of EAZs.

The literature builds on this approach of looking wider than the school for solutions to inner city underachievement of pupils whilst at the same time taking on board lessons from school effectiveness and improvement research. Mortimore and Whitty (1997:4) argue for an approach to combating disadvantage which involves the creation of intervention projects, potentially open to all pupils, to accelerate educational development. However, as well as looking for practical in-school solutions, they argue for change not only to the nature of educational practice but also to "the broader social and cultural contexts within which education takes place" (op.cit:5). According to critical theorists, there is an urgent need to inject greater realism into what is seen as "sociologically naïve debates about school effectiveness and improvement" (Gray 2000:33). Such avoidance of naivety, according to Schoon (2001) includes tackling the consequences of a marketised school system which makes equality of opportunity and comprehensive provision extremely difficult to establish. For if more socially balanced neighbourhoods could be established, universal comprehensive schools would be easier to create, with children simply going to their nearest primary and secondary schools (op.cit:183). Thus, the same quality of education could be available to all children, creating an equal chance to fulfil their potential.

A major issue for practitioners and policy-makers concerning highly disadvantaged contexts is how to maximise inclusion and prevent exclusion in all its forms. According to Vitello and Mithaug (1998), the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate the consequences of diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. The World Education Forum (2000) aims to increase participation and learning of pupils who are vulnerable to marginalisation within existing educational arrangements. For others, the accent is on children's rights. Ballard (1995:37) regards the challenge of inclusive education as ensuring "proper learning support as a right for all children". To this end, progress towards meeting the needs of all students in the regular classroom has to embrace issues of "pedagogy, curriculum and school organisation" (op.cit:41). For many writers, effective schools tend to be those which value inclusion policies/priorities.

Clearly, these definitions of *inclusion* take us beyond students with defined special educational needs, linked to official statements and funding packages. In highly disadvantaged areas particularly, school practitioners may have to take account of a very wide range of pupil needs which fall nowhere near official recognition of *special needs*. But the needs of this wider group of disadvantaged pupils are nevertheless also relevant to the issue of *exclusion*. Certainly, New Labour set out from the beginning to adopt a "practical not dogmatic" (DfEE, 1997:45) approach to inclusion/exclusion. But as Dyson and Millward (2000:163-4) point out, the current situation in schools is far from satisfactory from an inclusive point of view. Dyson and Millward (2000:163-4) indicate that there is support personnel for some students but not others, in an inconsistent manner. One of the major difficulties to achieving truly inclusive practice in our schools is the competing agendas in play, for "some ways of teaching, grouping or resourcing may be technically effective but carry with them overtones of discrimination, stigmatisation or marginalisation" (op.cit:161). Nevertheless, the literature points to positive moves in mainstream schools in recent years, such as the restructuring of special need systems, the emphasis on in-class support, greater differentiation, and the welcoming of a wider range of student diversity.

In the 21st century marketised situation, it is questionable whether a meritocratic model modified by inclusive practices constitutes an inclusive model, or stands a realistic chance of delivering an inclusive mode of education. As Mortimore and Whitty

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(1997:1) point out "most formal education systems have failed pupils whose families are disadvantaged". Particularly, *hard to teach* pupils are often only welcome in schools which are under-subscribed and which are desperate for extra pupils to increase their financial viability. Nevertheless, "complex hope" is evident in the literature for achieving a realistic and attainable set of actions for inner city schools that maximises inclusion.

Change in the inclusive practice must involve attention being given to teaching and learning, according to the literature. Particularly, "the interplay between teachers and pupils" (Riley and Rustique-Forrester, 2002:6) is a crucial issue here. They also point out that not sufficient attention has been given "to how schools and teachers might rethink and devise more inclusive policies" in inner city contexts, linking to social intervention strategies generally (op.cit:17). Schools need to become "participative and child-friendly places" offering "a lively and challenging curriculum" (op.cit:39). Expectations and attitudes are widely regarded as being keys to success.

However, the task of meaningful inclusion for all pupils in challenging contexts is fraught with difficulties. Whilst educators in inclusive schools effectively use an adaptive process to design accommodations for students (Villa and Thousand, 1995:150), "generalisations … cannot be used to predict what will be found in any particular and unique site" as prescription is counter-productive in each situation (Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1995:170). However, "the presence of some students disrupts the education that can be offered to others or consumes inordinate amounts of the resources available to educate all" (Dyson and Millward, 2000:163). The so-called *inclusive school* is actually "shot through with contradictions, dilemmas, conflicts and ambiguities" (op.cit:170). This ongoing dilemma at the heart of inclusive school practice in highly disadvantaged contexts is a massive one for practitioners and policy-makers alike.

Summary

The literature is understandably replete with differences of approach and ways forward. Critical theorists tend to the view that unless the major underlying societal conditions that reproduce educational disadvantage can be addressed in a radical way, these

problems will continue, in spite of school improvement initiatives taking place. They also regard the current marketised system of schooling to be incompatible with government policy aims to achieve greater inclusion and a general raising of standards for all children. Other writers in the school improvement tradition look for practical measures for practitioners to adopt in tough contexts that address issues of teaching and learning, so that pupils stand a better chance of being inspired by the pedagogical process and where individual pupils have their needs met more effectively. The approach adopted in this research is one acknowledging the validity of both perspectives in the sense that context must be addressed at the same time as school improvement measures to effect maximum educational advantage for our most disadvantaged young people.

3. School leadership

Introduction

This section gives a brief overview of various prominent approaches, leadership models and issues surrounding values/moral purpose/shared vision. There is then consideration given to what is said in the literature about effective leadership approaches and issues surrounding leadership-in-action, particularly as it relates to schools in tough circumstances. Attention is then given to the nature of the school leadership task, as viewed by the literature: firstly as it relates to school-community engagement, and secondly to the micro-political nature of the school leadership role in these circumstances.

Themes and Issues

The demands of challenging circumstances require school leaders to have a broad range of leadership approaches underpinned by a core set of values and a strong moral purpose. The issues of values, moral purpose and shared vision are strongly present in the literature. The *transformational leadership* model has emerged strongly over the last few years both in the literature and in policy terms, but recently this way of working has been challenged in a number of ways. The literature is full of desirable/effective leadership models. For instance, whilst Harris and Chapman (2002) link effective

leadership with its positive effect on teaching and learning in a school, Fullan (2001:10) asserts a wider set of desirable leadership outcomes encompassing: "enhanced student performance, increased capacity of teachers, greater involvement of parents and community members, [and] engagement of students". Certainly, in tough contexts, such leadership aims together with achieving school pride and enthusiasm are likely to be all the harder to realise.

The different leadership concepts in the literature are many and not exclusive of each other. The overview here is therefore an outline of the main approaches, with acknowledged blurred boundaries between concepts. Firstly, *constructivist leadership* (Eagle, French and Malcolm, 2005) emphasises the importance of actors actively constructing meaning from experience for themselves. This concept envisages the empowerment of participants in an educational community to construct meanings for themselves that lead towards a shared purpose of schooling.

Secondly, *instructional,* and *pedagogical/educative leadership* all emphasise the importance of putting the educative task at the heart of the school leadership process. For Southworth (2003), *instructional leadership* is concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers, as well as student growth. Similarly, *pedagogical leadership* invests in capacity building for students and teachers (Day et al, 2000). This model is specifically concerned with adding value by developing various forms of human capital. However, Leithwood (1994:499) has characterised this type of approach as inadequate if the "organisation building" aspects of the leadership task are downplayed or ignored.

Thirdly, *participative, distributed, shared, democratic* and *postmodern leadership/management* concepts all emphasise the importance of leaders adopting an inclusive approach to maximise team effectiveness. Thus *participative leadership* puts the decision-making processes of the group as the central focus (Leithwood et al, 1999). According to Bolman and Deal (1991:155) "participation is one of the few ways to increase both morale and participation at the same time", although they believe that "*participative management* often exists more at the level of myth than reality" (ibid.). The reason for this is that managers may believe in sharing power but may at the same time fear that subordinates will misuse it. Harris (2002) argues that democratic leadership styles are a natural "fit" to the present rapidly changing world inhabited by

schools. *Democratic leadership* is linked to postmodernism, suggesting that postmodernism might legitimise the concept (Starratt, 2001). However, *postmodern leadership* as a concept has the significant drawback of offering few guidelines for leaders except in acknowledging the importance of the individual.

Democratic leadership denotes a way of working in schools embracing equity, empowerment and moral purpose. At the same time it is "people-centred and centrally concerned with community building" (Bennett, Wise and Woods, 2003:21). Working in a democratic way is essential to school leadership and school operation, as teachers need to learn from students, parents and the community, to help encourage democracy more broadly (Gunter, 2001). Similarly, *distributed leadership* emphasises the role of interacting individuals within open leadership boundaries (Bennett, Wise and Woods, 2003), in a similar way to that of *concertive action* outlined by Gronn (2002). *Distributed leadership* is characterised by "the ability of those within a school to work together, constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively" (Lambert, 1998:5). In a similar vein, other writers (Simkins, 2004; Stark, 1998) stress the importance of sharing leadership and of team development in the school/college context.

Fourthly, arguably the most prominent current concept is that of *transformational/transformative leadership*. Allix (2000:9) defines *transformational leadership* in terms of the engagement of others. *Transformational* school leaders recognise and exploit their needs and demands in such a way that "the authentic exigencies of both leaders and followers are satisfied". For Sergiovanni (1992:125-6), schools need to be places where:

> "leaders and followers are united in pursuit of higher-level goals that are common to both. Both want to become the best. Both want to shape the school in a new direction. When *transformative leadership* is practised successfully, purposes that might have started out being separate become fused".

Transformational leadership focuses on the moral values of the leader and how these are disclosed to colleagues (Duignan and MacPherson, 1992). In the school context, it may be identified by a number of core leadership activities: setting directions; developing people; organising; and building relationships with the school community

Leithwood et al, 1999). According to Bennis and Nanus (1997:3), *transformational leadership* "commits people to action, converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into agents of change". It asserts that leaders can transform followers can be persuaded to subordinate their individual needs to the needs of the collective. Features of *transformational leaders* include inspiration, paying attention to individuals, providing intellectual stimulation and communication of ideals influence (Gronn, 1999). Most recently, reference has started to be made to *post-transformational leadership* (Harris et al, 2003). This stresses the current requirement for effective leaders to read and adjust to the particular school context they find themselves in.

In spite of the above generally positive set of definitions of the *transformational* model, it has come to signify the charismatic and "superhead" tendency believed by critical writers particularly to lie at the heart of the concept and of current New Labour preferred leadership models. For Gunter (2001), *transformational leadership* enables and supports existing power structures to be maintained and developed, and is a "top-dog theory" that meets the needs of management and implies a pattern of social relations structured for domination (Gunter, 2001; Ball, 1987; Alix, 2000). For critical writers, the emphasis of this leadership model is hegemonic and against the perceived requirement for schools to be more democratic institutions.

As far as values and school leadership are concerned, a great deal has been written about their importance and centrality, particularly in recent years. For Harris and Chapman (2002:6) "the demands that schools facing challenging circumstances place upon leaders requires them to have a broad range of leadership approaches underpinned by a core set of values and a strong moral purpose". For them, "effective leadership is defined and driven by individual value systems, rather than external demands or managerial concerns" (op.cit.). This seizing hold of values/the moral dimension of school leadership in recent times is partly as a reaction to the managerialist agenda referred to earlier on. For instance, Hallinger and Snidvongs (2005:4) observe that "today we note a push towards redefining educational leadership primarily in terms of its moral dimensions and a strong reaction against *managerialism*".

However, establishing shared values and maintaining those points of reference in a complex and challenging environment can be a tough leadership task. As MacBeath and

Myers (1999:19) observe "leadership .. is more about people, relationships, intuition, values and moral judgement ... things [that] are in themselves not easy to identify and difficult to dissect". So, they continue: "it is when deep moral purposes seem to be compromised by pragmatic and political considerations that dilemmas begin to surface" (op. cit. p.72). Hodgkinson (1991:129) refers also to this complex process of leadership based around values: "the quality of leadership is functionally related to the moral climate of the organisation and this, in turn, to the moral complexity and skills of the leader". For Hopkins (2001:120) the establishing of values in a school is closely related to the process of improvement and involves "building an evolving consensus around higher order values that will unite and excite members of the school community". However, the process of establishing and gaining widespread adoption of shared values in a school context is a complex and problematic one.

The importance and positive value of *moral purpose* in school leadership is a strongly emerging issue in the literature. *Moral purpose* is viewed as crucial to making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and for society in general (Fullan 2001). Fullan (ibid.) also contends that *moral purpose* facilitates an understanding of change processes, and the basis of good relationships required for the creation and sharing of knowledge in schools. However, the current centralist and managerialist agenda impacting on schools threatens to make the establishing of *moral purpose* in the day-to-day situation a difficult one for school leaders.

At the same time, modern school leadership, particularly in poor areas, represents an extremely complex and challenging sense-making process (Simkins, 2004). The often "top-down" and managerialist policy environment creates potential ambiguities and conflicts for school professionals and their leaders. In this context, the weighing of contending sets of values and choosing the right combination "remains the mystery at the heart of good leadership" (Hampden-Turner, 1990:2). School leaders have the task of acknowledging those dilemmas arising from competing and contrasting claims, and to provide "a resolution which enhances all values in contention" (op.cit:11). In tough situations, ducking dilemmas is not an option if positive progress is to be made organisationally and in terms of educational outcomes.

In the complex school leadership process in inner city contexts, establishing shared values and providing a strong sense of direction is therefore a tough task. As we have seen, it is both a moral enterprise but it is also likely to be a pragmatic one. School leaders have to grapple with prevailing micro-political realities in their roles, as well as providing visions for their organisations. For "vision is the commodity of leaders and power is their currency" (Bennis and Nanus 1997:17). School leaders need to avoid "an over-emphasis on doing things right rather than doing the right things" (Sergiovanni, 1992:4). So the right balance needs to be struck in this situation, which is likely to be increasingly difficult, given the complexity of the current school leadership task.

In addition to the values-related leadership processes outlined above, the literature is replete with positive prescriptions for school leadership. In highly disadvantaged contexts, a prevalent approach is one where leadership generates social capital by building relationships and distributes power to others (Harris and Chapman, 2002). Headteachers in inner city primary schools, particularly, are likely to promote "community awareness, celebration of small steps of progress, passion" and a "*we can do* culture", according to Englefield (2002:27). Such an emphasis can help undermine the negative influences of these contexts.

Transformational and instructional leadership practices are regarded as particularly relevant for bringing about school improvement in SFCCs (Hopkins, 2001). Other leadership characteristics are also seen as relevant to school leadership in these contexts. For instance, mobilising and working with others to achieve shared goals, with teaching and learning being at the heart of leadership effort, are regarded as desirable by Leithwood and Reihl (2003). For them, "leaders influence student learning by helping to promote vision and goals, and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well" (op.cit:4). So successful school leaders are viewed as ones who urge colleagues to embrace necessary school change, strengthen teaching and learning, and promote staff togetherness.

The literature outlines a number of areas where school leaders can aim to create positive effects. These include: creating a shared vision and mission for the school, restructuring the formal organisation of the school to support instructional effectiveness, provide stimulation and individualised support for staff, and reshaping school culture to promote

continuous learning and collaborative work (Hallinger and Snidvongs, 2005). Certainly, the creation of a learning culture is a prominent issue, with the quality of school leadership being seen as crucial (Eagle, French and Malcolm (2005). Crucial to this learning culture is the ability of leaders to engender co-operation and shared models of leadership. Not only is it likely that teacher collegiality and collaboration are features of effective schools, but school improvement is unlikely to result from top down, technical-rational approaches.

Sharing of leadership at the school level is viewed by many writers as crucial in the present-day context. For instance, Gronn (2002) calls for the sharing of leadership among a number of leaders. Recent developments demonstrate examples where schools have moved away from identifying leadership exclusively with the headteacher, "and begun to address how leadership can be made available throughout the management structure and at all levels in the school community" (Hopkins, 2001:99). As Fullan (2001:134) says: "strong institutions have many leaders at all levels". Similarly, "there is a groundswell towards leadership as empowerment, transformation and community-building and away from the *great man* theory of leadership" (Harris et al, 2003:1). They back this up by pointing to research evidence (Hopkins et al, 1994; Hopkins et al, 1997) demonstrating the importance and efficacy of devolved leadership at different levels within the school organisation.

Collaborative cultures are regarded as particularly appropriate in the present-day context. These are "complex times", and collaboration is best capable of fostering necessary diversity, knowledge creation, connectedness and open-endedness in schools (Fullan, 1999). Frost and Durrant (2003) emphasise the importance of school leaders creating a collegial dimension which implies responsibility, mutual accountability and collaboration. They believe that schools should develop as communities in which all members have a voice and are allowed the space to fulfil their human potential and exercise leadership.

A further vital element in creating a collegial working environment is the ability of school leaders to engender positive relationships amongst the school community. One of the most important functions for a head teacher is to improve school culture by spending time with staff, students and parents (Ansell, 2004; Stoll and Myers, 1996;

Hopkins, 2001; Harris and Chapman, 2002). Similarly, MacBeath and Myers (1999:9) assert that establishing positive relationships with older students is important for headteachers to do (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). In the same vein, Heifetz and Laurie (1997:124) regard relationships as lying at the heart of culture change, but recognise that this process is often far from straightforward. So, the mobilising of people throughout a school organisation to adapt to current requirements is viewed as a crucial leadership task.

According to the literature, leadership effectiveness in schools is also bound up with a range of competences, some of which are associated with *leadership* and others with *management*. Hallinger and Snidvongs (2005:4) associate *leadership* with "moral purpose, vision and the ability to motivate and inspire others to create schools we would desire". The previous section considered the impact of the current perceived *managerialist* agenda on schools. Despite the strong reaction in the UK against *managerialism*, there is an acceptance in the literature that both management and leadership are necessary in the modern school context (ibid; Fullan, 2001). The achievement of a vision for an organisation clearly requires a strategy and managerial competence to bring it about. In the current policy climate, schools require both visionary leadership and effective management (Bush and Glover, 2003). The essential distinction between managing and leading is that leaders influence commitment, whereas managers carry out position responsibilities and exercise authority (Yukl, 1994). Leader effectiveness is most commonly judged by the extent to which the leader's group or organisation performs its task successfully and attains its goals (op.cit.). For Louis and Miles (1990:19), "effective managers keep the system on keel and headed in the direction that has been set. Leaders on the other hand … make new things happen". Whilst a difference of view exists in the literature about the balance to be struck between leadership and management in the school context, nevertheless there is common ground about the current developing complexity and challenging nature of the task. This is particularly the case for school leaders in highly disadvantaged communities.

There are differing views and emphases in the literature about the nature of leadership agency. For Hopkins et al (1999:17), it is through "jolting a system" that leaders can bring about positive change in a school, but "the effect of jolts diminishes over time"..

Hampden-Turner (1990) characterises successful leadership as like being a skipper. Errors need to be spotted quickly, the course adjusted rapidly whilst maintaining continuity of purpose, and every disturbance needs to be taken into account when deciding a course of action. Whilst the process involves orders going from the top down, information needs to flow the other way if decisions are to be made wisely, as systems can grow virtuously but they can also regress viciously.

Heifetz and Laurie (1997) emphasise the need for leaders to let people take the initiative in defining and solving problems, with management supporting rather than controlling. They also point out the need for leaders to engage people in confronting challenges, through adjusting their values, changing perspectives and learning new habits (op.cit..). For Gemmill and Oakley (1992), positive leadership allows people to take the initiative, using ideas and imagination to carry things through. Grint (2001) warns against reliance on charismatic leadership as this tends to undermine the ability of followers to participate in – and thus achieve – the resolution of their collective problems. Further, he believes that the search for charismatic or "superleaders" often generates a form of leadership that is unable or unwilling to recognise when change is required, despite evidence to the contrary.

The issue of leadership agency is strongly challenged by a number of writers. The positive and negative aspects of *transformational leadership* were examined earlier on. Gunter (2001) is concerned that the *transformational* model exaggerates agency in ways that objectifies, and hence undermines, professional relationships between head teachers and teachers, and their students. Bolman and Deal (1991:404) refer negatively to the widely held "unquestioned" view that leadership is a very good thing. Gemmill and Oakley (1992:113) view leadership as "a serious sign of social pathology ... that induces massive learned helplessness among members of a social system". For Simkins (2004:3), "ideas about leadership which are predicated upon the assumption that *what works* can be identified, prescribed and replicated are at least an inadequate way of conceiving the concept". Certainly, the extent to which leaders effect change and the ways that they are perceived to engender positive school cultures remains an area of disagreement in the literature. This is given added focus in an increasingly complex set of relationships both inside 21st century schools and in the outside contexts they operate within.

This external environment for schools today is an increasingly complex one, as has been noted earlier on. The nature of this context for highly disadvantaged communities is additionally challenging by definition, but also because of the many agencies that schools are required to engage with to do their job effectively. This network of relationships and accountabilities tends to create a major micro-political task for the inner city school, and particularly for its leadership.

Whilst good teachers in challenging contexts gain satisfaction from linking with their surrounding communities, many schools can struggle in this regard. Few schools are really good at building effective bridges between home learning and school learning" (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). However, involved pupils, parents and other members of the community can create "a supportive climate for learning" (Hopkins, 2001:97). Whilst teachers are central to creating learning, they can also learn from students, parents and the community in a two-way process (Gunter, 2001). Significant improvements in educational standards require concerted local action so that "schools and the communities they serve work towards commonly agreed ends" (Chitty, 1998:81). Similarly, Gewirtz (2001) argues for schools to engage with perspectives of working-class children and parents as well as their middle-class counterparts. This is in reaction to what she and other critical writers perceive to be a middle class bias in New Labour's approach to parental engagement that potentially stands in the way of getting the best out of pupils from poor backgrounds. For school leaders, this networking and linking task is a major challenge, particularly in highly disadvantaged contexts.

Effective schools listen to and learn from students and their parents (Wrigley, 2000). For many writers, parents need to be encouraged to become involved in their child's schooling. Also, according to Harris and Chapman (2002:10), effective headship emphasises "generating positive relationships with parents and fostering a view of the school as being part of rather than apart from the community". The heads in their study encouraged an interconnectedness of home, school and community, because they regarded these links as having potential for creating successful school outcomes. Also, their study shows that schools having solid links with the local community are likely to gain vital support in difficult times, particularly in tough contexts.

The complexity of the school leadership role in highly disadvantaged communities involves sense-making amongst multiple accountabilities, and people skills to motivate and empower hard-pressed individuals involved in the collective task. The micro-political nature of the task has become more apparent in recent times and this is reflected in the literature. Micro-political working can be negative where exploitation and personal dominance are uppermost, but it can be a positive force for good where visions and collective goals are created (McClelland, 1975). According to Bolman and Deal (1991:204) "it is not inevitable that power and politics are always demeaning and destructive". Certainly, the school leader in a tough context requires high-level people and micro-political skills to deal with the stressful environment and the sometimes extremely challenging relationships associated with it.

This micro-political environment is fraught with difficulty and danger for leaders. An effective way of freeing up channels of communication is to make use of in-jokes to shift ideas and perceptions amongst colleagues (Hampden-Turner, 1990). Certainly, "the leader must be a superb listener" (Bennis and Nanus, 1997:8). Since conflict is central to organisational dynamics (Bolman and Deal, 1991), "leadership can never be taken for granted" (Gronn, 1999:17), because its basis is fickle, capricious and precarious. Leadership is never guaranteed and it must always be renewed (Gardner, 1995). Above all, in micro-political situations, outcomes often depend on people following what self-interest dictates, rather than what they believe to be right.

A school leader has to be aware of the complexity of linkages in their organisation. These include structures, friendship cliques, conversational grapevines and rumour mills, which constantly need to be taken account of (Gronn 1999). In such circumstances leaders may need to create their own space in which to operate, a "zone of discretion" to counter negativity and establish positive outcomes (op.cit:112). Negotiating skills are often more important for school leaders than debating skills. Yukl (1994:43) emphasises the importance of dealing with groupings and individuals in an effective and credible manner. Aiming for positive relationships with all subordinates, rather than establishing "in-groups" and "out-groups" is regarded by Yukl (1994) as crucial for leaders to do. Also, "leaders in effective organisations create relationships in which they have strong influence over subordinates, but are also receptive to influence from them" (op.cit:51). Developing or possessing the people skills capable of tackling

these complex micro-political realities is a major issue for school leaders, particularly in tough contexts.

Strategic thinking for school leaders is also a micro-political issue. There are "scores of economies, trade-offs, technology transfers and useful exchanges" involved in this process (Hampden-Turner, 1990:141), requiring the use of micro-political skills. However, the major political arena for the school or project leader in an inner city environment is that of sense-making. School leadership is characterised by a state of relative agitation, due to the increasing number of competing initiatives (Simkins, 2004). Not only have leaders got the task of devising innovative strategies, but also to engage the surrounding community, so that the most effective outcomes can be achieved. This is because:

> "boundary crossing is never easy: differences in cultural assumptions and practices as well as concerns about the future distribution of power and influence require extremely sensitive handling and are likely to affect significant conceptions of appropriate forms of leadership in future years" (op. cit. p.15).

So the current environment for school leaders is characterised by micro-political and organisational complexity, coupled with accountabilities in different directions.

This complexity is characterised in a number of further ways in the literature. The leadership role is likened to that of a helmsman, since the course steered "is resisted by the wind and current which pull in other directions" (Hampden-Turner, 1990:16). Also, a leader must strike a balance between having people feel the need to change and having them feel overwhelmed by change (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997). In this sense, leadership is a razor's edge. Bolman and Deal characterise the leadership task as involving "bargaining, negotiation and jockeying for position" (Bolman and Deal, 1991:188). These features of modern school leadership in tough contexts are compounded by multiple accountabilities and responsibilities. As a result, micro-political and people skills are likely to be highly-prized assets in these complex environments.

Summary

School leadership in highly disadvantaged communities is therefore a complex process in the modern context. As has been seen, the literature is full of different models of leadership, set within a policy context that arguably promotes a *managerialist* and top-down way of working for schools. Contestation exists in a number of key areas. There are sharply differing views about the efficacy of the current policy direction, particularly as it affects school leaders working in poor communities. The school-community interface is a major theme, and one with potential for assisting both schools and local people to affect educational outcomes in a positive way. But the current performance of schools in relating to their surrounding areas produces a very mixed picture. The school improvement aspects of leadership performance are also an area containing different perspectives about leadership agency and ways of working in the literature. Finally, the sheer complexity of the school leadership task, particularly in tough contexts, is reflected strongly by writers. Its micro-political nature, with multiple accountabilities is a developing issue for school leaders, requiring considerable sense-making skills for successful outcomes to be achieved.

Conclusion

As we have seen from the literature, there are sharply differing views about the efficacy of the current policy direction, particularly as it affects school leaders working in poor communities. The school-community interface is a major theme, and one with potential for assisting both schools and local people to affect educational outcomes in a positive way. But the current performance of schools in relating to their surrounding areas produces a very mixed picture. The school improvement aspects of leadership performance are also an area containing different perspectives in the literature about leadership agency and ways of working. Also, the sheer complexity of the school leadership task, particularly in tough contexts, is reflected strongly by writers.

So, the literature has examined the complexities involved in the role of school leaders in highly disadvantaged communities today. Firstly, the task of securing school improvement within a marketised school system in an inner city context is a huge undertaking rich in dilemmas. Secondly, the role of schools in grappling with context and also in effecting change in that environment is considerable and problematic. Thirdly, school leaders wishing to put values at the heart of their role face considerable

difficulties, particularly in the current often managerialist policy context. Fourthly, the political task that school leaders face in challenging circumstances involves not just that of maximising the relationships locally to promote pupil learning, but the complexity of the role itself cannot be underestimated.

The two stages of fieldwork (in Chapters 4, 6 and 7) examine issues of school improvement and leadership in the context of highly disadvantaged communities. These studies were able to test what was perceived to be effective school leadership in these tough circumstances, what means of school improvement were viewed as helping to raise standards for these young people, and what significance, if any, the school/community interface was to the raising of pupil outcomes and the creation of a positive school ethos. Not only did the studies establish that schools in these contexts were likely to be fragile but the challenging nature of almost all aspects of the pedagogical and school leadership task. Also, the demanding current policy context tended to provide additional difficulties for practitioners as well as opportunities. The nature of the task, then, is dimensionalised in these later data chapters, with similarities, differences, perceived effective practice examples and theoretical/policy outcomes being outlined in Chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology: The Scoping Study

Introduction

The policy context and the personal/professional orientations leading to the choice of aims, objectives and research questions for the *Scoping Study* were outlined in Chapter 1. This *Scoping* phase of the research began the examination of *educational achievement, the management and development of the school's role within the community,* and *leadership*. A "working hypothesis" during this stage was that the school/community interface was a pivotal issue to perceived successful school leadership and school improvement in highly disadvantaged communities. Personal hypotheses for the research also underpinned this stage of the work:

1. Exploring shared leadership;
2. Exploring the role of values in the school leadership task; and
3. Exploring the nature of the micro-political task faced by school leaders.

This chapter firstly lays out the philosophical and methodological stance underpinning the *Scoping Study*, with reference to relevant literature. The rationale and process for the conduct of the initial *Pilot Fieldwork* are then outlined. The approach adopted for the subsequent and more substantial *Scoping Study* is also set out, including the broad process of data analysis adopted. Finally, some brief conclusions are made about methodology, methods, and the research project as a whole in the light of the *Scoping Study*.

Philosophical and Methodological Stance for the *Scoping Study*

A common distinction is made in the literature between "positivist" and "non-positivist" research paradigms. Ashworth (1997) describes positivist research as presupposing that there is some underlying, true, unequivocal reality to be uncovered by research activity. Non-positivist research he categorises as being mainly: descriptive/phenomenological, interpretive/hermeneutical or discourse analysis. Similarly, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991:23-24) refer to the two main sociological traditions as being positivism,

where "the social world exists externally" and phenomenology, where "the world and reality are not objective and exterior, but … socially constructed and given meaning by people". Cohen and Manion (1994) categorise these two main approaches as "positivism" and "anti-positivism".

Positivist research methods can be weak in understanding processes or the significance people attach to actions, but tend to be fast and economical. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) characterise "anti-positivist-type" methods as strong when looking at change processes over time, understanding people's meanings, adjusting to new issues and ideas as they emerge, and in contributing to the evolution of new theories. Their weaknesses tend to lie in the areas of time, resources, data interpretation and credibility for policy-making.

Four main research paradigms can be outlined as: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and related ideological positions, and constructivism. Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to positivism and post-positivism as the "received view" of science, focusing on efforts to verify (positivism) or falsify (post-positivism) a priori theses. Critical theory, they characterise as being a blanket term encapsulating neo-Marxism, feminism, materialism and participatory inquiry. According to Schwandt (1994), constructivists/interpretivists aim to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it, by interpreting it. The main non-positivist paradigms that have influenced this study are *constructivism* and *critical theory*.

Constructivism

This paradigm encapsulates phenomenology, ethnomethodology, hermeneutics and social anthropology, as well as interpretism and interpretivism. According to Schwandt (1994), this paradigm is layered with ideas stemming from German hermeneutics, the "Verstehen" sociological tradition, Alfred Schutz' phenomenology, and critiques of logical empiricism (e.g. Winch, Louch and Berlin). He characterises constructivists as arguing for the uniqueness of human inquiry.

For constructivists, social settings are "an intersubjective world of culture, consciousness and purposive action, in which relationships are organised through ideas,

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values and interests of members of society, producing human action and interaction" (Filmer, Jenks, Seale and Walsh, 2001:27). The social world is intrinsically meaning-making, so constructivists aim to investigate the methods by which people make sense of their activities, both to themselves and others. For Schwandt (1994:118), constructivists in general focus on the processes by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified within a specific context of human action".

This constructivist process necessarily involves "Verstehen" (understanding). Gadamer (1960) points out how interactions need to take account of the cultural tradition and historical situatedness of the actor and interpreter, with meaning lying at the intersection of the two interpretations. Also, according to Denzin (1989:22) this type of research is conducted "from the point of view of the person experiencing the problem", effectively siding with the "underdog" rather than the "policymakers". He also recognises that "value-free" research is impossible, as "every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied" (ibid:23).

Critical Theory

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1994:138), critical theory "usually refers to the theoretical tradition developed by the Frankfurt school", with "the emotionally and sexually liberating work of Marcuse" providing the philosophical voice of the "New Left" (ibid:139). They define a criticalist as someone who uses their work as "a form of social or cultural criticism", where all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations and where the relations of capitalist production and consumption reproduce "systems of class, race and gender oppression" (ibid:140). As Sayer (1992:19) points out "in changing our social and natural milieux we change the forces and conditions which shape the character of society and its people". For her, systems of domination are maintained not only "through the appropriation, control and allocation of essential material requirements by the dominant class, race or gender" but also through the reproduction of "systems of meanings" (ibid:35).

For Kincheloe and McLaren (1994:151) critical postmodern research respects the complexity of the social world, with fallibility being built into critical theory as well as having a "contingent relation to progressive social change". They point out that

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"trustworthiness" rather than "validity" is what critical postmodern research aims for, "when the constructions are plausible to those who constructed them".

So, *constructivism* is a paradigm aiming to encompass the complexities of human interactions in a given social environment. *Critical theory* looks to underlying societal structures as a cause for inequalities, with a view to changing these undesirable features of the world.

The General Approach Taken

At the time of the *Scoping Study*, it is true to say that the methodological approach was still at a formative stage. The work was situated within the non-positivist paradigm, given the nature of the subject matter: the functioning of schools in their community contexts. Nevertheless, the stance taken at that time has been refined and built upon more recently, rather than being changed in a substantial way. Particularly, it has further been defined in terms of case study method in Chapter 5, and also in terms of the processes of interviewing and data analysis leading to theory generation.

However, to say that the work sits within the non-positivist paradigm methodologically is also partly misleading. Certainly, a qualitative approach is more likely to be capable of exploring the complex interactions, perceptions and issues arising in a school situation. Smith (1998:159), for instance, refers to the way hermeneutics and phenomenology "seek to understand the subjective and meaningful construction of the complex social world". However, as Silverman (1993:4) points out, techniques are only "more or less useful" depending on their fit with the theories, methodologies, hypotheses and research topic being tested. Cohen and Manion (1994) emphasise the importance of avoiding only a limited view of the complexity of human behaviour and therefore argue that positivist and anti-positivist methods should be used as necessary and without an either-or mentality being adopted by researchers.

In any event, the qualitative approach adopted for this piece of work necessarily involved appropriate triangulation of fieldwork data with such "concrete" reference points as available school, LEA, Ofsted and other data. However, such reference points are not unproblematic in themselves as sources of information about individual pupil

progress as well as school progress more generally. But a qualitative approach has been adopted largely for practical reasons related to my personal perspective and the subject matter itself, rather than in the spirit of utterly rejecting a positivist/post-positivist approach to research work.

The adopted research approach is effectively positioned between constructivism and critical theory. Ontologically, it accepts constructivism's view that social realities are the products of human intellects but rejects its relativism. At the same time, it accepts the critical view that historically situated structures have a major influence on human activity. Epistemologically, the approach generally accepts the constructivist view that knowledge is created in interaction between investigator and respondents but also agrees with the critical assumption that values lie at the heart of knowledge. This set of approaches is partly influenced by a perception of social realities that is conscious of their human complexity but nevertheless sees people as capable of constructing positive versions of those realities. What is deemed to be potentially "positive" is influenced partly by my emancipatory personal and political values but also particularly by what are perceived to be practical ways forward by the individuals concerned.

The research approach is essentially "abductive" in nature, emphasising the exploratory imperative of qualitative inquiry. Drawing on Peirce (1979) and Kelle et al (1995), Coffey and Atkinson (1996:156) characterise the process of abductive reasoning/research as accounting for specific phenomena by relating them to broader concepts. These broader perspectives they outline to be "our own experience, our stock of knowledge of similar, comparable phenomena, and the equivalent stock of ideas … from within our disciplines and neighbouring fields". As Strauss (1987) points out, the utilisation of experiential data beyond the analyst's technical knowledge and experience derived from research must also include personal experiences. The abductive approach adopted for this research has necessarily involved checking out data outcomes not only with findings from relevant literature but also with my stock of professional knowledge and personal experience of highly disadvantaged communities and the leadership process, as well as my personal values.

The current work has aimed to get behind current structural conditions and move beyond purely managerialist solutions and "everyday thinking", as the process of

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understanding and explaining social phenomena necessarily involves "evaluating and criticising societies' own self-understanding" (Sayer 1992:39). It aims to make a contribution to theory through the use of "grounded methods" of data collection, without relying on the data alone for the generation of concepts and theoretical issues. Phenomena have necessarily been looked at in their natural settings, with reflection on the meanings people bring to them, bearing in mind the complex role and nature of language use. As part of this process, personal researcher values are bound to have influenced not only the situation itself but also the perceptions and interpretation of what is going on. However, every effort has been made to minimise "researcher effect", and to enable views of participants to be reflected in outcomes as accurately as possible. Certainly, during the *Scoping* stage, the approach aimed to avoid a dialogical type of interaction and to maximise validity as far as responses were concerned, through production of verbatim data accounts, and through constant examination of the nature and quality of each piece of fieldwork as they occurred.

Certainly, conducting fieldwork to gain insights and understandings of complex situations such as that found in schools in disadvantaged communities is profoundly challenging. Qualitative researchers aim to explore other people's understandings to generate data which will give "authentic insight into people's experiences" (Silverman, 1993:91). Silverman, however, warns against the assumption that words are simply "a transparent medium to reality" (1994:822) or that the open-ended interview offers an "authentic gaze into the soul of another" (ibid:833). Kvale (1996:105) points out, nevertheless, that interviews can study "people's understandings of the meanings in their lived world", clarifying and elaborating "their own perspective". Fontana and Frey (1998:655) point out the need for interviewers to attempt to "see the situation from their viewpoint". Certainly, recognition of the complexity of conducting this type of fieldwork, care with the interviewing process and realism about the nature of outcomes and their general significance were the underpinning approaches to *Scoping Study* work. Values, too, were viewed as crucial to providing a sense of direction for this work. These not only related to my personal values and perspectives but also the personal hypotheses outlined in Chapter 1 and the values of participants. Also, in the tough contexts of schools in highly disadvantaged communities the imperative for research is not simply to "give voice" to respondents but also to reflect their values in a way that points towards practice outcomes capable of potential application wider than the study

itself to other similar situations. Thus, practice as well as theoretical outcomes from the research, particularly relevant to the issue of school leadership, are the subject of the Chapters 8 and 9.

The *Pilot Fieldwork*

Chapter 1 outlined the initial objectives for the research project:
1. To consider how those holding leadership positions conceive of educational success;
2. To identify key sources and processes of leadership associated, in particular, with the effective management of the school's role in the community; and
3. To identify key leadership capacities and competencies and to derive guidelines for good practice.

Right from the beginning, the issues contained within these objectives were recognised to be highly contested. This contestation is also reflected in the literature, as outlined in the previous chapter. As far as (1) is concerned, educationists differ about what makes for "success" in terms of outputs and outcomes. Concerning (2) and (3), as pointed out in the first chapter, "leadership" is widely regarded as crucial to the education process, but models of leadership, the nature of its agency and ways to maximise its effectiveness form the basis of a lively, ongoing analysis. In addition, the initial stage fieldwork explored the issue of the importance of the school/community interface, particularly in a highly disadvantaged context. Practitioners expressed the view that this interface had a potentially important role for schools, but exactly how this was to be viewed or maximised required further examination. For schools in highly disadvantaged areas, it may be that school/community links are a potential key to raising aspiration generally, but particularly as far as education is concerned. However, it quickly became apparent that there were wide variations in the way that those connected with school education viewed the significance of this interface. So, the *Pilot Fieldwork* began the examination of this major issue as well as the broad range of other contested matters contained in the Objectives.

Initial conversations were held during the first few months of the project with LEA (see Glossary) advisers in three of the four authorities contained within the sub-region being

examined, to explore current major issues relevant to the work. These issues included: the nature of the educational task facing professionals in local disadvantaged areas; the challenge posed to these areas by government targets and programmes; the pressing issue of school "failure" and progress being made with this problem; how Education Action Zones (EAZs: see Glossary) were performing and their potential development in the sub-region; and how LEAs were planning to tackle attainment issues in disadvantaged communities. Possible locations for fieldwork study connected with the project were also discussed.

An area in one of the authorities emerged from these discussions as being suitable for a pilot study of the above issues within the context of the Objectives outlined above. The area had within it a secondary school and its feeder primaries, forming a small and well-regarded EAZ. The secondary school had received positive Ofsted and advisory appraisal and two of the primary schools particularly were nationally recognised to be producing positive outcomes in tough circumstances. This was therefore seen to be a fruitful set of circumstances for examining some success factors in challenging circumstances. The study employed a small number of semi-structured interviews with head teachers and the EAZ co-ordinator, as well as two observation sessions. Available documentary information was also examined alongside the qualitative fieldwork data. As part of the study, an interview was also held with a well-regarded EAZ co-ordinator in one of the neighbouring LEAs in the sub-region. This served the purpose of gathering views about the situation facing schools and their communities in a different yet similar disadvantaged community, to achieve a limited amount of issue triangulation.

Alongside the adopted methods used in this and subsequent stages of the work, the ongoing *research diary* provided an important vehicle for a number of purposes. Diary entries were regularly made right from the beginning of the research project whenever required:

- as an aid to reflection and ideas generation;
- to provide structure to research and fieldwork activities;
- to summarise literature reading;
- to record points raised in supervision sessions and my reaction to these;
- as a central tool in data analysis; and

- as an introspective record of personal feelings related to the research process.

The *research diary* was not only a useful tool along the lines of the above, but has been used as a quotable source in this thesis, alongside fieldwork data. It was in the *research diary* where much thinking took place to record special achievements, dead-ends and surprises. Particularly, much of the reflection surrounding data categories and their relationships in data analysis took place in the *diary* as well as around emerging issues and the development of theory from the data.

The question of "what works" in these contexts was a particular focus during the early part of the work. It reflected a concern to examine where positive progress was being made in tough situations and where schools were able to achieve "against the odds". It was hoped that through finding these examples and examining them, it might be possible to replicate some of the positive outcomes elsewhere. However, the phrase very quickly came to be modified to be "what is perceived to work", reflecting the qualitative nature of the research. In truth, the phrase became less helpful as a focus for inquiry as the project progressed. This is partly because replicating outcomes from one situation to another is certainly not a straightforward matter, given the importance of context to issues of school leadership and improvement. So the phrase increasingly seemed like a "blunt instrument" and therefore less helpful in unlocking solutions and ways forward in this context. Nevertheless, the issue of how to engender school improvement in these difficult circumstances remained central to the study and this was reflected in the research questions and the direction of the work later on.

As outlined above, the methodological stance for the work developed as the research progressed, and was informed by experiences in the field. This development methodologically through experience was an extremely important feature of the project as a whole, reflecting the refining process being followed on a number of fronts: the research questions, the issues being looked at, the methods being used, the researcher stance and the sample of respondents. Certainly, early interviews initially aimed to ask the same long list of pre-set questions to each respondent, related to the purposes of the project. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, with interviewer intervention to be kept to a minimum to allow respondents maximum opportunity to express their views about a given topic or situation. It quickly became apparent that there were far too

many questions to fit into the time set aside for these interviews (approximately forty-five minutes). The result was more open-ended and more of a conversation than originally intended. Establishing a positive rapport with interviewees was essential, to enable them to feel comfortable about revealing their professional and personal motivation in tackling their often extremely challenging daily circumstances. In practice, all these issues led to a looser structure for the interviews being followed than originally envisaged.

This tension about the degree of structure and the desirable extent of interviewer input persisted throughout the project. For instance, just prior to the start of the *Scoping Study* interviews, the following observation was made in a research diary entry:

> *My feelings are that I should try to ...[keep] the interviews as semi-structured as possible ... This enables me to vary the questions slightly for different stakeholders, respond to the points as they come up in the interviews and generally to seek to get a more relaxed response out of the respondents that enables me to derive data that as genuinely as possible represents their views ... This is certainly the way it appears to have been approached in "Headship Matters" (Peter Ribbins and Michael Marland). Perhaps I need to re-plan the questions to make them more open-ended and more like headings rather than questions.*
> *(Research Diary, 7th September 2001)*

Certainly, as this initial stage of *Pilot Fieldwork* progressed, the conduct of interviews allowing maximum opportunity for respondents to pursue their concerns and issues within a broad interview framework began to become a more settled model. But it is true to say that during this stage of the work, there existed a tension between aiming for comparative sets of answers to pre-set questions with minimum "interviewer effect" and a move towards a more open structure of interviewing. Also, the limitations of a fairly small sample of respondents with little or no triangulation of method and comparative data (necessarily so in the *Pilot Fieldwork*), highlighted the reality that there was no guarantee that what respondents said in an interview was actually what they really believed. Nevertheless in spite of these limitations, the early pieces of fieldwork provided interesting and potentially useful background information about perceptions of the situation facing schools and their pupils across a sub-region's disadvantaged communities in the North of England. Data analysis at this point aimed only to provide

information about context, broad views and patterns or lack of them. The main aim was to inform the next stage of the research: two qualitative *Case Studies.*

So, the *Pilot Fieldwork* interviews were experimental in the sense that the practical process of interviewing was being tested, the questions asked were designed to begin establishing perceptions of the situation facing schools in poor communities, and these field experiences took place when researcher methodological and philosophical stance was at a formative stage. Interview transcripts were not fully verbatim records, but rather detailed versions of the sessions taken from tape recordings. The two observation studies were written up immediately afterwards from detailed hand-written notes, with comments about issues arising included in the final version.

The *Scoping Study*

These interviews were carried out to provide additional information about issues contained in the three Objectives, further to examine the importance to practitioners of the school/community interface and to probe respondents' views about the personal hypotheses (shared leadership, values and micro-political working). "Stakeholders" in key positions throughout the sub-region being studied were identified for this work. The respondents were: three of the four local authority chief school advisers, two council heads of social inclusion, a secondary head teacher in an EAZ area, and five EAZ co-ordinators from two of the LEAs. A list of questions (see Appendix 1) covering the three main areas of *educational achievement, the management and development of the school's role within the community,* and *leadership,* formed the basis of the interviews but with the heads of social inclusion being asked to respond mainly to the leadership and community areas of inquiry. Other issues explored included: expectations of pupils, current interventions to raise attainment/achievement, examples of perceived effective school leadership, the general environment affecting school leaders, issues surrounding the whole issue of "failing" schools, and the perceived importance of community and inter-agency links locally.

Interviews lasted approximately an hour each and were transcribed verbatim and anonymised. As well as aiming for an overview of perceptions of the situation facing schools in disadvantaged communities, to inform the next stage of the work, the

interviews also provided invaluable experience of conducting, transcribing and writing-up outcomes from a substantial piece of fieldwork. It also provided information about possible communities and their schools for study in the next part of the project.

Even though this *Scoping Study* only aimed for an overview of the situation in the Northern sub-region being studied, nevertheless a mainstream qualitative data analysis of the data was made. This involved a reading and re-reading of interviews to note core ideas and concepts and to find themes. Coding of the material involved grouping similar ideas together and figuring out how themes related to each other. Analysis involved "domain analysis" (Spradley, 1979) to cluster related terms and processes, with each cluster becoming a major coding category, and "axial coding" (Strauss, 1987), where groups of ideas were thematically related to develop relationships between core ideas, concepts and themes. So these essentially "grounded methods" were applied at this fairly early stage of data collection and analysis, but in a fairly open and general manner.

Providing an overview of the situation facing schools in disadvantaged communities, comparing perceptions of a range of individuals of potentially successful ways of dealing with this situation and looking at points of difference that emerged could have led to an "anecdotal" account. Fielding and Fielding (1986:32) characterise "Anecdotalism" as a tendency to select field data which are conspicuous because they are "exotic", at the expense of less dramatic but possibly indicative data. Every effort was made to avoid such "anecdotalism" both in this *Scoping Study* fieldwork and in the later *Case Studies*. This was consciously done through: verbatim interview transcription, recording of interview impressions immediately afterwards in field notes, constant reflection on the interview process and its outcomes, allowing the categories of analysis substantially to arise from the data itself, striving constantly to allow the respondent's voice to be reflected in data outcomes, and ensuring throughout appropriate use of research methods alongside a handling of the data that was as objective as possible. In short, every attempt was made during the conduct of this *Scoping Study* fieldwork and afterwards to ensure that the account accurately represented the social phenomenon to which it referred.

Practically-speaking, the early fieldwork clearly depended on positive relationships with individuals and groups being established at all stages. These professionals were operating in tough contexts and their time was clearly limited. Advisers, EAZ co-ordinators and head teachers were, however, generally open to sharing their ideas and experiences, given the project's overall aim of examining perceived effective leadership and school practice, with a view to applying these more widely. They were keen to contribute to the development of knowledge about their area of work, being generally very committed to highly disadvantaged communities and their young people. There was a sense, too, that hard-pressed professionals welcomed the opportunity to talk to an informed outsider about their daily experience and motivations in that situation, as opportunities to do this can be few and far between for these individuals.

Ethically-speaking, a process of semi-structured interviewing where individuals' beliefs and experiences applied in challenging situations were examined in some depth required sensitivity and caution. Individuals and organisations took part on the basis of informed consent at all stages. It was made clear, too, that all information would be anonymised and treated with confidentiality. As the approach involved probing for examples of perceived effective practice, with participants chosen for that reason (based mainly on information and opinions of LEA advisers) the issue of potential negative fall-out for the schools or the individuals concerned was not a live issue. Also, since the work was a *Scoping Study*, subsequent feedback to the individuals concerned was not offered or asked for by participants.

However, the fact that the research was carried out by an elected councillor from one of the LEAs was a practical and ethical matter requiring some attention during the project as a whole. During the *Scoping Study,* the work was carried out almost entirely outside this LEA, so did not impact in any major way. The two roles (elected representative and researcher) were consciously kept separate, with the practical political agenda of party politics separated as much as possible from the academic issues of the research. However, whilst this professional approach was necessary to adopt, consciously seeking to avoid the politics influencing the research, the divide in my head in reality came to be difficult to maintain throughout the project. There was a sense, too, in which a synergy existed between the concerns and everyday experience of the political/community

leadership world and those of the issue being researched. This dilemma is returned to in the context of the *Case Studies,* in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the general methodological approach adopted during the first part of the research project. It was a cross-paradigm position, related to not only my personal stance but also to certain epistemological and ontological starting-points appropriate to the study of schools and their leaders in highly disadvantaged communities. The essentially *abductive reasoning* way of working also linked to a general *grounded methods* approach to the research process, without adopting a fully *grounded theory* methodology. Also important methodologically were certain underlying *personal hypotheses* as well as a *working hypothesis* adopted during the *Scoping* stage that the school/community interface may be a crucial linkage for schools aiming for successful outcomes in a highly disadvantaged context. This methodological approach was developed and built upon during later stages of the research process, rather than changed fundamentally.

The methods used in the *Scoping Study* were designed to derive fairly broad views on a wide range of issues pertinent to the research. These related to: educational achievement, the school's role in the community, and leadership. The two pieces of fieldwork were also useful test-beds for developing interviewing and research skills that could be used later on in the *Case Studies.* They also tested issues related to the adopted methodology in terms of interviewing, data analysis and other matters referred to above.

So, the methodology outlined so far developed considerably during the next stage of the work. The justification for adopting a case study approach, issues of validity and reliability within a qualitative context, ethical issues and dilemmas encountered, the whole matter of "focusing-down" within an outline design following the emerging outcomes from the data, and the process of data analysis, are all matters considered in some depth in Chapter 5. The research questions also required revisiting in the light of the outcomes from the *Scoping Study* and this process is also looked at. The nature of the outcomes from the research project as a whole, related back to the methodological approach is also a matter discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

The Scoping Study

Introduction

This chapter explores the progress and outcomes of the fieldwork conducted during the first year of the project. The purposes of both the *Pilot* and *Scoping Studies*, together with the adopted methodological approach, were outlined in detail in the previous chapter. Here, therefore, an account is firstly given of the *Pilot Study* and its outcomes. Secondly, broad outcomes from the *Scoping Study* are fully outlined. Thirdly, consideration is given to some major emerging themes and issues, which formed the basis of further work and outcomes later on in the research.

1. The *Pilot Study*

Introduction

The *Pilot Study* was conducted in a small EAZ (made up of a secondary school in a highly disadvantaged community and its feeder primary schools) in Northern England. As part of this initial piece of fieldwork, an interview was also conducted with Donna McKeown, the EAZ Co-ordinator in a neighbouring borough, to provide additional responses to the same issues but in a different geographical context. These very early interviews and observation studies (see Box 4:1) were experimental in the sense that the practical process of interviewing was being tested, the questions asked were designed to begin establishing perceptions of the situation facing schools in poor communities, and these field experiences took place when my methodological and philosophical thinking was very much at a formative stage. Detailed notes were taken of the interview sessions from the tape recorded record. These were not word-for-word transcriptions, but illustrative quotations were recorded in full. Names of respondents, schools and specific communities were anonymised with alternative fictional ones. So, extracts given below are provided in that context. The two observation studies were written up almost immediately afterwards from detailed hand-written notes, with comments about issues arising included in the final version.

Fieldwork Outcomes

Straight away a number of issues come to the fore from the fieldwork, particularly: pupils' challenging behaviour, the pressing need to raise attainment, the importance of the school/community interface, and the sheer weight of current external initiatives impacting on local schools. Some interesting leadership issues across different roles immediately made themselves apparent, raising important questions about ways of ensuring success for schools in these types of situation.

Box 4:1

Pilot Study **Fieldwork**
(conducted in a small EAZ, North of England)

Semi-Structured Interviews

- 5th March 2001: John Southgate, primary school headteacher

- 15th March 2001: Edward Stiles, EAZ co-ordinator

- 16th March 2001: Donna McKeown, EAZ co-ordinator (neighbouring borough)

- 29th March 2001: Eve Lynam, primary school headteacher

- 30th March 2001: Elaine Roberts, secondary school headteacher

Observation Studies

- 6th March 2001: EAZ head teachers meeting with the EAZ co-ordinator

- 3rd May 2001: Staff training day at Eve Lynam's primary school

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Edward Stiles (EAZ Co-ordinator) reflected on his role in a pragmatic way. Clearly, EAZ co-ordinators were in a potentially difficult position in that they were expected to deliver targets and outcomes in a partnership context. They had to find ways of doing this across a group of schools, co-ordinating the efforts of local head teachers and other staff in an effective way. He pointed out "if I can see the best way to get something up-and-running I may sometimes find myself needing to by-pass a head teacher to get the best result". He nevertheless firmly professed to believe in co-operation to achieve progress locally, observing that "in one of the local schools the leadership is very top-down and the curriculum development programme has had least impact because it's all done by the head teacher".

Challenging children with the greatest educational needs was a major issue, he believed. Solutions for these young people he felt were hard to come by: "you could use all your energies on these pupils – the "harder end" of the continuum of need – and it wouldn't necessarily have any impact". Whatever is done to tackle the needs of the most demanding and needy youngsters he felt required a joined-up approach. For instance, unless the Connexions work "sits alongside other support programmes it will not be effective". This requirement for better co-ordination also linked into the need for better planning of educational and other initiatives locally, as he didn't feel "the quality of strategic planning is there".

John Southgate, (primary school head teacher), particularly regarded focusing on the educational basics as the key to his school turning itself round in recent times: "we made a decision that to do the best for our children we needed to impact on core areas – concentrating on literacy and numeracy very heavily". He also raised the issue of aspiration as being crucial to success: "there needs to be high expectation throughout [and] … within that, that high expectation, you need to have a culture of respect".

Another local primary school headteacher, Eve Lynam, was very proud of what her school had achieved to become a Beacon School. She was keen to move beyond the basics to concentrate on the wider needs of the children: "we work a very child-centred, creative, curriculum" and "the creative things enable the children to be confident and the spin-off from that goes into the core". She regarded a pupil-centred approach as the bedrock to success, with "constant praise for what's done well, special mention assembly, pupils [having] … a lot of responsibility, [and] pupils having a schools council, a voice". She appeared to have a view of her very successful school as being such in spite of the difficulties surrounding it, saying that "the school is like a little jewel in the middle of the community".

Elaine Roberts (secondary school headteacher) was full of praise for the positive progress being brought about through the operation of the local EAZ, believing that it had "strengthened the partnership within the community: primaries and secondary". Whilst being pleased that her school attracted "every initiative" because of its disadvantaged location she was nevertheless concerned that her small school lacked the

capacity to respond to all these projects effectively. She also agreed with the EAZ Co-ordinator that the government needed to "pace and join up its initiatives more".

Another consequence of having a small school, she believed, was that "non-teaching support is very limited … [with] monitoring of teaching and learning [getting] … pushed further back than they ought to be". But her major concern was with behaviour: "there's a tremendous amount of challenging behaviour at the moment" as "some children don't seem to respect authority at all … neither police, nor teachers nor their parents". She did, however, feel positive about the position the school had established as the centre of the community, believing that this made a difference in establishing links with the families she dealt with: "we have the police office here. We also have the Barnardo's family support workers and the community worker for the area based on our school site … we've also got a drug centre, the community centre, the multi-media centre – four or five classes for community use and for family learning".

Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) also raised four major issues explored by other respondents, which she believed to be crucial for schools in her zone: improving teaching and learning, encouraging school/community links, supporting leadership and tackling challenging behaviour. She felt that schools were under massive pressure to reduce exclusion, to cope with increasingly difficult pupils in mainstream situations, and to improve their numeracy and literacy scores. In these circumstances, challenging behaviour loomed as possibly the major issue for schools in her locality. To make positive progress in this area she believed "heads [need] … to take ownership of the challenging behaviour issue in their individual schools, taking advantage of EAZ input, external funding and lessons from best practice both inside and outside the EAZ, and elsewhere". To this end, headteacher capability and performance, she felt, was a massive local issue that could make a huge difference negatively or positively.

She also emphasised "the importance of teaching and learning in raising standards in schools and … this needs to be the main focus of attention". Finally, to make a crucial difference to perceptions of the school by its surrounding community and to aid the educational task in a disadvantaged area, she believed "a community focus for school work could be crucial to involving parents, raising parents' morale and self-esteem, improving the community and reducing levels of deprivation which in turn has a

positive effect back into the school".

The two observation studies took place at: an EAZ meeting involving local head teachers, and at a staff training day at Eve Lynam's primary school. At the first, Edward Stiles' (EAZ Co-ordinator) detailed grasp of the issues and initiatives in the zone and his fairly low-key but very effective leadership style were on display. He certainly did most of the talking, having prepared the contents of each item on the agenda extremely thoroughly, each time suggesting a way forward with clarity and inescapable logic. In the circumstances, only a few questions were asked by colleagues and every item was agreed as Edward intended. The atmosphere was somewhat muted but productive in terms of clarity of decision-making, with head teacher colleagues effectively acquiescing to Edward's plans.

At Eve Lynam's school, there was a slightly unreal atmosphere in the sense that almost all her young staff had decided to leave and move to other jobs at the end of term. Eve herself had indicated to me that the local authority's plans for the school to amalgamate with the infants school on the same site were unacceptable to her and she intended to leave as well at the end of the year. So this Beacon School was going to be going through an almost impossible shock with imminent effect. In the circumstances, plans to move the curriculum and the learning of the young people on in the school discussed in the meeting had a very limited point to them, except to be handed on at the end of term to the next group of staff. As far as Eve was concerned, she dominated proceedings with her presence and her expertise.

Eve had also let me know that she was against her school being part of an EAZ because she regarded the initiative as a "deficit model" and also did not feel the need to be part of a co-ordinated approach with other local schools. She was also negative in response to questions about the role of the community in her school believing their input had limited relevance to the children's progress educationally. This was at odds with later interview evidence from a local Head of Social Inclusion where she was held up as an example of excellent working of a school with its surrounding community.

Whatever the true position about Eve and her school, her views and stance represented a major challenge to the other opinions in the *Pilot Study* where the community input was

highly valued, where the EAZ plans were generally felt to be beneficial and where more consensual models of leadership appeared to be in place in individual schools and across the zone. Nevertheless, it would appear that Eve's nationally recognized school provided an extremely high quality education for its pupils in very difficult circumstances.

Conclusion

Whilst there was an official general commitment to partnership working at local family of school level, delivered through an EAZ structure and shared aims/objectives, this situation masked some underlying tensions and disagreements. Certainly, the EAZ was a vehicle delivering additional targeted resources at specific pupil needs, to raise standards of literacy, numeracy, ICT and other educational issues. Such was the scale of need in this highly disadvantaged community that most of this shared activity and extra money was welcomed by professional colleagues, almost without question. However, differences of view were quickly apparent between individuals about the role of a school in its surrounding community and concerning the efficacy of these structural arrangements. Whilst most individuals were keen to work in partnership as a group of schools, one headteacher was not so keen, regarding EAZ designation as an indication of educational weakness.

So, this issue of how best to co-ordinate professional colleagues for best effect and to share a vision for school delivery in a highly disadvantaged community setting was a major one to be explored further. The issues of how best to bring about school improvement and provide effective leadership in a highly disadvantaged context were clearly complex areas, with examples of different approaches being employed from the schools in the study. The extent to which increased parental and community involvement in school might help to bring about positive outcomes in these types of situations was also a live issue in these *Pilot Study* schools, worthy of further exploration in subsequent fieldwork. The interviewing process and the nature of responses was also an area requiring further examination in future work. So, this *Pilot Study* opened some useful lines of enquiry for future deliberation and examination. The next round of fieldwork was designed to facilitate more in-depth testing of these and other related matters.

2. The *Scoping Study*

Introduction

The purpose of the next round of fieldwork (see Box 4:2) was to examine further key issues linked to the aims and objectives of the project: school leadership, disadvantaged communities and school improvement. This work was designed to gauge opinions and perceptions of these issues from some key players and education providers throughout the sub-region. In the event, some of the individuals originally contacted found arranging time for interview impossible or declined to be formally interviewed. Also, the sample settled around nine people for practical purposes. The interviews were personally transcribed, except for one which was professionally produced, due to time constraints.

The semi-structured interviews were structured around a number of "areas of questioning" rather than formal questions (see Appendix 2), to enable respondents to raise issues within that framework that they felt to be relevant, and to allow the sessions to be as informal as possible, whilst aiming for a degree of comparability between interviews.

Box 4:2

Scoping Study Fieldwork
(Semi-structured interviews conducted across a sub-regional area in the North of England)

Chief Advisers

- 22nd October 2001: Dororthy Waddington
- 25th October 2001: Ena Smith
- 12th November 2001: Elizabeth Savage

Council Heads of Social Inclusion

- 7th November 2001: Mike Ross
- 18th December 2001: Michael Moon

EAZ Co-ordinators

- *15th November 2001: Donna McKeown*
- *30th November 2001: Frank Robinson*
- *15th November 2001: Esther Morris*
- *26th November 2001: Elspeth Cooper*

EAZ secondary headteacher
- *27th November 2001: Graham Cummings*

Fieldwork Outcomes

The local sub-region was perceived to be a deprived area overall with significant disadvantage spread throughout the county. For instance, Elizabeth Savage (Chief Adviser) characterized her borough as not having "an area of advantage. Every secondary school intake has areas which are significantly disadvantaged". The features of this deprivation as far as school pupils were concerned included: poor standards of literacy, a culture of underachievement, high proportions of ethnic minorities in some schools requiring specialist support, poor health and home resources, communication difficulties, problems caused by transition between stages, negative peer pressure and inadequate routes to school.

As Frank Robinson said of the area where he was EAZ co-ordinator, "the biggest block here is that members of the family have nothing to aspire to". Elspeth Cooper EAZ Co-ordinator), too, described wider features of disadvantaged communities locally when speaking about her area: "there's a great deal of poverty, high crime rate and not very much take-up of further education. All the normal things ... [including] poor health ...associated with the kind of poverty in his area [with] ... a lot of low self-esteem both in the kids and I suspect in the parents as well".

The role of LEAs was seen as potentially crucial for schools in difficult circumstances. However LEAs were viewed as having current efforts skewed too much towards recovery rather than prevention, making the task of providing assistance to schools in tough contexts particularly difficult. Their role was also almost impossibly wide in this flagship area of public service provision. LEAs were expected to provide support to schools, targets for each establishment, comprehensive standards monitoring and substantial intervention for establishments designated as being below acceptable standards. Speaking generally about how her LEA approached its task, Elizabeth Savage (Chief Adviser) said that her aim was "to develop the ethos in the borough that enables everyone ... to provide improvements". Leadership was regarded as very important by her, with head teachers particularly having a vital role in helping pupils to achieve and in inspiring colleagues in their work. However, she believed that leadership was to be found throughout the school, especially among so-called "middle managers".

Attitudes and values amongst education workers varied but there certainly existed a depth of professional honesty about the nature of the task, passion about their roles and a general faith in disadvantaged communities and their young people. Illustrative of this were the comments of Dorothy Waddington (Chief Adviser): "I was brought up in a very disadvantaged mining community – it's tough and it was hard and there were some kids who didn't succeed and could have done and others who did ... so I hate to make ... sweeping statements"; and "as a youngster who came from a disadvantaged community – I have to say my teachers didn't believe in me and I would have been a self-fulfilling prophecy. So I think teachers have an incredible role to play in terms of expectations".

Many schools were "achieving against the odds", with EAZs and related programmes helping some schools to raise attainment, and providing targeted help to individual children. For instance, Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed "Excellence in Cities has been really useful where trios of schools are actually looking at each other's practice". Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) said "one of the things a zone can do is just put that extra resource in and enable people to be able to do things that are a bit more exciting".

However, there were widespread teacher supply problems and difficulties caused by falling rolls in many schools. In these circumstances, even with intervention programmes, improving attainment was likely to be a slow process. However, these targeted interventions were perceived as suffering from a lack of joining-up with other regeneration initiatives and, in these circumstances, EAZ co-ordinators could often feel isolated. This was compounded by schools themselves feeling there were too many initiatives threatening to divert them from their core educational tasks. As Mike Ross (Head of Social Inclusion) said "I do think we've been a bit initiative crazy, where the government's thrown so much at us all that I don't think they're knitting together". Similarly, Elspeth Cooper (EAZ Co-ordinator) was almost despairing about the lack of joining-up in her area: " we don't really work very closely with [the local regeneration project] ... I have to say ... the schools have got the buildings, they've got the people and they are part of the community [but] ... there seems to be a notion that these kids and their families are not the same children that we've got in our schools".

The school/community interface presented a mixed picture. There was an acknowledgement that in some cases community support had helped schools emerge from "special measures" but many educational professionals felt that local community potential for support of the school and its pupils was limited. At the same time, a shortage of community facilities in a disadvantaged community was often perceived to make the educational challenge even greater. Nevertheless, Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher) was realistic but positive: "there were in the past barriers associated with unemployment. Expectations as to whether education could provide a job. I think there's a lack of awareness as well … in an area such as this, as to what education aims to do, and can do, and might do for children. But having said that … I would argue that the vast, vast majority of parents are very supportive of this school in what it does". Further, Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) believed that community involvement in schools was the main element in the strategy for educational progress in her zone: "the main [initiative] … that we're concentrating on is community learning and getting the community into schools - getting them to participate in the learning process that the children are taking".

How to Make Progress

There was broad agreement on a range of actions required for schools to make progress in areas of disadvantage. Overcoming barriers to learning was believed to require targeted solutions within the context of a more flexible curriculum, with individual pupils' needs being met through the use of differentiated learning materials. As Esther Morris (E.A.Z. Co-ordinator) said of her zone: "in the classes we're almost individually teaching up and down the corridor … which is possibly the way through to success". Further, this required the adoption of more innovative teaching methods and access to high-quality early years provision to give young people a firm basis for future learning.

Curriculum innovation was certainly what Michael Moon (Head of Social Inclusion) had in mind: "I think there's … the opportunity to maybe look at more imaginative ways of engaging youngsters in the learning agenda". He also believed in lifelong learning playing an important role because it was "all about the wider aspects of learning and parents, grandparents, etc. and the whole community can play a role in improving the education of people and [of] …children in our schools".

Frank Robinson (E.A.Z. Co-ordinator) believed "the structure of the school day and the way comprehensive schools tend to teach" required a major overhaul, because it "doesn't seem effective for low attainers and ... intermediate children as well. I think it fails them all". Similarly, Esther Morris (EAZ Co-ordinator) felt that to tackle underachievement "there's just got to be a radically different approach to teaching and learning".

Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher) believed that influencing parents to help children could achieve positive results: "we're not going to move children on unless we influence parental views, parental aspirations, parental expectations". He also felt that local people could help teachers find effective ways of engaging young people: "the ...thing I think's critical is to encourage staff, encourage the professionals to ask children, people in the community, other workers such as youth workers: what are the barriers or what works?" However, "there's no point in asking children unless you do something about it".

As far as the curriculum was concerned, too, Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) thought that "we shouldn't look upon academic qualifications as being somehow superior to vocational qualifications" and that it's important for teachers to look "at finding a range of different ways forward that actually meet the needs of individual children or a group of children." Further, "if we can get more flexibility in key stage four I think that will help". As well as looking for curriculum innovation, Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed that teachers' expectations required changing: "the major block is teacher expectations, I would say" as "the only reason why we would expect our youngsters not to achieve as other youngsters do would be if we could demonstrate that they're not as able as other youngsters, and that isn't the case".

The surrounding community and children's parents were seen as having great potential for helping to engage young people in education, but harnessing this potential was seen as a major challenge. Attitudinally, it was felt to be important to regard parents as partners in the education process through initiatives such as outreach work with them in the community and lifelong learning opportunities, so they could help their children, for instance in ICT. It was believed that having local people in school as role models and

engaging local business in the life of the school were beneficial also. But it was recognized that a local community needed building up to respond to the needs of its young people and that the presence of structures to engage local people in the life of their community such as area assemblies and youth forums were often helpful.

Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed community pride was key to raising people's aspirations and expectations generally in the local context: "the litter picking, the chewing gum, the dog fouling, all of that sort of thing". Esther Morris EAZ Co-ordinator) felt the practicalities of life at home for disadvantaged youngsters required some attention also: "I know a lot of girls who've confided in me that they've got nowhere to work at home, and no space" and " there are all sorts of cultural things that can be against these children, stopping them achieving".

So, the community required attention to address its problems in a realistic way but could also be a resource for learning itself. In order to maximize the community' potential as far as schools were concerned, "schools need to be more outward-looking and recognize that they can't do it alone, nor should they", according to Dorothy Waddington (Chief Adviser). This meant "going out to the community and bringing the community in, which is always easier at primary level than it is at secondary". She also believed "you can't do things to a community, you have to work with a community, and through it". For Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher), parents needed to be aware of what the school "can actually do for their child and what they need to do along with us and other agencies to get their children to benefit from [education]". Also he felt that "the more success you can present to the local community in terms of children ... the better. Whether it's academically, whether it's support in performing arts, anything. If you can celebrate that publicly with parents, with the local community, that's all going to do something to help raise the profile of education - what it can do for children, what it can do for the community".

Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) believed that "there really is an important place for schools in neighbourhood regeneration. And I think that's where you start getting the self-motivation, the self-esteem, the aspiration moving as well". But for schools to be able to fulfill that crucial role she wanted to see "dotted lines round them so there's

much more percolation in and out in all sorts of different ways between the school, the parents and the community".

School leadership was believed to be crucial to educational achievement and at different levels in a school. Head teachers were perceived to be the most effective if they enabled and co-ordinated, harnessing everyone's skills effectively, creating and "selling" a vision about what needed to be done and lifting morale in the organization. It was believed that a range of styles could be effective as long as head teachers were able to establish personal credibility, adopt a problem-solving approach and have effective informal interpersonal skills. Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed that leaders should "enable and empower people to do things for themselves". Frank Robinson EAZ Co-ordinator) believed that school leaders in tough situations needed to be "very outgoing ... very loud and very enthusiastic. You've got to have somebody with vision, somebody who's capable of seeing not only the problems but ways round them ...[someone who is] not afraid to say what the problems are".

Where schools were experiencing difficulties, the issue of leadership and possible leadership change were crucial issues, with either Ofsted or the LEA insisting on change as a prerequisite for a school being lifted out of "special measures". Tough situations particularly were believed to require a remorseless and visible commitment by leaders to bring about educational improvement. Personal strength and an ability to confront resistance amongst colleagues and others were perceived to be highly-prized leadership assets in these types of situations. As Esther Morris EAZ Co-ordinator) said, "sometimes you do need something much stronger and [where a school is in] ... special measures you've got be much stronger there". Certainly, Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed that the LEA should provide assistance to school heads and middle managers to develop leadership capacity in schools: "I think we ...[develop leadership] in two ways [firstly by] actually developing the leadership ... [and having] a long-term view of leadership and what is needed. [And secondly] ... you actually focus on developing the leadership qualities within the non-leaders, if you like". Dorothy Waddington (Chief Adviser) also felt that her role was to help schools develop their leadership potential in a wide sense: "for me it's about leadership at all levels. It's leadership in terms of curriculum areas. You've got to have strength there, whether that be primary or secondary. You've got to have a strong team".

Even though schools in poor areas were in a situation where children's backgrounds have an important influence on educational outcomes, it was widely believed that this could not be viewed as any kind of excuse for pupil failure. In these circumstances, too, it was felt that schools needed to keep their focus firmly on their "core business" rather than allowing themselves to get side-tracked by all the other social issues impacting on young people's lives. Rather, linking into a team of workers to provide more holistic provision for families in need was regarded as the way forward.

Finally, developing creative approaches to teaching and learning was also felt to be vital, particularly in disadvantaged communities. As Donna Mc Keown (EAZ Co-ordinator) pointed out: "I think one of the things we need to do is to put more sparkle in[to the curriculum] because that is what then gets children feeling more positive and motivated. And teachers as well for that matter … things like the gold star production where we had three hundred children in the local theatre performing in the children's festival last year".

Major Points of Difference

There were major points of difference about the best way to approach the educational task in deprived communities. Chief Advisers tended to be supportive of current government education initiatives to create school improvement. Their general approach was to maximize the pedagogical and leadership solutions to schools' issues to effect major change in children's outputs. The government perceived approach which they had the task of implementing, argued for the spreading of best practice and the targeting of resources to maximum effect, thereby improving life chances. This approach did not see the achievement of major social change as a prerequisite for educational advancement as poverty was not to be regarded as an excuse for educational failure. For instance, Elizabeth Savage believed that as long as teaching was of a high standard all pupils regardless of background should be able to achieve national attainment targets, adding "the only issue might be an attendance issue … in fact to me it's straightforward and simple really, to be honest". EAZ Co-ordinators, whilst sharing the same school improvement agenda, tended to be less optimistic about the scope for achieving major positive change at the local level. Heads of social inclusion tended to regard the social circumstances of poor communities as extremely hard to shift, having a crucial negative

effect on educational attainment that could not be tackled by professional action at school level alone. For instance, Mike Ross thought "it would be daft for us not to recognize that there is a correlation between disadvantage and educational achievement, or non-achievement."

Whilst Chief Advisers tended to be supportive and positive about outcomes being delivered by EAZs and other current community-focused government initiatives, co-ordinators of these projects themselves were less positive about successful outcomes being achievable. Heads of Social Inclusion were more critical and sceptical still, being critical of schools' ability to engage with wider social programmes. Michael Moon, for instance, was doubtful about the capacity of EAZs to deliver any positive results at all: "[the performance of EAZs] in some of the areas ... has actually gone backwards as opposed to improving performance in the schools".

Chief Advisers tended to support the managerial, "top-down" discourse and solutions from government, which they had the task of implementing. To effect change, they tended to concentrate on applying the input measures which formed government initiatives in the education sphere, such as EAZs and Excellence in Cities with some expectation of success being achieved. When asked to provide reasons for recent positive changes to the education service in her borough, Ena Smith pointed to the managerial upheaval that had taken place: "the Chief Exec.'s changed, the leader's changed, [and] the management structure of the education department has changed".

By contrast, Heads of Social Inclusion and local workers tended to regard "bottom-up" approaches as significant in achieving educational change. The targeted resources provided by programmes were seen as helpful, but of crucial importance were seen to be local workers' values, enthusiasm, and ability to join up the use of these resources in an effective package, and this tended to fall to Co-ordinators, head teachers and frontline local staff to deliver. As Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher) said about how his community began the process of positive change: "a group of us met over a period of time trying to influence officers [and] politicians ... we did it all: attendance, background ... trying to quantify the factors that ... [could be brought] to bear on children's experience". Similarly, Elspeth Cooper (EAZ Co-ordinator) pointed out: "the reason why there's an EAZ here is that they wanted it, not because somebody

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effect on educational attainment that could not be tackled by professional action at school level alone. For instance, Mike Ross thought "it would be daft for us not to recognize that there is a correlation between disadvantage and educational achievement, or non-achievement."

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over there said *this is a disadvantaged area it would be a good idea to have an EAZ.* The impetus came from within as opposed to being imposed from outside".

Chief Advisers tended to regard the national attainment measures five A* to C at GCSE as basically correct and relevant to young people, with arguments to be had about the best way of achieving them. Elizabeth Savage, for instance, regarded them as "spot-on ...it's a good measure in terms of national expectations and reasonable". EAZ Co-ordinators and other local workers generally tend to be much more questioning of them. Esther Morris believed "it's a waste of time ... it's just not relevant", whilst Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher) felt five A to E to be a more appropriate benchmark as it allowed young people access to intermediate GNVQ at post-16 level.

Views about the capacity of disadvantaged communities to act as partners with schools in the educational process were mixed. Ena Smith (Chief Adviser) believed "parental involvement [is] ... a two-edged sword. In certain ages and stages it's very important. At other ages and stages the children actively ask their parents not to be there". Graham Cummings (EAZ secondary headteacher) was rather more optimistic about parental involvement at the higher age level, believing that "it's just [that] we've never really in any area of work spent a lot of time explaining to parents how they can actually help their child within the process".

There was a difference of view, too, about the importance and relevance of schools working in partnership with their surrounding communities to effect educational improvement locally. Dorothy Waddington (Chief Adviser) held a mainstream view: "through active communities ...[community] groups, I think they all have a part to play in creating a sense of identity and hope ... creating opportunities for people to feel they're at least taking charge whether it be of their environment or ... making some contribution". Elizabeth Savage (Chief Adviser), however, felt that there was often insufficient capacity in a disadvantaged community for genuine partnership working to take place: "I think there's a balance between the officer analytical view ... and the community's view. So you might go to a community and say *education's the issue* ... but you might have the discussion entirely focused [instead] upon, say, the school playing field and dog fouling whereas actually the whole discussion should be on pupil standards".

Conclusion

Much of this chapter has concerned itself with perceptions by professionals of the challenges and possible ways forward for school education in difficult circumstances. For those actually involved in front-line delivery there were no easy solutions or "quick fixes". The day-to-day experience could be both utterly rewarding and totally depressing, all in a short space of time. Yes, targeting of extra resources could help address specific needs of individual youngsters and high aspiration of everybody involved could potentially make a major difference. But nobody could underestimate the sheer weight of disadvantage that needed to be tackled. There was a great deal to be overcome by many children in the inner city and this dragged them down from early childhood, making learning that much more difficult and problematic.

Nevertheless, as well as benefiting from extra targeted resources, many inner city schools were gaining from the networks and peer learning processes engendered by cross-school initiatives such as EAZs, and this was helping them to push up education outcomes from a low base. But this process of school improvement was often painfully slow and extremely hard-won. In these circumstances, a number of issues began to emerge about the exercising of school leadership and the process of school improvement that point us towards the next round of fieldwork outcomes:

- In a competitive and market-orientated school system, facilitating co-operation locally and expecting schools effectively to engage in partnership activity is a major challenge.
- Whilst leadership is crucial to providing an energy and a vision for a challenging school community, energy levels can easily be in short supply at times and visions are not always easily shared amongst colleagues.
- Whilst most professionals in schools in poor areas recognize the need for having faith in a progressive improvement agenda, nevertheless there is also a tendency for frontline workers to lapse into cynicism and hopelessness under the pressure of their daily experiences.

- There is perhaps a "reality gap" between the education administrators' view of what is happening and what is possible educationally, and the true situation as it impacts in the local schools and communities.

- And finally, it remains to be seen to what extent schools can be central to bringing about irreversible and lasting change in our most disadvantaged communities without other major social policy change being applied to address wider and deep-seated inequalities that so greatly weigh down our poorest citizens.

In the two *Case Studies* chapters (6 and 7), these issues are examined in greater depth. These two studies provided the opportunity to examine issues of school leadership and the raising of pupil outcomes in extremely challenging contexts. The studies examined a range of issues impacting on professionals' daily experience as they related to relevant critical events occurring in those schools. The resulting data demonstrated the challenging and fragile nature of the day-to-day experience in inner city contexts, yet the potential these schools and their leaders had for effecting positive outcomes for pupils. In spite of powerful external and internal pressures impacting on these situations, the studies aimed to discover if teachers and their leaders could bend these circumstances to make positive changes locally. The extent to which a collective vision of what could be done educationally could be engendered by school leaders in tough local contexts, and the potential role of vision in bringing about positive change was also examined.

The *Scoping Study* had specifically sought to examine the issue of the importance to an inner city school of its surrounding catchment area in effecting positive educational outcomes for its pupils. The study also covered a wide range of issues impacting on schools and their communities. As a result of this part of the work, it became clear that this range of issues and the focus of the research project required some adjustment for the next stage. This was partly to make the subsequent part of the study more manageable but also to focus more on the school leadership issue. For this reason, subsequent fieldwork focused more specifically on educationists and their practice. The issue of the wider community and its impact on schools became an aspect of school improvement and leadership issues, rather than an issue in its own right. The rationale for this approach and the focusing-down process adopted during the rest of the project is examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Research Methodology: The Case Studies

Introduction

The two *Case Studies* formed the second stage of the work. Chapter 1 outlined how the focus changed emphasis during this stage from examination of the school/community interface to a closer look at issues of school leadership. Stage two saw a continued examination of *educational achievement/success, the management and development of the school's role within the community,* and *leadership*, as well as the three personal hypotheses of:

1. Exploring shared leadership;
2. Exploring the role and values in the school leadership task; and
3. Exploring the nature of the micro-political task faced by school leaders.

This chapter firstly outlines the changed emphasis on school leadership adopted for stage two of the work, with reasons for this change of focus. An account is then given of how the adopted research methodology outlined in Chapter 3 was further developed and applied to the case study design for stage two. Issues relating to the two studies of sampling, scoping fieldwork, and the case study process are then outlined and explained. Methods of data analysis used are then explained and justified in terms of the adopted methodology. Finally, brief conclusions arising from the case study process and how this relates to other aspects of the work are outlined.

The Revised Research Questions for Stage Two

Following the *Scoping Study,* a re-evaluation took place of the research questions in the light of the initial fieldwork outcomes. These outcomes were considered in detail in Chapter 4. It became clear that perceived leadership and school success, and the elements of these, subsumed the school/community interface issue, notwithstanding its importance for effective working in highly disadvantaged communities. Also, a focusing-down of the work became necessary to avoid the research project being unmanageable in its scope. It was recognised, too, that issues of leadership and school

success were closely linked, with a main focus on one or the other being required to provide a fruitful basis for the next stage of the work. An emphasis on school leadership was chosen to be the most promising area of focus for the next stage of the research, underpinned by the "personal hypotheses" outlined and formulated since the beginning of the work, outlined in Chapter 1.

So, as previously outlined in Chapter 1, the reformulated research questions reflected this emphasis on school leadership as the focus of the next stage of the work:

Central question:

What is perceived to be successful school leadership in highly disadvantaged communities?

Areas of inquiry:
1. Where is leadership located?
2. How do those in leadership positions carry out their roles and how are they influenced by their values?
3. What is perceived to be successful leadership and why?
4. What happens in initiatives and what are the consequences?

How the Adopted Research Methodology Relates to the Case Study Design

The previous chapter outlined the adopted methodological stance and researcher positionality in general terms. This sits within the non-positivist/qualitative paradigm, whilst making use of as many "concrete" reference points as possible. The approach adopts elements of "constructivism" and "critical theory", employing an "abductive" way of working, aiming to make a contribution to theory using "grounded methods" of data collection, without relying on the data alone for the generation of concepts and theoretical issues.

As far as the research process is concerned, the emphasis involved data shaping the evolving outcomes (Alasuutari, 1995). The approach aimed for the fieldworker being open to discover the "markers and tools that people mobilise in their interactions with others" (Baszanger and Dodier, 1997:8), within the cross-paradigm approach already

outlined. The "personal hypotheses" also had an explicit role in the collection and evaluation of the data. At the same time, the personal stances and life experiences touching on school leadership in the context of highly disadvantaged communities have also had an inevitable influence on the research process, within a framework aiming for maximum validity and reliability of outcomes. How the methodology links into all these elements is explained largely in the context of how the *Case Studies* were conducted.

Also, as previously pointed out, my democratic socialist personal stance was bound to have impacted on my view of schools in these situations. Outcomes from the research were sought in the area of school practice and in policy terms, related to school leadership and improvement. However, my personal values and assumptions have led to a stance of advocacy at the same time as seeking to establish valid outcomes. This advocacy is on behalf of the practitioners, facing as they do a difficult task, as well as in the urgent task to effect the necessary practice, leadership and societal changes to make a lasting positive difference in inner city contexts. The urgency for major transformational change in these circumstances was apparent throughout the work, pointing to a practical response at all levels to build on the practical experience of schools perceived to be achieving against the odds and on the perception of "what works" in policy terms.

Case study research involves detailed investigation, often over a period of time, in one or more organisations or groups with a view to providing an analysis of the context and processes under investigation (Cassell and Symon, 1994). Case study design should also involve several methods to triangulate and improve validity. As Bassey (1999) points out, case studies can enable: the exploration of significant features of a case; the creation of plausible and trustworthy interpretations; the construction of a worthwhile argument or story; and a relationship to relevant research and literature.

Case studies are capable of providing a rich, detailed and precise account of processes at work within a particular case. They also have the capacity to "substantiate or refine causal processes thought to underlie observed patterns and correlations" (Hakim, 2000:60). Case study design is widely regarded in the literature as particularly appropriate for researching social phenomena such as schools in their community context, aiming for analysis of context and processes (Cassell and Symon,1994:208),

not mere description. Establishing causal relationships in a situation should be the major aim (Yin, 1993), with every effort being made to avoid premature use of theory. Instead, the point of case study should be to identify emergent categories from the data itself through qualitative data analysis.

The adoption of provisional research questions that can be re-examined against the data is crucial to case study working, as is the provision of a plausible account of events (DeVaus, 2001). Case study working should also be characterised by texts and data being grounded, triangulated, and based on naturalistic indicators. Outcomes should be carefully fitted to theory, comprehensive in scope, and logical and truthful in their reflection of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin, 1996). As Cohen and Manion (1994) point out, case studies should probe deeply in small-scale situations, to establish generalisations about the wider population.

The complexity of individual cases may only be capable of sampling, given the likely existence of many subsections, groups, and domains within any given situation. However, largely because of this likely complexity and richness, Bassey (1999) regards case studies as capable of establishing "fuzzy generalisations", given the likelihood that similar findings may occur elsewhere in similar situations. A common model that can be used is the "critical" or "strategic" case study, its purpose being to assess evidence for a conclusion by looking at the most favourable illustration of it. Looking at multiple actors in multiple settings is regarded in the literature as an important way to enhance generalisability. This is because "key processes, constructs and explanations in play can be tested in several different configurations" (Huberman and Miles, 1994:435). Also, examining slices of data from different sources is likely to work better for the generation of theory.

As far as the process specifically of conducting qualitative research is concerned, interactivity with respondents is regarded particularly by *constructivists* as inevitable and important to achieve. Grills (1998) emphasises the importance of being able to venture into the "life-world" of respondents in a direct way. Qualitative methodology enables an account to be made of "motives, means and ends, shared relationships and plans and expectations" of the people involved (Smith, 1998:164). Resulting theoretical frameworks, according to Cassell and Symon (1994:210) should inform and enrich the

data. Thus a sense of the uniqueness of the case can be provided as well as pointing to what is of more general relevance and interest from the research.

Reference was made in the previous chapter to the adoption of "grounded methods" for the work, as opposed to a strictly "grounded theory" approach. Applied to case study working, a "grounded theory" approach is characterised by building theoretical outcomes from the data itself, rather than a hypothesis-testing way of working, to reach "theoretical saturation" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At the same time, the constant comparative method in "grounded theory" involves inspecting and comparing all the data fragments that arise in a single case. Strauss and Corbin (1994) describe typical theoretical outcomes from a "grounded theory" approach as conceptually dense, with many conceptual relationships. Nevertheless, a "grounded theory" outcome is not necessarily "the only plausible one that could be based on the data", according to Strauss (1967:225). Rather, it simply needs to have "credibility", deriving from its systematic and analytical handling of data.

The methodological position adopted for these qualitative case studies is partly *critical theory* and partly *constructivist,* as previously outlined. Both standpoints lie within the broadly *non-positivist* paradigm, although it has been pointed out that this positionality has been adopted largely for practical reasons, given the nature of the subject matter. As Bassey (1999) points out, case study method lies outside the discourse of "quantitative experimentalism". Like Yin (1993), he regards an exploratory case study as a means of discovering theory by directly observing a social phenomenon in its raw form, with the grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) being an appropriate one for this type of work. So, the adopted methodological approach sits firmly within mainstream qualitative approaches for researching social phenomena such as schools in their highly disadvantaged contexts.

A potential area of weakness of the methodological approach has been the adoption of "grounded methods" combined with "personal hypotheses". This way of working is nevertheless felt to be justified on the grounds that the issues contained in the hypotheses (shared leadership, leadership values and the micro-politics of school leadership), were "live" within the day-to-day experience and practice of those involved in schooling, and relevant to the research questions/areas of inquiry adopted for the

second stage of the research. Further, the "grounded theory" approach is a problematic one in the sense that it is unlikely that outcomes can arise in their entirety from the data itself, or that the direction of a case study can be entirely driven by the data. Practically-speaking, individual researchers adopting a case study method carry a variety of influences in their approach to the case and to the analysis of data, that are bound to impact on its direction and the results. So the adopted methodological approach has sought to be explicit about the adoption of "personal hypotheses" in this case and also the likely influence of personal values and assumptions on the work. This methodological approach is contained within an "abducted" way of working, which recognises a variety of factors to be at play in the conduct of a piece of qualitative research such as this one. However, the success or otherwise of this approach in terms of reliability and validity of results has depended essentially on the way it has been applied in practice.

In spite of the existence of these "personal hypotheses" in the adopted case study method, the approach has nevertheless been a "theory-building" rather than an essentially positivistic "theory-testing" one. De Vaus (2001) describes this approach as one where cases are selected to help develop theory that fits those cases. Bassey (1999:41) further contends that *evaluative research* is a "subset of educational case study research: enquiry carried out in order to understand, evaluate and change". An *evaluative case study* he outlines to be a study of a case or cases in depth "with the purpose of providing educational actors or decision makers ... with information that will help them judge the merit and worth of policies, programmes or institutions" (ibid:27). The method adopted for the case study was *evaluative research*, given the stated aim of researching examples of perceived school and leadership success in highly disadvantaged contexts, with a view to establishing practice and policy outcomes that were capable of application more widely.

The Two Case Study Samples

A process of *theoretical* sampling was adopted for the two case studies, given the original research intention to examine what is perceived to "work" for schools and their leaders in highly disadvantaged contexts. Strauss' (1967) concept of *theoretical sampling* involves representativeness of the sample being a lower priority than selecting

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respondents who will maximise theoretical development. A closely-related method outlined by Hakim (2000) is the *critical* or *strategic* study, where favourable examples of a phenomenon are examined in order to assess the evidence for a conclusion or explanation. Similarly, Patton (1987:52) uses the term *purposeful sampling* denoting "information-rich cases for study in depth". In all these examples, the sampling method involves selecting a case which maximises certain characteristics, arrived at in advance. The stage one *Scoping Studies* provided data on which to base some criteria for case selection, and some further fieldwork prior to the setting-up of the studies also helped refine these options.

The two case studies were designed to be manageable in size (i.e. a secondary school and its family of feeder primary schools). Two groups of schools in their surrounding communities were identified with similar yet contrasting characteristics:

- "multi-cultural"/"white working class";
- small EAZ (Education Action Zone)/part of a larger EAZ;
- experience of relatively recent inter-agency working/longstanding inter-agency working;
- having different histories of schools in "special measures";
- having a stable school population/unstable school population;
- having experience of changes of school leadership/relative continuity of leadership; and
- involvement in developing strategies for dealing with some similar and contrasting critical issues.

During the stage one fieldwork, effective links had been established with two LEAs and with some of their school communities in particular. As a result, knowledge of the research project in these areas had also generated a certain level of interest in it. Following some exploratory meetings with advisers in both LEAs, two suitable communities with the above characteristics were selected as possible studies: namely, Thurlby and Burntake.

Both groups of schools were viewed as broadly successful educationally in difficult circumstances. Whilst Thurlby was "multicultural", Burntake was predominantly "white

working class". The two EAZs that they were in had positive reputations. Thurlby comprised a small zone with a secondary school and its feeder primaries, whilst Burntake was situated in a larger EAZ. Burntake secondary school had had the experience of emerging from "special measures" (see Glossary), whilst Thurlby had never been so designated. Both areas, however, had had schools in "special measures" at some time but now no longer had any of their schools in this category.

Both school areas appeared to have elements of good school/community links. Some of the strong school/agency co-operation in Thurlby went back some eight years or more, whilst joined-up inter-agency co-operation and links in Burntake was generally more recent. There were examples of schools in both communities where significant progress had been made in measured performance, some with a change of leadership and some with little change at senior management level. But both groups of schools were dealing with similar critical issues. Tackling these required not only effective leadership but sustained effort and commitment from all involved to effect positive outcomes. These issues included: work with parents, mentoring programmes, ICT innovation, work with disaffected pupils, staff training, community links, transition issues and literacy/numeracy activities.

Preparatory Fieldwork and the Choice of *Critical Issues*

To prepare for the case study, some preparatory fieldwork took place involving advisers in both participating LEAs, the two EAZ co-ordinators, the head teachers of the two secondary schools and the head teacher chairs of family of schools meetings. These interviews were essentially informal and examined issues likely to provide data that could inform the detailed case study design. At the same time, they aimed for insights from key actors about the nature of the educational task facing these professionals and their school communities. These informal interviews considered a broad checklist of issues relevant to these school situations, took approximately three quarters of an hour each, and were written-up immediately afterwards using detailed notes made during the interview. The checklist was, however, only a guide and allowance was made in the interviews for respondents to develop their own ideas and perspectives as well, to maximise their views in the outcomes. Issues in the checklist were:

- What is perceived to work educationally in disadvantaged communities?
- The school(s)/community's history;
- Issues present in the community;
- School involvement in regeneration initiatives;
- School approaches to leadership and values;
- Current critical issues;
- The nature of local inter-agency working;
- The impact of current external interventions on the school(s)/community;
- The perceived importance of leadership in bringing about change locally; and
- Willingness of participation and best ways to make contact locally.

As well as building on perceptions from the early fieldwork about the nature of the task facing these schools and their communities, this preparatory fieldwork helped to identify key stakeholders in Thurlby and Burntake and the nature of the contribution being made by them. Various local projects and forums were identified and the process of mapping key initiatives taking place designed to overcome barriers to learning started. The interviewees also helped in the identification of "critical issues" in Burntake and Thurlby (touching on the research questions/areas of inquiry, and the "personal hypotheses") that formed an important part of the case studies' design. These issues were to be genuinely tangible, action-focused and capable of meaningful examination. They involved:

- The exercising of genuine choice by individuals;
- A moral dimension; the making of interventions in young people's education;
- Personal and organisational values;
- A potential for real change being brought about.
- Genuine local significance; and
- The exercising of leadership at a range of levels.

Initially, six "critical issues" were identified (three in each community) linked to work with disaffected pupils, parental links, and curriculum innovation. As will be shown below, a process of focusing-down necessarily took place roughly at the halfway stage of the studies so that the issues came to be reduced from the original six to two in

number: a Pathway project in Thurlby for young people at risk of exclusion from school, and a Behaviour Improvement Programme in Burntake.

Case Studies: Methods

The adopted methodological approach accepts constructivism's view that social realities are shaped by human intellects and at the same time the critical recognition that historically situated structures in turn have a major influence on human action. This position reflects the belief that whatever the structural explanations for human behaviour, individuals and groups are capable of transcending those underlying drivers to shape their own destiny. The extent to which this is possible in small-scale or wider societal contexts is a constant tension and open to contestation. What the approach does not accept is the relativistic position adopted by some constructivists which simply aims for a reporting of an interactive dialogue, rather than aiming for establishing both theoretical and policy/practice outcomes whose relevance is wider than the situation being examined.

The methods adopted within the case study design were ones previously utilised in earlier stages of the work. They comprised three main types: semi-structured interviews, "reality check" informal interviews, and observation studies. Using these three methods provided triangulated data, as is commonplace in case study design. However, as Best, Ribbins, Jarvis and Oddy (1983) point out, the process of "picking things up" is potentially as important as more formal fieldwork techniques. This process is effectively going on all the time in a fieldwork situation, enabling the researcher to check out what respondents say in interviews against what is observed day by day. This process effectively gathers impressionistic information from observation of interactions, cultures and dynamics relating to the general environment of schools and their surrounding communities, as well as in documents and other materials.

There is an unresolved debate about the status of interview accounts in the literature. According to Silverman (1993), one view regards them simply as constructed accounts, with a focus on the nature of their construction, rather than whether they might be accurate or not. The other standpoint regards them as potentially accurate representations of such features as attitudes and behaviour. The adopted methodological

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approach for this research, which seeks to make judgements and draw conclusions capable of wider application, tends towards the second of the Silverman positions. At the same time, whilst the interview itself is to be viewed as a symbolic interaction, this does not mean that knowledge of the social world beyond the interaction cannot be obtained (Silverman, 1997). It is also the case that an interview cannot be viewed as merely a neutral conduit to knowledge about a situation, but rather one where an interaction is taking place between interviewer and respondent and this needs to be allowed for when drawing conclusions based on interview data. As Fontana and Frey (1998:663) also recognise "researchers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather they are part of the interactions they seek to study". Further, the qualitative interview is capable of uncovering "new clues", securing "vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts ... based on personal experiences", in spite of the potential limitations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe,1991:73), with more accurate outcomes being achieved if the interviewer is "perceptive and sensitive to events" occurring in the interview (ibid:76).

The process of conducting "reality check" informal interviews with certain key respondents, triangulated with semi-structured interviews and observation studies, took place over some eight months or so. A total of over fifty pieces of fieldwork across the three methods were carried out during this time (see Appendix 3). The term "reality check" was coined by one of the respondents, being the way the sessions were viewed by him. In their case study of Rivendell school, Best, Ribbins, Jarvis and Oddy (1983) pointed to the importance in qualitative study of getting interviewees to relax, to ask open-ended questions to allow teachers to say what they really felt and to get below the surface of meanings. Such aims are a potential way of countering "researcher effect" and views in the literature above about the potential limitations of qualitative interview data. They employed "informal chats" to provide one-to-one contact with certain key respondents on an ongoing basis throughout the study. Similarly, the "reality check" interviews were designed to explore issues as they arose, to give and receive feedback, pursue lines of inquiry, and to check out leadership processes and the progress of "action issues". This proved to be a useful way of "getting below the surface" of a school context with the potential for gaining deeper insights into individuals' perceptions about what was going on.

The "reality check" interviews took place throughout the studies, initially with six respondents (a secondary and a primary headteacher, and an EAZ co-ordinator in each family of schools). Following the "focusing-down" process at the halfway stage of the studies, the number of "reality check" respondents was reduced down to three (the two secondary head teachers and the primary head from Burntake), in a way which related to the reduction of "action issues". The individuals were interviewed every fortnight or so, and the sessions lasted approximately an hour. Detailed written notes were taken during the sessions rather than tape recordings, mainly for practical reasons. Every effort was made to maximise the informal nature of the interviews. This interview technique was particularly useful in helping to identify major themes and issues, contributing significantly to the process of theory development.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to explore issues pertinent to the research question/areas of inquiry, to track action issues and to probe for perceptions of the situation in each family of schools. Respondents included a range of individuals closely connected with the action issues either as co-ordinators, teachers, mentors, agency staff or as members of the surrounding community. Care was taken to identify respondents likely to provide the most useful and relevant information about the action issues as well as the wider matters relating to the study. Flexibility of approach allowed for the probing of individual views about issues and events arising from the data as the study developed, as well as enabling respondents to raise issues of importance to them.

A *purposive sampling* strategy was adopted for the case studies. As has been pointed out earlier, the purpose was to examine effective practice in context and what is perceived to work in schools in highly disadvantaged communities. So the two families of schools were selected through discussions with stakeholders and local authority advisory staff, against stated criteria, again outlined earlier. The case studies followed issue identification and scoping work with these stakeholders as well as specific pieces of fieldwork conducted from the start of the research project. The qualitative research techniques aimed to reveal deep insights into values, dilemmas and the dynamics of schools and their surrounding areas.

Through homing-in on specific *action issues* (Burntake: the Behaviour Improvement Project; and Thurlby: the Pathway Scheme), the aim was to examine the work of

individuals associated with those issues to gain insights into wider issues in the school/community. The two *action issues* were themselves arrived at as being two key areas of activity from an originally wider group of six issues (re. parental links and curriculum innovation), as part of a focusing-down process. This conscious focusing-down was carried out in the light of emerging research outcomes and to make the research process manageable in practical terms.

The sample of respondents included principally those associated with the *action issues* in each case study. This sample was not in any sense an exhaustive list of people, and was partly informed by advice from headteachers in the schools during the "informal chats" about who were involved in the *critical issue* initiatives. The sample in each study contained a mixture of "insiders" closely associated with the *critical issue,* specifically including:

- Deputy Head/Assistant head, also providing information about the school more widely;
- Mentor Co-ordinator; and
- Head of Support/SEN

Individuals less closely connected with the *critical issue*, but nevertheless closely linked with the work of the school, provided both "insider" and "outrider" views (i.e. they were involved in discussing this and other crucial issues with school staff but were also being able to form views as to the effectiveness of the schools' work. These specifically included:

- Most relevant LEA link people (e.g. BIP Co-ordinator and Dedicated Advisers); and
- EAZ Co-ordinators. These co-ordinators and their staff had a unique and inherently ambiguous relationship with schools that involved co-ordination of policy and effort but often in an arms length manner. They were therefore genuinely a mixture of "insider" and "outrider" respondents.
  Each sample also included "outriders", who were individuals with a genuinely outside perspective on the work of the schools, but to a greater or lesser extent. These included:
- The head of the multi-cultural centre in Thurlby, to provide a perspective about the work of the school with its multi-ethnic population;

- Regeneration Forum chair/Pathfinder co-ordinator: each providing intelligence about the schools' reputation and reach into the surrounding community; and
- School governors: able to reflect on what the schools are doing mainly from an outsider perspective, and with a community standpoint.

With these key perspectives consciously included in the sample, skewing of data has sought to be avoided whilst nevertheless opportunistically gaining perspectives from relevant individuals encountered during the course of the research, in addition to the above. A full list of participants in each case study is found near the beginning of the two Case Study chapters (nos. 6 and 7).

Finally, a small number of observation studies also took place to gauge group dynamics and relationships within the two families of schools, not only to triangulate data but also to probe below the surface of people's accounts of their everyday experiences. They were interactions mainly connected to the action issues. The researcher stance adopted was principally one of non-participation, except for one occasion when directly asked by a participant to comment on an issue under discussion. Notes taken during these sessions formed the basis of a detailed written record.

A number of issues about qualitative method in a case study design context arise here. Qualitative case study needs to reflect and capture complexity. At the same time, an account needs to accurately represent the social phenomena it is referring to. External validity is arrived at through establishing theoretical relationships in the case(s) to arrive at generalisations (Yin, 1993). For Silverman (1993:13), "authenticity" can best be arrived at through understanding people's experiences through conducting "open-ended" interviews. For this reason, the two interview methods used in the case studies sought to capture respondents' feelings about the tough ongoing situation they faced in their work, particularly in the open-ended "reality check" interviews conducted with key respondents.

Qualitative study needs to test key processes, constructs and explanations in play in several different configurations, and for slices of data from different sources to be produced (Huberman and Miles, 1994). De Vaus (2001) writes of the need for a picture of the case to be built up by taking into account information gained from many levels, whilst Cassell and Symon (1994) stress the potential strengthening of results through

the comparison of two cases in a study. Certainly, the adopted case study design aimed for comparisons to be facilitated, through two similar yet crucially different cases of schools in their highly disadvantaged communities being investigated simultaneously. They threw up many similar issues related to practice and leadership, but also important and instructive differences. Data was collected not only using a variety of different methods (as previously outlined), but also at a range of different levels. These respondents reflected the range of staff and their roles within the schools, principally attached to specific "critical issues". Respondents also included other stakeholders connected with these establishments, thus providing the possibility of different perspectives on issues central to the cases from that purely obtaining in the schools themselves. By following this approach, the studies aimed to provide a valid and authentic account of the situation pertaining in these two settings, certainly as far as triangulation and seeking out appropriate samples of respondents were concerned.

Keeping an introspective record during a study to take into account personal biases and feelings is widely regarded as crucial in the literature. Spradley (1979) refers to the crucial "brainstorming" process of analysis and interpretation in note-making, to bring together ideas from past reading, previously-established theory and respondents' comments. Also, considerable time needs to be set aside to for writing up notes of interviews, and of impressions gained, and this needs to be done as soon as possible after the event (Cassell and Symon, 1994). So, an introspective and problematising approach was followed throughout the case studies. Interviews and observation studies were turned into data almost immediately to maximise accuracy. The occasion of data production, too, was used to reflect upon the data itself. Checklists of questions for subsequent interviews took into account major issues emerging from the data, as well as the framework of research questions and personal hypotheses underpinning the work.

The studies followed a "grounded method" involving: placing emphasis on the data for the development of a sense of direction for the research; looking for contrasts and deviant cases to test emerging major issues and concerns of respondents; as well as constantly comparing data outcomes within and between cases. Nevertheless this method did not fully follow "grounded theory" in the sense that the data itself was not the sole determinant of the evolution of the project. As previously pointed out, a wide range of determinants encompassing personal stance and life-experience, previous

research findings, as well as the data, had a major part to play in the development of the studies. In this sense, the qualitative methods used incorporated what can be viewed as "mainstream" approaches, rather than "grounded theory". Similarly, the treatment of data exemplified below, demonstrates a broadly "grounded methods" approach but not in all respects for reasons given.

As has been pointed out, after the first three months or so of the studies, it became clear that the six "action issues" originally planned to be the focus of the work were too many in number to be manageable. Following the review of the studies that took place at that time, the range of six respondents involved in "reality check" interviews for the last half of the work changed. The two major issues of behaviour (Burntake) and curriculum innovation (Thurlby) then became the two focus issues for the studies, regarded as having the best potential for demonstrating underlying values and approaches relating to school leadership and improvement. This, however, meant that the three individuals (a primary head teacher in Thurlby, and the two EAZ co-ordinators) suddenly ceased to be a major focus for the studies and the work became more focused on the two secondary schools and Chatsworth primary school in Burntake, reducing the "reality check" respondents to three individuals (the three head teachers at those schools).

The process of focusing-down is an important one, reflecting a developing design and thematic focus. This development was based on an ongoing commitment in the case study design to a constant examination of focus, direction, and comparison of cases. This developmental process sought to best fit the fieldwork to the framework of questions and underpinning issues of the work, as they developed during the study. The process of development was, however, a conscious one based on: research diary speculation based on emerging data; brainstorming; consideration of the implications for future fieldwork of previous interview outcomes; and upon the halfway review of progress.

Data Analysis

The general approach to data analysis adopted for the case studies lies within the qualitative paradigm. Specifically, the analysis involved data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Categories and concepts were identified wherever possible from

the data itself, with "joint collection, coding and analysis" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:43) being carried out as much as possible. Clusters and groups of issues were then linked to each other in an emerging theoretical structure, with these relationships being plausible (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This structure also related back to the original issues and purposes of the research project and to the "personal hypotheses" previously outlined. This process of interpretation of data aimed for deep perspectives on events, producing theoretical insights (Bassey, 1999), with potential for practical application (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

The process of analysis involved: constant comparison of slices of data, emerging concepts being reflected upon and dimensionalised in research diary entries, written progress reporting, and summative accounts of data outcomes. Initial coding and data reduction involved reading and re-reading of interviews to note core ideas and concepts. A pragmatic approach was adopted to initial coding, with codes starting out as essentially descriptive, "only later being changed to something more abstract and of use … in coding other documents" (Bazeley and Richards, 2000:55). The subsequent stage of data display involved "identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data" (Patton, 1990:381). This essentially creative process required considered judgements being made about what was really significant and meaningful in the data (Dey, 1993). The subsequent process of data analysis, facilitated conclusion drawing of a broader kind, where cases could be contrasted, and themes explored.

In practice, the final stage of analysis involved identifying significant themes (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), aiming to see which concepts go together (Spradley, 1979), and looking to adopt a comprehensive approach through deep immersion in the data to establish "pools of meaning" (Tesch, 1990). The establishing of outcomes from the data involved not only establishing common patterns, themes and regularities, but "contrasts, paradoxes and irregularities (Delamont, 1992). This process of grouping themes and issues into major coding categories is referred to in the literature as either "domain analysis" (Spradley, ibid.) or "axial coding" by Strauss (1987). Although this coding process reflects a broadly "grounded" approach, the practice of data expansion outlined by Glaser above was not adopted for the study, given its time-consuming nature and general impracticality for this work. Nevertheless, "grounded theory-type" complexity of data categories and their linkages was a feature of the analytical process in this case.

Data was captured on the Nvivo computer program. The program thus stored the data from the three field methods, as well as facilitating coding, data display and the writing and storage of research diary entries and other linked processes such as interview checklists. This facilitated the "grounded method" of joint collection, coding, and analysis. However, whilst "domain analysis/axial coding" was the means whereby codes were grouped into issues for the development of theory, this process explicitly started in written form three months or so into the studies, as part of the focusing-down process that took place at that time. Data display and comparison of cases enabled major contrasts and issues to be reflected upon through immersion in the data. Differences of view between families of schools or within those school groupings about specific important issues (e.g. inclusion, behaviour policy and practice) were particularly reflected upon in aiming to develop categories for further development of data interpretation. At the same time, looking for the major emerging issues from the data across communities, linked to the research questions and personal hypotheses also formally began in written form at the focusing-down stage.

The emerging list of major themes at the focusing-down stage were a mixture of emerging theoretical ideas (e.g. "pragmatism and idealism") and strong themes which facilitated the grouping of codes together (e.g. "disaffection and behaviour"). These emerging categories were dimensionalised in written form, with subsequent versions being worked through in research diary entries and other written reports. But, with hindsight, this analytical process would have further benefited from memo usage to capture each code or groups of codes in a more systematic fashion. In reality also, the process of data analysis took place in stages, some of it alongside the collection of data but also at its conclusion and then beyond that point.

At the conclusion of the fieldwork, a major piece of writing sought to capture "emerging themes", drawing on the structure of codes at that time which broadly justified these emerging conclusions. It is possible that these were outlined too early, as further work was subsequently required to finalise the data analysis. However, at each stage of further work and analysis of data, the data itself was examined for patterns, with considered judgements being made about significant issues. This progressive process further aimed at refining groups of codes and overarching categories, through a

process of data examination and immersion in the data. Specifically, further refinement and development of theoretical outcomes took place when planning a detailed thesis outline, and in writing and refining the data chapters.

Ethical Issues

Within this methodological/philosophical approach and through the use of these methods/techniques, every effort was made to maximise *validity* and *reliability* in the ways outlined. It is acknowledged that pursuit of *credible* outcomes in mainstream qualitative research of this type is a complex and potentially problematic one. It is also the case that personal values and assumptions also touches on relevant ethical matters that arose during the studies. Certainly, informed consent from participants was sought and granted at each fieldwork stage. Assurances were given about the positive nature of the underlying approach, namely to track and evaluate practice in schools broadly regarded as making "good" progress educationally, but from a low base in most cases. The tough context provided participants with an added pressure, however, and potentially intrusive research of an in-depth nature, looking not only at outcomes but motivations and personal values inevitably posed a dilemma for those being researched.

The ethical guidelines adopted for this study were to: pursue a generally beneficial outcome for the cases themselves; obtain informed consent of participants; protect participants' confidentiality; consider the consequences of the study for participants; and carefully monitor and minimise the researcher effect on the study (Kvale, 1996). Certainly of initial concern to a small number of participants was my dual role of researcher and local political representative. The issue was overtly raised with all participants by myself to test for negative reaction or uneasiness about it. This up-front approach helped to gain trust and confidence amongst participants that this potential issue was being tackled in a professional manner. Effectively, the approach adopted for the research was to aim for an open-minded stance that also made clear that the two roles were entirely separate. In reality, this worked out well and did not ultimately seem to cause difficulties for participants. In fact, some participants were pleased to encounter a politician with an interest in and an appreciation of the day-to-day issues impacting on schools in inner city areas.

Anonymising of sources in the data was the standard method of not only providing reassurance to participants but in handling of the dilemma of the researcher's two roles. In general, respondents felt the research could provide beneficial sharing of positive practice and potential ways forward for schools/communities in similar situations, and to that end were willing participants. Outcomes from the two case studies are in the process of being shared with the three key participants, with a view to these being reflected in final comments prior to the end of the research project.

A number of issues arise concerning the dual roles of elected politician and researcher. Firstly, there is a methodological issue touching on validity of outcomes. It could be argued that respondents might recognise an underlying power relationship at play, no matter how professionally the work was undertaken by the researcher and no matter how remote this relationship might be. This could potentially lead to respondents telling the researcher answers that they feel he/she might want to hear about their motivations and approaches to their work. If so, this could clearly skew outcomes and undermine research validity.

In a sense, this is an issue applicable to qualitative research generally. For there is no guarantee that respondents will not be wishing to portray their professional motivations and daily actions in the most favourable light, and avoid negative interpretations in the research process of what they are doing and saying. To allow for this, qualitative case study research aims to: construct samples including individuals with different and relevant perspectives on the phenomena being looked at; triangulate methods; create situations where respondents feel comfortable enough to share their true feelings; and, wherever possible, to probe below the surface of values, motivations and actions to discover what is actually the case. Indeed, the way the researcher comes across to respondents in this type of research is absolutely crucial.

In the present case, every attempt was made to gain confidence of respondents and to provide reassurance about confidentiality and the positive research aim: to dimensionalise perceived "success" in tough circumstances. Additionally, the researcher demeanour aimed for genuine dialogue in the conduct of the fieldwork, avoidance of researcher-effect and the hint of any kind of power relationship in the interactions.

Secondly, an ethical perspective for research requires that every attempt is made particularly to:

- Provide utilitarian maximisation of the most good and least harm in each situation;
- Protect respondents' rights and, where possible, to seek for the extension of the rights of those being researched;
- Aim for maximum fairness of treatment in the conduct of the research; and
- Contribute wherever possible to the common good.

To a large extent, the ethical issues above can be handled in the day-to-day conduct of the research process and its interactions regardless of role, as long as credibility and relationships are carefully nurtured and safeguarded. Nevertheless, the role of local politician has a potential dynamic that can undermine relevant ethical considerations and create major difficulties. It is worth pointing out, however, that at no stage did this become an articulated issue for respondents in this piece of research.

Thirdly, it is probably true to say that the potentially negative dynamic referred to above is less of an issue the further away from the politician's immediate sphere of influence the research takes place. However, the potential difficulties probably apply throughout a region in reality, given the reach of the media and involvement of leading politicians in regional bodies. These potential difficulties revolve around such issues as: the potential for the press to take an interest in specific aspects of a piece of research; the way in which respondents' and institutions' anonymity could be undermined to their detriment; and events in a piece of research possibly being reinterpreted in the light of researcher wider roles in a negative and unfair way for all concerned.

For this reason, with the benefit of hindsight, conduct of research by a politician-researcher is probably best conducted outside their regional sphere of influence to avoid some of these potential difficulties. Certainly, in the present case, it has been agreed for the thesis to remain confidential for at least two years to overcome some of the above potential difficulties and to protect the ethical aims central to this type of research project.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the approach used in the *Case Studies*. The way in which these approaches and assumptions related to the methods, approaches to the fieldwork and to data analysis has also been outlined. Essentially, the methodological position for this work was qualitative and partly *critical theory* and *constructivist*. Whilst *grounded methods* were followed within a case study design, pre-existing personal hypotheses for the work alongside explicit stances were tested in reality in conjunction with emerging issues from the data itself. Whilst triangulation of methods was a feature of the case study design adopted, a particular and valuable tool within the fieldwork techniques were the "reality check interviews" with key respondents. These not only attempted a process of "getting below the surface" of key respondents' day-to-day experiences and values, but sought to track key issues and processes in an in-depth manner over time. A process of data analysis alongside data collection was characterised by reflective diarying and brainstorming, as well as a halfway-stage major review of processes, issues and themes arising from the data. In reality, the process of refining and analysing data outcomes took place in a number of stages, continuing well beyond the conclusion of the fieldwork. Refining and linking of data categories was a complex process arrived at through an interlinked *abductive* process involving: immersion in the data to make comparisons, deep reflection on linkages and contrasts, relationship back to research questions and explicit personal hypotheses, and linking of emerging outcomes to relevant life experience and literature findings.

Within the methodological framework and process outlined above, the data was analysed with a view to draw conclusions with potential wider application than simply the schools/communities involved in the studies. The themes, issues and theoretical outcomes which emerged from the case study data are considered in detail in the relevant chapters below.

Chapter 6

The Thurlby Case Study

Introduction

This chapter gives a detailed account of the case study conducted in the Thurlby community. This is the first of the two case studies conducted between December 2002 and July 2003 in similar yet contrasting highly disadvantaged communities. The structure of both data chapters involves the examination of:

1. *The Context*: an overview of the nature of each area and its local schools, drawing on initial exploratory fieldwork aimed at identifying major features and actors;

2. *Data Outcomes*: which identifies key issues and incidents encountered. These key matters have been chosen not only as important in their own right, but as vehicles for illustrating more fundamental issues related to the research questions (i.e. locating leadership, exploring leadership roles and values, exploring what is perceived to be successful, and what happens in initiatives). Each section of data display dealing with a key issue/incident has an explanatory introduction, followed by consideration of key themes and issues, and a final summary analysis of these outcomes.

3. *Conclusion*: This examines the key outcomes in a summative form, developing them further to link into the final three chapters.

The Context

In this section, an overview is given of the main features of the highly disadvantaged community of Thurlby, with specific issues that it faced. Quantitative matters are combined with qualitative assessments from an initial round of exploratory interviews with advisers and head teachers and the EAZ Co-ordinator prior to the study.

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Thurlby secondary's family of schools comprised: the Bellhouse Centre (nursery), Kyle Infants, Kyle Juniors, Pollard J. and I., Valentine J. and I., Downham Infants, Downham Juniors and Far View J. and I. The secondary was an 11-16 school, with post-16 provision locally principally being provided by the Technical and Sixth Form Colleges. These schools made up a small EAZ in the area to the east of the town centre. The outline application for an EAZ (1999:5) described the relevant features of the local area in terms that still largely applied at the time of the study: limited employment opportunities, high levels of social and economic disadvantage, limited aspirations within the local community, a significant number of pupils who have English as an additional language, and increasing disaffection as pupils move through the education system. Also, there were "relatively high levels of demotivation expressed in terms of: poor behaviour (resulting in fixed-term exclusions) and non-attendance, both being particularly noticeable amongst white boys, and high rates of teenage pregnancy".

The Excellence in Cities Action Zone Plan, (April 2003 to March 2004) stated that "statistical information confirms that the three wards which make up the zone's catchment area are within the poorest 2% of the wards of greatest deprivation in the country. When taking into account unemployment, earnings, housing conditions, health factors, free school meals and crime data all our feeder wards are in the top 200 of the 8418 in England. If anything the gap is widening" (p. 16).

The local Pathfinder Project fell within Thurlby's catchment area. Their delivery plan (2002:6-7) put unemployment in their area at double the borough's rate (11.8%), long term unemployment was at 29.8%, as was youth unemployment, way above local and national norms. Burglaries and criminal damage were much higher than the national average, and there was a high level of drug-related offences. Smoking and heart disease were at a significantly higher level than in other parts of the country overall. Anti-social behaviour was a major issue for local residents also, as was the quality of the local environment. So it is against this level of local difficulties that schools struggle to make progress with young people's education.

A key feature of the Thurlby community was its multi-cultural population. According to the Pathfinder project's baseline study the local area had an 18% black and ethnic

minority population, whereas the borough average was around 2%. According to the study:

> "Our community has a diverse demographic and ethnic make-up. There is a wide and active range of community organizations, interest based, faith groups, reflecting age gender and culture ....[Also] there is a relatively recent asylum seeker community" (2003:19)

According to Raja Hussain (Co-ordinator of the multi-cultural centre), the local Pakistani community:

> "is by far the largest black and ethnic minority community ... Alongside, there are Yemenis, Chinese and now asylum seekers. Ninety per cent of the Pakistani community is Mirpuri".

The local EAZ Action Plan also gave a snapshot of strengths and weaknesses of its schools, taken from Ofsted reports. Clearly, these reports were only part of the overall picture of what schools had been achieving but there were a lot of positives, generally outweighing any specific weaknesses. Schools were commended for a range of features, such as: the quality of teaching, good behaviour and relationships, good partnerships with parents, effective management and leadership, positive ethos, and strong teamwork. At the time of the study, none of the schools was designated as having specific weakness or failure, although this was true further back in the past.

The most recent Ofsted report for the secondary school unfortunately dated back to as long ago as 1999. At the time of the study, statistically and in reputational terms, the school had made significant progress since 1999. Nevertheless, the report pointed to some major positive features that have continued to be built upon, including (p.7): "the ... results are better than those in similar schools and pupils make good progress in most of their General Certificate of Secondary Education courses"; "the relationships at all levels and the pupils' personal development are very good"; "one fifth of the teaching is very good or better and three fifths is good or better"; "the provision for extra-curricular activities is especially strong"; "the support and guidance for extra-curricular activities is especially strong"; "the partnership with parents and the school's community is very strong"; and "leadership and management are strong", with "the ethos" being "especially positive".

The report described the school as "friendly and welcoming" (p.9). It also pointed to the school's belief in promoting links with the surrounding community, providing "an extensive range of fruitful contacts with community groups and external agencies which all have the ultimate objective of raising pupils' achievement" (p.22). At the same time, the school's leadership was characterized not only by a "capable senior management team" but also a head teacher providing "especially clear educational direction for the school" with the staff having a shared "sense of purpose" (p.23).

The initial round of pre-case study interviews yielded a good deal of useful perceptions about Thurlby's educational provision. There was a particular focus on early years, with the Bellhouse centre having a parents group to develop parenting skills. Ethnic minority community links were flagged up as a continuing priority, given the multicultural nature of the area. The EAZ was regarded as having had a positive impact, with the drivers for its initial development being viewed particularly as the heads of the secondary school and of Valentine primary. Rebuilding plans for the secondary school and an extension to Far View primary were perceived as having a potentially major positive impact on schooling in the area, and for community development too.

The involvement of local people in schools as workers was a growth area and generally welcomed as positive. Breakfast clubs, help for parents to be reading partners for their children and to learn about ICT were all believed to be benefiting local schools. But the involvement of parents in their children's schooling was an ongoing difficulty for schools, requiring constant effort. Indeed, breaking down barriers between school and home required persistent and patient endeavour by schools, given the often negative legacy of past educational failure for local families. Barriers were perceived to exist, too, between schools and partner service providers locally, so "joining-up" efforts in the area was viewed as a priority not only by the schools themselves but more widely. Whilst the head of the secondary school was regarded as a powerful leadership figure in the area, the shared leadership locally facilitated by the EAZ was generally regarded positively, having led to common targets and joint planning of activities to get schools working more as a group.

Data Outcomes

Introduction

As explained in Chapter 5, the initial case study plan was to track three "action issues" using "reality check" and semi-structured interviews, together with a small number of observation studies. So the study eventually focused-down on to one of these issues after an exploratory round of fieldwork. This focus issue was the *Pathway Scheme*, planned to be an innovative intervention for young people at the secondary school at risk of being excluded, due to their disaffected conduct. The scheme involved a team planning process and a range of staff including the head teacher, and was interesting in its own right as a project, touching on the central issue of school ethos/discipline, curriculum innovation and motivation of disaffected pupils. However, this issue was used in the research mainly as a vehicle for exploring local actors' perceptions about issues of values, leadership and "what works" in their highly disadvantaged community.

The overall range of respondents (see Box 6:1) reflects the initial wider scope of the study, and therefore issues touching on the entire age range of pupils, the working of the EAZ, and issues beyond the schools themselves are picked up. The initial round of mainly exploratory interviews was more informal in nature, with field notes being taken at the time, rather than being taped. "Reality check" interviews took place with the secondary head teacher over the entire case study period (eight months) at regular intervals, and for the first few months with the head of Far View Primary and the E.A.Z. co-ordinator. Again, field notes were taken of these sessions.

In the data display of this case study and the Burntake research (see next chapter), fieldnote extracts appear in italics, referenced "RCI" (Reality Check Interviews) or "Inf" (Informal Interviews) with the date. Fieldnotes of observation studies are reproduced in italics, referenced "F", also with the date.
(N.B.: Direct quotations are indicated by the use of inverted commas).

During the second half of the study, semi-structured and taped interviews producing verbatim data took place mainly with respondents associated with the

Pathway Scheme planning process. Extracts from these interviews appear in normal text in the data display, referenced "SSI" with the date.

The data in this chapter and in Chapter 7 is structured under four major headings. These headings ("Behaviour", "External Factors", "New Buildings" and "School Reputation/Values") represent major issues occurring in both families of schools and which genuinely arise from the data. The "External Factors" are, however, different in each case and the elements of both could have formed headings in their own right (e.g. Thurlby: the Iraq war critical incident and the issue of schools' relationship with their surrounding multi-cultural community; and Burntake: the impact of top-down policy imperatives at local level). Nevertheless, as these issues effectively act as a challenging context in each case, being able to examine schools' reaction to these challenges and potentially to draw comparisons about this aspect of their work was the most useful way to display this aspect of the data. Also, it is the case that although behaviour issues are relatively more prominent and pressing in the Burntake context, nevertheless this issue is a major feature of both studies with different emphases in practice and philosophical terms that were also of potential theoretical and practical interest.

Box 6:1

Thurlby Case Study Fieldwork

List of Interviewees

- Graham Cummings: head teacher of the secondary school
- Roy Payne: head teacher of Far View primary school
- Matthew Garwood: E.A.Z. co-ordinator
- Pat Webster: E.A.Z. literacy co-ordinator
- Norma Booth: E.A.Z. expressive arts co-ordinator
- Maureen Wilkinson: educational psychologist
- Raja Hussain: co-ordinator of the local multicultural centre
- Angela Senior: co-ordinator of the neighbourhood management pathfinder project
- Suzanne Swann: secondary school assistant head teacher
- Mona Robinson: adviser
- Rashid Khan: parent governor at the secondary school
- Meg Butler: governor at the secondary school
- Maureen Nash: learning support co-ordinator at the secondary school
- Chris Grant: senior learning mentor at the secondary school
- Erika Morton: guidance co-ordinator for curriculum at the secondary school

- **Observation Studies:**
  -Two Pathway Scheme planning meetings
  -An E.A.Z. head teachers meeting, and
  -A Community Partnership meeting about the secondary school's P.F.I. building plans
  (Detailed field notes were made of these meetings)

Summary of Key Themes and Issues

1. **Behaviour**
   - Where leadership was located
   - Models of leadership in action
   - Leadership values in action
   - Followership issues
   - Changing institutional practices
   - Issues of child-centredness and inclusion
   - Looking beyond the school
2. **External Factors**
   - The micro-politics of leadership
     *Boundary crossing
     *Doing things right
   - The elements of leadership strength
     *Meeting issues "head-on"
   - The lessons for leadership
   - Weighing contending values
   - Avoiding failure
   - Using a crisis as a relaunch
   - Leadership fragility
   - Followership issues
   - Calling upon pupil/parents goodwill
   - Meeting people on their terms
   - Role models
   - The role of community leaders/parents
   - Coping with school fragility
   - Fragility of relationships
3. **New Buildings**
   - The micro-politics of leadership
   - Providing a "holding environment"
   - Models of leadership in action
   - Mobilising for change
   - Raising aspiration
   - Inspiration of pupils
   - School at the heart of the community
   - Investment as a sign of value
4. **School Reputation/Values**
   - Issues of child-centredness and inclusion
   - The importance of creating a "genuinely comprehensive" intake
   - The micro-politics of leadership
     *Sense-making
   - Encouraging inter-agency co-operation
   - Leading in projects
   - Changing institutional practices
   - The importance of creating success
   - Rebuilding reputation in a challenging context
   - Coping with school fragility
   - The importance of family of schools co-operation
   - Looking wider than just education.

Certainly, the issue of reputation was a crucial one in both studies, particularly at secondary school level. Again, the way both families of schools had made progress with this and the differences between them were particularly interesting and instructive. Beneath the four broad headings, issues of leadership, practice and school/community interface also arise in the text, generally relating back to the research questions. These underlying issues and themes also genuinely represent the reality of focus for schools grappling with the day-to-day task of working in both these highly disadvantaged communities. (For a summary of themes and issues arising in the Thurlby Case Study see Box 6:2).

1. Behaviour

Introduction

Perceptions from the L.E.A. advisers I had spoken to in initial conversations were that the secondary school had made good progress in recent years, particularly under its current head teacher, and that this positive progression was continuing. However, Graham Cummings (the head teacher) flagged up to me early on in the study that *"the more you praise the ninety-five per cent, the more disaffected the other five per cent become"* (RCI:17/12/02). He planned to tackle this dozen or so highly challenging youngsters in each year group through a *Pathway Scheme*:

> *They're getting a group of children together around 13-19 development: an identified cohort of five per cent of children (ten to twelve in a year group Y8/Y9) around the issue of challenging behaviour ... [the aim being] to give this cohort intensive testing to see where their interests lie and see what to do at age seventeen (e.g. GNVQ in engineering). Identifying an "end-game", the aim is to see what literacy, numeracy and I.C.T. needs these children require, then everything else becomes subservient to that goal: curriculum, parents, behaviour.* (RCI:17/12/02)

Similarly, at the first observed *Pathway Scheme* meeting at the secondary school right at the start of the study, Graham had given out a short outline of his rationale for the planned initiative:

> *The objectives are: the provision of a more appropriate curriculum to engage these youngsters, the identification of appropriate pathways for these youngsters,*

promotion of more positive post-16 progression routes, and the raising of attainment for these young people both at KS3 and KS4. Again, Suggested activities are: identifying a cohort of eight to ten young people, an intensive spring/summer term programme of careers guidance, identifying for each child an appropriate post-16 goal and the required skill levels for access, determine a KS3/KS4 programme to provide necessary knowledge and skill to enter the chosen post-16 activity, identify opportunities for GCSE entry in Y9, Y10 and Y11 (particularly in English, science and maths) and trade experiences. (F:9/1/03)

The core team of staff he drew together to jointly plan the programme and explore possibilities were:

- himself as chair

- Maureen Nash (Learning Support Co-ordinator)

- Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher)

- Chris Grant (Senior Learning Mentor), and

- Erika Morton (Guidance Co-ordinator for Curriculum)

These were supplemented by other staff connected with this area of work, a local youth worker and LEA advisers.

Planning meetings took place every month or so, with named individuals being tasked to work up proposals and plan activities to report back progress at subsequent meetings. The planning meetings took place in the main school building, which dated back to the early twentieth century, with classrooms leading off an open central library area on two levels. The meetings were business-like but informal and generally good-natured, with the chair putting forward his ideas for the scheme and then allowing detailed scrutiny of the proposals to be made by his colleagues, particularly the practicalities of the project. The initiative was interesting in its own right, particularly as a possible way of working with challenging secondary school youngsters in a highly disadvantaged community: in other words, from a practice and curriculum innovation standpoint.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose during the study, related to the operation of the *Pathway Scheme.* The driving force behind the scheme was clearly the head teacher, but his approach to planning the programme was one where he expected the core group of his colleagues to work up ideas into practical proposals. Maureen Nash (Learning

Support Co-ordinator) described the group's way of working at one of the planning meetings I had attended:

> "Each of us had a particular job to bring to the meeting. And Suzanne was doing the timetable, the action plan if you like about how things are going to pan out over time. I was bringing the academic profiles and talking about their accessibility to the curriculum and Chris had done the careers profiles and actually spoken to the kids about what they see their future as and the involvement they wanted." (SSI:20/5/03)

Chris Grant (Senior Learning Mentor) also described how one of her tasks for the planning group was to look "at various other avenues that could be a possibility for these kids to work and experience from". (SSI:20/5/03)

The head teacher felt that *"Most staff are on-board but partly dreading the extra work"* (RCI:6/3/03)), due to the day-to-day stresses of their jobs. In fact, this issue of potential pressure on staff was raised at one of the planning meetings:

> *The issue of the relative expense to the school involved in dealing effectively with these pupils was raised, including the "wear and tear" on staff themselves. However, it was recognised that these children generate substantial costs already, whether there's a programme or not. (F:9/1/03)*

To overcome these and other concerns, Graham Cummings had to persuade and explain to his colleagues. Pat Webster (EAZ worker) characterised Graham's general leadership approach as *"strong in his ideas and persuasive. He makes things happen ... by constantly coming back to the agenda, keeping focused on important issues"* (Inf:17/3/03) and this certainly was my experience of his way of working with the *Pathway Scheme*.

Further, Mona Robinson (Adviser) said of Graham Cummings' philosophical approach to his work that "he's really into this transformational leadership" (SSI:30/7/03). She also thought that:

> "He's unique, partly because he's visionary and he's actually got quite an academic approach to some things but he actually gets on very well a) with the kids and b) with the bulk of, you know, the frontline staff, which for a head in that sort of school is actually quite unusual." (SSI:30/7/03)

These philosophical views about leadership arguably expressed themselves in terms of aiming for shared ownership of the scheme's values and planning processes by his staff. But he also wanted a "champion" from amongst this group of colleagues apart from himself, to drive the work forward in an effective way:

> *[He told me that] Chris Grant (Senior Learning Mentor) has said she would like to be its co-ordinator. Co-ordination, he believes, is crucial to projects like this. Children need advocates, he asserts: someone who will drive things through for them. (RCI:18/3/03)*

Arguably, Graham Cummings' values of child-centredness were central to this scheme. In getting his staff to deliver an effective programme, he needed to encourage a similar view amongst his colleagues. So, for instance, at the first planning meeting that I attended, Graham punctuated the session with remarks such as:

> *"We need to inspire [the children on the scheme] ... and get them through to something useful at post-16 level",*
>
> *"The issue is the perceived increasing number of disaffected youngsters who are not getting enough out of school as it is currently structured. Nevertheless it is vital for these young people to get some meaningful qualifications while they're at school",*
>
> *He feels that "we shepherd these kids through fairly well" but that the process needs "turning on its head" by asking them at Y8/Y9 level what they would find useful and interesting with an end result in mind for the individual at post-16 level, and*
>
> *"We're making them fit the curriculum at the moment". (Some people agreed and others disagreed). (All F:9/1/03)*

Mona Robinson (Adviser) characterised his approach as being:

> "Very much about individual young people achieving as much as they can do if you sat in his office and there's a teacher outside shouting at a child and, you know, he doesn't like the tone of what's being said he'll go out, bring the teacher in he'll not put up with children or parents being spoken to in a way that he wouldn't want to be spoken to himself." (SSI:30/7/03)

His colleagues generally reacted well to this child-centred approach, but with inevitable concerns being expressed in the planning meetings about practicalities of implementation. Certainly Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) was fully on-board with Graham's vision:

"Everything we do [as a school] is designed to challenge the low self-esteem, the levels of disaffection,[and] the low literacy levels the pupils bring with them." (SSI:12/5/03)

The micro-politics of the headteacher's advocacy of this scheme and its realisation was a significant leadership issue during the planning process. His enthusiasm and credibility as a leader, underpinned by values that resonated with his staff assisted with his getting the scheme accepted over a period of months. This micro-political situation was characterised as follows:

> He believes [the Pathway scheme] ... will happen because people feel it is a good idea but staff are concerned at the same time about their own personal workloads. He feels he initiates a lot of development in the school and is sometimes in a position of having to "cajole" staff into action. He admits this can be somewhat "top-down" ...He prefers things to be "bottom-up" wherever possible.
> (RCI:18/3/03)

So, in the planning meetings, he was persuasive with staff in his advocacy of the scheme, answered their concerns and encouraged openness about potential difficulties but was clear that he wanted the work to go ahead. In this sense, he managed the politics of the situation in a careful but firm manner, asking at points in the discussion for commitment to his ideas, which he received from colleagues: *[Graham Cummings:]* *"Any reservations about the proposal?" There was general enthusiasm for the proposal."* (F:9/1/03). He also, however, made it clear about the direction of travel politically that the work was taking. For instance: *"As you can see I want this to happen."* (F:9/1/03)

Where he could sense reservations from staff in the group, he checked to see they were on-board from time to time. For instance: *"Maureen, you're very quiet. Are we alright with this so far?"* (F:6/3/03). The same staff member had expressed some reservations at the previous meeting about whether the scheme was going to be radical enough to deliver for these young people and Graham had had to not only reassure her towards the end of that discussion but had talked to her afterwards about her worries, to keep her on-side. This appeared to me to be an effective piece of micro-political working on these occasions.

A number of practice issues arose in connection with the scheme. As the planning

meetings progressed, it became clear that the individualised and child-centred approach to this work was going to be constrained by practicalities, mainly timetabling issues. This had been a fear of both Graham Cummings (Headteacher) and also some of his colleagues in the course of the work. As it turned out, the Y9 group were due to access only a fairly narrow range of options outside core subjects the following term, as explained by the assistant head teacher:

> "Depending on how well they access the curriculum, they will either be in the core subjects or they'll be in the mentor base - working on the core subjects and then there will be various activities using the learning mentors to supplement that . So although within one double option block we really are only offering construction and engineering we probably will also offer some entry level courses there this year, maybe a food, maybe an ICT course. So there are four options and those will take place in other points in the curriculum as well." (SSI:12/5/03)

In practice, then, the ten or a dozen young people identified for the Pathway Scheme who were just choosing their options for Y10 courses were being moved only part of the way towards the child-centred approach originally envisaged at the start of the planning meetings. Maureen Nash (Learning Support Co-ordinator) had been concerned about the possible outcome of the process from the beginning. However, her attitude to progress made was philosophical and pragmatic:

> "We're constrained by the school as an institution, the school and its timetabling, the school and its staff and I think the further we can get away from that with these kids the better. I'm happy with the way it's panned out at the moment. We are going to be able to give the kids a lot of options which I think they need other than the national curriculum, because it's obviously failed them in lots of ways. They are not capable of accessing the curriculum as it stands at the moment. And I feel this Pathways project will go some way towards addressing that for them." (SSI:20/5/03)

She believed that while "it's still an element of fitting the kids into the system rather than the other way   round", nevertheless "the team that have been chosen and have become involved with the Pathways are committed to making it work."

So, the *Pathway Scheme* planning started from a child-centred and inclusive perspective but staff associated with the planning of the work inevitably encountered practical difficulties in carrying this approach into the final shape of the programme. Nevertheless, staff connected with the scheme shared strong child-centred views about ways of tackling disaffected students. For instance, Chris Grant (Senior Learning

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Mentor) believed that if the national curriculum "doesn't work" for the young people on the scheme, the school needed to find a way of providing something more positive for them, which she believed the programme would be. She felt that the important aspect of the scheme's proposed way of working was to enable the youngsters to access "different experiences, getting different life experiences or work."

There was an intention by the staff planning the work to avoid stigmatising the children on the scheme:

> *There was a desire not to create a "sin bin" of young people out of this project but rather for an individual path to be created for each child.* To this end, *It was felt to be necessary to negotiate with the kids on their terms [and they believed] ...it wouldn't work if they're put together as a group.* (F:9/1/03)

Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher*)* believed the school needed to make the extra effort to accommodate these pupils educationally for moral as well as practical reasons: "because I wouldn't like to be in that child's place." She added, "We could see that the system wasn't going to work for them so we needed to work for them a little bit harder" (Both quotes SSI:12/5/03). So she felt that:

> "If we need to treat these children differently if we want them to have a lifestyle that we would be happy with, we have to treat them differently because that's why we're educators." (SSI:12/5/03)

Maureen Nash (Learning Support Co-ordinator) believed that relationships were key to disaffected children's performance in school:

> "I feel the relationships that they form in school are going to be the most important angle. Because I think if you can win a child over because they trust you, because they feel that you've got something to offer, because you're not seen as judgmental or criticising their particular lifestyle, apart from their behaviour in school, then you're well on the way to winning them over anyway. So I would always say that the relationship build-up is the most important angle." (SSI:20/5/03)

A number of school/community interface issues arose that touched on this scheme. The relationships angle lay behind Suzanne Swann's (Assistant Headteacher) belief that parents were extremely important in helping staff motivate these challenging pupils:

> "They're really important because we don't come into contact with the pupils enough to keep them motivated and focused and certainly we need to do some parental INSET training as well. We actually need some quite positive talk from

the parents to keep these kids on track. So the parents need to be involved in the discussion about the child's potential career and then to wholeheartedly support the decision." (SSI:12/5/03)

To aid this process of engaging parental involvement with their children's education, she believed the work of learning mentors was potentially vital, as "the learning mentors we employ are people from the area so they get on really well with the majority of parents". Similarly, Maureen Nash (Learning Support Co-ordinator) felt the role of parents with youngsters on the Pathway scheme was crucial to its success:

> "I would always bring the parents in and make sure that they know all about it, what we're trying to offer, and get their not just consent but ... their involvement in it if possible." (SSI:20/5/03)

Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) went further in how she characterised the school's position in its surrounding disadavantaged community, saying "we need to be part of the community to succeed". This was because:

We provide skilled individuals to help the community prosper and they provide us with encouragement, support, whatever to help us prosper." (SSI:12/5/03)

She saw this particularly working in the school's favour with the input to the school from local learning mentors:

> "Learning mentors are good and the learning mentors we take from the community have got a passion about the community. You can't really recreate that and people from the community have that from day one" (SSI:20/5/03).

Summary

Clearly, Graham Cummings the head teacher came across as the major driving force for this initiative, and also in the school more generally. He, nevertheless, sought to be collaborative in the way he went about the planning of the Pathway scheme, aiming for the senior learning mentor to be its "champion". The other key leadership figure in this process was arguably the Assistant Headteacher, Suzanne Swann, who was tasked to make the timetable arrangements fit the needs of the young people destined for the scheme. The Learning Support Co-ordinator, Maureen Nash, also provided low-key but critical input to the planning process from a very child-centred philosophical standpoint. The perception gained from the study was that staff planning the scheme were

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motivated to make it work partly because they came to share the head teacher's child-centred approach on this issue, but also because they believed that the *Pathway Scheme* stood a good chance of providing a positive outcome for some of the most challenging young people in the school.

Whether Graham Cummings provided "transformational leadership" in this situation is arguable. However, he was perceived by those around him as a strong leader who made things happen in the school. His wish was to be "bottom-up" in his approach, but he himself felt circumstances often created a "top-down" way of working to ensure success. Both the head and his staff appeared to have strong child-centred views about the educational task they were involved in but also had a very practically-based approach to their work also.

Graham Cummings had a good grasp of the micro-politics of the situation in the planning of the *Pathway Scheme*. He felt the need to "cajole" his staff at times but appeared to face practical difficulties in discussing with colleagues with honesty and care, whilst at the same time aiming to ensure that the end-result of delivering for these young people remained firmly in view. He checked to see that colleagues with concerns about aspects of the work were kept on board, and made a point of stating and re-stating the underlying values he brought to the scheme, to encourage and inspire people involved in the planning process. He therefore appeared to possess a high level of people skills in this situation, coupled with a relentless attention to detail in the planning of the scheme.

During the study, actors felt that they were likely only to achieve some of their original aims with the Scheme and its young people. However, staff involved in the planning work were philosophical and pragmatic about this. It seems to me that their shared child-centred orientation was likely to be a success factor for the young people involved. Staff commitment, also, to involve parents in a realistic way also stood a good chance of helping the young people involved to get the maximum out of this innovatory programme.

2. External Factors

Introduction

As previously pointed out, Thurlby school is surrounded by a multi-cultural community where particular efforts need to be made by educators and others to raise confidence locally and overcome their barriers to learning. So this is a crucial issue for schools to get right and therefore an interesting matter to examine. The data raises interesting matters about what schools locally experience and aim to achieve to ensure inclusion of ethnic minority children and their families.

Of relevance here, too, was a critical incident that occurred at the secondary school on the outbreak of war in Iraq, during the period of the study. The war and this incident had a potential to destabilise the surrounding multi-cultural community, undo years of work to engage with that community, as well as having a potentially devastating effect on the painstaking improvements achieved in recent years. Basically, some two hundred Y8 and Y9 pupils from the school left school and went into town, causing trouble. According to Mona Robinson (adviser) it was "not a riot but they were messing about." (SSI:30/7/03). Graham Cummings (head teacher) described it as *"war fallout [that was] ... a misguided response with children taking advantage of it ...He was concerned they'd lost it."* (RCI:20/5/03) The critical incident was illustrative mainly of leadership issues.

Key Themes and Issues

Firstly, a number of leadership issues arose in relation to external influences on the secondary school. Speaking both generally and also in the context of Thurlby school's relationship with its surrounding multi-cultural community, Rashid Khan (school governor) believed that:

> "Since Mr. Cummings came actually as the headteacher there has been a great improvement actually I'd say at the school. Now everybody wants to send their children to this school." (SSI:11/7/03)

As a headteacher, Graham Cummings arguably possessed very good people skills that enabled him to move beyond the school to engage with parents and community

members in a relatively easy and open manner. Micro-politically, this process of successful boundary crossing and doing the right things as far as a diverse range of parents and local people were concerned appeared to have paid dividends both for the school's and the head's reputation. For Raja Hussain (Co-ordinator of the Multi-cultural Centre):

> *He believes Graham Cummings is highly respected and drives Thurlby school to do well and engage well with its community, and ethnic minority people particularly.* (Inf:22/7/03)

The headteacher's strong leadership qualities also came to the fore when he had to deal with the Iraq war incident at his school. The general perception amongst respondents was that the good set of relationships with the surrounding community not only stood the school in good stead in dealing with the fall-out from the war as far as the ethnic minority community was concerned, but also in general terms. Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) characterised Graham Cummings as "strong" in terms of his leadership. She also described the response to the incident as senior and middle managers in the school "standing firm" in the face of "unrest in the student body" (All SSI:12/5/03). According to her, this "hard line" consisted of:

> "exclusions, temporary exclusions, readmittance, code of conduct, parents and everything ... and children were eventually ashamed of what they'd done, the majority. If we weren't happy with their responses then they didn't come back." (SSI:12/5/03)

However, according to Mona Robinson (Adviser), Graham Cummings took charge of the situation, almost single-handedly:

> "It was perfectly obvious that he was the person who had got control over this. He knew exactly how he was going to manage it ...[and] it's quite obvious to him I think, you know "if I wasn't here what would be happening?"" (SSI:30/7/03)

So, this leadership strength of the headteacher appears to have been exhibited on this occasion through taking hold of events and confronting them "head-on" in a very decisive way. In this situation of high stress and challenge it was necessary for Graham to take charge and get his leadership team all acting together in an effective way to combat the disorder and its aftermath. What motivated the head was his determination that:

"they come out stronger and better. He is concerned to maintain the right ethos in the school. "It was a massive opportunity to restate what you're about" [but] ... it was "the worst three days of my life"", (RCI:20/5/03)

This almost "apocalyptic" language was due to its extremely serious and make-or-break nature as an event in the life of the school. However, he explained, too:

> *how he used humour to deal with the trouble when he did an assembly the next day in upper school.* (RCI:20/5/03)

This ability to confront a serious situation in a way that engaged the pupils through jokes as well as extreme measures, demonstrated what others have described as his leadership strength in a graphic manner, involving valuable people skills and micro-political ability.

In deciding what to do as the crisis was threatening to spiral out of control, the headteacher will have had to determine a course of action which put the maintenance of ethos and orderliness above all else. Other contending values of child-centredness and mutual respect were clearly made subject to the integrity of the school as a functioning establishment on this occasion, given the seriousness of the incident. The overriding need for the school at this time was to avoid failure in the face of a crisis and to be seen to be successful in dealing with it in the wider community. In that sense the event and how it was dealt with stated a lot about the school and its leadership: arguably that leadership, whilst shared in many ways, on this occasion came from the top in a very strong manner and the timeliness and appropriateness of the response enabled the school to emerge in a strong way from the crisis. The school, then, possessed the capacity to deal with something that could have undermined in a single incident on a single day the good progress of recent years painstakingly won.

Nevertheless, in spite of perceived success on this occasion in dealing with this critical incident, the event was illustrative of the fragility of schools like Thurlby, serving a highly disadvantaged community. It also showed the potential fragility of leadership and hard-won success, with crises caused by outside factors waiting around the next corner in this kind of context. It illustrated, too, that without followers who share the headteacher's values and approach in a crisis like this, a united response in the face of a

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severe difficulty would be impossible. On this occasion the school was able to pull together and call on their shared values as an organisation, pupils as well as staff.

Finally, Suzanne Swann (Assistant Head) believed the Iraq war itself and its aftermath had been extremely sensitive for relationships in school, particularly as they served a multi-ethnic community with a sizeable Muslim population:

> "It could have been awkward and we managed that tension and we have had tensions over the last couple of months where it could have gone badly wrong for us but because of the relationships we have with the Asian families, the Asian community, it's been kept manageable. It's been kept out of school really." (SSI:12/5/03)

So, strength of leadership together with a bedrock of positive relationships with the surrounding school community enabled Thurlby school on this occasion to weather the storm of this incident, and to come out stronger as an organization.

A number of other issues also concerned the school's relationships with its surrounding community. The work done to meet ethnic minority people on their terms to establish their cultural needs in the new secondary school building had gone down particularly well, according to Rashid Khan (school governor):

> "I found it was a very positive step ... to look at the needs of the children from the different communities and their religious beliefs and to see how we can meet their needs ... for instance the changing facilities, we've looked into that as well and we're looking at the prayer areas as well." (SSI:11/7/03)

According to Pat Webster (EAZ Literacy Co-ordinator):

> *The issue of working with ethnic minority families is a major one [and] ... being accepted by the Asian community is crucial and she feels she does have their broad approval most of the time. Asian families tend, she feels, to be more appreciative of efforts to help than counterpart white families.* (Inf:17/3/03)

So where a successful connection is made with Asian and other cultural groups locally, this can be a major plus for the work of local educators. However the picture was mixed in this local area. For instance, at Far View primary school, the headteacher had not found these links easy to make: with parents in general, but particularly with Asian parents. According to the headteacher Roy Payne:

Work with parents had been a real struggle, in spite of a lot of effort being put in: ICT groups, coffee mornings etc. The work had "not been wonderfully successful"... The school had debated with Ofsted whether it should be a priority for action in the future and the conclusion had been that it shouldn't be, due to the lack of success with initiatives. However, he had had a meeting with a couple of Asian parents in the autumn where they complained about lack of working with parents ... So Roy now intended to write to parents again to float the idea of forming a parents group. (RCI:8/1/03)

The issue of role models was potentially a crucial one for reaching and assisting ethnic minority children and their families. According to Roy Payne, bilingual staff were potentially extremely important. For instance, in the context of the plan to employ an outreach worker between the EAZ and the local *Pathfinder Project* he felt:

> *It had potential for improving the local situation, particularly if the person was bilingual and could be used to break down barriers between schools and, particularly, Asian parents. (RCI:8/1/03)*

Local workers and community role models were already playing a positive part in improving school/community links at the secondary school, according to Rashid Khan (school governor):

> "A local councillor ...[is] actively involved into the school's activities and there's a youth worker, Qurban Rafiq, he's actively involved, actually, in the school's activities. So we all jointly support the school as well and we make sure the needs of the ethnic community are met as well within the schools." (SSI:11/7/03)

To this end, a school trip to Kashmir had been organised involving white as well as ethnic minority children, "half and half", visiting refugee camps and local schools over there. Qurban Rafiq had organised the trip and whilst over there, the group had recognised some of the chronic poverty and lack of clean water as two major issues affecting the local population, and according to Rashid Khan (school governor):

> "They brought a lot of good things back as well as doing, actually, in front of the whole school and in front of parents. So it was quite useful ... I mean, this is the way I'm thinking this school is progressing and involving the community more. I think [as a result] parents are more confident about the school." (SSI:11/7/03)

Rashid also felt that progress was being made at the secondary school with employment of staff, but that this was a slow process:

> "I know there has been an increase, actually, in the number of staff from the ethnic minorities. But there is lacking, actually, towards the qualified teachers.

We need actually more teachers from the ethnic minority ethnic community."
(SSI:11/7/03)

He also believed, though, that in spite of positive progress with parents there was still a long way to go:

> "I think there's a lot of things we need to do at the moment really in terms of involving the community more. Like, I still feel the people from the ethnic events in the school they are not actively involved, they're not coming, and they need to be encouraged and information should go through to them as well." (SSI:11/7/03)

In the context of a highly disadvantaged community like Thurlby, relationships can be extremely fragile between a school and its local population, but nevertheless crucial. A challenging context means that fragility is part of the everyday local situation and this needs to be constantly worked on to make a difference in outcomes. As Graham Cummings (Headteacher) said: *"Everything's precarious in a school/community like this ... particularly in a mixed ethnic community."* (RCI:20/5/03). This fragility was made more problematic by an ethnically mixed surrounding community, but this additional complexity could arguably also offer added value, if handled right.

According to Angela Senior (Co-ordinator of the Local Management *Pathfinder Project*):

> *Local parents feel "marginalised" according to the project's baseline study ... a lack of being openly welcomed by schools is the general feedback.* (Inf:10/4/03)

An example of this lack of positive links as far as ethnic minority parents were concerned was an incident at Far View towards the beginning of the study:

> *The school was down to about sixty children due to unauthorised absence of the majority Asian children because of Eid ... [Roy, the head] is concerned about the Asian kids just taking the day off.* (RCI:11/2/03)

This raised a number of issues about the school's relationship with its surrounding multi-cultural community, about: how this unsatisfactory situation can have arisen, the nature of links with these parents, and whether genuine two-way communication and planning could have possibly facilitated families to celebrate Eid and at the same time met their commitments to their children's education. The potential effects of the impending war in Iraq were also touched on in my conversations with the head of Far View:

[A month beforehand] I asked about the possible effect on the Asian children and parents from likely war in Iraq. [Roy] felt that this is likely to have a minimal effect. September 11th hadn't had a major effect and they'd done work in assembly to focus on terrorism, not religious issues. He said they have to deal with racism in school but in a low-key way. (RCI:30/1/03)

These problematic and even negative aspects of relationships locally were also rooted in wider issues from the past, according to Raja Hussain (Co-ordinator of the Multi-cultural Centre):

> *"Politically, the borough has been paternalistic and traditionally even racist" but this has changed a lot under the then council leader and moved forward ... The council has been forced to change radically particularly in the area of race equality.* (Inf:22/7/03)

Nevertheless, Rashid Khan (school governor) believed that the secondary school had gained his trust and those of other ethnic minority parents partly and significantly through the achievement of good examination results by their children. The leadership strengths of the headteacher and his team together with their confidence-building endeavours were important for local people, he believed. But ultimately, he felt, what engendered confidence in the school was improving results for local children. In a context of high disadvantage this is extremely difficult to achieve, but nevertheless a critical issue for local people when assessing the worth of their local school:

> "After my first child had gone through Thurlby school and he was doing really well ... He's got nine or ten GCSEs and most of them C-plus, actually, and some Bs as well ... I built up confidence in the school." (SSI:11/7/03)

Summary

The head of the secondary school, Graham Cummings, was perceived as having brought about a great improvement in his school's links with its surrounding multi-cultural community. He was also felt to possess the people and political skills to cross boundaries successfully and to gain the confidence of his local community, including people from its ethnic minorities. So his leadership was once again believed by respondents to be making a major difference locally.

Arguably, too, the head teacher Graham Cummings' strong and decisive leadership on the occasion of the Iraq war incident had inspired his colleagues to take firm and unified

action that had a successful outcome, in the face of a dangerous crisis for the school. He had been motivated to take a tough line as he saw the potential for the crisis to undo years of positive work in the school to provide a good ethos built on mutual respect, and that made possible the progressive improvement in outcomes year-on-year that had been taking place.

The head teacher was able on this occasion to decide that the overriding value to be upheld was that of school integrity as an organisation. He also demonstrated both a high level of political and people skills that enabled him and his staff to pull everyone together afterwards, including the pupils. Also, the perceived good relationships locally, particularly with Muslim parents, enabled the school to weather the storm of the Iraq war and its aftermath without too much difficulty following the initial crisis. Nevertheless, the incident demonstrated the fragility of leadership and school progress in highly disadvantaged context such as Thurlby.

The secondary school's efforts to plan for ethnic minority cultural and religious needs in the new building and the way this had been done stood the chance of raising confidence in the school still further in the local area, it was believed. However, there was still a mixed picture of perception and success locally for the family of schools in overall terms, as far as ethnic minority people were concerned. Far View's parental links were perceived to be problematic, particularly with ethnic minority parents, as the Eid event demonstrated in graphic terms.

Some of the ethnic minority role models were producing positive results, particularly at the secondary school. Even though the number of ethnic minority workers overall was increasing the number of teachers from ethnic minority communities was deemed to be insufficient to make enough impact. At the same time parents needed constantly to be encouraged to get involved in school activities.

Overall, in spite of some good progress made in recent years in this crucial area of work, relationships remained fragile, as is typical of this highly disadvantaged kind of community. So constant effort would have to be made by all concerned to maximise educational outcomes and local relationships and to continue making progress in tough circumstances. Arguably what engenders trust and confidence most is examination and

other success by pupils, including ethnic minority youngsters. This is likely to be a tough thing to achieve in a highly disadvantaged context such as Thurlby and a constant struggle for educators working there.

3. New Buildings

Introduction

At the time of this study, the secondary school was bracing itself for major changes. The LEA had agreed that a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project should rebuild the school on one site, with "state of the art" modern facilities. The project was to combine new buildings with a new specialist status bid, adding to building investment due to happen at Far View school down the road. The specialist status bid, for sport and art, was designed to build on the emphasis in the EAZ in recent years on the same area of work. The purpose of this emphasis was to provide additional inspiration for pupils in this highly disadvantaged area, to encourage them to value their education beyond the specialism itself.

The new buildings and specialist status were designed also to impact positively on local perceptions of the school. Reputation and local relationships for a school like Thurlby were clearly key to its future success, given that the natural tendency was for local residents to be cynical about their secondary school provision and about the intentions of "the powers that be". This tendency was rooted in likely experiences of local people over many years characterized by failed promises, problematic school histories and deprivation. So, breaking through this history to make something far more positive was extremely difficult, particularly where reputation was concerned. Making a secondary school like Thurlby truly a community resource that people value was a constant battle, both in practicalities and also as far as winning the hearts and minds of people was concerned. Also, making links with other local regeneration projects and thus providing the most supportive environment for local people possible was also a major struggle for schools such as this. Nevertheless, it was clear that this school building programme provided a huge opportunity to make a real difference locally in Thurlby. So, as well as making a continuing success of school outcomes against the odds, Graham Cummings and his staff now had the additional challenge of maximizing the potential for the

school and its surrounding community of this major new project.

Like local authorities up and down the country, Thurlby's LEA had been under-investing in its school buildings for many years previous to this study taking place. Suddenly, resources were being made available to begin reversing this capital shortfall and the secondary school was due to benefit the most locally. So, this represented a very significant development not only within the EAZ but for the local community's regeneration.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose in relation to the proposed new school building work. Certainly, the challenges posed by moving the secondary school to take on specialist status at the same time as having a rebuild on one site were considerable. Managing this process successfully, whilst dealing with all the logistical, relationship and potential morale issues in a large inner-city secondary school was a big leadership challenge for the head teacher and his staff. Inevitably, this was a massive opportunity as well, but the process of moving from one situation to the new environment was a challenging prospect, nevertheless. A major leadership task, then, was for the headteacher and his staff to provide a "holding environment" sufficiently stable and purposeful to move the school through to a successful outcome.

Mona Robinson (Adviser) encapsulated the nature of the task thus:

> "Obviously some of the tensions will come round with PFI and actually how you maintain all of the school improvement and regeneration activities while coping with PFI ... Whether that's possible and taking on specialist status, whether that's possible or not only time will tell." (SSI:30/7/03)

Similarly, Meg Butler (school governor) expressed her concerns about how the changes would be managed:

> "How on earth they're going to get on with PFI, I just feel so sorry for them. I only come down once every half term to the meetings for premises and finance, and it's been a nightmare". (SSI:16/7/03)

An observation study was made of a meeting held towards the end of the study where the building plans had been shared with a classroom full of local residents. After a rather negative set of questions about the status and purpose of the meetings from one or two residents, the head teacher, one or two of his staff, an LEA officer, and someone from the firm of contractors took people through the plans. Questions were taken as the meeting proceeded, with Graham Cummings (Headteacher) sitting on a desk in an informal manner and answering most of them. He had an easy manner and dealt with the concerns about site safety and the impact on the local area in a patient and effective way. In short, he was reassuring and positive. However, he used the opportunity, as did other staff, to promote a vision of what the school could provide in the community and to encourage local people to share that vision:

> *Graham started to wind up by saying that this is a "massive opportunity" for young people in the area but that local residents' needs are to be taken into account as well. He made reference to "striking the right balance" between increasing opportunity and minimising nuisance. His comments went down well generally. Reassurances were given about TUPE transfer for existing staff. Graham said the future security arrangements should be superior to what exist now. (F:3/6/03)*

So, the headteacher encouraged his staff and the surrounding community to use the impending changes at the school to make a positive advance on a range of fronts. Graham Cummings was concerned that the needs of different faith groups attending the school would be accommodated satisfactorily in the new school. So he consulted with local people to establish the best arrangements, going out to local mosques as part of the consultation. Rashid Khan (school governor) said this piece of work was:

> "One of things in terms of the different ethnic communities within the catchment that has been very positive." (SSI:11/7/03)

Knowing the crucial opportunity that this offered the school to cement positive links with the surrounding community and to further enhance its growing reputation, the school and its leadership set about promoting a positive vision for the school and its surrounding area. This vision was one where local people were encouraged to lift their horizons and those of their young people, to build a brighter and more successful future.

Some specifically school/community interface issues also arose here. Continuing the

theme from the above community meeting, Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) spoke enthusiastically about how these initiatives stood a good chance of raising aspiration locally and inspiring pupils in their schooling. She characterised the future for the school as being:

> "All singing, all dancing. We've got this performing arts status [coming up] so we'll be a new school which will be quite - judging by the plans - it will be an impressive new building. So that will provide opportunities for the community for the catchment area and within that we're talking about more community services. I can see us not just educating eleven to sixteen year olds but involved in the training of adults whether we're training adults to be learning mentors or whether we're training adults to be involved in the performing arts, but certainly giving other people opportunities that perhaps they didn't have. Feeding success is how I see it anyway. Performances, competitions in this part of town." (SSI:12/5/03)

This view was in line with what Pat Webster (Educational Psychologist) said about how a school should relate to its surrounding highly disadvantaged community:

> *"The community dimension of the school['s way of] working is crucial: the school must be relevant to the community's lives."* (Inf:17/3/03)

And Raja Hussain (Co-ordinator of the Local Multi-cultural Centre) believed that this was likely to be the outcome of the current school developments, including the improvements at Far View primary across the road:

> *The new building will, he feels, provide a major opportunity for schools to engage more effectively with the community.* (Inf:22/7/03)

Rashid Khan (school governor) was enthusiastic about the inspirational potential the sport and art specialiasm for the secondary school had for pupils:

> "If you're not confident as a child, even if you're reading all day in the class or at home, if you're not confident it's hard to deliver it or say it to somebody else, or to express your views, then it becomes really difficult and for that child's future career, actually. So whereas, getting into sport, building up your confidence seems to give you more confidence to express your feelings to people and to express your views more openly." (SSI:11/7/03)

This specialist area of work had already been successful in involving local people and in spreading a positive reputation for the secondary school, according to Meg Butler (school governor):

> "Wc have a sports evening where the trophies and things are presented ... it's a wonderful night and the pupils that go to get trophies and medals and things, it's

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fantastic. The hall is full. It's full of pupils and full of parents. So that's within Thurlby but of course they play these sports with other schools, so Thurlby is spreading the word out to other schools as well about how good they are at sport." (SSI:16/7/03)

The head teacher, Graham Cummings, was keen for the new buildings to put the school at the heart of the community and to aid local regeneration, as he said at the community consultation meeting:

> *There's not enough for local people to do and the school can be of benefit to the community generally.* (F:3/6/03)

Similarly, at the same meeting:

> *The deputy head pointed out that the inclusion of a youth facility in the plan would be a positive development.* (F:3/6/03)

The head teacher and his colleagues were conscious of the importance of reputation to the success of their establishment. As has been pointed out already, the school had made steady progress in recent years so that there was now competition for places, with its reputation generally enhanced as a result. Clearly many inner city schools have to struggle with the reputation issue, and poor reputations are notoriously difficult to shake off. In spite of "value-added" measures of performance being used in current league tables of examination results, this issue of reputation is likely to remain a long-term project for many schools in highly disadvantaged communities and a difficult one to address.

The school saw the specialism bid and its new building opportunities as potential ways of enhancing its growing positive local image. As Meg Butler (school governor) pointed out:

> "I think [the new building is] ... going to raise Thurlby, in the authority, in the area ... in the immediate area. The local community are starting to look at Thurlby as a centre, rather than "oh, that school down there". Because they've done so many initiatives from Thurlby, the pupils have done it, that have brought in the   local community." (SSI:16/7/03)

Also, she added:

> "When we get PFI and if it all comes to fruition as we want it, this new expressive arts block is going to be as good as a theatre, a public theatre." (SSI:16/7/03)

Added to this is the quality of planned sports provision, according to Graham Cummings

(Headteacher):

> *Graham explained that some of the playing fields could still be available for sport but some of it would be astro-turfed. He also pointed that the other current school site would have specialist sports facilities. (F:3/6/03)*

These new buildings and facilities were therefore potential ways to improve the school's reputation but also arguably likely to be viewed by local people as symbols of the value now being placed on state schooling in the local area.

Summary

The task of planning and executing the school rebuilding programme and moving towards specialist status was rightly viewed as a big leadership task by the school. It clearly had the potential to undo the good progress made by the school in recent years, as well as being a potential major positive factor. In these circumstances, the school's leadership would need to provide a holding environment to enable the staff and pupils to maintain a positive momentum, whilst making the necessary radical changes to the educational provision.

The headteacher, Graham Cummings, approached the consultation process with local people in a no-nonsense and easy manner. He aimed to share his positive vision for the school to help get local people on-board with the changes. His credibility with local people and the positive portrayal of the changes by colleagues appeared to help gain their approval to the plan. The united vision put across was that of a shared pride locally and in their educational provision.

The consultation process about the changes provided the opportunity for the school to go out and engage with different local cultural groups, to help establish their expectations and requirements in the new buildings. Meeting local people in their community settings appeared to add to the head's reputation as someone who was "on their side" and prepared to listen in a constructive way. The determination of the school in this process of consultation and discussion about the new plans was to place the

school firmly at the heart of its community as a major local asset. The specialism, too, stood a unique chance of raising pupil aspiration and confidence in difficult circumstances. The new buildings and specialist status was also likely to have a positive impact on the school's growing reputation. It was also likely to be seen as a symbol of value being placed on state education provision at local level.

4. School Reputation/Values

Introduction

Thurlby operated as a community secondary school in a highly disadvantaged context, but positive parental choice locally in recent times had enabled it to retain the middle class intake, arguably creating a genuinely comprehensive school with the broad range of ability and social mix. As we have seen, the sport and art specialism together with a brand new set of buildings was likely to cement this pattern of opting-in by parents across the social spectrum rather than the opposite, if the school could continue to retain the confidence of the local community. So it is against a broadly successful recent background that an examination of the school's perceived values is made here.

For Graham Cummings (secondary head) and local school leaders, the task of reputation-building for their schools was linked to the task of capacity-building of the community. Clearly, capacity-building within a highly disadvantaged community such as Thurlby was an urgent task, if local people were to stand a chance of developing their area. It was arguably through building of skills, aspirations and potential locally that individuals could hope in the future to achieve personally and educationally. The scale of the task in this particular community was a major, if not daunting one. Certainly, the secondary school and its feeder primaries had developed a vision of how they could contribute to the well-being of the area and its individuals, and had made some progress in improving things. If school pupils were to overcome barriers to learning they would require more than just high-quality and committed professionals in a school context. As we have seen, Graham Cummings and his colleagues had embraced a partnership approach that encompassed as many of the agencies and groups working with local families as possible. They had concluded that only by "joining-up" efforts being applied to help local people across the board could the schools hope to make a significant

impact on educational outputs of pupils, and this included all forms of community regeneration.

The frustrations and challenges involved in working in partnership with service providers and projects are not to be underestimated, as far as schools are concerned. Nevertheless, Graham Cummings and local professionals had doggedly persisted in following this shared vision of what was needed to be done at community level, with the assistance of additional targeted resources, and they believed this had contributed to improving school success over a period of time. Now that a major investment of public money was about to be made in the form of new school buildings and specialist facilities in this highly disadvantaged area, the headteacher and his colleagues believed that school provision was set to become an important potential vehicle for further neighbourhood renewal of a transformational kind.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose regarding school reputation and values. A major leadership task in Thurlby of a micro-political nature was sense-making in a complex network of local projects. Graham Cummings (Headteacher) and his colleagues had recognized over a number of years previously that something had to be done to pull together local effort, as has already been noted. However, it had not been clear who had the job of doing the "joining-up" at the local level, so the EAZ and the secondary school had taken some of the initiative in making links and encouraging inter-agency co-operation. But the task of doing this was a major micro-political task, to bring colleagues together where there was a mutual interest to do so, making links and networks as the need arose.

However, according to Mona Robinson (Adviser), this process of trying to join-up in a piecemeal and opportunistic way was:

> "Almost [like] trying to push water uphill because ... he [Graham Cummings] sometimes doesn't get the support he should be getting." (SSI:30/7/03)

Similarly, Graham himself characterised the situation on the ground as:

> *"A bit like a meal. All the ingredients are there but it's a question of pulling the*

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ingredients together at the local level." (RCI:6/3/03)

This situation of messy complexity from an organisational and leadership point of view was compounded by funding insecurity. As the head of Far View pointed out:

> *Roy feels that we're getting more and more things that are unsustainable in terms of external funding.* (RCI:11/2/03)

He also felt that the process of bidding for pots of funding to sustain activities in his school was often *"uneconomical of his time."* (RCI:11/2/03)

According to Graham Cummings, the leadership task in shaping local service provision was one of *"making coherence out of apparent incoherence."* (RCI:20/5/03). The co-ordinator of the local *Pathfinder Project*, Angela Senior, concurred with this view when she said that *"there is a major challenge locally to build up relationships and join up initiatives."* (Inf:10/4/03). Nevertheless, progress had been made in joining-up local effort through the leadership and vision operating in Thurlby. For Maureen Wilkinson (Educational Psychologist):

> *One of the main bits of her work is to co-ordinate the multi-agency support team to tackle very vulnerable/challenging young people and families. This inter-agency work is crucial to accessing what children/families require by way of intervention. This is good for relationship-building and challenge to practice between groups of workers.* (Inf:4/4/03)

At the same time, the EAZ Co-ordinator, Matthew Garwood, had been trying to improve links between two local regeneration projects operating either side of the main road (an SRB project and the *Pathfinder* work) and between them and his zone:

> *He is keen for education to link better into their aims. [But as far as one of the projects is concerned,] he feels the ... steering committee is too big and he's less hopeful about them. There is, he feels, no over-arching aim.* (RCI:19/2/03)

So, the micro-political task involved in schools aiming for better linkages at local level was an essential but challenging task. The environment was cluttered by a large number of initiatives from different external sources. The Thurlby schools nevertheless agreed with the headteacher of the secondary school's vision that "joining-up" of initiatives wider than the schools themselves was necessary to do, both to maximize effectiveness of this work but also to enhance the reputations of the schools with their surrounding

community.

A number of practice issues also arose concerning reputation and values. As far as values were concerned, Mona Robinson (Adviser) believed that the secondary school took a rounded view of its educational task:

> "They're not ... working with the disadvantaged to the expense of the people who have got the ability to achieve well" (SSI:30/7/03).

Rather, according to Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) the inclusive and child-centred approach the school adopted meant that:

> "We've always listened to the individual child and work with the individual, whether it's in a traditional class setting or whether it's to develop a particular expertise that they want to develop." (SSI:12/5/03)

Also, Suzanne characterised the ethos of the school generally as one designed to provide reassurance particularly to children from challenging home backgrounds because they required a positive framework:

> "We're quite an open establishment, a welcoming establishment. Which I think is quite important. Graham [the head] has this saying that "individuals struggle, organisations cope". And it's a very positive place ... So I think there's an air of confidence about the place that's quite reassuring." SSI:12/5/03)

This child-centred and caring approach was perceived to encompass a pragmatism in how children were dealt with in school as well. According to Graham Cummings (Headteacher):

> *He strongly feels that a pragmatic approach needs to be adopted to "sharp-edged kids" [children with challenging behaviour], requiring them to receive help but in such a way that other pupils do not become disadvantaged.* (RCI:18/3/03)

As far as school reputation and practice was concerned, there had been a recognition that schools in the area needed to effect pedagogical and curriculum change, partly through the work of the EAZ, in order to raise standards and overcome barriers to learning for young people. This positive movement in pupils outcomes was recognised through the work of the zone to be crucial for raising school reputations. Norma Booth (EAZ Co-ordinator for Expressive Arts) had been trying to engage children in the curriculum through arts work and this had required teachers at all stages to engage in this strand in practice terms. To this end:

She and Pat Webster [Literacy Co-ordinator] had recently run a training/experiential learning day with 210 teachers (cross-phase) in the EAZ to encourage teachers to consider using more experiential learning methods back in their schools. She believes initial suspicion about new ways of working two years ago has given way to the majority of staff taking these methods on board [with] ... some progress ... at secondary level, but it remains patchy. (Inf:17/3/03)

Mona Robinson (Adviser), nevertheless, believed that the secondary school had been working hard at being an inclusive school and "has moved quite a long way in a short time in its curriculum offer to become inclusive." (SSI:30/7/03)

According to Suzanne Swann (Assistant Headteacher) "perceived success breeds success." (SSI:12/5/03). This certainly appeared to be the case at Thurlby secondary school, where according to Mona Robinson (Adviser):

"It's moving from that "there's no way my kids go to that school" type of thing to actually being over-subscribed ...[and] people now make a positive choice to go to the school, such that the Y7 for this September is well over-subscribed by about fifteen." (SSI:30/7/03)

Similarly, Meg Butler (school governor) said:

"For the first time next September we've had a waiting list of pupils coming, who want to come to Thurlby who've gone to appeal ... [and] when you've known how far Thurlby have been below other schools ... I don't mean, sort of, academically as such, I mean people's views of Thurlby "oh you go to Thurlby" sort of thing." (SSI:16/7/03)

So, the secondary school had rebuilt the school's reputation with its catchment area and beyond in a challenging set of circumstances and this had been done prior to its application for arts/sport specialism and prior to a new school being built. The school had achieved this difficult transformation in tough circumstances through such developments as: improved examination performance, links with parents/the surrounding community, positive school ethos, its child-centred approach and the effective links with feeder schools. The leadership qualities of the headteacher and other staff in the school were also likely to have played a crucial part in this transformation over a period of time.

Respondents stressed the child-centred approach as being at the heart of the drive for positive outcomes by the family of schools, and their joint desire to improve their

reputation locally. For instance, Maureen Wilkinson (educational psychologist) felt:

> *"We need to look at the developmental needs of children, including nurture groups: focusing on where they are at the time. They shouldn't be squeezed into the system at the expense of their individual needs ... [pointing out that] there is a needs-based approach to identify areas of concern and address them, looking at the whole child and barriers to learning. Some of the help provided to children are often small-scale and innovatory. Investing time is crucial", she believes.* (Inf:4/4/03)

In the same vein, Meg Butler (school governor) observed that the secondary school's approach was one where "they'll back children to the hilt." (SSI:16/7/03)

However, school fragility is something that has to be worked with by local staff, as part of their ongoing situation. As Mona Robinson (Adviser) pointed out:

> "The thing is it's the nature of the [secondary] school that ... you don't have an easy day. There aren't any easy days, there's always something going on ... you know, it can be fine one day and the next day you've got a riot in the middle of town." (SSI:30/7/03)

The family of schools' policy was to avoid focusing purely on the behaviour issue as a response to this ongoing fragility, aiming to treat is as a symptom rather than a cause of wider difficulties in school. For instance, Graham Cummings (Secondary Headteacher):

> *is concerned about the behaviour-focused approach, believing that teaching and learning is central. But sharp-edged kids are requiring behaviour, Pathways and community interface activity and focus.* (RCI:20/5/03)

Matthew Garwood (EAZ Co-ordinator):

> *felt that all the schools in the zone had actually "got a lid" on the behaviour issue.* (RCI:7/1/03)

So a range of work was in place across the zone to deal with pupils presenting behaviour challenges for staff. Matthew explained how educational psychologist support was targeted at individual pupils with specific behaviour problems:

> *The ed. psych. (Maureen Wilkinson) works four days per week on behaviour management throughout the zone, [and] ... looking at behaviour management systems in schools ... and then ensuring the sharing of good practice throughout the zone.* (Inf:4/4/03)

Also, according to Roy Payne (Headteacher of Far View), his school had in place

specific curriculum and personal support arrangements to provide effective working on the behaviour issue:

> *They already have a form of special provision at Y6 where they set for literacy, numeracy and science with a C group of eight children receiving specific support. They also aim to provide differentiation as much as possible with as much practical working as possible with weak pupils.* (RCI:30/1/03)

Norma Booth (EAZ Expressive Arts Co-ordinator), also felt that a range of initiatives and ways of working had enabled colleagues across the family of schools to make an impact on the behaviour issue:

> *She feels attitude, behaviour and learning are moving ahead and this is applicable for the majority of children. She feels, too, the support structures and programmes for the "sharp-edged" pupils are helping these children. The arts work is capable, she believes, of reaching even disaffected children and to help boost self-confidence. [For instance] the mentors are a way for accessing these children, who otherwise find engagement with adults and schools difficult.* (Inf:17/3/03)

So a number of practical ways had been found locally to address issues in local schools that had an impact on the reputation issue, to move it in a positive direction. This had been a constant challenge that had required a great deal of effort and commitment by professionals over a long period of time.

A number of school/community interface issues arose concerning reputation and values. According to Matthew Garwood (EAZ Co-ordinator):

> *"Our cluster [of schools] is a very close group and they support each other verywell" ... [and he believes that trusting each other] is what makes the Thurlby zone what they are: having a collective view and sharing what they do. [In fact] ."they trust us so much that we [people who work for the E.A.Z.] just get on and do it."* (RCI:5/3/03)

As has been already noted, this co-operation pre-dated the setting-up of the zone and was borne out of a genuine drive and belief locally in the benefits of co-operation across stages to achieve improved pupil outcomes. During the process of bidding for an EAZ, the driving force to make it happen had been Graham Cummings, according to Mona Robinson (Adviser):

> "In six months he did a great deal of work with those primary heads and, you

know, the quality of the discussion, six months, had moved on a huge amount. And he brought quite a lot more rigour to their views [yielding] ... some positive benefit to the management within those junior schools." (SSI:30/7/03)

Links with the wider community and parents were seen as an important part of raising the reputation and success of schools. To this end, both the EAZ and the *Pathfinder Project* had identified the need for better pre-school links and other connections between schools and the community. As the *Pathfinder* Co-ordinator, Angela Senior observed that:

> *The education agenda for her project is about improving the pre-school skills of children, raising parent trust and involvement with local schools and increasing governing body participation. Some parents, she believes, don't necessarily feel welcome in school and there is a perceived need for more effective school outreach in the community.* (Inf:10/4/03)

The EAZ had already been concentrating on the pre-school and early school stages as the place to improve engagement of parents in their children's education, as Pat Webster (Literacy Co-ordinator) pointed out:

> *She teaches parents how to play games with their children. There is a project she is working on called "Time for Rhyme" with nursery children and their parents, with teachers contacting parents personally. It is important, she feels, for parental presence to be valued in the classroom. Her parents group she runs encourages parents and children to learn the week's rhyme. She emphasises the social learning involved in language.* (Inf:17/3/03)

Similarly, the post agreed to be set up jointly by the zone and the *Pathfinder Project* was due to encourage community-based engagement of parents of young children. According to Matthew Garwood (EAZ Co-ordinator):

> *This was due to be a literacy outreach worker to get mums and dads into oracy work with their young children to support the work currently done by Pat Webster, the E.A.Z. literacy co-ordinator ... The work should enable more positive play in community locations to take place and other literacy-related activities. The aim of the post is to provide better co-ordination between different agencies in the area and make the work more coherent.* (RCI:7/1/03)

Work was going on across the zone which brought the local professional rugby club into schools and vice versa, with a reading project. Pat Webster (Literacy Co-ordinator) was enthusiastic about the initiative:

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The rugby club work has ... been good in involving parents, she believes. This work is raising the profile of education in the community generally, she feels." (Inf:17/3/03)

Matthew Garwood (EAZ Co-ordinator) explained what was involved:

The local rugby team, a large steel firm, and another major employer [were involved in it]. This had been a massive success with young people being offered tickets to rugby matches and this having a major spin-off in encouraging them to read books. "It's terrific" with the eight to ten weeks work culminating in a celebratory assembly in each school, creating a real "buzz". (RCI:17/1/03)

Chris Grant (Senior Learning Mentor at the secondary school) had the task of building up a range of activities in the surrounding community for the *Pathway Scheme*:

"Forest Schools: it's part of Woodland Heritage. A lot of LEAs other than ours have got Forest Schools already up and working. And what they do is they take disadvantaged or disaffected kids, work with them literally within a forest and they learn different skills. they learn social skills through to crafts and living within a forest, making things." (SSI:20/5/03)

She also explained how someone from the local radio station was investigating another community-based project:

"She's looking at seeing whether we can get hold of an allotment nearby and getting that and using that as part of our school, as part of the work experience and time out." (SSI:20/5/03)

So, the community in its widest sense was seen by local schools as a resource for educational work with pupils as well as a source of support in growing school reputation locally. This was seen in Thurlby both as important and as a two-way process.

Summary

Values of staff at the secondary school were child-centred and inclusive of the full ability range. However, there was a determinedly pragmatic slant to their inclusivity and child-centredness, based on a determination that pupils should do well across the board without anyone being disadvantaged through practice constraints or difficulties. School reputation, too, was linked in practitioners' view to making sense and joining-up of the maze of local initiatives linked to schools. This was seen as a major micro-political

challenge by Graham Cummings (Secondary Headteacher) and other educational and community project leaders. Nevertheless, making the best use of vital additional resources and capacity in as coherent and planned a way as possible was what local educational leaders were committed to, as they had been over a number of years previously. This they felt gave them the best chance of making headway on a broad front in his highly disadvantaged community.

One important way in which the secondary school and feeder primaries were aiming to raise reputation locally was through positive pedagogical and curriculum change. This in turn was designed to effect an uplift in pupil outcomes year by year. Certainly, in the case of the secondary school, the positive changed reputation was quite marked, leading to its being oversubscribed in terms of applications for the following September's intake.

A fragile context was something that required constant focus across the family of schools to maintain a positive educational momentum. To their credit however, local schools determinedly aimed to concentrate on teaching/learning improvements to make outcome gains, rather than focusing on behaviour as an issue in itself. Their aim instead was to use innovatory behaviour management and other support to individual children with behaviour difficulties to deal effectively with these young people.

The school/community interface was regarded as a significant element across the family of schools in effecting positive reputational and other changes. However, the E.A.Z.'s schools regarded co-operation between themselves as an essential basis for successful educational provision that involved schools then reaching out to their communities in an effective way. Pre-school links with parents and their children was seen as a very important building-block for pupil success later on in the school system. Links with local employers, too, and placement of pupils in community settings were all helping to address disaffection and raise educational standards, respondents believed.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined themes and issues pertaining to the Thurlby situation. These touched upon the central matters from the Central Research Question/Areas of Inquiry:

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school improvement and leadership in context. These issues also related back to key areas raised in the *Literature Review* (Chapter 2), particularly: the nature of leadership required, the role of schools in their surrounding communities, the importance of vision and inspiration to school achievement in the inner city, the issue of reputation, and the sheer difficulty of the task.

The Thurlby data provides an example of school leadership that aimed for a child-centred approach and the sharing of leadership tasks. The difficulty of achieving those aims in this disadvantaged context was demonstrated in a number of ways, particularly in the Iraq war critical incident and in the progress of the *Pathway Scheme* planning process. The strength of vision in a number of areas was also a feature of the study. Certainly, the secondary headteacher's vision of building a school's reputation through practical school improvement measures that aimed for pupil inspiration and praise, coupled with a community capacity-building process with schools at its heart, was a strong and ambitious one.

Nevertheless, the struggle involved in this process was also starkly apparent. Great resilience was in evidence, coupled with a determination to turn a tough situation into a good set of outcomes for the young people concerned, no matter how challenging they were. This task was compounded by the complexity of accountabilities and the large number of initiatives in play. The leadership task in this situation was a complex and demanding micro-political one, which the secondary headteacher, Graham Cummings, was nevertheless effective in turning to his school's advantage. However, the dilemmas posed by this complex and demanding environment were major ones, with staff having to come up with practical and pragmatic solutions to the leadership and pedagogical issues that they faced in their work.

Chapter 7

The Burntake Case Study

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the Burntake case study, conducted concurrently with the one at Thurlby between December 2002 and July 2003. As in the previous chapter, there are three sections:

1. *The Context*: giving an overview of the Burntake community and its schools;

2. *Data Outcomes*: considering key issues and incidents from the study; and

3. *Conclusion*: pulling together the main issues from the study and briefly linking them to relevant issues from the *Literature Review*, as well as anticipating their relevance to the final three chapters.

Context

As in the previous chapter about Thurlby, this part of the chapter begins with an overview of the area and its family of schools. There is also a brief summary of outcomes from interviews held prior to the study with the EAZ Co-ordinator, advisers and local headteachers. As with the Thurlby study, this summary outlines some of the key educational and other features of the area that are then taken up in the data display.

The Burntake family of schools consisted of Burntake secondary school (11-16), Chatsworth N.I.J., Yew Tree N.I.J., Ashgate N.I.J., Meadow View N.I.J., and Spring Farm (C.E. aided) N.I.J. Four others part fed into Burntake and into the other secondary school in the cluster.

The council described the Burntake catchment area as "serving one of the most deprived areas in the city. The number of pupils taking free school meals [at the secondary school] is 484 (43%)" (Cabinet report, November 2002). In November 2002, the secondary headteacher said of the school's community ("Planning a Positive Framework for the Future" p.2): "unemployment is at 2.4 times the national average,

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9% of adults are classed as permanently sick, 66% of all households have no car, 37% do not take any holiday at all, 40% earn under £10,000 per annum, [and] there are 2.5 times average proportion of people with incomes of less than £5,000". The Ofsted report on the secondary school of September 2001 pointed to the additional problem in the area of high pupil mobility, with "half of the Year 11 pupils in 2000 ... [joining] the school after Year 7". Also, "pupils' overall attainment at the time they joined the school was very low, especially in literacy and numeracy, and the proportions of pupils on the special needs register and with formal statements are high". One of the feeder primaries was in an area described by Ofsted in May 2001 as having "much disadvantage, close to the centre of the borough", where "fifty- three per cent of children are eligible for free school meals ...most ... live in rented housing close to the school", and "a significant number join and leave during the school year". As pointed out earlier, too, whilst being broadly comparable overall in terms of deprivation, the Burntake area nevertheless contrasted with multi-cultural Thurlby due to its almost entirely white population.

However, this picture of challenging social circumstances was not uniformly the case for all the schools. One of the primary schools was situated in the southern suburbs, where attainment on entry was average and conditions at home were generally not deprived. These families, though, tended to opt away from the catchment secondary school, with only 25.5% choosing to go there in 2002, thereby making Burntake's secondary school population disproportionately deprived. This was compounded by the school being asked by the LEA to take excluded pupils from other parts of the city, due to Burntake having spare capacity. By their nature, these tended to be pupils with challenging behaviour or other major problems, further skewing the nature of the school's population and increasing the scale of the task for staff working there.

In spite of these major challenges, the Ofsted report (p.8) asserted that the secondary school was doing "a satisfactory job in difficult circumstances", benefiting from "purposeful leadership and management which are increasingly effective" and seeing teaching improving and standards "beginning to rise" from a low base. Further on, it pointed out that pupils' attitudes remained a difficulty for the school with "a significant minority ...[having] poor attitudes to school and learning ... [and being] difficult to motivate" (p.9). Also, the report's judgement was that "parents have positive views of the school" (p.11), and that "the school looks after its pupils well and is committed to

equality of opportunity, educational and social inclusion". Overall, "parents are positive about the school and recognize that it has improved recently both in its management and in its reputation in the community" (ibid. p.20).

The secondary school leadership felt these positive messages to be a recognition of progress made since it was put into special measures in 1996. They came out three years later under a new headteacher, who continued to be in post during the period of this study. He saw the continued positive development of the school as revolving around such aspirations as: new buildings; Artsmark; Sportsmark; Specialist Status (performing arts); possible city academy; continually rising outputs; and working with the EAZ and partners to help the regeneration of the local community ("Planning a Positive Framework for the Future" p.3).

As well as the secondary school having been in special measures in the past, two of the primary schools had so been designated in the late 1990s and successfully came out under new headteachers. One of the other schools (Spring Farm), whilst deemed by Ofsted in May 2001 as being "effective in valuing each child" and having "a strong team of teachers ... who are working hard to improve the quality of what the school provides", nevertheless progress in raising standards was a slow process. Meadow View had also not been in special measures, but according to its Ofsted report in April 1999, whilst it had "good quality teaching", and "pupils'attitudes ... are good", "procedures for ... promoting discipline are very effective" and "the headteacher provides strong and effective leadership", "the well below average attainment in core subjects is a weakness" (p.6). Yew Tree was in the more relatively advantaged part of the community and, according to its Ofsted report in April 2002, "is a good school", where "pupils' attitudes towards work is very good" and "the newly appointed headteacher is a strong leader".

The two schools that had recently emerged from special measures under new headteachers, had arguably made the most progress overall amongst the local primary schools. The Ashgate Ofsted report from April 2002 said "the school is well led by the headteacher, who receives good support from the deputy headteacher, senior staff and governors. There is a strong sense of direction to the school's work, with a clear priority on raising expectations and standards. Tasks have been carried out effectively, including

the need to tackle weak teaching. Teamwork is manifest in the action plans devised by the teachers in each year group, in shared planning, in the significant contribution made by classroom assistants and in the consistency of approach from class to class" (p.2).

Chatsworth was one of the two schools chosen for ongoing "reality check" interviews with the headteacher, the other being the secondary school. Chatsworth was undergoing amalgamation as a 3-11 primary on a split site at the start of the case study. They had had a CDRom produced and a description of it appeared on the producer's website. According to the site "this KS2 school rose out of "special measures" to award winning status in just 3 years by empowering parents to support their own children, and the school". The CDRom contained interviews with parents, children, the headteacher and her deputy, "describing the scale of the problems of low morale and poor achievement and how they were overcome", partly as a result of the school's Family Friendly Homework Project. Further, according to the website, "parents in Chatsworth, previously thought to be uncooperative and disinterested, have embraced this policy and proved themselves to be a hugely positive influence on school development. Despite all the economic disadvantages in the area, parents have found the commitment to change their own (and others') children's attitude to learning".

In the value added scores for primary schools in national tests for eleven year olds in 2003, Chatsworth registered 108, which placed it well within the top five per cent of schools nationally. Given the distance it had had to travel since being in special measures only three years or so previously, this was a remarkable turnaround. In the initial round of pre-case study interviews, further comment was made about the success of the Family-Friendly Homework Project at Chatsworth primary, as a positive example of parental engagement. At Ashgate Junior, good work with parents and successful engagement with the local community regeneration trust had enabled the school to get closer to its community also. The secondary school had a public confidence issue all the time with its local catchment area that it constantly had to address, with mixed success. This was because perceptions locally of poor reputation from the past had been difficult to change. The EAZ Co-ordinator had identified community engagement across the zone as a major development area for schools generally, to help them in their educational task.

The "transformation" in the quality of educational provision at both Chatsworth and Ashgate schools through the work of their leadership teams and strong headteachers were important features of this family of schools. Nevertheless, the leadership performance across the zone (wider than this family of schools) was regarded by some respondents as an issue, with strengthening of leadership being a major task on an ongoing basis. Other positive features of activities locally included the developing sport strategy, parents' training courses and parent group work for dealing with pupils' challenging behaviour.

Data Outcomes

Introduction

As with Thurlby, the initial case study plan had been to look at three "action issues" using "reality check" and semi-structured interviews, together with a small number of observation studies. The study eventually focused-down on issues to do with behaviour, particularly tracking the performance of the new *BIP/BEST* project for this area of work. This government-funded programme had been rushed into being locally and was only partly staffed at the time of the study. It was designed to tackle a broad range of issues touching on behaviour difficulties of pupils, a big issue for schools in this locality. As with the other study, looking at the behaviour issue was intended to be of interest in its own right, but was also mainly a vehicle for exploring the perceptions, values, leadership experiences and views about "what works" of school staff and some local people in this highly disadvantaged community. The sections mirror those from the Thurlby study, given the similar contextual issues:

1. Behaviour;
2. External Factors;
3. New Buildings; and
4. School Reputation/Values.

It was originally envisaged to gather data more widely across the family of schools than eventually was the case. In the end, the work focused onto the secondary school and one of its feeder primaries, Chatsworth. As with Thurlby, time constraints played their part in this eventual focus of attention as did the very strong themes linked to certain individual actors that emerged from the data during the study.

So, the range of respondents (see Box 7:1) reflects the process just described. Initially, the range was planned to be wider and more general, covering the work and emphasis of the large EAZ that encapsulated the family of schools in the study. Initial interviews were necessarily exploratory and less formal in nature than later ones, with field notes being made at the time. "Reality check" interviews took place with both the secondary headteacher and the head of Chatsworth school over the entire case study period (eight months) every two weeks or so, and for the first few months also with the EAZ Co-ordinator (recorded again by fieldnotes). During the second half of the study the norm became semi-structured, taped interviews producing verbatim data. These interviews took place with individuals closely associated with the behaviour project work and of people in the local area qualified to talk about the work of the local schools. A summary of "Key Themes and Issues" for the case study is at Box 7:2.

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Box 7:1

Burntake Case Study Fieldwork

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List Of Interviewees

- Donna McKeown: EAZ Co-ordinator
- Julie Brier: Headteacher of Chatsworth primary school
- Richard Johnson: Headteacher of the secondary school
- Vanessa Lunn: secondary school Deputy Headteacher
- Andrea Marriott: Head of the Support Service at the secondary school
- Kirsty Meade: secondary school Arts Co-ordinator
- Robert Jones: secondary school Mentor Co-ordinator
- Caroline Swift: LEA B.I.P. Co-ordinator
- Mary Wood: Governor at the secondary school
- Deborah Davies: Adviser
- Alice Warburton: Chair of a local Regeneration Forum:

- **Observation Studies**
  -A meeting of a local school cluster head teacher's group
  -A discussion between the headteacher of Chatsworth school and the local BIP Co-ordinator
  -A meeting of local headteachers of schools involved in the BIP/BEST initiative, chaired by the EAZ Co-ordinator

(Detailed fieldnotes were made of these meetings)

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1. Behaviour

Introduction

The issues of challenging pupil behaviour and disaffection were high-profile ones in the Burntake context. Unlike in Thurlby, the EAZ had behaviour as one of its three priorities. According to Donna McKeown the EAZ Co-ordinator:

> *The issue itself consumes vast quantities of staff time and constantly threatens to skew the work in each school. So the choice of the issue as a theme has been "bottom-up".* (RCI:6/2/03)

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Box 7:2

Summary of Key Themes and Issues

1. **Behaviour**
   - Models of leadership in action
   - Leadership values in action
   - Micro-politics of leadership
     *Momentum and high energy
     *Struggling with a tough context
     *Managing change
     *Developing a shared vision
     *Juggling hope and despair
   - Changing institutional practices
   - Issues of child-centredness and inclusion

2. **External Factors**
   - Problems caused by "top-down" initiatives
   - The tangled local organizational context
   - The consequences of a lack of joining-up

3. **New Buildings**
   - Mobilising for change
   - Raising aspiration
   - Inspiration of pupils
   - School at the heart of the community
   - Investment as a sign of value

4. **School Reputation/Values**
   - The micro-politics of leadership
     *Sense-making
   - Changing institutional practices
   - Creating success and its importance (the mixed progress in this case)
   - Issues of child-centredness and inclusion
     *"Caring" approaches
     *Child-centred approaches
     *Not genuinely comprehensive schooling
   - Ideology and pragmatism

The impact of context

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Of particular concern to staff were a small group of very disaffected and disruptive pupils across the age range, often referred to as "sharp-edged kids". Discussion of the needs of these children and ways to meet those needs in a school setting were returned to again and again during the study.

A potentially important response to the needs of these challenging and disaffected pupils was the government's *Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP)*, which was just getting underway in the Burntake family of schools during the study. Its LEA Co-ordinator, Caroline Swift, explained that part of this work involved deployment of a *Behaviour and Education Support Team (BEST)* in Burntake and in other parts of the LEA. The idea was:

> *To respond to pupil needs and to get close to the community [with the team comprising] ... a senior learning mentor, an E.W.O., a school nurse, a primary health worker, a key worker, an area manager, 0.5 speech/language therapist and admin. support.* (Inf:18/2/03)

In the event, this team of workers was slow to be deployed and there were perceived difficulties when it came to fitting the work of this initiative into what already existed in schools.

The study looked at the impact on the secondary school and on Chatsworth primary of planning for the deployment of the *BIP/BEST* initiative and also of the day-to-day experience of behaviour issues.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose during the study in connection with behaviour and the *BIP/BEST* initiative. The headteacher of Chatsworth primary, Julie Brier, was an energetic and participative leader. She was constantly concerned about the behaviour issue as it impacted on her school's ability to provide a positive environment for highly disadvantaged children to reach their full educational potential. Her response was to involve school staff in tackling the behaviour issue through:

A behaviour working group on Tuesdays ... where interested staff aim to take a whole school approach to this issue ... There is a spokesperson for each age stage where an examination takes place of strengths and weaknesses in the approach to behaviour. A vision statement for behaviour has been agreed, outlining perceived strengths and weaknesses [in the school]. (RCI:27/1/03)

Similarly, she referred to:

A "fantastic" in-service day held recently [at the school] where they talked about creating a "community language" and a team building experience, centred around behaviour policy. (RCI:27/1/03)

She firmly believed that in the context of behaviour and other pressing issues for her school, *"the team is what makes the school a success".* (RCI:7/4/03)

The head of the secondary school, Richard Johnson, was widely regarded as being a very effective leader, but with a style that was possibly more about "leading from the front" than Julie Brier's. This way of working had arguably enabled him to make things happen in an extremely tough context at his school. His Deputy Headteacher, Vanessa Lunn, described him as:

Outstanding, with his leadership being key to the school. He provides clear direction, takes people with him and gives responsibility to people. He is a clear and excellent communicator with very high professional standards but also with a sense of humour. (Inf:6/2/03)

Richard himself described his way of working as *"a consultative leader who believes in being decisive when required."* (RCI:10/3/03) Also, according to him:

He has been described as a charismatic leader which he resents as he feels he is more thoughtful than a charismatic leader. (RCI:10/3/03)

The tough managerial situation he faced at the school was touched on in his recognition of the micro-political task involved in the leadership role:

He also listens to his "enemies" to find out what their motivation is. He feels you need to be conscious of what's going on. His strength lies in his ability to understand how to judge people's potential and talents so it related to the future of the school. (RCI:10/3/03)

His tough approach to providing leadership in a context where there could be opposition to what he viewed as necessary change, particularly in moving ahead with raising standards and school ethos was illustrated by these comments:

> *If you keep at things long enough you start to move ahead. After the initial "cull" people back off and they aren't surprised at what's happening. He tries to make "our priorities" really clear and nothing's a surprise. "I don't think I'm popular but people know where they are with me". (RCI:12/2/03)*

Nevertheless, he had concerns about being too dominant:

> *He feels the school is too dependent on him and he is reflecting on how to improve the situation and also to ensure eventual effective succession. (RCI:10/6/03)*

In this tough context, the micro-political nature of the school leadership role was arguably more pronounced as leaders grappled with difficult, if not almost impossible situations. Julie Brier (head of Chatsworth) illustrated the importance of gaining and maintaining momentum at her school in a range of areas:

> *She explained how excited she was about the ideas and working engendered in the school concerning work with parents ... For instance, the school has an expectation of high attendance that precludes permission being given for holiday absence ... She explained that parents appreciate high expectations and standards. The children are now proud to wear the school uniform as it is a prize for doing well at the homework initiative. Similarly, pupils have been given a school bag in connection with the homework initiative and pupils are proud to carry this around. (RCI:4/12/02)*

The nature of the context, particularly as it related to pupil behaviour, had constantly to be contended with by school leaders in devising strategies for moving their schools forward. This context was particularly tough in Burntake. For instance, the zone had a looming potential leadership crisis which was due to impact on some of the schools in the Burntake grouping, according to the EAZ Co-ordinator:

> *The seven heads in the zone due to leave in September provide a potential major challenge threatening "things being tipped over the edge". RCI:9/4/03)*

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Also, the secondary school had a leadership difficulty of its own, due to the pressure of work generated by the bids that they were pursuing, according to Deborah Davis (Adviser):

> "There's a reduction in capacity in terms of leadership because on the one hand we've got a deputy and an assistant head putting the bid together for specialist school, and that takes a lot of time and a lot of energy [as well as the school pursuing the academy bid]." (SSI:14/7/03)

In this situation, tension in the secondary school's senior team was bound to arise as staff were increasingly put under pressure. This presented a micro-political situation of some challenge for its members, particularly the headteacher. As one of the team pointed out:

> "The strength of the management team is that people are very different with different skills and very different attitudes actually, which is challenging. And nobody's got a more different attitude than me and nobody's more challenging than I am (laughs)." (SSI:7/3/03)

The tough context continually came up during the study, particularly as it related to behaviour issues. The head of the secondary school (Richard Johnson) referred to the constant possibility that:

> *The school is still capable of being "blown off course" by events.* (RCI:10/6/03)

Julie Brier (Chatsworth Headteacher) was particularly concerned about extremely challenging behaviour exhibited by some of her pupils, so-called "sharp-edged kids":

> *"We've never come across children like these before"* (F:11/2/03);

> *"Yesterday a Y5 teacher got attacked by a kid and she said she wanted her classroom back"* (F:14/2/03);

On one occasion during an interview, it had to be cut short because:

> *She felt she had to sort out a situation personally: a young child who had decided to sit in the middle of the school field and wouldn't co-operate with teachers.* (RCI:13/3/03)

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She also expressed the view that in spite of major gains educationally in the school, nevertheless, because of the behaviour of some extreme children: *"The school is on a knife-edge"* (RCI:7/4/03)

Also of major concern to local school leaders and also in the wider EAZ area were other challenging and worrying pupil behaviours, such as:

> "*Predominantly girls whose behaviours cause them to allow things to happen to themselves [and] ... behaviour [that] is highly sexualised.*" (F:14/2/03)

In this challenging context, the politically precious commodity of being able to generate and exhibit hope was constantly threatened to be undermined by the onset of despair, due to the cirumstances that leaders found themselves in. The sort of incidents that caused Julie Briar (Chatsworth Headteacher) to be extremely worried were:

> *"[The previous evening] five children set about one child at the school gate."* (F:11/2/03)

She also explained how:

> *Two lads had joined the school last term and "pulled the rug" and really "rocked the boat" as far as the life of the school is concerned.* (RCI:13/3/03)

An example of the school's tough context behaviourally was where:

> *We walked around school to witness the genuinely calm and purposeful atmosphere that she referred to earlier, but then also encountered a child being sent out of a class by the teacher. This boy was taken out of the situation by Julie and later dealt with by the deputy head. This child has occasional fixed-term exclusions, she explained.* (RCI:7/4/03)

At the secondary school, behaviour was a live issue not only because of the difficulties presenting themselves on the behaviour front each day but particularly as a recent external behaviour audit had criticised the school's quality of leadership on the issue. The head (Richard Johnson) admitted that:

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"Staff feel there's not enough leadership on behaviour management."
(RCI:10/3/03)

This had caused him to think long and hard about how to tackle this perceived problem and to take his staff along with him in an effective manner. But the context of challenge made this micro-political leadership task especially daunting, threatening to undermine previous good work at the school, and the precious commodity of hope. This context had caused the school to be judged harshly by the advisory service. For instance, towards the end of the study, the headteacher said:

> *The school's LEA annual performance review will be produced in a week's time, showing that the school is still "vulnerable".* (RCI:10/6/03)

This was a despiriting term for the school to have used about it, Richard felt, as his whole aim was to make the school more "normal" both in its reality and in people's perception of it. As Deborah Davis (Adviser) pointed out:

> "[The school] will always be fragile. Richard will hate me using this word but it will remain vulnerable because of its context." (SSI:23/7/03)

This context involved a situation where, according to Vanessa Lunn (secondary school Assistant Head):

> *Disaffection is starting earlier ... Particularly for these young people we have to look at alternatives. The issue has been a massive problem at the secondary school.* (Inf:6/2/03)

A number of practice issues arose concerning behaviour. The policy of inclusive practice in this tough context was recognised generally as a major challenge, particularly as it related to behaviour. Mary Wood (secondary school governor) characterised the school as:

> "An inclusive school and [the Headteacher] ... doesn't want to exclude anybody that is in our catchment area and I'm all for that." (SSI:14/7/03)

For the EAZ Co-ordinator, (Donna McKeown) this meant that:

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"You're constantly balancing-off the good of the individual children against mainstream children." (RCI:9/4/03)

Her practical solution to this dilemma was:

Modelling of alternative forms of provision [particularly in situations] ... of intensive support prior to return back to mainstream [schooling]. (RCI:9/4/03)

Certainly, the challenge of providing a genuinely inclusive style of provision, particularly at secondary level, in a situation where challenging behaviour was such a major issue posed a major dilemma for school leaders in Burntake. Nevertheless, the link adviser for the secondary school, Deborah Davis, expressed the view that staff commitment in this situation was of critical importance:

"Whenever I go into the school I am entirely optimistic because the staff are very, very committed, the majority of them." (SSI:23/7/03)

It was widely recognised in Burntake's schools that the way the schools themselves operated would have to change in future to engage, inspire and energise some deprived and challenging youngsters. Major efforts had been made within the family of schools in recent years to change practice, particularly to encourage the use of creative arts pedagogies in mainstream situations. The work of the EAZ had also encouraged the use of creative and active learning in school practice wherever possible. Given the tough context that schools were working in, this approach was not only difficult but at the same time deemed absolutely necessary to enable young people to access the curriculum effectively. The secondary school's push to prioritise its sport and arts work, partly through the pursuit of specialist status was designed to enable a more pupil-centred and lively curriculum offering for pupils that went beyond narrow subject areas into mainstream learning situations across the board. As Vanessa Lunn (Deputy Headteacher) pointed out:

She feels it is crucial for young people in school to have other ways of expressing themselves beyond writing and expressive arts can help provide these opportunities. (Inf:6/2/03)

Similarly, Caroline Swift (LEA BIP Co-ordinator) felt that concentration on behaviour issues in their own right was unlikely to be a productive strategy educationally, as:

> "Behaviour needs to start shoulder-to-shoulder with other initiatives."
> (Inf:18/2/03)

Mary Wood (secondary school governor) had a similar view:

> "Anything that is going to try and encourage learning and stop bad behaviour, stop unruliness in the classroom, corridors ... it's about learning, isn't it? To me it's all about learning. The children need to go [to school] ... knowing they're in a safe environment, and to want to learn, and that's basically it." (SSI:14/7/03)

Issues of how best to provide an inclusive educational environment that dealt effectively with challenging behaviour and special educational needs of pupils but at the same time enabled pupils to achieve something as near to their full potential as possible, loomed large in Burntake's schools. This was acutely felt by staff, given the challenging context they found themselves in.

Julie Brier (Chatsworth Headteacher) and her other primary colleagues in the EAZ were very worried indeed about the current effect of challenging behaviour in their schools and the consequences for their ability not only to cope but to move forward educationally. She believed that:

> The "really sharp-edged kids" cannot co-exist alongside other children in a mainstream whole-class situation. She thinks the school does well with these children but it's very time-consuming. But support for the minority is not in existence, she believes. They need something "special" for this three per cent of children. [So] ... an isolated unit would, she and Susan Dixon (Headteacher of Ashgate school) feel, be a useful provision: self-contained with one-to-one supervision and guidance. She feels these children shouldn't be in school because nothing's relevant for them and they can't be rescued in that situation. (RCI:13/3/03)

This proposal had been worked-up into a paper for the LEA to consider. Julie Brier had explained that the cluster of primary schools' headteachers containing the Burntake family of schools had endorsed a proposal:

> To set up a unit for eighteen children in the area: a twelve week placement model linking into the BEST team; a nursery nurturing early identification process based

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at a primary school, a Y3/Y4 unit at Chatsworth and Y5 unit at another local
school. (RCI:7/4/03)

Resources for the proposal were to be found from within existing LEA or school budgets. But when the proposal had been considered by the LEA officer concerned, it had received a negative response, as:

> *He feels they are over the top in regarding three per cent of their children*
> *requiring this kind of support.* (RCI:7/4/03)

At secondary level, school policy was firmly in favour of as much "genuine inclusion" as possible, in an extremely challenging context. However, if inadequate support was available in whatever teaching situation, the provision was likely to result in mere "integration" with poor outcomes for many of the pupils. The Head of the Support Service, Andrea Marriott, had a firmly child-centred and behaviourist orientation to her work with the pupils she had responsibility for. For instance, she had done an analysis in school of causes of pupil disaffection:

> *She recently interviewed forty-five truanting children (from throughout the age*
> *range) to find out why. She found that a great deal of the disaffection and*
> *unhappiness revolved around relationships and that children were happy to*
> *attend certain lessons for a variety of reasons even if they are very disaffected*
> *generally... She feels strongly that disaffection is a lot to do with people rather*
> *than structures.* (Inf:7/2/03)

She explained that the BIP/BEST team had originally offered some individual and group work with "extreme" children:

> "The mental health issues and the needs of extreme children are such that we can't meet all their needs and it's a slow and laborious process. Some of our children can't make relationships with adults and if they're sitting in the corner with their hood up rocking they need major help. But we also want to avoid putting them into the community where they've got nothing. They need mega, slow-drip stuff."(SSI:7/3/03)

But the support offered by *BIP/BEST* was perceived by Andrea to be both inadequate in quality and insufficient to make a real difference to the school's ability to cope with these children. So she outlined the plan that the school had devised to begin to address the needs of these children:

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"What we're going to do is empty the [learning support] unit in the afternoons of individual children we normally deal with in there, for instance a kid who can't cope with her science lesson, or someone who needs some one-to-one help. These kids are going to have to go back into the school in the afternoons and that's going to put more pressure on the school. But what we're going to do is identify kids "on the edge" and do some extremely intense group work with children like that." (SSI:7/3/03)

So, there was a trade-off in the school between the needs of the "extreme" group and the other large number of children requiring special needs support of various kinds. In different halves of the day, one or the other group of children were back in mainstream provision potentially being "integrated" rather than "included", depending on the level of support available in the classroom situation, on the relationships individual children had with particular members of staff, or the skill in dealing with special and behavioural needs of the mainstream teachers they were with. Given, too, that the learning mentors in school were deployed to achieve some positive change with the "middle group", rather than the special needs children (seen as the learning support department's job), support for "extreme" and challenging pupils was likely to be at a premium, putting greater onus on the mainstream teacher.

As far as school/community links were concerned, there was a general recognition in Burntake that good links with the surrounding community were important and had potential vital spin-offs in this highly disadvantaged community. Some views were stronger than others and dependant on the issue under consideration. For instance, when I asked Robert Jones, the secondary school's Mentor Co-ordinator about whether his mentors were local people:

> *He explained that they weren't, that quality was what mattered [and] ... that he does not agree that "local" people are necessarily good for employment in school for their own sake.* (Inf:7/2/03)

Clearly, staff quality is important, nevertheless it could be argued that local role models amongst support staff such as mentors can be important in encouraging local children to exhibit positive behaviour and attitudes in school, and in providing a link between school and community.

The EAZ Co-ordinator, Donna McKeown, was particularly keen on community links:

> *It's self-evident that the community is key to achievement educationally. Some individuals, she felt, who don't recognise this aspect of the educational task sometimes don't understand the nature of disadvantaged communities and the struggle that living in one and achieving educationally in those circumstances poses.* (RCI:10/12/02)

For instance, she believed that:

> *"If you've got parents engaging with kids and kids' learning, that will help them in turn to develop as adults educationally - it's part of the process of lifelong learning".* (RCI:10/12/02)

So, as far as behaviour is concerned:

> *"Because behaviour management is about young people developing their own self-control, this is also a community issue."* (RCI:10/12/02)

Summary

The head of Chatsworth primary school (Julie Brier) had an energetic and team-working approach both to her leadership role generally but particularly concerning the behaviour issue. The secondary head, Richard Johnson, aimed to involve staff effectively across the range of issues facing the school, but given his personality and context, often found himself forcing issues with colleagues and tended to "lead from the front", to effect change in his school.

Generally, community links in Burntake were regarded as being beneficial to the educational process in this tough context. However, the strength of view and practice to make this happen were patchy. The EAZ Co-ordinator, though, regarded community links as vital to making headway educationally and assisting with the behaviour issue. School leaders in this tough situation recognised the need to achieve and maintain momentum to bring about change. However, the tough context meant that progress was never easy and that high degrees of personal commitment and resilience were required to inspire and energise their colleagues in the task they faced. In this situation, alongside hope there loomed despair on a daily basis.

Inclusive practice in this tough environment was clearly a major issue, particularly regarding challenging pupils with deep-seated difficulties. The primary headteachers were keen to "include" rather than "integrate" but saw the needs of "sharp-edged kids" as potentially fatally undermining all the good work in recent years to move their schools forward. Further specialist "step-off" provision in units adjacent to local schools they believed to be the only viable means of coping with this situation in the future.

In the secondary school, the inclusive philosophy of the leadership meant that efforts to provide intensive support to children at specific times in the school day potentially put greater strain on mainstream staff and challenged them individually to renew their skills in dealing with children having behavioural or special educational difficulties.

2. External Factors

Introduction

As at Thurlby, Burntake's schools were having to cope with a bewildering array of national and local initiatives, targeted at the inner-city. Much of this work was essentially "top-down" in nature, with local school staff expected to engage in as positive a way as possible to deliver change for local young people. Certainly, schools were not central to some of the community regeneration projects/initiatives taking place in the area at all, even though these had potential to affect the nature of the context that schools were working in. The EAZ initiative had arguably been more closely linked into priorities identified by schools themselves in a more "bottom-up" fashion than some other work going on locally.

One of the most potentially helpful initiatives impacting on this family of schools was the *BIP/BEST* initiative, given that it was targeted at children and families with some of the most severe difficulties across the board. The issue of challenging behaviour was extremely pressing for these schools, as has been demonstrated. Nevertheless, this initiative was perceived negatively by staff, in spite of attempts by all concerned to use this additional resource as proactively as possible.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose in connection with the impact of external factors locally. The family of schools in the study were part of a wider group that were chosen to take part in the *Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP)*. The work was ongoing at the time of the study, but the initial perception of this programme was rather negative amongst respondents. The dilemma for leaders and professionals was a familiar one: is it reasonable or, in fact, possible to turn down an opportunity for extra resources targeted at a priority area of work (in this case behaviour), even though the concept and planning has been almost entirely imposed "top-down" and in an unhelpful way, at short notice? The tough context that leaders and their colleagues worked in meant that what looked like an opportunity for positive working in this priority area of work had real potential to distract them from the task in hand as they struggled to fit it into the existing framework of activity.

Comments from respondents about the programme and its progress bordered on total exasperation:

> *"It's been a cock-up from the DfES from the start with the planning being impossible to do in the time available."* (RCI:6/2/03)

> *He regarded it as a "back of fag packet job" and essentially government-led.*(RCI:4/12/02)

> *As far as progress with the BIP is concerned: he initially just said "oh dear". He feels that it has potential but the organisation so far is poor.* (RCI:3/2/03)

> *She ... feels that BIP/BEST is failing at present. It still isn't a complete team, the LEA still has no coherent behaviour policy and half the EAZ schools are in BIP/BEST and half aren't. The slow start and not being sure it's the right model is causing uncertainty.* (RCI:9/4/03)

> *[She] referred to this as "one of the crassest bits of DfES planning" with absolutely ridiculous timescales.* (RCI:10/12/02)

Andrea Marriott (Head of Pupil Support) pointed out that:

"The fact that the project has been extended to include eight primaries is going to

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dilute the provision available to participating schools." She felt, therefore, that staff shortages in the team, the untried nature of the team in working with some of the most challenging pupils, and the way it had been organised put a question mark against its likely impact on the behaviour issue in her school. (SSI:7/3/03)

Right at the beginning of the study, Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) had felt:

> *There may be problems in individual schools to make sense of the initiative and get the maximum out of it. Connexions, EWOs, STEPs teams, child protection people: all do existing work, so how is the BEST team going to work is a current live issue for all participants. So it may be that leadership at the school level in this situation may be crucial to a positive outcome.* (RCI:10/12/02)

So this top-down initiative was having limited impact at the school level, with very low expectations about its future potential to be a helpful addition to existing initiatives on behaviour. Staff tended to feel they were being expected to expend time and effort fitting it into existing initiatives in an unhelpful way, due to its top-down nature, and that this was likely to be a wasteful use of resources when they were hard-pressed and struggling with existing commitments and initiatives. However, as Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator) said, even though prospects were unpromising:

> *"Schools are prepared to give it a go", with the EAZ providing logistical support in pulling together the planning of the work.* (RCI:10/12/02)

A number of school/community interface issues also arose in connection with this issue. Alice Warburton (Chair of the local Forum) admitted that the process of getting:

> "More funding ... creating more funding, or applying more funding ... just seems an enormous hill to climb at times." (SSI:31/7/03)

She also described a very tangled web of local groups and funding sources, with poor co-ordination and, in fact, competition between projects at the local level. This web of funding sources principally comprised government funding bodies and the European Union, with funding dependent on demonstration of community support and capacity, which tended to generate new local groups and committees of volunteers overseeing projects. But these groups tended to grow opportunistically, with little guarantee of coherence. Amongst the structures and groups she mentioned as being relevant locally were: two development trusts, an area panel of councillors, the umbrella voluntary

action grouping, a development group covering the south of the local authority area, a housing futures group, a childcare strategy group and the EAZ.

In spite of its potential significance to the local area, the new building plans for schools had been on the periphery of her and other local activists' radar screens, she felt:

> "I suppose there's an element of us seeing something that's a threat to, you know, what's going on here [in her community building]. And it'll be bigger and better and that this has been set up without any consultation with us so this is coming ... it's like a juggernaut that's coming whether we want it or not and we don't quite know what's happening. [Also] ...it was, sort of, something that was quite hard to engage with and get into really." (SSI:31/7/03)

Not only was this her negative perception of the new school building plans for the area, but existing links between schools and her local group were fairly limited too, particularly regarding the secondary school.

The Headteacher of Chatsworth primary (Julie Brier) had made a point of trying to engage parents of her pupils, to increase the school's links locally, improve its reputation and increase the skills base of local people at the same time. These initiatives included:

> *The Learning Zone circle of parents. They go on adult education college residential courses, have produced "Burntake the Musical" at the main theatre in town and made a video of it. They have also organised a Mystery Weekend at the adult education college.* (RCI:4/12/02)

These initiatives took place at the other end of the estate from Alice Warburton's community building and was not a set of initiatives she was familiar with either, although she had a positive view of Julie Brier and her school's work. However, the local community groups in the area had limited experience of links with local schools and were generally reeling from a plethora of initiatives and structures that were bewildering and lacking coherence. If true, this represented a potentially wasted opportunity to join-up and make best use of not only regeneration resources, but also new school buildings that could provide high-quality community facilities and a focus for developing community pride in the future.

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Summary

Leaders in the family of schools struggled with fitting the "top-down" *BIP/BEST* initiative into their existing work, particularly in the area of behaviour. The programme had been introduced with virtually no notice, had been slow to get off the ground and had suffered from staff shortages since the beginning. Politically, local education leaders had had little choice but to seek to engage with the project, but participating staff had doubts about the usefulness of the project for the challenging pupils and were sceptical about how this might fit into existing work of a sensitive nature. Making the effort to engage with *BIP/BEST* also ran the risk of skewing scarce time and energy of staff working in a tough context. All of these difficulties demonstrated the potentially unhelpful nature of "top-down" initiatives. Arguably, ways of working devised and owned by front-line education workers and their leaders stood a better chance of success in delivering effective programmes with pupils, particularly in highly disadvantaged communities.

At the school/community interface, a very tangled web of local initiatives and groups threatened to almost overwhelm local activists and stifle their determination to move on their local highly deprived community. Engagement of local people in school regeneration plans had been fairly limited and to a potentially unhelpful extent, given the potential for this major amount of public investment to contribute to community regeneration in Burntake. Clearly, account needed to be taken of this situation in the future to maximise the opportunities locally for school development and community regeneration in a more coherent manner.

3. New Buildings

Introduction

The issue of new buildings and specialist educational focus were live at the time of the Burntake study, as in Thurlby. A primary regeneration plan had been the subject of local consultation in the recent past, resulting in imminent plans for two new primary schools and a school closure in this family of schools. The new buildings were to be provided from the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), again as in Thurlby. The consultation

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had gone fairly smoothly, although the level of local involvement in the process had been perceived as fairly low-key, particularly concerning local residents. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of enthusiasm amongst school staff for the prospects of new buildings situated in an area of high disadvantage, and the potential signals this might send out locally for the role of local schools in aiding regeneration and in the value being placed on educational provision. Certainly, the existing buildings were in need of modernisation, with Chatsworth struggling with a recently-amalgamated primary school on a split site.

At the secondary school, the head teacher, Richard Johnson, was keen to move his school "on to the next level", but believed that something major was now required to make a crucial additional difference to the school's nature and perception locally. The poor state of the school's buildings were recognised to be an obstacle to progress by all concerned. So the school was set on a course of applying for academy status, with a potential for government funds to be unlocked to rebuild the school, provision of a sport and creative arts focus, and the financial backing of a sponsor to add to LEA formula funding. The identification of a suitable sponsor had not been straightforward to date and the school was keen to identify a partner that would support their inclusive ethos and build on progress made, rather than require a wholesale change in direction. As a fallback position, they were also looking at the possibility of specialist sport and arts status. This was a less attractive proposition as it involved less capital money to rebuild the school and potentially less financial underpinning generally. However, both routes were strong possibilities to take the school forward into the future, and both carried with them strong LEA support.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of issues relating to the school/community interface arose concerning buildings. According to Kirsty Meade (Arts Co-ordinator at the secondary school) specialist/academy status carried with it a range of possibilities. She believed it had potential to aid the school to change its practice and ethos, to raise aspiration locally, and to inspire pupils. This was set to build on gains already made from a low base. She pointed out that now Expressive Arts achieves relatively high examination results at GCSE level in the school, with a choice of subject being offered within the course

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between dance, music, drama and verbal art. They had developed video expertise that she felt *"particularly benefited boys",* and the EAZ had facilitated the setting-up of a digital studio in the school to input the technical side of the work, with training being funded as part of the package. Pupils were also used as peer teachers in this area of work. She pointed out that:

> *The specialist status is designed to facilitate different initiatives throughout the school: to break down some of the prevailing macho culture, to encourage the adoption of different learning styles, to bring the curriculum "alive" through more frequent use of dance and physical theatre, to boost pupil self-confidence and create more articulate students and encourage children to be given more responsibility. The specialism should enable barriers to be broken down more effectively between the school and the surrounding community, with kids involving their parents. (Inf:7/2/03)*

Further, she felt that spin-offs from this area of work, encapsulated in a potential future academy/specialist status:

> *Should lead to more cross-curricular work and more independent learning. She believes this will lead to children becoming more confident and being able to communicate with people more effectively. Of crucial importance is the provision is of high quality facilities, contributing to major improvements being made at the school leducationally. The working day needs to be changed in the sense that it needs to be more flexible with activities such as music taking place after school. She is keen for her youngsters to go out to the junior schools in the area, partly as a "P.R. job" for the secondary school. (Inf:7/2/03)*

Mary Wood (secondary school governor) agreed that a new focus for the school could inspire some pupils to take advantage of their educational opportunities in a renewed manner:

> "If you think of a child, disadvantaged at home, doing something ... that they might not be educationally great in maths and English, but if they can do something in the arts or sports or whatever, brilliant. Look at Linford Christie, if you can do something like that, exploit it, why not?" (SSI:14/7/03)

However, the wider potential impact of the secondary school re-building/re-branding on the local community was something that required greater awareness from staff if it was to be fully exploited in terms of its regenerative effects, according to Donna McKeown (EAZ Co-ordinator):

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She believes, then, that the community angle is the critical factor for the future, but acknowledges that this isn't widely accepted either locally or wider amongst teachers. She believes a lot of the impetus for this work currently in the zone is down to the LEA Director's view that education/schools can and should contribute to neighbourhood renewal. (RCI:6/2/03)

Also, Deborah Davis (Adviser) made the point that community engagement, even with the huge changes likely to take place at the secondary school envisaged in the academy bid was unlikely to be automatic:

> "They have to do the market research. They have to see what that community will engage in. What do they want? And if they don't want what's offered, what could be offered as alternatives? You can't do it to them, you've got to engage in dialogue and find out what it is the community would like." (SSI:23/7/03)

In spite of these reservations, there was general high hope developed by the bids and possibilities for major building investment. The headteacher's aim to "move the school to the next stage" had potential to raise up the local community and its children in a significant way, as far as the school's leadership team was concerned. Not least of the mechanisms for changing perceptions was the massive potential signal that would be sent out locally by a large amount of public spending on a secondary school. Instead of pupils feeling under-valued and this being symbolised by their education taking place in unsuitable buildings, the opposite inference might be drawn by the local community's young people about what they were entitled to. As Mary Wood (school governor) said:

> "If we could have another building it would be great. I've been in when they've had buckets under holes, leaking roofs, water coming through, you know what I mean ... We went for years where we'd had an old kitchen burnt out and we were trying our best to get that sorted out. So if they've got new facilities that would be, oh it would just be fantastic. Again, it would change the image, people don't go "there's that tatty old building", it would be change the image, so it really is important ... We've got to get away from the people's train of thought that that's the old school. And that's the only way, well, it's one of the ways, by building the new building, starting afresh." (SSI:14/7/03)

Summary

The Arts Co-ordinator of the secondary school (Kirsty Meade) pointed to a range of possibilities in the school offered by academy/specialist status. These were set to build

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on positive gains for pupils already achieved in the school. As well as potentially encouraging curriculum innovation across the board, the changes carried with them the possibility of breaking down barriers to learning and the building-up of pupil self-esteem. She also felt that the school and its community could mutually benefit from the academy/specialist focus in the future in a major way. Kirsty's views were also shared by the school's leadership, and were likely to have been held more widely in the school and possibly its community. Perceptions amongst staff and wider about the community regeneration potential of the possible new buildings were, however, patchy. Views were expressed, too, by some respondents that community engagement in these developments was not automatic and needed focused work to enable best use to be made of a major new community resource for the area.

However, the potentially huge signal that significant investment in state-of-the-art educational buildings for this highly disadvantaged community could send out locally were generally felt to be potentially extremely important: for local people's feelings of self-worth and for their children's perception of educational possibilities for themselves.

4. School Reputation/Values

Introduction

The issue of reputation-building in a tough context had been a major one for Chatsworth primary and for the secondary school in the recent past, as well as for other schools in the family group. Both schools had emerged from "special measures" in recent years and this had been extremely difficult to do. However, achieving this degree of progress, whilst being a major achievement, was only the start of a long process required to build their reputations locally to an acceptable level. Nevertheless, both schools were ambitious to move beyond a perceived basic level of acceptability in the eyes of their local community to be viewed as "normal" schools in every sense. This meant addressing barriers to learning amongst their school populations and raising aspirations in a transformational way: an extremely tough agenda.

At the same time, these schools had some very challenging pupils to deal with on a

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daily basis. There were differing views about the best way to deal with the inclusion issue, particularly where "sharp-edged kids" were concerned. These views were difficult to capture both philosophically and in terms of practice in these schools. Nevertheless, getting the balance right between inclusion beliefs and practice was a pressing leadership and pedagogical issue. The inclusion issue had potential seriously to undermine the work taking place on changing school reputation if either leadership on this issue was inadequate or the right mix of practical solutions was not available at school level.

Certainly, the prospects of new school buildings at Chatsworth and at the secondary school carried with them the potential to take these schools' reputations forward in a positive way, as at Thurlby. However, transformation in reputation could not be guaranteed in any sense through this process. In fact, school rebuilding carried with it the threat of undermining recent progress by these schools, as well as the opposite, if the change processes could not be approached in the right way. Nevertheless, the provision of new buildings was potentially a way of making a new beginning for these schools that could carry their change agenda forward in a positive way, in spite of the inherent risks.

Key Themes and Issues

A number of leadership issues arose in relation to the reputation/values area. Whilst school reputation and relationships with parents were seen as crucial at Chatsworth primary, arguably they were even more pressing at the secondary school. At this learning stage, the market can have a greater impact, with patterns of opting-away tending to skew the nature of a school's "comprehensive" status. The secondary, too, had an ongoing reputation issue that had its roots in perceptions predating amalgamation of two secondary schools on the present site, back in the 1980s.

The head teacher of the secondary school, Richard Johnson, believed that achieving a step-change in this situation required a bold vision and micro-political leadership skills to carry this through:

He feels passionately that a high-quality provision that can raise and meet local

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people's aspirations and is capable of including even "sharp-edged kids" is what the deprived area he serves requires."(RCI:10/6/03)

To this end, he believed:

> *"Academy status is something that can provide the necessary impetus for positive change [as] ... we need and merit to move another step forward."* (RCI:4/12/02)

Also, he calculated that:

> *"Academy status ... should enable the school to move on to the "next stage" - providing the mechanism for change and some extra resources."* (RCI:4/12/02)

Certainly, this bold vision was likely to be controversial and not unproblematic in nature, given the need to involve a partner sponsoring organisation. It was likely to require careful handling, not only in terms of identifying the type of partner that could attract the support of the staff body and the community, but also to be supported more widely as a concept. So Richard Johnson's micro-political skills as a leader were being tested in a challenging way as he steered ongoing negotiations involving potential sponsors and the LEA, and handled the issue with the school's stakeholders.

As far as practice issues were concerned, the head teacher of the secondary school regarded "moving on to the next stage" as necessary for the school. It had the capacity to change the reputation in a transformational way, partly because this *"will actually get people moving into the community to live."* (RCI:12/2/03) Because of the challenging context, he naturally was concerned:

> *"Can the management team lead the school on to the next stage?"* (RCI:4/12/02)

One sign, according to him, of the staff's general progress in recent times that gave him optimism about their capacity for change was:

> *"There is less panic among staff when things go wrong [given that] ...the school serves a very fragile community."* (RCI:3/2/03)

Another school practice that Mary Wood (school governor) believed was a good basis for the school moving ahead in the future was its organisation of pupils into sets:

"I think the grading is very important, because they were put in sets from day one. And I think that's so important I can't begin to tell you ... There are children who go to that school who really do have problems even in reading and writing, and if they weren't setted right from day one, then I think there would be problems all the way on the spectrum." (SSI14/7/03)

However, Deborah Davis (adviser) believed that the school needed to be aware that:

"It's the small things that damage reputations [and that] ... people have long memories [requiring the school to pay] ... attention to details." (SSI:23/7/03)

She recounted an example of where:

"A local landscape gardener wrote to the LEA because there were some youngsters from the school hanging around in what ought to have been school time. And for me those youngsters should have been picked up." (SSI:23/7/03)

Similarly, she recalled an incident:

"Of an attack on one of the [primary school's swimming] buses, probably by an excluded child [and] ... whenever things like that happen the school needs to be seen to be publicly proactive in terms of tracking down the perpetrator in this case ... and I mean publicly proactive, about making sure that they are saying "this is unacceptable" ... And sometimes I don't think they are perceived to do that." (SSI:23/7/03)

Certainly, the secondary school appeared to face a major uphill struggle in lifting local perceptions significantly. As Mary Wood (governor) pointed out, at the more advantaged end of the school's catchment area:

"You know, mud sticks. And it's going to take a long time ... to change people's ideas, [as there's] ...a lot of hype, a lot of rumours, a lot of parents tittle-tattling and "oh, you mustn't send him there" and "you're a bad parent if you send him there"." (SSI:14/7/03)

She admitted that a few years previously, when she was considering which secondary school to send her son to:

"The exam results [at Burntake secondary] terrified me ... I really was appalled by those." (SSI:14/7/03)

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Significant uplifts in examination performance at the school since that time were likely to have made some positive difference in the local perception of the secondary school, from a low base. Also, according to the Headteacher (Richard Johnson):

> *Value-added scores will help the perception of the school, he believes. [Also] he mentioned that the students from the more advantaged part of the catchment area have done "brilliantly" within that, demonstrating that some more able pupils also do well at the school.* (RCI:3/2/03)

However, one potential major difficulty that the secondary school particularly had to grapple with was, according to the headteacher:

> *The continuing tension caused by "kids being dropped on us" who do not add value to the school statistics and in other ways.* (RCI:3/2/03)

This, he believed was over and above the inclusion agenda for the school's surrounding community, challenging though that would have been on its own for the school to manage. As long as the school had surplus places and substantial learning support provision it was likely to have challenging pupils placed there by the LEA. This was also a difficulty faced by Chatsworth primary, to a lesser extent. So, he calculated that a step-change for the school engineered through academy status was likely to address this problem by targeting the more advantaged end of the catchment area and aiming to persuade them to stop opting-away from the school, thus reducing or eliminating its spare capacity. The head of the secondary school believed:

> *There is little incentive for a school to deal with the most disaffected pupils as it doesn't improve the reputation of the school.* (RCI:4/12/02)

Nevertheless, for his catchment area pupils, he felt that his school should aim to include them effectively, even though this was a dilemma for the school and its ongoing reputation:

> *"The young people who are excluded or allowed to stay away from school are likely to be indulging in inappropriate activities and getting themselves into*

serious trouble." (RCI:4/12/02)

Also, effectively, the school was having to "include" a skewed school population prior to achieving academy status and all the positive changes that the head believed should flow from that (outside and inside catchment area pupils, many of these with challenging behaviour and complex special needs), with many middle class children opting away to other schools. This made the task of inclusion of all pupils in a challenging context all the more difficult to achieve in a realistic way, and the job of building a positive school reputation all the more problematic.

At Chatsworth primary school, the head teacher, Julie Brier, had been aiming to demonstrate to local parents that success across the board for a school such as theirs was possible and happening. This demonstration of success was, she believed, an important way of raising aspiration for young people locally and lifting morale in the community, at the same time as raising her school's reputation:

> *She explained how the school had recently won an inter-schools quiz and how this demonstrated what an inner-city school can do with an injection of belief and high expectations.* (RCI:4/12/02)

Also, linked to improving national test results:

> *She explained how the LEA had indicated that they wanted to do a piece on the school (for the press) about how they had achieved an uplift in their SATs score of over fifty points. For these reasons and others she said she could now hardly remember the "dark old days" [i.e. three years previously when she had joined the school and it had been in special measures].* (RCI:4/12/02)

Such positive publicity was likely to help the school lift its reputation with its local community, if linked to other initiatives on an on-going basis, she believed. To this end, she was keen to see positive parental links, for instance:

> *The GCSE parent group, with parents doing trips to the local theatre. [and the transformational] family-friendly homework project ... "a turning point for the school".* (RCI:4/12/02)

As far as values were concerned, Richard Johnson (secondary school Headteacher) believed his approach and that of his school should be caring and child-centred, with a

moral purpose:

> *In the [staff] briefing held earlier on a teacher had said that a [notorious] Y9 group were going out to the countryside and hoped that the school would enjoy their day as a result. Richard had said the important thing is to hope that the children have a good day as the kids and their opportunities is what the school is about, not the benefit of the teachers.* (RCI:12/2/03)

The head of the secondary school's support service (Andrea Marriott) believed the school had:

> *An inclusive vision and inclusive guiding principles. "It's about getting it right for everybody and we can't predict need." There is a lot of care in the school.* (Inf:7/2/03)

Mary Wood (governor) had a similar view of the staff, from the parental viewpoint:

> "They want the children to learn ... with more commitment, probably, than any other school." (SSI:14/7/03)

However, the inclusion philosophy was stretched to breaking point, Mary believed, because of the skewed nature of the school's intake, due to surplus places:

> "People know we've got a good special needs department, they know we've got the unit where disaffected children can go ... so unfortunately the local authority see fit to be sending us lots of children that aren't in our catchment area ... Inclusion is from your whole catchment area. It's not bringing in children that have been excluded from other schools into yours." (SSI:14/7/03)

Deborah Davis (Adviser) voiced similar concerns about the skewed pupil intake at schools like Burntake secondary:

> "I don't think I'm aware of a city anywhere in the country with such polarisation in terms of wealth and deprivation. And obviously that's reflected in the schools to some extent as well. [So]... my view would be that it ought to be a truly comprehensive system where we are creating truly comprehensive schools [and to do that] ... it's a question of convincing middle class parents that their kids are going to get a decent deal in the local comprehensive." (SSI:23/7/03)

"Truly comprehensive" she regarded as a school where:

> "There is that normal distribution in terms of intellect and in terms of wealth of a school community [which] ... I think is the only way forward." (SSI:23/7/03)

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Making an inclusive ideological position practically effective in any educational situation is an ongoing challenge for school staff. In situations of working in highly disadvantaged communities the dilemmas are potentially extremely difficult to manage. This is likely to be even more problematic in schools where parental opting-away and surplus places skew the intake still further towards the challenging end of the spectrum, and away from a "truly comprehensive" pupil mix, as at Burntake secondary school. Nevertheless, the practical dilemmas were also considerable at schools such as Chatsworth primary and others feeding into Burntake secondary.

Caroline Swift, the LEA's BIP Co-ordinator, was firmly of the view that more could be done by schools across the age range to deal with pupils more effectively within the school itself, without resorting to specialist provision outside:

> *Head teachers tend to want the [BEST] team to take them away for a substantial amount of time, but she believes, they need to be in school as they are part of the community and sending them to a unit somewhere else is not the answer.* (Inf:18/2/03)

However, according to Julie Brier (Headteacher of Chatsworth) the needs of some children attending her school were so severe that even with high level teaching skills amongst her staff and specialist support on site, these "sharp-edged kids" were effectively being integrated rather than included, and disadvantaging other children at the same time:

> *There's a number of key people - a nurse dealing with autistic spectrum problems, the LSU [Learning Support Unit on site], I'm buying in people by the hour, pupil support allowance has just run out. Yet I've still got about five children in school who shouldn't be here – "it's about coping and keeping them in."* (F:11/2/03)

And for her, the situation was immediate, urgent and of a "make-or-break" nature. As was outlined earlier, she and her colleague primary head teachers believed that some "step-off" provision locally sited for some of the most urgent cases was the best way forward. She felt that:

> *"We need immediate action on the sharp-edged kids right now. This needs to happen now. It's a nonsense to think about the other [ongoing educational issues*

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for schools] before dealing with them." (F:14/2/03)

So, Julie Brier and her primary colleagues were signed-up to an inclusive agenda, as long as there was specialist provision to deal with the most challenging youngsters sited locally, as the schools themselves did not feel able properly to include them. This was at odds with the views of Caroline Swift and others (at the LEA) that not enough was being done by the schools to find strategies to genuinely include even these most difficult youngsters, without recourse to units. So, in effect, the policy did not fit the practical perceptions of what was possible and necessary to do at the school level for genuine inclusion to take place in these tough situations.

At the secondary school, the leadership's policy was very inclusively-orientated, in an extremely tough context. This effectively represented a difference of view between the primary and secondary stages about the practical parameters surrounding the inclusion of pupils. As Andrea Marriott (Head of the Support Service) said:

"They have an inclusive vision and inclusive guiding principles." (Inf:7/2/03)

For Richard Johnson (Headteacher) this meant:

He sometimes feels he pushes colleagues almost too hard on being child-focused, on inclusion and on discipline but this is necessary, he believes, alongside the passionate, inclusive vision that he has. He believes he is pragmatic in amongst the visionary stuff, however. [But]... meeting the needs of sharp-edged kids is only possible if continual pressure is applied in raising teaching and learning standards to reduce their number to make them more manageable as a group.(RCI:10/6/03)

At the same time, he pointed out:

Nobody wants the really disaffected kids but nevertheless he was extremely keen to keep the difficult kids in school if possible. (RCI:4/12/02)

As a result:

The inclusion agenda of the school does make it more vulnerable on behaviour. As far as getting the balance right between the internal health of the school and inclusion of pupils are concerned, "it requires common sense". We have to be up-

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front and stop children feeling intimidated, he feels. "Acts of violence are
unacceptable." (RCI:10/3/03)

For Robert Jones (Mentor Co-ordinator):

> *Bad behaviour, he feels, is about emotional illiteracy and also about classroom*
> *organisation. In the past, he believes, there has been too much emphasis on*
> *behaviour. (Inf:14/2/03)*

Like Caroline Swift (LEA BIP Co-ordinator), he was keen for pupils with challenging
behaviour to have their needs dealt with in the mainstream school situation, rather than
outside:

> *He feels the school exports a lot of their disaffected young people to other*
> *agencies (about 60 out 240 in a year group at Y11). "That worries me", he says*
> *,as teachers find it hard to learn the necessary lessons about how to work with*
> *these young people effectively in the school situation. (Inf:18/2/03)*

However, the dilemma for teachers in dealing with "sharp-edged kids" in a mainstream
secondary school situation (as at Burntake) in practice terms was spelt out by Andrea
Marriott (Head of the Support Service):

> "If a kid bites people and tells everyone to "F off" then nobody wants to include
> them because it stops others learning and stops teachers teaching. I believe in two
> basic rules: children have a right to learn and teachers have the right to teach and
> education is about rights." (SSI:7/3/03

Burntake's highly inclusive policy was applauded ideologically but questioned for
ongoing practicality by Deborah Davis (Adviser), particularly in the light of its
challenging context:

> "I admire Richard Johnson [Headteacher] and the inclusive philosophy that he
> very much lives out himself, but there are a huge number of very challenging
> youngsters in that school and he's asked to take ever more of those challenging
> youngsters [because of the surplus places in the school] ...The challenge for them
> is to make sure that [philosophy and practice] becomes embedded and each and
> every teacher works through their strategy for managing behaviour and sticks to
> it." (SSI:23/7/03)

So, for her, the dilemma was a constant one that was extremely difficult to manage at a

school like Burntake, but also in a general sense:

> "There will always be dissonance I think for us all about the inclusion agenda."
> (SSI:23/7/03)

Summary

At the secondary school, the head teacher (Richard Johnson) calculated that the only way to "move the school on to the next stage" was through developing and implementing a bold vision for the school. His chosen vehicle for achieving transformational change was academy status. His political leadership skills were set to be fully tested by this vision, given the need to persuade staff and parents that partnership with an outside organisation was necessary and a good thing. The secondary school, too, was grappling with a reputational issue from the past that was proving difficult to shake off, particularly in its highly challenging context.

Of crucial importance was the ability of the school to change practice to deliver improved performance across-the-board in the future, The school's setting policy was potentially a plus in this regard, according to Mary Wood (parent governor). But capacity of the management team, and current practices concerning troubleshooting at the school/community interface were issues that required further attention in the future, if the school was to improve its reputation and performance substantially at the local level. Other issues such as exam performance and surplus places also required further attention. At Chatsworth primary school, day-to-day attention to teaching and learning was supplemented by demonstrating to pupils and parents that the school could achieve major success in its drive to improve reputation incrementally.

There was a contrast of emphasis and practice between the LEA and primary headteachers concerning the way forward with the inclusion agenda. This contrast also existed between primary and secondary emphasis and practice, as the secondary school had a policy of drastically minimising exclusions and expecting class teachers to manage challenging behaviour within a framework of targeted support programmes in-school. This ambitious inclusion policy at the secondary school was against the very challenging context of not only a highly disadvantaged catchment area but a skewed

social mix, due to opting-away patterns and placement of excluded pupils in the school from outside.

The Headteacher of Chatsworth (Julie Brier) and her colleague primary heads were of the firm view that integration was likely to be the result rather than inclusion, unless specialist provision in local units were available to cater for "sharp-edged kids". This was not the perceived view of the LEA, who were keen to pursue the possibility of in-school solutions for these pupils. So, effectively, there was an ongoing wrangle about this situation. The secondary school's policy on inclusion was creating its own internal tensions and practice dilemmas, according to Deborah Davis (Adviser), that effectively threatened to undermine the school's morale and the push to enhance its reputation.

Conclusion

As with the Thurlby case study, the Burntake experience picked up on issues not only from the Central Research Question/Areas of Inquiry about leadership in practice and school improvement in a tough context, but also matters raised in the *Literature Review.* Given the particularly challenging context in Burntake, the consequences of that tough environment within a marketised school system were especially apparent. Reaching out to the surrounding community and its perceived importance for schools was an issue that got a mixed response. Reputation was a major issue for schools, given the need to raise aspiration locally and to encourage buy-in by parents to the educational vision on offer. In aiming for an uplift in local perceptions of Burntake schools, external pressures and policies had a major impact on what could be done to address this situation, particularly the inclusion strategy that was being pursued at LEA and school level.

The context impacting on these schools was challenging, too, when it came to the sheer number of initiatives impacting on schools. The *BIP/BEST* programme had a potential to address the behaviour strand that the EAZ had identified with local teachers as one of the priorities for effective action. But the way it was being delivered at the time of the study made the integration of the *BIP/BEST* team and way of working difficult to dovetail with existing school initiatives. At the same time, proposals from primary headteachers in the area to address the potentially destabilising behaviour issues had stalled in the planning process, due to an apparent difference of view between

practitioners and the LEA about how inclusion should be approached.

School leadership was particularly challenging in the Burntake context. Certainly, good progress had been made at Chatsworth and at the secondary school in raising attainment from a low base in the years immediately before the case study, and this had involved some strong and determined leadership from the headteachers and their staff to bring about. The extent to which this had been shared leadership is discussed later on, but shared vision and inspiration of staff to raise educational attainment, and attention to teaching and learning were leadership strategies evident in the data. However, no matter how up-beat and aspirational this leadership aimed to be, fragility and despair was likely to be just around the corner, given the tough context. To escape this fragility, the headteacher of the secondary school was in the process of pursuing a bold vision to manage the marketised system at local level to the school's advantage: through going for an academy bid. This aimed to make a step change through persuading the entire social range within the catchment area to send their children to the school, thus the current lack of comprehensive intake. This vision for the school was a major micro-political issue for the headteacher and his senior team, as the controversial plan required broad support to bring about both within the school and out in the community.

Chapter 8

Case Studies Commonalities
Contrasts and Examples of Perceived Effective Practice

Introduction

This chapter develops concepts from the fieldwork data outlined earlier (Rudestam and Newton, 1992). This is partly an inductive process of grappling with the specific results of the case studies, to draw inferences to the world of theory (ibid). As outlined in Chapter 3, it is also an *abductive* process, which checks out data outcomes not only with findings from relevant literature, but also with personal experience and knowledge of the types of phenomena being researched. The focus has also been firmly to discuss the wider meaning of the work (Preece, 1994), so that best practice examples of working in highly disadvantaged contexts can possibly be replicated elsewhere.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the common theoretical outcomes from the Thurlby and Burntake case studies. Issues of difference between the two studies are then examined. Finally, examples are given of perceived effective practice, in six areas of working central to the Research Question/Areas of Inquiry:

- Outstanding school leadership;
- The fostering of positive parental/community engagement;
- Schools being agents of local regeneration;
- Overcoming pupil disaffection;
- Raising the reputation of schools in poor areas; and
- Future planning of viable educational provision locally.

Commonalities

In Chapters 6 and 7, outcomes from the two case studies were set out under broad headings: "Behaviour", "External Factors", "New Buildings" and "School Reputation/Values". Under these headings, issues of leadership, practice and school-community interface were outlined, also reflecting major matters from the *Literature*

Review (Chapter 2). Both communities and their schools were grappling with an arguably "top-down" and managerialist policy context. There was a complex web of projects and initiatives with multiple accountabilities. Both school communities had made substantial progress in raising measured outcomes for their pupils in recent years, also positively affecting their reputations locally in the process. Models of leadership aimed for sharing of responsibility wherever possible and for developing a shared vision to maximise staff effectiveness. Implementation of this way of working was patchy and constrained at times, due to the challenging context and the imperative to make progress locally. Similarly, links with surrounding communities was regarded by professionals as an important aspect of their work but with variable outcomes. Child-centred and inclusive ways of working were generally articulated as preferred models in both communities, but with sharp actual differences in practice being experienced both within and between families of schools. Finally, these highly disadvantaged contexts represented a major challenge for practitioners characterised by vulnerability. In spite of ongoing regenerative and other initiatives locally, designed to uplift surrounding communities, the environment remained a considerable challenge. Nevertheless, the professional commitment and skill of those involved in the two case studies provided a positive response to this vulnerability in a range of ways exhibited in the data.

This chapter identifies seven common themes as a basis of theory development, arising from both case studies. Underlying these themes are dilemmas and perspectives reflecting the different outcomes in the two studies, as well as similarities of perspective between the two families of schools. They encapsulate common areas of concern, pressing practice issues, and shed light on the process of school leadership in these circumstances, as well as pointing to major issues concerning the impact of context.

These themes relate to issues of leadership, practice and school/community which were prominent in the data. However, they are not the only headings that could have been arrived at. Nevertheless, they provide a workable and valid list reflecting the major issues summarised above, emerging not only from the case study data but also from the *Literature Review*. They also have a linkage to my personal "people-centred" stance, rooted in personal experience of school practice, leadership, and highly disadvantaged communities. This linkage relates, in this chapter and in the following one, to the

identification of practical and even pragmatic solutions to complex leadership and pedagogical issues that maximises human potential in a tough context.

The following theoretical outcomes express common conclusions about the situation as it affected these two families of schools, with possible wider applications for schools in similar highly disadvantaged contexts. The outcomes are firmly centred around the issue of "leadership", the "core" of the research project. The themes are:

1. The nature of leadership required in these situations;
2. The micro-political leadership task involved in local partnership working;
3. The fragility of leadership and school progress, yet the extreme need for hope;
4. The dilemmas and difficulties associated with adopting child-centred approaches in these schools;
5. The leadership imperative of raising and then maintaining a school's reputation, often from a low base;
6. The transformational potential of school investment in highly disadvantaged communities; and
7. The difficulty yet leadership necessity of working with parents and the surrounding community.

The dimensions of these theoretical outcomes are set out below.

1. The Nature of Leadership Required in These Situations

In the case studies, school leaders were striving to effect positive change in a complex and challenging environment. As in the literature, the dilemma about the degree of collaboration as opposed to top-down direction possible and desirable in these types of situations was evident in practice. The extent to which leadership practice was value-driven, together with perceived examples of leadership strength also emerged from the studies.

The three headteachers: Graham Cummings (Thurlby secondary), Julie Brier (Chatsworth primary) and Richard Johnson (Burntake secondary), were perceived to be

"strong" leaders. Ribbins and Marland (1994) regard strong, positive leadership as the necessary foundation for a successful school. As we have seen, Graham was viewed to be the main driving-force behind not only the *Pathway Scheme* but across much of what went on in the school. His beliefs embraced a collaborative approach, but this was never easy to achieve, he felt. For instance, in spite of identifying a *Pathway* "champion", his leadership was viewed as central to the development of this programme in the school. In spite of wishing to be "bottom-up" in his approach, often ways of working in school were more "top-down" to ensure things happened. Bolman and Deal (1991) point out the difficulty in practice of leaders sharing power and responsibility, and this is particularly the case in tough contexts. Nevertheless, his very effective people skills helped gain colleagues' commitment to initiatives in school and a shared ideological underpinning for their work, albeit often because of the relative strength of Graham's ideas and character. It is important for leaders not only to be good listeners (Bennis and Nanus, 1997), but also sharing of values in an organisation to maximise commitment and a sense of direction (Sergiovanni, 1992) is absolutely crucial to leadership. Certainly, his strong and decisive leadership during the Iraq War incident was perceived as critical to its successful outcome. For Hampden-Turner (1990), dilemmas must be confronted to bring about resolution of complex problems. Also, rather than protecting people from outside threats, leaders should help colleagues to face up to practice difficulties so that they can adapt effectively (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997). Graham had metaphorically grasped this particular tough dilemma with both hands and been determined to make sure the crisis wouldn't undermine recent school progress, rather using it as an opportunity to restate the school's ethos and sense of purpose.

Julie Brier came across as an energetic leader with strong team-working approaches to issues in her school. This teamwork she viewed as an embedded way of operating, extending beyond her sphere of influence to the way the staff team as a whole performed. It was Julie's view that this way of working had contributed in a major way to the school's recent success in driving up performance in many areas, including pupil outcomes. She believed that shared commitment and ownership by staff was essential to achieving change. However, it is possible that this process was nevertheless driven by Julie herself to a large extent, to achieve much-needed change in a hurry, from a low base.

Richard Johnson, as we have seen, was arguably a "charismatic" leader, although this was a term he felt uncomfortable with. In spite of aiming for staff involvement in an effective way on the challenging initiatives underway in his school, the context meant that "leading from the front" was often his preferred way of working. This also was possibly temperamentally suited to his leadership style. He admitted that, as a result, the school may have been over-reliant on his initiative as leader.

Leadership strength was a highly-prized asset in these two very deprived communities. It took personal strength on a day-to-day basis to provide effective leadership to move these schools forward, and the responsibility was considerable, often without let-up, in these and other similar situations. The strength required lay partly in being able to engender a vision which others could commit themselves to, but also in developing the skills of others in the team. As we have seen, this was problematic at times for the leaders in the studies. Not only did various leaders have to jolt their schools into more effective delivery from a low base, but the imperative to improve standards was remorseless, requiring leaders to encourage a relentless focus on curriculum development and delivery.

At times, leadership had to be provided through being role models for others and providing encouragement in difficult circumstances. In these contexts, leaders were likely to deal with situations of extreme difficulty, of a "make-or-break" nature, where failure to find immediate, effective solutions could easily result in schools sliding backwards as organisations. Where leaders were able to promote a co-operative vision across a community to benefit young people in innovatory ways, arguably the outcomes for these schools in highly disadvantaged circumstances could be positive and productive. But such initiatives proved difficult to bring about and sustain.

2. The Micro-political Leadership Task Involved in Local Partnership Working

In the messy environment of modern partnership working for school leaders in highly disadvantaged communities, this clear vision linked to attainable goals is likely to be hard to achieve. In practice, twenty-first century school leaders in tough contexts have to negotiate their way through multiple accountabilities and responsibilities. For schools to see themselves as part of a wider network and to take advantage of the flexibilities

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and gains offered by this partnership environment is not only difficult in its own right, but also organisationally problematic.

As has been noted, school practitioners in the Thurlby community had developed a vision to aim for greater coherence between statutory service providers over a period of years. As Bennis and Nanus (1997) point out, the leader's vision for an organisation must be clear, attractive and attainable. This approach of local joining-up wherever possible, linked to levering-in of external funding sources, with schools potentially at the centre of this network had helped to form the EAZ, in effect. Schools had been able to demonstrate at the time of the bid that they had the beginnings of a common approach within the local area and a co-operative approach between themselves. They agreed with Graham Cummings' (Secondary Headteacher) view that this co-operative approach stood the best chance of schools starting to make headway in transforming young people's life-chances.

In Burntake, the *BIP/BEST* initiative had been an extremely problematic and "top-down" initiative, with major implementation difficulties at the time of the study. Local schools had felt they had little option but to try to engage with the project, but nevertheless found links generally time-consuming and problematic, with only very limited perceived positive results for the schools and the individual children that the project was aimed at. Arguably, a project conceived and owned at local level may have stood a better chance of success and of linking into existing work more effectively. Also, in the Burntake community, local regeneration initiatives had been set up over the past few years with many funding sources and different accountable bodies. At the same time, the local school regeneration proposals had been planned largely separately from the community regeneration plans. This lack of co-ordination locally was likely to have caused scarce resources to be deployed in this highly needy community in a less than efficient way.

Clearly, disadvantaged communities need all the help they can get in terms of regeneration and lifting of people's horizons. The stark nature of the challenge being faced makes it imperative that all agencies work together to maximise resources available to build up the community, with schools having a crucial part to play in the joining-up process. In both case study communities, the local Education Action Zones

had co-ordinated projects devised by all the schools jointly in a bottom-up way, using extra government funding. It had not only been perceived to increase local school co-operation but has also made possible a certain amount of school engagement with other agencies and organisations.

However, this process of joining-up was extremely difficult, particularly given the challenging nature of school delivery in these types of communities. Also, so numerous were the local initiatives, that making sense of the totality of local regeneration projects, to the benefit of the local population, was extremely patchy. Where the needs are so enormous, this lack of co-ordination is a very serious concern, as families require the maximisation of any available resources to improve their situation. Schools, too, tend to find outside engagement a major difficulty, given their need to concentrate on the core educational task. However, whatever the blocks, ways do need to be found to increase co-ordination between initiatives, and schools arguably should be at the heart of a community's regeneration efforts, not at the margins.

3. The Fragility of Leadership and School Progress, Yet the Extreme Need for Hope

In the school improvement literature, prescriptions for success abound but are often rightly regarded as context-related. Also, a huge amount of contestation exists concerning the extent to which schools can achieve positive results without attention also being given to affecting context. As previously pointed out, the position adopted for this study sits between school improvement and critical theory approaches. Effectively, this accepts that everything possible should be done to bring about school improvement but that context also needs to be addressed.

Achieving higher practice standards based on shared values, getting colleagues to work effectively as a team, and achieving change in a calm manner are all a major undertaking in a tough and challenging context. In Thurlby, the Iraq War incident demonstrated the fragility of progress, even in a school where much progress had been made on all the above areas. The headteacher's strong action at the time was perceived to be decisive in resolving the difficulty, but the situation itself illustrated the fragile nature of leadership in these situations and of school improvement. The school was able

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to call on parental goodwill on that occasion to help them cope with the crisis, but the relationships with the school's parents themselves were fragile too, due to the nature of the highly disadvantaged community. In spite of these difficulties, Thurlby's families of schools remained determined to concentrate on improving teaching and learning in their efforts to combat the fragility surrounding them, rather than through tackling the behaviour issue in its own right.

In Burntake, there was a strong desire amongst school staff to enable the young people to make good progress educationally, but this progress was seen as always hard-won and fragile. They had initially had to "jolt the system" (Gray et al, 1999) and aimed for calmer organisational approaches from a firmer base thereafter. High commitment and resilience, coupled with a vision of progress continuing into the future helped to keep the despair at bay. However, there was a management capacity issue at the secondary school, given all the initiatives and challenges they faced, as well as an ongoing need to be seen to take decisive action to put matters right when problems from school spilled out into the surrounding community. Exam performance, too, was difficult to improve to levels regarded as acceptable to all concerned. Cultural change had been essential to bring about at Burntake (Fullan, 1991) but, as Stoll and Fink (1996) point out, the school had felt the need to gain control of events in a more fundamental way to move forward. At Chatsworth primary school, whilst teaching and learning were much improved in recent years, "sharp-edged kids" were perceived to be a constant challenge to the school's progress and integrity.

Schools in disadvantaged communities like these are likely always to be fragile and remain vulnerable. One of the reasons is the "overload" experienced by teachers and those in leadership positions, because of the nature of the job. This is a daily struggle, with no days being easy from the working point of view. In this situation, individuals can become overwhelmed very easily, even if they are highly competent and resilient professionals. If something goes wrong in school, the reserves of energy and expertise available to deal with the situation are likely to be scarce and depleted, adding to the difficulties.

The situation is compounded either by the shortage of high-quality staff applying for jobs in these schools, or by a high staff turnover, which is especially serious when

outstanding leaders leave. So these features are particularly serious as far as the pupils are concerned, because the children being taught in these schools are very much in need of consistency and settled relationships with staff, to give them maximum support and encouragement. Also, the constant fallout from low attainment levels, compared to other schools in more advantaged areas, (published in league tables and official statistics) adds to the pressure on these schools to perform and to the associated fear of failure.

4. The Dilemmas and Difficulties Associated with Adopting Child-Centred Approaches in These Schools

It is not at all surprising that school staff in the case studies with inclusive beliefs were facing dilemmas and difficulties about turning an inclusive educational vision into reality in their work situation, given the difficulties they faced. In both case study areas, staff grappled with not only physical deprivation of pupils but also attitudinal blocks to progress (Whitty, 2001; Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). Certainly, respondents were aware that the young people they were working with faced a huge struggle day-to-day in every way (Ball, 1990; 2000; Schoon, 2001). In Thurlby, the child-centred and inclusive vision of the secondary headteacher, Graham Cummings, was also arguably a pragmatic one. This approach to the *Pathway Scheme* came to be perceived as a useful and potentially helpful one for the target disaffected pupils, as far as participating staff were concerned. This was done partly through Graham's people skills and micro-political abilities in this situation, but also through a step-by-step planning process with colleagues. Even though it became clear during the planning stage that the original full aims of flexible and pupil-centred planning were unlikely to be available in the first phase, the pupil-centred approach was nevertheless perceived to have been kept at the heart of the proposals by staff. On this basis, they remained committed to the scheme in spite of the apparent difficulties.

In the Burntake study at primary school level, the difficulties involving the inclusion agenda involved the perceived mismatch between intention/philosophy and the practicalities of the situation. Staff were keen to "include" rather than merely "integrate" and felt that extra specialist assistance would be required off-site to assist some challenging youngsters with their learning, away from their peers. This view was not

one that was shared by relevant LEA advisers and therefore led to an ongoing disagreement about how to achieve "inclusion" in practice for this age-group.

At secondary level, the inclusive philosophy of the headteacher and the leadership team came up against practical difficulties, given the inadequacy of available specialist help to meet the needs of challenging and disaffected pupils in the mainstream situation. The challenge to staff in mainstream classroom situations to renew their practice and acquire the necessary skills to tackle behaviour caused practical difficulties and problems of morale for individual teachers in this very challenging situation. As has been pointed out before, Burntake secondary school suffered from a skewed social mix of pupils weighted towards the challenging end of the spectrum, making the task of classroom teachers all the more difficult when it came to genuine "inclusion", rather than "integration". In these circumstances, the UK government's assumptions (and of writers such as Barber and Dann, 1995) that deprivation should not be regarded as a bar to progress was being very sternly tested. Certainly, without a plan to take the school "to the next level", Burntake would have been mired in an extremely tough set of circumstances without the prospect of significant progress being possible in the foreseeable future.

Making sure all, pupils were effectively included in mainstream schools was a huge issue in these disadvantaged areas. For some staff, there was an idealistic belief that this should happen so that youngsters are taught in mainstream classes for the majority of the time, with withdrawal being minimised, almost regardless of the knock-on effects. Others felt that some "sharp-edged kids" were too disruptive to be taught unless they could receive special support, either in a small group or in a unit catering for their needs, away from other pupils.

This situation was arguably best resolved through pragmatic strategies, where a balance could be struck between the needs of the majority and making sure the needy minority get help to enable them to progress. Certainly, there was a strong view that having challenging young people in mainstream classes without the support they needed was merely "integration" rather than "inclusion". The growing use of mentors and support units within schools, together with specific targeted help for individual children, but

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within the context of curriculum innovation and a buoyant and diverse pupil population, appears to offer the most promising way forward.

In the demanding environment of a school in a disadvantaged community, the temptation for staff to concentrate on their own survival day-to-day, rather than to put children's needs first, can be overwhelming. School leaders and their colleagues, therefore, have constantly to put children's needs at the forefront of their work to counteract this, whilst having regard to the internal health of the school. Unless children are truly at the heart of everything a school does, the chance of positive outcomes being achieved in these circumstances are likely to be remote indeed.

Certainly, disaffected young people are perceived to respond positively to certain adults in school in spite of their negativity. At the same time, when specific needs of young people are addressed and the curriculum is delivered in ways which inspire them, disaffection can be contained more effectively. Also, too, where young people are treated with respect as a matter of school policy this can foster positive attitudes within school, encouraging a sense of belonging and ownership rather than alienation.

5. The Leadership Imperative of Raising and Then Maintaining a School's Reputation, Often From a Low Base

We have seen that in the Thurlby study, the Iraq War incident had had the potential to tip the secondary school into a decline, in spite of the very good progress across the board in recent years. The headteacher, Graham Cummings, had judged that safeguarding the integrity of the school and its reputation were the overriding considerations on this occasion and acted in a strong manner as leader to this end. Even though the opportunity presented by new buildings was important for the school in terms of its future reputation, there were many potential pitfalls in its conception and implementation as far as the surrounding community was concerned too. The head teacher and his colleagues had been aware of this situation and made a major effort to keep ethnic minority parents on board, as well as other surrounding local residents. Examination success had been moving ahead well at secondary level particularly, making a positive impact on the school's reputation, in spite of the highly disadvantaged context. Perceptions amongst local staff had been that curriculum and

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pedagogical changes had also contributed to their schools being more highly-regarded. Certainly, the secondary school being oversubscribed for the first time was a sign of reputational advance in the local area.

In Burntake, the secondary school had struggled to shake off an inherited negative local reputation from the past. The headteacher, Richard Johnson, had judged that achieving academy status was the vehicle for repairing this difficulty for his school, and increasing its reputation. However, there was no guarantee that this was a panacea in itself, given the tough context for the school and the constant need to build on the real improvements made since it had been in special measures a number of years previously. At Chatsworth primary school, the headteacher, Julie Brier, had successfully taken it out of special measures also. Results in tests were much improved and links with parents were greatly increased, giving the school and its community a renewed sense of pride. This had all been achieved prior to a projected move into new school buildings. Again, new buildings were likely to have a further positive impact on the school's growing reputation, if Julie and her staff could manage the fragility of the school environment that they were working in.

We have seen in the literature, that part of the head teacher's task is viewed as enabling pride in the school (Ribbins and Marland, 1994). However, this task of raising aspiration, and ultimately school reputation in highly disadvantaged communities is, almost by definition, likely to be extremely problematic. The potential for schools to transform the life chances of young people in tough circumstances may require measures beyond the school improvement agenda. Schoon (2001) calls for the setting up of socially balanced neighbourhoods throughout the land to enable children everywhere to have access to the same quality of education and an equal chance to fulfil their potential. At the same time, he believes that only truly comprehensive schools in poorer neighbourhoods can deliver for disadvantaged young people. We have also seen that the operation of a marketised school system involving parental opting-away from community schools makes this aim extremely difficult to achieve in practice. Nevertheless, avoidance of skewed intakes and the encouragement of balanced social intakes, particularly at secondary level, is arguably crucial to school achievement and reputation in inner city contexts.

School reputation is absolutely vital to schools in these situations. Positive relationship with the community on a whole range of levels is extremely important and often revolves around issues of trust. In times of difficulty, the school may need to fall back on its local reservoir of goodwill to survive the shock and move on. But, in these types of community, the tendency is for negative school reputations from the past to depress demand for places at local secondary schools, with many parents opting to send their children elsewhere. If these parents tend to be more middle class, as is true in Burntake, this reduces the social mix of young people at secondary level, making it more difficult to establish a genuine comprehensive school population. Tackling this trend is arguably an absolute imperative if these types of communities are to receive an education for their children of equal worth to those in more affluent areas. Tackling this issue of reputation was certainly a major one in these two communities, with some success being achieved in turning this situation around.

6. The Transformational Potential of School Investment in Highly Disadvantaged Communities

In the Thurlby data, it was clear that the planned new secondary school buildings were perceived by staff both as an opportunity and as a potential stumbling-block. Maintaining a positive momentum during the changeover was likely to be a major leadership, pedagogical and organisational task. Graham Cummings, the headteacher, recognised the importance of keeping the local community aligned with the positive vision that the plans encompassed: for high quality education, linked to a very important local resource for the population as a whole at the heart of their deprived community. As Putnam (2000), Coleman and Bourdieu (1991) and Gamarnikow and Green (1999) point out, transforming the prospects for disadvantaged communities and their young people needs to involve the building of "social capital", together with genuine "bottom-up" transformation. For them, this transformation needs to be related to a broad range of issues in the inner-city, wider than simply educational inputs and outcomes. The planned sport and arts specialism was designed to build on existing work with young people but also to provide a potential vehicle for raising aspiration locally and a source of community pride. The message that this scale of public investment could potentially send out in this poor context was a very important one: that the community's education

was highly to be valued and that unprecedented levels of capital funding were being provided to enhance local young people's life chances.

In Burntake, the secondary school was also embarking on a creative arts specialist trajectory, building on foundations of existing work in this curriculum area. Like Thurlby, they viewed this specialism as a potential driver of aspiration and inspiration for pupils and their families, and a potential way of increasing local pride and school reputation. These aims they saw as crucial ones in this highly deprived context where these commodities were in short supply and hard-won. But the way this building project and new status would lead to the anticipated gains was not viewed by staff or local people as unproblematic. Community focus for this work was likely to be a major issue of potential difficulty, given the track record in the area of past consultation about school regeneration, which had been perceived as not involving local people sufficiently. Reservations also existed about the quality and extent of secondary school links locally. Julie Brier, Chatsworth headteacher, had already begun to engage with her surrounding community about their shared vision (the local population and school staff) for their new school buildings and the potential impact they could have locally.

As we have seen from the studies, schools in disadvantaged communities have the potential to be a major resource and focus of pride for their communities. Both these aspects of what schools can provide tend to be much-needed in poor areas, and where they are in evidence, can have very positive spin-offs for the school and its pupils. There is a general sense in which community groups and their leaders can have an important role in helping schools to do their job effectively, and this goes beyond just parental involvement. The links of a school with its surrounding community touch, too, on the micro-politics of a disadvantaged community, with its networks and associations.

In these situations, initiatives to involve the community in sport and expressive arts work featuring local children can be extremely effective. Also, if schools are celebrating success of pupils, or where plans are being made substantially to improve a school's facilities, great strides can be made in moving a school closer to its community and build faith in the local area's future. Equally, failing to engage with the community in these types of ventures can be a massive lost opportunity.

In these two highly disadvantaged communities, large investments of public money to rebuild or repair the schools were about to take place at the time of the studies. Both secondary schools were due to be completely rebuilt, as were some of the primary schools. A large amount of community engagement was taking place as a result, to look at the plans and their possible benefits locally. So this was a massive opportunity for schools not only to re-launch themselves and to engage more with their local area, but these projects were potential regeneration catalysts for their local areas in their own right.

7. The Difficulty Yet Leadership Necessity of Working with Parents and the Surrounding Community

In the Thurlby data, Graham Cummings, the secondary school headteacher, was perceived as having made important strides in linking the school with its local population, including its multi-cultural community. As Barber and Dann (1995) and other writers stress, parental involvement in schools together with special programmes of educational support for individual pupils, are vital to progress being made in poor communities. Other writers argue for schools to see themselves as part of a wider network to maximise the educational gains for their pupils and the local population generally. His leadership was regarded as very important to this process by respondents. However, there was still a problematic environment of school/community links in the family of schools as a whole. Far View, particularly, struggled to engage effectively with their ethnic minority parents. Nevertheless, role models from the community, mainly in the form of support staff such as mentors at the secondary school, were seen by respondents as being a key to better school/pupil and school/community relationships in the future.

The meeting of local people in community settings by the secondary headteacher and other staff, added to local people's feelings of the school being part of their community and an organisation that they could feel part of in return. Pre-school links across the family of schools were a shared focus of activity, aiming to embed good connections between local people and schools from when their children were still at a very young age. The growing practice of community placement of young people and links with

employers at a local level, were all initiatives designed to link schools better to their surrounding community.

In Burntake, respondents also regarded community links as important for schools to do well, particularly at Chatsworth primary school. Julie Brier, Chatsworth's headteacher, had deliberately set out to embed school practice out in the community through the operation of the homework project, and had initiated opportunities for local people to use the school as a community resource. These initiatives, she believed, were extremely important for the school's educational practice and success, as well as its reputation. Community links at secondary level appeared to be less strong and well-established. However, the EAZ Co-ordinator had a strongly-held view that community links in her zone held the key to schools doing better across the board, particularly as far as pupil behaviour was concerned.

As we have seen, making parents partners in the work of a school in a disadvantaged community is particularly difficult but nevertheless vital. There is a thin dividing line between success and failure in this aspect of what a school does, with progress made being easily undone in a short space of time. Clearly, unless parents can be encouraged to help their children and show an interest in their progress, the school's task is all the harder. And in poor communities there is likely to be a negative history as far as schooling is concerned for many individual parents, that tends to take a great deal of effort to overcome.

However, where parents are encouraged to engage with schools when their children are young and to develop their parenting skills, where school projects encourage children to receive parental support with home-working, and where parents have their lifelong learning needs catered for, a great deal of progress can potentially be made. These positive links stand the chance of helping schools to create a positive attitude to education in the community as a whole, that impacts back on children's achievement. Unless inroads can be made into attitudes in this way in disadvantaged communities, prospects for educational advance are likely to be bleak.

Highly disadvantaged communities are often extremely low on trust in local people, outside agencies, service deliverers and local schools. The tendency may be to believe

that the situation cannot improve and for widespread cynicism to hold sway. At the same time, local skills and networks may be limited and the ability to improve this, extremely difficult to do. In these circumstances, raising people's horizons and driving-up educational performance locally is a colossal undertaking. Arguably, virtually nothing can be achieved without the surrounding community sharing a school's enthusiasm and optimism for positive change.

Contrasts

1. The Behaviour Issue

In the Thurlby data, it is clear that in spite of ongoing fragility in this highly disadvantaged community, staff were keen to avoid focusing purely on the behaviour issue in their day-to-day practice. In policy terms, they aimed to treat behaviour difficulties as a symptom rather than a cause of wider difficulties in schools. Graham Cummings (secondary school Headteacher), particularly expressed concern about a behaviour-focused approach. The EAZ Co-ordinator also pointed out that the zone had decided not to pursue a behaviour strand to their work (unlike at Burntake). Rather, a range of support for pupils having particular behaviour difficulties was deployed across the zone, which respondents generally felt to be delivering the desired outcomes: educational psychologist support on behaviour management, curriculum and personal support arrangements in schools, and a major push to transform teaching and learning across the zone to address disaffection. In the case of the secondary school, mentor deployment for a wide range of needs including behaviour, positive measures to encourage good pupil-staff relationships and the *Pathway Scheme* were all deployed to effect improving behaviour in school.

Although the socio-economic indicators for Burntake were similarly low compared to Thurlby, the context presented as more challenging across the age range in Bunrtake. At the same time, the EAZ had decided to major on behaviour as a specific area for improvement across the zone, rather than simply to treat it as a symptom of wider issues. The zone certainly had had a difficulty fitting the perceived "top-down" *BIP/BEST* initiative into their behaviour work, which added a complication, yet potential additional resource in their challenging context. As we have seen, there was a

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perceived difference of approach, too, across the family of schools and with the LEA about the best way to tackle the inclusion/behaviour issue that added to the difficulties on this issue. The primary head teachers were keen to tackle their most challenging pupils' problems through local "step-off" unit provision to make the mainstream situation more manageable both for the majority of pupils and for staff. This they felt stood the best chance of achieving genuine "inclusion" of these young people, rather than mere "integration". As a potential way forward, it was essentially a "tough choice" and a pragmatic approach. But during the study, this way forward had not found favour with relevant LEA advisory staff and did not look likely to gain approval.

At Burntake secondary school, leadership policy was firmly in favour of maximising inclusion in the mainstream situation, but in a very challenging context. This arguably resulted in some "integration" rather than "inclusion" of pupils if the support for individual pupils was inadequate to the task, and if class teachers did not possess the necessary skills in dealing with challenging behaviour. Where the learning support unit was not always available to provide support for pupils requiring special educational input due to pressure of needs and where the mentor team were used to assist what was termed "the middle group" rather than the most challenging young people, the situation was likely to have been at times problematic in individual classroom situations day-by-day.

So, it is arguably the case that in Thurlby, a combination of a perceived less challenging context, a more unified and settled approach to behaviour across the family of schools, and a philosophical view that causes of behaviour needed focusing on rather than the behaviour itself, was having a positive impact on the behaviour of pupils. In Burntake, the philosophical differences of those involved, the more challenging context, the complication of the *BIP/BEST* implementation difficulties, and the greater focus on behaviour as an issue rather than its causes, were possibly contributing to a less positive result overall.

2. Differing Degrees of Fragility

We have seen that at Thurlby secondary school, the Iraq war incident had had the potential to undermine much of the hard-won gains of recent years. This view and perception from respondents illustrates the fragile nature of schools in highly disadvantaged communities like Thurlby. The fact that the school and its leadership came through this dangerous crisis is much to their credit, showing that they possessed the necessary organisational and leadership strength to cope. The head teacher, Graham Cummings, was fully aware of the fragility of the context he was operating in, recognising that this situation required constant effort to overcome on a daily basis. The added element of operating in a multi-cultural community meant that still greater efforts had to be made to build trust, given cultural differences and perceptions. Arguably, however, this diversity had become a source of strength for the school, given the progress they had made in building trust across the range of cultures locally. Also, Thurlby secondary school had established its reputation with its surrounding community to the extent that it was now over-subscribed, attracting the full range of available pupils and therefore having a largely comprehensive intake. This had been achieved over a period of time from a fairly low base, but nevertheless prior to the school receiving its new specialist status and preparing to move into new buildings.

In Burntake, a small group of very disaffected and disruptive pupils across the age range, often referred to as "sharp-edged kids" were a particular challenge and concern for staff. The issue was at the forefront of participants' thinking in a way that did not appear to be the case in Thurlby to the same extent. At Chatsworth primary school, Julie Brier its headteacher was constantly concerned about the behaviour issue due to its potential impact on the ability of her school to make progress and transform pupils' educational outcomes. As previously noted, the fragility of the situation in this family of schools was added to by the potential looming leadership crisis during the study, due to a high proportion of head teachers moving on to other work.

Certainly, some of the incidents reported in "reality check" interviews by Julie Brier, Chatsworth's head, were extremely concerning and serious in nature, such that she confessed that they were a new experience for her and her staff. The secondary school was viewed by inspectors as providing insufficient leadership on the behaviour issue

during the study, adding to the concern of the head teacher, Richard Johnson. He also echoed the view of the head of Thurlby when he characterised the school as being vulnerable on the discipline issue, due to its context. Of particular concern to the secondary head teacher, however, was the constant arrival at the school of outside pupils in need of a school place. These pupils were generally in this situation following exclusion or expulsion from their previous school and therefore further skewed Burntake's intake towards the challenging end of the spectrum, and away from being genuinely comprehensive. So, prior to moving to specialist status and moving to new buildings, Burntake secondary school still had surplus places, difficulties of reputation from the past and a critical mass of disaffected pupils to contend with.

So, comparing the two contexts, superficially they are similar, but the degree of fragility built into the Burntake situation appeared to be greater than the Thurlby set of circumstances for the reasons given. It may be that the longer experience of developing holistic inter-school and inter-agency solutions in Thurlby had led to these changes being more embedded, with a positive effect on the schools as a result.

3. The History of Fragility and its Impact on Schools

Thurlby's secondary headteacher, Graham Cummings, had identified that local initiatives drawing on external funding to aid the regeneration of the community were important to improving pupil outcomes. This had been an aim of his dating back to the start of his head-ship, some eight years previously. Even though these initiatives had begun to make a difference locally, he felt that the joining-up process was often left to busy professionals like himself and this was an inadequate model. Nevertheless, progress had been made to join-up efforts in Thurlby, partly due to the existence of an EAZ that was perceived to have been operating successfully. Local schools had not been in any form of special measures for some years, and the secondary school had never had any designation of weakness or failure.

In Burntake, two primary schools and the secondary school had all been in special measures in the past, but not in the three years prior to the case study. The two schools, including Chatsworth primary, that had recently come out of special measures had made a great deal of progress in terms of pupil outcomes, arguably more than other schools in

the family. As we have seen, the secondary school particularly was having to cope with a large number of challenging pupils and students with special educational needs. This made the difficulties of context all the greater, particularly as the school operated a very inclusive policy which required teachers to cope with some extremely challenging young people in their mainstream classes. School reputation was also a major issue in Burntake, particularly for the secondary school.

So, whilst both case study communities had had schools in the "failure" category at various times, the schools in Burntake had more of them and more recently. As this process was so traumatic for the schools concerned, it may be that the more settled experience in Thurlby, together with the longer time in post of key leadership figures there (including the very influential head teacher of the secondary school) helped this community to build strength incrementally over a period of time. Also, it may be that the relatively embedded regeneration project work in Thurlby began to impact positively back on the schools and their performance in a way not happening to the same extent and for the same length of time in Burntake.

4. Perceived Differences in Approach

The approach at Thurlby secondary school as far as challenging pupils was concerned, involved a child-centred and inclusive approach, as in the *Pathway Scheme*, but firmly rooted around practicalities of implementation. Graham Cummings, the head teacher, was personally committed to pragmatic approaches but informed by a child-centred and caring philosophy of teaching. So he very much believed in "sharp-edged kids" receiving as much assistance as the school could provide, but in such a way that other pupils did not become disadvantaged. As far as he was concerned, the outcomes for the individual child were the drivers of school practice and policy.

In Burntake, the particularly challenging context across the age range meant that getting the balance right between inclusion beliefs and practice was a pressing leadership and pedagogical issue, even more than at Thurlby, arguably. The impact on school reputation of getting the mix wrong was likely to be damaging both short- and long-term, with potential for further skewing the intake towards the challenging end of the pupil spectrum, particularly at the secondary level.

Comparing the approaches adopted between the two studies, the Thurlby situation appeared to offer a relatively settled, calm and pragmatic way forward, but within a volatile context. They concentrated on what was believed to work best, both short- and long-term, coming up with innovative and practical solutions to complex problems. They arguably applied their child-centred and high-quality curriculum delivery in a way that linked it coherently to practice. Burntake secondary school, meanwhile, had such a challenging context that the high commitment and ideals of leading staff were likely to have been tested in practice terms on a daily basis in all classroom situations. The challenging context at primary level in Burntake led head teachers to take a radical view of the best way to deal with their most challenging pupils which at the time of the study had failed to impress the administrators.

5. The Impact of Parental Choice

As has already been noted, Thurlby secondary school had made progress in recent years to address the difficult yet vital issue of reputation. The steady progress in delivering improved pupil outcomes in public examinations had resulted in there being competition for places at the school. This was a remarkable achievement, given the problem schools in similar highly deprived situations tend to have with the reputation issue. In spite of recent "value-added" measurements being applied to league table scores for schools, with the consequent improvement in some inner-city schools' positions in the tables as a result, this is possibly only likely to have minimal effect on surrounding community perceptions of their local school's reputation, unless it is linked to other major signals of a school's progress and performance.

At Burntake, the reputation issue at Chatsworth primary school had been tackled in recent times through engaging parents in a variety of ways in the work of the school, as well as aiming for improved pupil outcomes. Success in these areas had generally been positive at the time of the study, prior to the school moving into new buildings and therefore possibly improving its reputation still further, based on existing embedded improvements. At the secondary school, the market system was operating so that patterns of opting-away skewed the comprehensive nature of the intake in a negative way. The ongoing poor reputation issue inherited from the past was hard to shift in a

positive direction, and this worked with market forces to the school's disadvantage. To break out of this situation, the headteacher, Richard Johnson, had calculated that improvements made in the school under his leadership required a further change-agent to truly repair and transform the school's reputation, and encourage local parents to support the school so that their children transferred there at age eleven. The vehicle for this transformational change he identified as academy status.

So, comparing the two situations, Thurlby secondary was effectively at a stage further on in its development than Burntake secondary school, having improved its reputation and results to a level where they now have an over-subscribed situation. All this is prior to moving to new buildings and achieving specialist status. Effectively, Burntake was reliant on the new buildings and specialism to move up to a further level of reputation and attainment, even though progress under their head teacher from special measures in the past had been positive.

6. Community Engagement

As has been noted already, Thurlby secondary school saw its role not only in relation to its pupils, but also to its surrounding community. This was a philosophical belief of its headteacher, also shared by other key staff members, that community engagement led to added value back in the school as far as pupil learning was concerned. Graham Cummings, the secondary headteacher, possessed leadership and micro-political skills that enabled him to cross boundaries out into the community in ways that were perceived to be effective. This also had the potential to impact back positively on the school's reputation with its surrounding community. The secondary school had a policy of aiming for local people to be employed in school as support workers wherever possible, believing that this also aided the process of engaging young people in learning. However, it was the perception of one respondent from the local ethnic minority community that these positive developments can only go so far in building a schools reputation. He felt that pupil outcomes were the crucial indicator of a school's effectiveness as far as parents were concerned. At primary level, it has also been noted that the relationships with local people were more problematic, certainly when it came to relationships between Far View primary school and ethnic minority parents. However, the most significant aspect of Thurlby's drive for greater community

engagement, according to its head teacher, was the synergy between community development and school progress across the board. This view was shared by colleague head teachers and wider in the rest of the family of schools, and particularly through the work and aims of the EAZ.

In the Burntake community, the situation was mixed between stages (as in Thurlby), but more so. At Chatsworth, as has been noted, a community development approach went hand in hand with school improvement measures. Julie Brier, the headteacher, had a vision of the community being an important resource for the school and genuine partners in the learning process, as far as pupils were concerned. This was similar to the views of the Thurlby EAZ and that of the secondary headteacher outlined above. The Burntake EAZ Co-ordinator also articulated similar views about the potential role of community engagement for schools working in highly disadvantaged contexts, such as hers. To this end, the EAZ had a community engagement strand to their work.

Generally, however, schools had not been centrally involved at all in regeneration activities in Burntake and this had applied the other way, so that in general terms, community groups did not necessarily feel closely engaged with school activities, particularly as far as the secondary school was concerned. This was a difference of approach in practice between the Thurlby and Burntake situations.

Perceived Effective Practice

The term "perceived effective practice" is used here in preference to the problematic term "best practice". Certainly, what is perceived to operate successfully in terms of leadership, professional practice or community engagement in one context may not be useful or applicable, even in similar contexts. The term "perceived effective practice" is employed here, as previously explained, in the sense of studying singularities with a view to asserting that similar findings may possibly occur elsewhere in similar circumstances (Bassey, 1999:12). Similarly, the favourable case is used here to establish possible wider conclusions (Hakim, 2000) and establish possible generalisations about the wider population (Cohen and Manion, 1994:107). The purpose of these final paragraphs, then, is to pull together some common themes and examples, that have potential for wider application.

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Many examples of what could be viewed as "outstanding" leadership in a challenging context are found in the case study data. As previously pointed out, leadership can be found in a variety of situations and may not be formally acknowledged as such in people's job descriptions or roles. Where, for instance, schools have been successfully brought out of an official designation of "weakness" or "failure" in highly disadvantaged communities, the leadership from a variety of quarters required to achieve this is arguably "outstanding", given the scale of the task. This had been true of Far View, Chatsworth and Burntake schools, but not Thurlby secondary. However, there are a number of ways in which Thurlby secondary school's headteacher, Graham Cummings, provided outstanding leadership in his school's tough context that has potential wider applications to other similar situations.

Graham approached the role of leadership with considerable commitment and determination, as with other professionals in the data. He drove initiatives, as in the case of the *Pathway Scheme*, but in a way that placed responsibilities on colleagues to work up ideas into practical proposals themselves. This often required a lot of persuasion, explanation and strength of belief, with a focus on important issues and a constant return to the wider agenda in hand. He exhibited, too, a child-centred approach to his work, whilst recognising the practical difficulties of innovatory approaches being pursued, as far as staff were concerned. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm and credibility as leader were prized assets in this tough situation, underpinned by values that resonated with his staff, encouraging them to get involved in a positive way. He was persuasive with staff, adopting an open approach with them that exhibited a high level of micro-political and person skills.

So, he was viewed by those around him as a strong leader who made things happen in the school. He was keen to be as "bottom-up" in his working as possible, but acknowledged that circumstances often meant a more "top-down" way of working was required at times to make progress with some vital issues. Nevertheless, he appeared to be keen to take colleagues along with him to ensure maximum success in initiatives wherever possible, through encouragement and inspiration. His strong leadership qualities were tested potentially to destruction in the Iraq war critical incident, where he nevertheless came through extremely positively. This strength of leadership was

absolutely vital to the school on this occasion, helping not only to protect hard-won gains of recent years, but also restating and strengthening the school's values and togetherness in the face of severe challenge.

As far as the perceived fostering of positive parental/community engagement is concerned, both Chatsworth primary school and Thurlby secondary school engaged particularly successfully with their surrounding highly disadvantaged communities. They did this because they believed there were potential beneficial spin-off effects on the education of pupils in their schools. Thurlby school aided the process of engaging parental involvement with their children's education through the work of their learning mentors. They had a deliberate policy of employing these workers from the local area to help the links with their parents as well as the children they worked with. They characterised the school's position in the community as being a two-way process, with the school seeing itself as needing to be an active part of the community to succeed.

The perceived high-level people skills of the headteacher, Graham Cummings, enabled him to engage with local people and community members in an easy and open way. This successful micro-political process of boundary crossing was a positive feature of Graham's leadership style, creating a perception locally that he and the school were doing the right thing on a range of fronts. The positive perception of the school and its headteacher was helpful in aiding the resolution of the Iraq war critical incident. This was especially so when it came to relationships with the high number of ethnic minority parents and community members in the area, with this linkage being perceived as a plus for the school, rather than a negative factor, as in one other local school.

One of the reasons why perceptions of the school and its headteacher were positive, particularly amongst the ethnic minority population, was the work done to meet them on their terms. This had been done as part of the work to establish cultural needs for the planned new buildings. This could have been a stumbling-block for the school, but looked to have turned out positively. Employment of ethnic minority staff was also a positive and improving factor at the school, but from a low base and with considerable further progress required. Nevertheless, even though the relationships were perceived to be positive between the school and its surrounding highly disadvantaged community, the context was nevertheless essentially fragile, with nothing taken for granted, and

constant efforts required to maintain and improve relationships all round. However, the steady improvement in examination results at the school were viewed as being a significant factor in positively moving forward relationships and faith in the school amongst local people.

At Chatsworth primary school, school reputation and relationships with parents were believed to be strongly interlinked by the headteacher Julie Brier, and her staff. She believed that ever-greater success was possible for pupils at her school and that local parents had a part to play in achieving that success. This success, she believed, needed demonstrating locally, so that aspiration could be raised generally, with a knock-on lifting of morale and pride in the surrounding community. So, positive school publicity to the local population was believed by Chatsworth to be essential to the process of lifting the school's reputation. The "transformational" family-friendly homework project had helped the school not only to sell itself to local parents but also to engage them much more positively in the life of the school and of their own children. The school also encouraged as much lifelong learning on site as possible, believing that children's learning required the interest and attention of parents to receive proper focus, and that for this to happen, parents themselves needed energising and where necessary an uplift in their skills.

As far as schools and their leaders being potential agents of community regeneration is concerned, the activities at Thurlby secondary school, linked to the work of the EAZ, provide a particularly positive example of how a school can engender change in a partnership context at local level. The headteacher, Graham Cummings, had a vision from the start of his headship of schools working in partnership with other agencies and organisations to effect widespread positive change locally. His aim had been to help provide the most supportive environment possible for families facing severe and often catastrophic social conditions acting as barriers to reaching their full human potential. During the study, he saw the opportunities being offered by new school buildings as a further step on the road to putting his school at the heart of the community and as a catalyst for local community regeneration.

For Graham, the task of school reputation-building was linked to the process of capacity-building of the community, as he believed the one could not prosper without

the other. He felt that if his school's pupils were to overcome barriers to learning they were likely to require more than high-quality learning opportunities, important though he believed those to be. He also embraced a partnership approach, along with other colleagues locally, encompassing as many agencies and organisations working with needy families as possible. They concluded a number of years previously that only by "joining-up" efforts in this regard could schools hope to make significant strides in addressing underachievement of young people in their highly disadvantaged community. However, it had never been clear whose job it was to join up initiatives in this way, so the EAZ and the secondary school had taken some of the initiative in making necessary links. However, none of this process was ever easy, with projects and agencies all having their own culture, focus and organisation that made true co-operation and "joining-up" almost impossible to achieve. Nevertheless the perception locally was that the secondary school's initiatives and activities over time had helped create a local sense of purpose that aided the education process and sense of community pride. This had created aspiration and a feeling of progress locally that underpinned increasing educational outcomes. This work also drew in pre-school family engagement as well as local employers and sports organisations.

Looking at the issue of overcoming pupil disaffection, Thurlby secondary school's approach to tackling pupil disaffection was one where tangible positive results were being produced, in a highly challenging context. The school was developing an ethos designed to provide reassurance particularly to children from challenging home backgrounds, who might need a positive framework. The approach was firmly caring and child-centred, but encompassed a pragmatism in the way children were dealt with day-to-day in school as well. This, Graham Cummings (headteacher) believed needed to ensure that "sharp-edged kids"/children with challenging behaviour should receive the help they needed but only in such a way that did not disadvantage the rest of the school's pupils.

The child-centred approach was believed to be the best basis for achieving a steady uplift in the school's reputation over a period of time, particularly with the surrounding community. This child-centred approach also rested on an avoidance of focusing on the behaviour issue as a response to the underlying frailty of the school and its community. They were firmly of the view that poor behaviour should be treated as a symptom of a

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range of issues, rather than as a cause of wider difficulties in school. So work was in place not only at the secondary school, but across the EAZ, to deal practically with the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour.

A great deal of consideration has been given concerning the potential working and underlying philosophical/pedagogical approaches associated with the *Pathway Scheme* for disaffected pupils. Overall, during the case study, there was optimism among the Thurlby staff that the scheme could become a highly successful, innovatory way of tackling the needs of highly disadvantaged and challenging young people who might otherwise drop out of the education system altogether, unable to fulfil their potential in any meaningful way.

At Thurlby secondary school, the achievement of being oversubscribed at the time of the study, based on enhanced local reputation, improving examination results and a purposeful way of working on a range of fronts, was a major one for the school and its staff. The retention of its catchment area pupils, even in a highly deprived context, meant that the school retained a social mix of pupils with a wide range of abilities. This broad success helped the school to maintain an increasingly purposeful forward trajectory within a more settled and sustainable environment, in spite of the ongoing fragility of its surrounding community. As has been pointed out previously, this positive growth in school reputation, improving examination success and general school progress had all taken place over a period of time, but prior to the conferment of specialist status or the provision of potentially transformation new school buildings, a considerable achievement. So the new buildings and opportunities they offered for making further progress locally and educationally in the future were likely to build on as secure foundations as these circumstances were likely to afford, a significantly positive situation for the school and its possible future progress.

Graham Cummings, the secondary headteacher, certainly used the opportunity offered by the planning for the new building work as an opportunity to promote a vision of the school and what it could provide, firmly within the context of a community-based community asset. This was set to build on existing work carried out by the school to: continually improve examination results, promote links with parents and the surrounding community, remorselessly address issues of ethos within the school,

continually have a child-centred approach, and develop ever-closer links with feeder primary schools to ease transition. Positive pedagogical and curriculum change were at the heart of the school's drive continually to develop as an organisation, better to inspire staff and pupils alike.

Finally, it has been noted that Burntake's secondary school's headteacher and his staff had had an uphill struggle in the years prior to the case study. The school's reputation had been poor in general for many years and the "failure" designation three years or so previously had been a body-blow. It had encapsulated in a very public way what local people had believed about the school for years, in general terms. But the designation had been based upon extremely low examination outcomes and perceived poor leadership and management, not least in teaching and learning. In that sense it was a "wake-up call" for the school and its staff, providing a huge challenge organisationally and pedagogically. It was into this tough context that the then new headteacher, Richard Johnson, had stepped. His task had been to effect far-reaching and positive change in the school and to raise its reputation off the floor, thereby preventing its closure by officials. It is to the credit of him and his staff that they managed to move the school forward positively on all fronts, particularly in leadership quality and examination results.

However, at the time of the case study, Richard felt that the school needed to move to "the next level". They were regarded as having recovered somewhat by the LEA and local people, and some of the middle-class parents had supported the school and shown faith in its new leadership by sending a cohort of children there. Major efforts had been made to re-engineer the curriculum offer, to maximise teaching and learning, and to create an inclusive ethos and practice in the school. Central to these efforts were believed by the headteacher to be the work of learning support in the school and of the mentor team. Nevertheless, Richard Johnson believed that something dramatic needed to change the perception of the school externally and to lift aspiration amongst both staff and pupils in the school. Only such a transformation stood a change of changing the reputational problem that persisted, creating a skewed intake of pupils creating a highly deprived and challenging set of educational circumstances.

The headteacher and his senior staff, therefore, strongly promoted the possibility of academy status for the school. This was designed to produce a state-of-the-art learning environment, replacing the extremely poor existing buildings. It also aimed for a wider age range, including sixth form provision, to give local young people on-site post-16 courses to go on to after GCSE examinations, with the possibility of increasing the staying-on rate for these young people. This was envisaged to be a shared post-16 offer with the next-door secondary, in a similarly deprived "white working class" community. This proposal of academy status also posed major dilemmas for the staff concerned, as it potentially meant leaving the LEA and partnership working with a sponsor, possibly with religious aims. In this situation, the potential huge advantages outweighed the potential disadvantages. But he expressed certain "bottom-lines" in this situation: the sponsor had to value the local community voice in the new arrangements, and good working arrangements would need to be maintained in future with relevant partners, including the LEA.

So, this vision of *transformational change* for the school carried with it huge risks. If local parents were not prepared to back these controversial government-inspired plans, if school staff unions came out vociferously against, and the LEA failed to agree them a great deal of energy and effort would be wasted, with morale suffering a major setback. However, such was the headteachers' convinced determination that this dramatic transformation for the school and its prospects were essential to its continued functioning, that he was prepared to invest a great deal of his energy and drive into this medium-to-long-term project. There was no guarantee, either, that he would be appointed as headteacher of the new academy school, injecting further personal vulnerability into an already high-stress leadership situation.

There was no guarantee that a change of status and buildings would provide the necessary impetus for transformational reputational uplift required at the school. At Thurlby secondary, major positive changes had preceded the provision of new buildings. At Burntake secondary school, the positive change had been more modest, albeit arguably in a more challenging context. Nevertheless, the bold vision and forward-looking leadership of Richard Johnson had the potential to effect the kind of major changes required to help the school break out of its tough contextual difficulties.

Without this bold vision and way ahead, the future for this school in a highly challenging context, was arguably bleak.

Conclusion

So far, a number of common approaches to the school leadership and pedagogical task in highly disadvantaged communities have been outlined, together with instructive differences arising from the case studies and examples of perceived effective practice. These have related to the central issues of the research question/areas of inquiry, namely: what is perceived to be successful school leadership, where leadership is located in schools and their communities, the relationship of practitioner values to practice and the process involved in current initiatives taking place in inner city areas.

Commonalities dimensionalised a leadership task requiring strength and determination, linked to an aspirational vision for the young people being educated. This task was a complex micro-political one where different agencies and the surrounding community needed to be involved in an effective way in the educational enterprise locally. Hope and aspiration were regarded as the currency of leadership but fragility was also decidedly built into the leadership environment. The adoption of child-centred and inclusive approaches was the order of the day, but nevertheless fraught with major practice difficulties. Similarly, the raising of school reputation was regarded as crucial to future school progress, but with mixed results. Where school rebuilding work was planned to take place, the transformational potential of this development for the local community in qualitative and social capital terms was being appreciated by leaders and their staff, but at different levels and in different ways. Finally, leaders recognised the importance of parental links to the task of raising pupil outcomes in these tough circumstances, yet the task was fraught with major cultural and practical difficulties.

Differences of approach were evident in a number of areas. In terms of behaviour, the two secondary schools were effectively at different stages. Thurlby had reached a point where they effectively tackled the issue as the outcome of school approaches to teaching, learning, curriculum, pedagogical values and child-centredness. Burntake were arguably tackling a more challenging context and having to deal with behaviour as an up-front issue in its own right. At the same time their approach to inclusion created

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difficulties for the school as far as behaviour of pupils in mainstream situations was concerned. Fragility was built into the everyday experience of both case study communites. However, Thurlby was arguably less fragile and this was possibly due to the longer-standing efforts made by all concerned to join up support for the vulnerable children and families in the area, with particular emphasis given to early years support.

The application of child-centred values in a tough school environment had mixed success in the studies. Burntake had admirable values in this regard but struggled to apply them in a highly challenging context, made doubly difficult by the influx of excluded children from other locations, on a relatively large scale. The Burntake primary schools wanted to introduce a step-off provision locally to help with the influx of "sharp-edged kids" but this was not supported by the LEA. Thurlby secondary school was oversubscribed for the first time in its history so this had provided a more comprehensive intake of pupils, allowing them to adopt pragmatic and targeted support for their challenging young people. These differences illustrated the challenge to inner city schools provided by parental choice in a market environment. Unless reputation can be raised and thereby the confidence of the full social range of local parents, schools with surplus places can be left to struggle with a highly needy set of pupils, making the task for staff extremely challenging.

Linked to the reputation issue is that of parental links generally. The head teacher at Chatsworth primary school had the view that her "family-friendly homework project" had signalled the turning-point for the school a few years previously. This had radically improved school-parent relationships and enabled the school to engage with parents to the benefit of pupils outcomes. Similarly, Thurlby secondary school had made a point of engaging with parents and particularly its ethnic minority community, by meeting people out in the local area if necessary. They also encouraged local people to act as support staff in school. This gave local parents more confidence in the school from a low base. Burntake secondary school was at an earlier stage in its parental engagement and in building a positive reputation with its local area. Perceived effective practice examples related to outstanding leadership, parental engagement, schools as regeneration agents, the tackling of pupil disaffection, raising of school reputation and the planning of future educational provision.

It is clear from the case study evidence that the school leadership task is a complex and demanding one, requiring micro-political skill and a value-driven approach capable of providing inspiration to staff and pupils alike. The task is also one of boundary-crossing and sense-making in a demanding environment with accountabilities in different directions. Sharing of leadership in this challenging context is regarded by leaders as desirable in general terms, yet fraught with practical problems. The added complexity in a twenty-first century context of constant policy initiatives and inter-agency working increases the challenge for leaders and their colleagues, yet also provides opportunities to put schools at the heart of community regeneration initiatives.

But the question remains concerning ways forward to achieve these kinds of positive outcomes more widely in these kinds of contexts. So, Chapter 9 examines suggested leadership approaches to underpin school practice in relation to the major issues impacting on inner city schools. These approaches address the networked and micro-political reality of the twenty-first century context, the importance of values to the modern pedagogical task, and the need for a *subversive* approach to be adopted to reflect local needs in a "top-down" policy environment.

Chapter 9

Implications of the Research

Introduction

This chapter firstly summarises broad research outcomes so far, related to the research Areas of Inquiry. These issues are summarized in Box 9:1. Secondly, implications of the research are examined in relation to the two parts of the theoretical concept: Subversive School Leadership. This second section forms the substantive answer to the Central Research Question.

The term Subversive School Leadership refers, firstly, to the nature of the leadership task in a complex inner city context, where boundary-crossing for school leaders is a required activity, and therefore developing networks are the order of the day. This term reflects the essentially networked and micro-political nature of the school leadership task, as well as the crucial wider linkages for schools in the context of their surrounding communities, which need to be fostered and exploited to the full in order to maximise educational outcomes and opportunities for local young people.

The term, secondly, encapsulates a leadership approach to sense-making at local level, in an often tangled organisational setting. In such contexts, an active construction and fostering of support and other networks within a partnership setting is absolutely essential. But this needs to be a network that operates on the terms of the networkers and for the benefit of local people, especially children attending school. Child-centred values and a collective model of leadership have featured strongly in the case study outcomes. Such values, it is argued, are essential to providing a positive response at local level in the face of current policy imperatives within a marketised school system. This is particularly the case in highly disadvantaged communities.

Box 9:1
Summary of Research Outcomes Related to the Areas of Inquiry

1. "Where is leadership located"
Thurlby

- Teamwork but a lot of persuading from the headteacher
- Desire for "bottom-up" working, but often "top-down" to make things happen
- Key staff: learning support co-ordinator; senior learning mentor; assistant head; EAZ co-ordinator; educational psychologist; early years workers; youth service; primary school headteachers
- Other key people: local business and community leaders

Burntake

- Julie Brier (headteacher, Chatsworth primary): "participative", wanted to involve the community. Teamworking approach
- Richard Johnson (headteacher, Burntake secondary): charismatic and "leading from the front". Imperative to make things happen. Concerned about being "too dominant"
- Sharing of practice through the EAZ
- Key staff: deputy head; arts co-ordinator; head of support service; mentor co-ordinator; EAZ co-ordinator; primary school headteachers
- Other key people: local forum, project and tenants/residents leaders

2. "How do those in leadership positions carry out their roles and how are they influenced by their values?"
Case Studies Commonalities

- The micro-political leadership task: the difficulty of joining-up at local level; vital for agencies and schools to co-operate
- The difficulty yet leadership necessity of working with parents and the surrounding community

Differences

- Perceived differences of approach between the two case studies

3. "What is perceived to be successful leadership and why?"
Case Studies Commonalities

- The nature of leadership required: strength of leadership; personal strength; gaining others' commitment to a vision; and promoting effective school delivery in tough circumstances
- Acknowledging the transformational potential of school investment
- Raising and maintaining a school's reputation

Differences

- The impact of context, differing degrees and history of fragility on leadership

The Six Perceived Effective Practice Examples

4. "What happens in initiatives and what are the consequences?"
Case Studies Commonalities

- The dilemmas and difficulties of adopting a child-centred approach
- The fragility of leadership and the need for hope

Differences

The different approaches to behaviour; parental choice; community engagement

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Summary of Research Outcomes Related to the Areas of Inquiry

In spite of the difficulties associated with schooling in highly disadvantaged communities, the answers to the Research Question/Areas of Inquiry are positive ones. Examples of perceived success in school leadership from the case studies convey great commitment and ingenuity in the face of problematic local relationships and perceptions of the educational task. Not only were there determined and innovatory examples of school leaders providing an educational vision that could be shared with colleagues to great effect, but also attention to context was evident from their actions. All this positive activity and set of outcomes was carried out in the face of numerous policy initiatives from the centre, often insufficiently joined-up. In spite of these difficulties, approaches were taken at local level by some school leaders to ensure that effective outcomes were achieved that cohere with their deeply-held philosophical/educational values.

Areas of Inquiry

1. "Where is leadership located?"

In spite of the current discourse relating to "superheadship", team-working approaches and attempts to share leadership have been outlined in the case studies: in specific initiatives (e.g. the Pathway Scheme), in the local community itself (e.g. the Family-Friendly Homeworking Project), and in co-operative partnership arrangements entered-into by schools (e.g. EAZ and BIP/BEST arrangements). Also, leadership has not always been specifically linked to position responsibilities. However, in spite of these instances, there has also been a need at times to "lead from the front" to get things done, according to headteachers in the studies. Where the day-to-day challenge has been considerable, strength of leadership from headteachers has sometimes required a more "top-down" approach than is implied by their personal beliefs about sharing leadership.

In the Thurlby case study, the headteacher Graham Cummings wished to encourage teamworking and a shared child-centred vision in the school. He was keen to consult children and parents about issues in school. He was committed to a "bottom-up" way of

working with colleagues but felt he acted in a "top-down" way to make things happen. He was keen to involve support staff and outside expertise in the teamworking exercise to set up the Pathway Scheme for disaffected pupils. Of particular significance in this planning process were the learning support co-ordinator and the senior learning mentor. Also of crucial importance to making the scheme operable in practice was the role of the assistant headteacher, given her timetabling responsibilities.

Wider than the school itself, leadership roles were performed in key areas by youth service staff, the educational psychologist, as well as local community and business leaders in advancing and promoting the school's vision of child-centred achievement across-the-board. The EAZ co-ordinator and his staff had a key task to facilitate and pull together shared activities between local schools and their headteachers, reaching out at the same time to other partner organisations working with local families.

In the Burntake case study, the headteacher of Chatsworth primary school, Julie Brier, was perceived to have a participative style of working and was keen to involve the local community in the school's future direction. Moreover, she regarded the community dimension to the school's work, particularly the involvement of parents, as fundamental to the school's strategy to improve pupil outcomes in a tough context. Richard Johnson, the secondary school headteacher, was regarded as a charismatic head and often felt he had to "lead from the front" to make things happen at the school, as Graham Cummings had found. Richard had concerns that he was often "too dominant".

The school's bid for an expressive art specialism and also for academy status was supported by the deputy headteacher together with the arts co-ordinator. These two members of the senior management team were trusted and crucial colleagues for the headteacher in this process. Two other staff members had vital roles in the school: the mentor co-ordinator had an influential input to the school's inclusion policy and the head of the support service was co-ordinator of day-to-day working with their most vulnerable and challenging young people, as well as being a member of the senior management team.

The EAZ co-ordinator, as with Thurlby, had an overarching responsibility to pull together joint initiatives and sharing of effective practice across the zone, using a team

of staff to facilitate co-operation and staff support. The primary school headteachers worked as a local grouping to interface with the LEA. Beyond the schools, a tangled web of accountabilities and leadership existed out in the community, related to a plethora of local initiatives. In this situation, forum chairs, tenants and residents association leaders and other community activists were sources of local leadership with limited impact on the schools themselves.

2. "How do those in leadership positions carry out their roles and how are they influenced by their values?"

The case studies provided examples of school leaders striking a different balance in their practice between competing values. Of central importance was the value of "child-centredness" and how this was to be realised in practical terms. Striking the right balance in providing an inclusive outcome for young people whilst recognising the need to establish and maintain school integrity in a challenging context, and ensuring all children received every possible support in-school was a tough balancing-act. Leaders struggled with this issue in practice with greater or lesser perceived success, requiring an effective balance being struck between idealism and pragmatism.

Commonalities from the case studies demonstrated the micro-political leadership task involved in these inner city communities. Given the tangled web of local initiatives, many of them "top-down" from the LEA and government, school leaders often had the task of pulling initiatives together at local level. This was more in evidence in the Thurlby study than in Burntake. This local "joining-up" of school effort with local agencies and projects was felt to be an important task by participants, given the waste of scarce resources and opportunity in tough contexts that failure to do so represented.

Work with parents and the surrounding community was also felt to be an important aim in the studies, with patchy results. The reason for this "patchiness" was the difficulty of the task in a highly disadvantaged community. Thurlby secondary school had the added task of reaching out and gaining the confidence of a multi-ethnic local population, arguably with some major success. Nearby Far View primary had found the task more problematic. As previously pointed out, the headteacher of Chatsworth primary school had regarded the community dimension to her school's work as being crucial for

progress to be made by pupils educationally, with some success. Burntake secondary school were mired in a reputational difficulty inherited from the past and this made positive relationships difficult to engender at local level, in spite of efforts made to put this right under the headteacher Richard Johnson.

Differences from the studies centred around approaches to a challenging context, but with the environment being perceptively more difficult in Burntake. The Thurlby situation was arguably more settled and calm, albeit within a fragile environment. Solutions to major issues impacting locally appeared to be found through a pragmatic set of solutions designed to meet child-centred values of staff. In Burntake, the secondary school faced such a challenging context that deeply-held views at leadership level about inclusion policy faced major practical difficulties, in spite of a resilient and extremely committed response from staff at the school to these issues in their daily practice. This challenging context at primary level led the headteacher to advocate an approach to "sharp-edged kids" that required local step-off provision, which did not find favour with LEA administrators.

3. "What is perceived to be successful leadership and why?"

The present context for school leaders
A number of major issues currently impact on school leaders in highly disadvantaged contexts. The practice examples in chapter 8 captured leadership responses to these issues that were viewed as successful in context. Firstly, quantitative measures of a school's success primarily currently revolve around SATs and GCSE results. These in turn are assessed officially and in the public domain according to the "value-added" nature of the pupil outcomes achieved. These results are clearly key to assessing a school and its leadership's relative performance. Secondly, school reputation is a very important measure of success, given the market situation in schools and their leaders find themselves operating within. The consequence of poor reputation can often be surplus places and reducing school budgets to the detriment of attempts by schools for stability and school improvement.

Thirdly, the complex environment experienced by school leaders and their ability to contend with this complexity is an important issue. Fostering of fruitful links locally as

well as working effectively to join-up agency engagement with local families is a key leadership test in inner-city environments. Fourthly, there is a major difference of view amongst professionals/practitioners, policy-makers and in the literature concerning desirable models of school leadership. This ranges from essentially a "transformational"/leading from the front concept to more "democratic" ways of working. Perceptions of leadership success amongst colleagues and local people may revolve around views held by individuals about desirable leadership styles and ways of operating. Fifthly, not only is there great emphasis currently on in-school efforts to inspire and assist pupils to achieve their full potential educationally, but also, rightly, increasing attention on contextual issues that affect pupil performance in a less direct way. Sixthly, perceptions of leadership success are bound to be subjective in nature, whilst taking into account some of the more "concrete" measures referred to above.

Since school leadership involves a process of human relationships and the maximisation of human potential, assessments of leadership qualities/processes is bound to relate to the individual case itself initially. However, below are actions that are seen to be effective in practice in a disadvantaged context, that are sufficiently robust to be generalisable more widely. This robustness relates not just to the methodology and methods used in the research, but also to the positive outcomes achieved over a period of time and across the two families of schools in the studies. In spite of the difficulties encountered by school leaders in these highly disadvantaged contexts, they demonstrated that the following actions were capable of making a real, positive difference to young people's educational experience and performance.

Leadership actions that are seen to be effective
Firstly, in the area of *reputation/dealing with external pressures:*

- It is necessary for school leaders to encourage co-operative working between families of schools. This involves: setting priorities for action, co-ordination of the curriculum, providing mutual support, learning from each other's strengths, acting together to tackle difficulties as they arise, and making transition an opportunity rather than a setback for pupils. Above all, working co-operatively can help schools in a disadvantaged context to assert a community identity to offset the potentially damaging effects of parental choice to the viability and comprehensive nature of local educational provision.

- Leaders need to encourage the development of shared values. This is particularly necessary in the face of the current strong, top-down policy agenda, often of a managerialist nature. Strong identity and values can help to provide inspiration of pupils, staff and the surrounding community to maximise local educational opportunities. These values need to pursue democratic ways of working that harness the skills and commitment of everyone, however sometimes tough circumstances may require leaders to "lead from the front". These shared values require constant stating and reassertion to embed them in different enterprises being undertaken in a school and its surrounding family of schools. They also require to be revisited and refreshed regularly over time.

- School leaders need to encourage the achievement of school success, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The market is tough on these schools and potentially damaging to them, so there is no alternative to make the market work in their own favour. This essentially needs to be tackled through: exam success, tackling disaffection in an effective way, making constant efforts over time to raise the quality of teaching and learning, providing curriculum innovation and maximising school-community links. Such actions can be successfully used to avoid a "downward spiral" for such schools and to engender instead a "virtuous circle" of success. Parents need to be encouraged to vote with their feet to support and subscribe to the school and its future. To engender this overall situation in inner city contexts is, however, a difficult and daunting leadership task.

Secondly, the issue of *how to work with pupils*:

- Leaders need proactively to harness scarce funding resources (often linked to local regeneration programmes) for educational ends wherever possible. These funding sources need to support families and parents in assisting their children in their school work through providing adult education/lifelong learning locally, as well as early years and parenting support. Funding is also required to target additional resources for child support in pathway schemes, vocational curriculum initiatives and for learning in community contexts.

- High-quality teaching and learning needs to be linked to child-centred approaches. In situations where the tendency is for teachers to aim for personal survival, adopting child-centred ways of working is a tough leadership and pedagogical task, but essential. The preoccupation tends also be around behaviour in these challenging contexts but the focus needs to be on the child. This must involve: meeting the individual needs of each child wherever possible, involving children in decision-making and in establishing agreed behavioural standards, and providing individual support in the classroom and in other settings. To maximise the standard of teaching and learning, leaders need to create conditions for the school to be a learning organisation that works in teams to share and create effective practice and to find solutions to problems as they arise.

- The retention of the full range of ability and social mix in a school requires leaders to have regard to the needs of each child. This process needs to take account of: gender, ethnic grouping, special needs, disability and the effects of challenging home backgrounds. This is extremely tough to do in inner city contexts and for some children requires being prepared to design a work programme around them. But leaders need to be pragmatic in striking a balance between the needs of individual pupils and those of the majority. It remains a major leadership challenge for young people genuinely to be included rather than merely integrated educationally.

Thirdly, the issue of *fostering relationships with parents and the surrounding community:*

- School leaders face extreme difficulty with this issue in contexts where there tends to be a lack of trust amongst the local population. Nevertheless, successful school leaders aim to put the school at the heart of the local community, to harness its strengths, whilst being realistic about the challenges inherent in this process of engagement.

- Affecting context is an essential leadership task involving: getting involved in partnership working, using school developments as transformational

opportunities and harnessing national initiatives such as Extended Schools and the creation of Childrens Services for joining-up of effort to the benefit of local communities.

- To maximise local community input, school leaders need to: reach out to where people are, seek to involve parents in every aspect of their children's education, include them in setting the school's vision, and generally help to create optimism and aspiration through co-operative working and school success.

4. "What happens in initiatives and what are the consequences?"

In the case studies, schools both initiated programmes and also became involved in locally- and nationally-determined initiatives. Schools were able to perform to maximum effect arguably where they were able to "subvert" programmes to their own aims, vision and values. Also, in this complex partnership context of community regeneration initiatives linking into school-based projects which sometimes involve adult community members, an effective networking approach is essential. Schools in an inner city context that fail to grasp opportunities and "subvert" them to their own aims, as well as failing to take advantage of local networks and strengths, run the risk of being on the receiving-end of outside forces rather than in control of their own destiny.

Commonalities from the case studies made clear the fragile nature of school leadership and improvement in these tough contexts. Even with considerable professional skill and personal commitment, school leaders faced an uphill struggle to effect change, as illustrated where successful projects were being undermined by "sharp edged kids" (Chatsworth primary), pupil demonstrations at the time of the Iraq war (Thurlby), and through the externally-organised BIP/BEST initiative being perceived by staff as impacting in a sometimes unhelpful way on existing behaviour and support programmes (Burntake secondary).

The dilemmas associated with the adoption of child-centred strategies impacted in both studies. The Pathway Scheme at Burntake provided considerable professional, organizational and leadership challenge to all concerned, with staff having to accept an incremental approach to achieving the scale of change to the school's way of working

required by the scheme's child-centred approach. The degree of difficulty posed to Burntake secondary school by the inclusion issue was considerable, if not daunting. In a situation where individual child support was regarded by staff as inadequate, the burden placed on mainstream class teachers by the challenging behavioural context at the school was a constant perceived difficulty. In this situation, the staff struggled to provide genuine inclusion, rather than mere integration. At Chatsworth primary, staff similarly struggled to avoid the majority of pupils being disadvantaged because of the presence in mainstream situations of pupils with challenging behaviour.

Differences in the studies focused on the major issues referred to previously of: differing approaches to behaviour impacting on school improvement; the impact on school efforts to make progress of parental choice; and success or lack of it in the area of community engagement.

Aspects of a Subversive School Leadership Concept

This section answers the Central Research Question for the study ("what is perceived to be successful leadership in highly disadvantaged communities?") by characterizing it as "subversive" in nature. This "subversion" relates to the need for school leaders in highly disadvantaged communities successfully to contend with conflicting outside pressures as well as internal pedagogical and leadership issues in a way that enables them to meet the needs of young people effectively. This requires a resilient, determined and strong value-based approach, with child-centredness at its core. It is "subversive" in the sense that local solutions can run counter to top-down policy and funding prescriptions in fundamental respects, if they are to represent the actual needs of young people and their communities on the ground.

1. Networking and Micro-politics

Introduction

This section firstly provides an overview of contextual issues impacting on inner city schools. Secondly, the external policy environment is outlined, with its particular challenges for schools in poor communities. Thirdly, potential action to address these

difficulties by government and local workers is outlined. Fourthly, the necessarily networked nature of local school leadership is outlined, together with the opportunity provided by parental support. Finally, the potential micro-political and networked role that school leaders can employ to make a substantial impact locally is outlined.

Dimensions of leadership issues

Chapter 2 outlined how writers had rightly emphasized the stark nature of highly disadvantaged communities as they impact on young people and the schools they attend. The additional challenges and potential opportunities provided to inner city schools by the current policy context were also pointed out. Particularly, writers pointed to the market system and its operation, the plethora of initiatives impacting on schools and the complex accountabilities that teachers have to grapple with. It is true to say that much of the literature on this subject from the critical theory standpoint tends to emphasise the complexities and difficulties facing highly disadvantaged communities and schools serving them, whilst playing-down school improvement/effectiveness research findings and potential practical ways forward. This also operates the other way around. Whilst difference of view based on philosophical, political and professional beliefs is healthy and inevitable in this area of work, nevertheless an analysis is preferred which takes account of both perspectives wherever possible: recognizing the potentially crushing and deterministic nature of challenging social conditions and the difficulties posed by context generally, but believing that schools can profitably apply school improvement/effectiveness research findings to make a local difference.

This study affirms the critical view about the nature of the context. The environment is extremely challenging for schools and their leaders (Englefield, 2002). This harsh and challenging context can have a devastating effect on individual pupils as they try to cope with schooling every day (Lupton, 2004; Anyon, 1995; Riley and Rustique-Forrester, 2002). Inner city contexts pose a challenging environmental diversity for local schools, particularly in a multi-cultural setting, and a great deal of damage can be done to young people's educational chances by their challenging context and class background (Schoon, 2001; Ball, 1981; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). A marketised system of schooling can have a negative effect on poorer pupils also. Market operation can make the evening-out of school intakes to create genuinely comprehensive schools problematic (Lupton 2004).

The market system and parental choice, too, have had a damaging effect on pupil performance in the inner city (Macbeath and Mortimore, 2001; Ouston, 1999), with current education policies possibly providing insufficient sensitivity to context (Hopkins, 2001). Certainly, if the current competitive system of schooling daily impacts negatively on underachieving pupils (Van Langen, 2001), then measures need to be taken at local level to take account of these effects, and to counter them. Lupton (2006:19) is also critical of the current discourse of inner city "transformation" itself, believing it depends on deconcentrating the poor and market forces, rather than sustained "welfarist policies to improve public housing and neighbourhood services, including schools".

That there are also too many initiatives hitting school improvement efforts in the inner city (Harris and Chapman, 2002; Fullan, 2001) is undeniable. At the same time, the lack of joining-up locally can pose additional major problems for hard-pressed professionals (Grint, 2001), who are already having to cope with an extremely difficult task. On top of this, the nature of school leadership is made more complex by external funding requirements and policy initiatives which can often stretch and undermine their professional values and beliefs (Day et al., 2000). School headteachers can also find themselves uncomfortably and challengingly caught between external and internal accountabilities (Harris et al., 2003) with sense-making and the process of providing effective leadership being extremely problematic.

The case study outcomes reflect and confirm these concerns and realities: the process of joining-up initiatives was problematic and extremely difficult, numerous local regeneration initiatives had a patchy impact, and the context was a constant fragility factor. Heading-off potential despair amongst staff in these tough contexts was a major problem, in spite of high commitment and determination to provide effective pupil inspiration. Management capacity to tackle the numerous initiatives targeted at inner city schools was often insufficient to cope, whilst major difficulties loomed ahead without much warning, potentially requiring decisive leadership responses to avert catastrophe for the school and its organization. So, there were no easy days for staff, possibly leading to "overload" at times for individuals. This situation made appropriate responses to tough situations either in the classroom or around school all the harder in

inner city contexts. The shortage of high quality staff at times in these schools was a major worry, given the need of these pupils to have stable and positive relationships with teachers, better to make progress in their learning.

The constant pressure, too, on these inner city schools to maintain a positive forward momentum with test/examination results and to compete effectively with nearby schools in a market environment was extremely tough. The fear of failure added to the cocktail of difficulty for these professionals. The tendency for staff in these circumstances to look to their own survival first rather than to adopt child-centred approaches was considerable. However, such negative approaches were likely to make the task of raising school reputation and results in a market context all the harder. Certainly, staff in the case study schools (particularly at secondary level) believed that their salvation lay in competing successfully in their market environment and retaining as many of their local children as possible, to maximize numbers but also to establish as broad an intake as possible in terms of ability and social mix. This "comprehensive" intake they believed to be crucial for helping to provide as optimum a platform for pupil educational inspiration and achievement as possible. The success or otherwise of Burntake and Thurlby secondary schools relative to each other in tackling the operation of the market, provided an interesting comparison, with Thurlby arguably providing a more successful operational model. Certainly, as Thurlby school found, reputation in this tough context needed to be built on a wide range of activities and indicators, beyond test/examination results. The school links with the surrounding community and its degree of connectedness to other work taking place to raise up the local area and to provide support to families were rightly regarded by Thurlby as being essential to impact long-term on their reputation and perception locally.

As far as what schools can do in this challenging context are concerned, both the literature and the data provide some important pointers that also suggest a micro-political response. There are calls in the literature for forms of teaching and learning to be adopted that are contextually sensitive (Leithwood and Reihl, 2003), with the possibility of radical new schooling departures (Gibbons, 2002). At the same time, it is unarguable that the scourge of poverty requires concerted action at all levels, if the tough inner city context is to be improved (Anyon, 1995; Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000; Whitty, 2001; and Gamarnikow and Green, 1999). Such anti-poverty measures

require not only a continuation of the positive central government measures targeted at the inner city that we have seen so far under New Labour, but concerted local action at the neighbourhood level including school activity in partnership with local groups and agencies.

The building of social capital is a central task for the raising-up of neighbourhoods and for helping schools in their educational task (Bourdieu, 1984; Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000). For Grace (2005:13), there needs to be a sustained political and moral commitment" to the process of inner city transformation. However, beyond the policy and the neighbourhood renewal aspects of anti-poverty working, school activity at the local level is absolutely critical and can make a major difference to pupil outcomes in the inner city (Harris and Bennett, 2001; Reynolds and Creemers, 1989). But the two issues need to be tackled simultaneously to be potentially effective in educational outcomes terms. School co-operation can make a positive difference as well (Ansell, 2004), as can schools owning their own improvement agenda (Harris and Bennett, 2001; Fullan, 1992; Hopkins et al., 1997; MacBeath and Myers, 1999).

But it is at the local level that major change can begin to impact on schools in highly disadvantage communities, through models of greater school co-operation and accountability, involving the creation of "complex hope" (Chitty, 1998; Grace, 1995). Local joining-up of effort involving schools is essential if children and families at local level are to receive the support they need to improve their educational outcomes and wider life opportunities (Harris and Ranson, 2005; Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). At the local level, the type of school leadership where joining-up of effort across agencies wider than the school is linked to a commitment to see schooling as wider than just the educational issues themselves, is one requiring greater networking and local political action. Such a way of working involves the school leader establishing and maximizing local networks to effect maximum positive change in an extremely tough context.

Initiatives to promote a networked approach between schools locally involving local workers, agencies and groups is hard to engender and sustain, particularly in a highly disadvantaged context. Nevertheless, the networked approach adopted by Thurlby secondary school and its headteacher over a number of years had provided the platform not only for the creation of the local EAZ-based school co-operation in the area, but also

project work wider than the school using external funding that aimed for building the social capital of local people. This "bottom-up" way of working also put local schools in a good position to take advantage of current government initiatives impacting on their community in most recent years. The secondary school was also arguably in a good position to build on recent educational and community improvements when it came to new school buildings being provided in the area. This approach provided a platform for the school to convince local people that this development was something that could benefit them directly, with spin-off community pride and aspiration potentially being created in this inner city area. In spite of the low trust in areas such as Thurlby, local school workers shared the head teacher's vision that a networked approach can be effective in raising aspiration and changing attitudes to create increased trust and support for the work of the school.

So, a "middle way" has been taken in this section between critical theorists who are unhopeful of the efficacy of current policy to address social inclusion and poverty in the inner city, and those who tend to almost ignore context when pursuing a school improvement/effectiveness agenda. The poverty of the inner city requires sustained and committed work/investment over a prolonged period to effect a necessary amount of change. These in turn are likely to have an eventual crucial effect on educational achievement in these areas, as well as other neighbourhood improvements as far as the quality of life is concerned. However, much of the improvement work needs to happen at the local level through amalgamating the efforts of those working with local families into an effective synergy. Co-operation to help create quality schooling and other services locally are the best platform to help build local trust and belief in the positive future of their community. However, as we have seen, none of this is likely to be unproblematic to achieve in a tough inner city context, where trust is often low and belief difficult to come by.

Schools and their leaders are not always natural networkers and maximisers of their surrounding environment (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). Part of the reason for this is their need to concentrate on the core educational task, particularly in a challenging context. However, school success needs to be built at least partly on a supportive community environment (Hopkins, 2001; Gunter, 2001; Chitty, 1998), with parents being empowered and treated as partners, regardless of social background (Gewirtz,

2001; Wrigley, 2000; Harris and Chapman, 2002). In spite of the major difficulties and cultural problems for schools to reach out effectively to their surrounding community and to its parents in particular, this is an absolutely fundamental activity in highly disadvantaged communities. This is especially so as school success can often partly rest on this partnership with parents and the community, especially in times of crisis. Empowerment is also crucial through whatever means is available locally to schools: using neighbourhood forums, tenants and residents groups, community projects and their management groups, as well as formal school-based initiatives (such as EAZs).

Certainly, Thurlby secondary school was keen to network effectively with their surrounding community: through pro-actively recruiting support staff from the local area, particularly their mentor workers. This policy was not something that was pursued positively in the same way at Burntake secondary. Thurlby, however, saw these local role models and link-people as being important aids to bringing the school closer to local people and to its children particularly. To this end of improving the networked linkages with local people and children from the earliest possible point, the Thurlby EAZ actively encouraged early engagement at pre-school stage for parents and their very young children. These community linkages were felt to work both ways in a mutually beneficial way, when it came to pupils being placed with local businesses for work experience, increasing the perceived relevance of learning to everyday life.

Similarly at Chatsworth primary school, the parental links were believed by the headteacher to have helped to transform the school's reputation locally. She believed these networked links to have enhanced its ability to engage young people in learning and in a number of other ways, perceived as crucial to encouraging pupils to regard their education as something valuable and of relevance to them. Similarly, reputation-building at Thurlby secondary was believed by staff to be closely linked to the school's effective community networks, and its ability to work in a partnership context to aid the regeneration of its surrounding inner city area, as well as on in-school factors.

In an inner city context, the school leadership task is a particularly networked and often highly micro-political role. This is not only because of the complexity of partnership working involved in the task (Englefield, 2002; Mortimore and Whitty, 1999), but because relationships and networking on a daily basis within the school and at a number

of levels is crucial to leadership success in this challenging environment (Hampden-Turner, 1990; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Bolman and Deal, 1991). Particularly in testing contexts, leadership can never be taken for granted and is by nature tenuous (Gronn, 1999; Gardner, 1995). Leaders are required to address the challenge posed by groupings within their organization (Yukl, 1994) and to aim for a co-operative set of outcomes, no matter what the scale of the challenge. Leadership tends to also be strategic in a highly political way (Hampden-Turner, 1990), with leaders having to balance competing initiatives on a daily basis (Simkins, 2004; Hampden-Turner, 1990; Heifetz and Laurie, 1997; Bolman and Deal, 1991).

At Thurlby secondary school, the leadership model of the head teacher was extremely effectively networked. Graham Cummings' people skills enabled him to gain colleagues' trust on an ongoing basis and to share commitment to core values being applied each day. His strength of leadership lay not just in decisive action when required but in the networked strength of a shared task in the workplace. Given the nature of the context, managing competing and difficult priorities for action and maintaining a sense of direction for the school was a weighty undertaking, requiring personal resilience and commitment.

So, the school leadership role in inner city schools is necessarily micro-political and networked. This is partly necessitated by the increasingly complex and fluid partnership context of the 21st century school and partly because of the potential added value afforded by positive networks locally. However, the scale and nature of the leadership task in these circumstances cannot be underestimated. The leadership role is also a lonely, challenging and potentially founded upon shifting sands. The reality is also one where a strategic sense needs to be combined with a politically astute balancing of competing priorities.

Summary

This section has outlined a number of issues and potential ways forward for school leadership in highly disadvantaged communities. The difficult nature of inner city contexts can impact severely on young people's life-chances. At the same time, there currently tend to be too many unco-ordinated initiatives targeted at these communities

in an often unhelpful way. School leaders are expected to raise standards and contend with market forces impacting on fragile environments. Greater effort is required to address the overarching social needs of these areas if educational progress can be made more easily by pupils.

Nevertheless, school co-operation at local level, school leaders networking effectively with a range of service providers to join up local effort, and the treatment of parents as partners in the educational enterprise can make a positive difference in spite of context. If parents and local residents can be encouraged to be involved and employed in the nearby school and if pupils can take advantage of placements for work experience and other opportunities in the community, a synergy of advantage can be created to local young people's benefit. So, a great deal can be done to "subvert" the prevailing culture and policy environment at local level, but the task is enormous and the role of school leader is complex and demanding.

2. Meeting Local Needs and Aspirations

Introduction

This section firstly sets out ways in which local school leaders and their colleagues can assert their own values and aims at local level. Secondly, potential solutions to the challenge of pupil disaffection are examined. Thirdly, school improvement that can realistically and usefully be pursued in local inner city contexts are examined. Fourthly, the dilemmas and potential ways forward with regard to the inclusion agenda are explored. Finally, the elements of a values-related approach to pedagogy and leadership applicable to inner-city contexts are explored.

Dimensions of leadership issues

The leadership task for schools at local level is a highly problematic one. This is because in highly disadvantaged communities the context is so challenging and the marketised and managerialist policy environment potentially undermining of the best efforts of staff. So a way needs to be found to counter these environmental factors. Certainly, the tension between a perceived "top-down" environment and a desire

amongst many school staff to pursue a values-based and child-centred way of working, with shared leadership and genuine teacher creativity was explored in the Chapter 2 (Wilkins, 2003; Simkins, 2004; Ball, 1990). Nevertheless, a *subversive* and obstinate determination by school staff to pursue their own progressive way of operating at local level in spite of the policy environment is, practically-speaking, what happens in families of schools and individual establishments all the time.

A school and its leadership is required to find its own best ways to turn a challenging situation to its advantage, applying their own collective educational values. So this section explores this model, referring back to the literature and with examples from the case studies. At local level, therefore, committed professionals can apply a positive vision that encourages disadvantaged children and their communities to aspire to have a better future, in spite of the extremely challenging context.

As far as pupil disaffection is concerned, research outcomes from the school improvement/effectiveness literature about how schools can successfully tackle this issue need to be applied to each local situation by schools in their own way (e.g. Ofsted, 1999, 2001). Underlying causes of disaffection also need to be tackled at the same time. Lack of social capital locally (Ouston, 1999; Gamarnikow and Green, 1999; Wrigley, 2000) is also a factor behind this issue, just as it underlies educational underachievement generally. The potential skewing of school populations in inner city schools towards the highly disadvantaged and challenging end of the spectrum (Schoon, 2001) is a further difficulty that can make the combating of disaffection all the harder. However, as has already been pointed out, it is at the local level that schools and their leaders can begin to tackle these contextual issues in partnership with other workers and agencies, as well as giving attention to the school-based ones.

In the Thurlby case study, staff across the EAZ had decided to treat disaffection/bad behaviour as a symptom of wider problems being brought into school, rather than a cause. This view was related to a child-centred approach to their educational task which aimed to tackle a range of issues contributing to poor behaviour, beyond the school as well as inside it. As we have seen in the Chapter 6, they sought to address the specific problem of challenging behaviour with individual child support, work with parents across the zone, and deployment of dedicated educational psychologist input. At the

secondary school, as well as using mentors and other specialist staff to assist some of their more challenging youngsters, they were in the process of planning for a dedicated *Pathway Scheme* for disaffected pupils most at risk of exclusion from school. This way of working was perceived to have been broadly successful in providing a platform for these schools to move ahead positively on a range of fronts, particularly at secondary level.

As we have seen, Burntake schools had majored on behaviour as an issue in itself, with mixed results, possibly partly because of the approach itself as well as there being a more challenging context there. One of the difficulties that the secondary school faced was the way its ongoing poor reputation continued to deliver a challenging school population, given the apparent reluctance of mainly middle class local parents to send their children there, combined with the arrival of challenging young people into the school as they were excluded from establishments elsewhere. This pupil population "downward spiral" was avoided by Thurlby secondary through its good local reputation delivering actual competition for school places at the time of the case study: a contrasting "virtuous circle". This contrasting set of fortunes of the two secondary schools illustrates not only the almost catastrophic effect that parental choice can have on inner city schools but at the same time shows how a "subversive" local approach can actually make this market system work to the advantage of an inner city school. Thurlby's approach, though, required sustained work over a period of years not only on the in-school educational issues but also on the wider neighbourhood regeneration factors that staff believed to influence pupil outcomes.

Much can be done to bring about school improvement in a highly disadvantaged context through attention to research evidence in the literature about: effective features of schools (Mortimore, 1991; 1999), ways to bring about cultural change (Hopkins et al., 1996), ways to establish a learning organization (Fullan, 1999), and ways to engender positive school change generally (Gray, 2000; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Wrigley, 2000). At the same time, policy and practice changes wider than the school to aid the fostering of school improvement also need to be taken account of (Barber and Dann 1996; Mortimore and Whitty, 1997; Schoon, 2001).

Certainly, Thurlby secondary school had "subverted" the market system locally by

changing its reputation in a positive way. Given the tendency for parental choice to move a proportion of potential pupils away from inner city catchment areas towards more advantaged ones (Schoon, 2001), this was a considerable achievement. As we have seen, this had been achieved over a period of years from a low base but nevertheless in advance of some further potentially positive changes about to happen: receiving its new specialist status and replacement buildings. This improved reputation was perceived to rest upon improving examination results, effective leadership, a purposeful way of working on a range of fronts, as well as a networked approach to its task locally. At the same time, the school was committed to co-operative working with its family of schools and other local agencies and organizations working within the surrounding community and generally promoted itself as a community asset and a source of pride locally. This positive model demonstrates what can be done to make the market system work to the advantage of an inner city school, given a balanced approach to addressing both school improvement and community capacity-building.

The issue of inclusion policy and practice, particularly in an inner city context, is a highly problematic area. Whilst the present Labour government have promoted a so-called pragmatic inclusion policy in schools, with some practical benefits for previously excluded children (Dyson and Millward, 2000), nevertheless inclusive practice is often unsatisfactory (ibid.). School-level inclusion policy/practice effectively has to compete with the external standards agenda, inevitably leading schools also to be concerned about league tables of test results, parental choice, pupil behaviour, streaming and setting, and so on (Ball, 1981; Mortimore and Whitty, 1997). At the same time, if inclusion is to be meaningful as far as the individual child is concerned, the nature of teaching and learning in a 21st century school requires constant rethinking (Riley and Rustique-Forrester, 2002). The crucial aspect to be borne in mind in determining the success or otherwise of a school's approach to inclusion practice must be the extent of its child-centredness (Villa and Thousand, 1995; Rogers, 1969) rather than indications of mere integration of pupils. To deny the dilemmas inherent in this issue is also short-sighted (Dyson and Millward, 2000), given that the presence of pupils with special needs or challenging behaviour in mainstream classroom situations without proper support or appropriate teaching input, can seriously disadvantage other pupils in the group.

Certainly, the dilemmas and contrasts in outcomes concerning inclusion policy and practice were strongly present in the two case studies. Given the challenging context and skewed pupil population at Burntake secondary school, the school leadership's ideological belief that pupils should be taught in mainstream classes wherever possible was always going to be extremely challenging, especially where individual teachers felt they lacked the necessary skills to deal with certain special needs or where there was insufficient in-class support to help individual pupils. The primary-level concern about "sharp-edged kids" (young children exhibiting extreme challenging behaviour) had resulted in a disagreement between the headteachers and the LEA about the appropriateness of these children being segregated from other children off-site to receive extra support for large periods of time. In both of these examples, there was a resultant perceived unsatisfactory outcome for pupils and staff at school level.

However, at Thurlby secondary school their approach to inclusion was firmly child-centred and pragmatic, linked to a whole-school policy that aimed to praise pupils wherever possible, and involve them and their parents in decisions about their education. The networked leadership approach in the school aimed to share leadership on this issue and maximize available resources and support for individual pupils requiring it but firmly within a pragmatic context. This meant that the location of support for children was not the deciding factor for what was appropriate educationally but rather the extent of its effectiveness for that child's personal development. The school was prepared to take radical measures where necessary (as in the case of the *Pathway Scheme* for disaffected young people) to try to fit the curriculum around the child's needs rather than the other way around. This general approach to inclusion had been effective and appropriate in the Thurlby context, and in circumstances where the school had retained its full ability range and social mix of pupils from the local area, albeit skewed to an extent because of the nature of that community.

So, the case study outcomes illustrate the struggle involved in successfully "subverting" both context and policy environment to create a positive and practical way forward educationally. However, the Thurlby example illustrates that in their specific context, they had found a way of: tackling pupil disaffection, involving themselves in the task of regeneration and capacity-building locally, retaining their local pupil population through having built a sound reputation (thereby making the market system work in

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their favour), and applied the national inclusion agenda in a pragmatic and child-centred manner. This relative success and the manner of it, is a model that may be applicable more widely and therefore provides an optimistic example of how the complex educational task in highly disadvantaged communities can be tackled.

The dominant *transformational leadership* concept of recent years (Allix, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992; Duignan and MacPherson, 1992; Leithwood et al., 1999; Bennis and Nanus, 1997; Grint , 2001; Gronn, 1999) has tended to fall into disrepute through becoming identified with the present Labour government's emphasis on various models of "super-headship" and managerialism as solutions to school under-performance (Gunter 2001). As a result, the term *post-transformational leadership* (Harris et al., 2003) has started to surface in the literature. In this context, too, the concept of leadership values has strongly and rightly begun to assert itself, partly as a counter-balance to this previously referred-to perceived managerialist policy agenda for leadership in schools. In this environment, the challenging situation in inner city schools requires a leadership that is responsive and effective, and with child-centred values.

Schools in challenging circumstances require leadership underpinned by core values and a strong moral purpose (Harris and Chapman, 2002). Values are absolutely vital in situations where highly difficult circumstances make sense-making and dilemma solution problematic on a daily basis (Harris and Chapman, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Bolman and Deal, 2000). A major focus for school leaders in tough contexts must be effective teaching and learning (Harris and Chapman, 2002) and the successful engagement of teachers, parents, community and students (Fullan, 2001). Values that inspire consensus in contexts where consensus-building is bound to be problematic (Hodgkinson, 1991; Hopkins, 2001), and that enable the right balance to be struck in the decision-making process (Sergiovanni, 1992), are absolutely central to school leadership in the inner city.

With moral purpose at the core of leadership action, an essentially people-centred approach to difficult circumstances is capable of being adopted with the chance of success (Ansell, 2004; Stoll and Myers, 1998; Hopkins, 2001; Harris and Chapman, 2002, MacBeath and Myers, 1999; Heifetz and Laurie, 1997). Passion and community awareness are required in the school leadership role to combat negative local influences (Englefield, 2002) that are bound to impinge on daily activity in a major way. Where

this people-centred approach can be adopted, a collaborative and collegial organizational culture is likely to be more possible (Harris et al., 2003; Fullan, 1999). Leadership in inner city schools must also be an effectiveness model (Yukl, 1994), where tough goals can be attained, since young people's futures and that of their community crucially depends upon school success. However, it is also important to problematise the whole issue of leadership agency in these circumstances (Bolman and Deal, 1991), since agency is provided in a variety of ways in a highly diffused manner in complex organizations that rely upon motivation of individuals to operate effectively.

In the case studies, sharing of values across schools in a consensual way was problematic. "Strong" leaders in the headship role did not always find it easy to gain acceptance of their values amongst colleagues. Also, the core value of sharing leadership that the headteachers of Chatsworth primary and the two secondary schools (Burntake and Thurlby) all professed to aspire to, did not always happen in practice in the way they wished. For instance, at Thurlby the head teacher wished to be consensual but efforts to get a team to pick up the *Pathway Scheme* planning process was patchy, in spite of the planning group taking on board the basic philosophy of the work in a fundamental way from an early stage. So, the headteacher at Thurlby felt that his leadership was often operationalised through his being a role model for colleagues and someone who could be relied upon to provide a lead, together with relative stability in tough times. However, of crucial importance to the Thurlby leadership model were people skills as well as the strength of values lived out day-to-day in the headteacher's professional role.

Summary

This section has asserted elements of an approach for schools in highly disadvantaged areas which take account of contextual difficulties but also recognises that concerted action at the local level can make a positive difference. Where staff wish to pursue their own child-centred and collectivist approach, this is possible to do if a pragmatic set of actions relevant to local young people are adopted. It is recognised that measures locally to build social capital will ease behavioural difficulties in the medium to long term and that this can be helped through concerted inter-agency co-operation. Where it is possible to concentrate on the contributors to poor behaviour through such measures as

individual child support, work with parents, educational psychology provision and specific pathway schemes, inroads can be made in disaffection overall. In the inner city context, the fragility of the situation can tip a school into a "vicious circle", but equally success can help create a "virtuous circle" within a market context.

School improvement research evidence can provide important means to address underachievement. A school creating conditions for improving examination results, positive local networking, and long-term capacity-building in the local area can the market system and make it work to young people's advantage. Applying the inclusion agenda in inner city contexts is a major challenge, particularly when schools are required to produce ever-higher examination and test scores. It represents a considerable pedagogical challenge also, and in curriculum terms. The dangers of integration rather than inclusion taking place, together with adverse impacts on other pupils are potential down sides. Nevertheless, practical and child-centred measures taken at local level can avoid integration, coupled with some additional targeted resources.

Finally, the importance and relevance of child-centred values underpinning practice in these contexts is asserted strongly. Coupled with effective teaching and learning and parental involvement in children's education representing a people-centred approach can be made to work in the most challenging contexts. However, passion and community awareness and "people skills" of leaders is absolutely necessary in these situations to combat negativity and inertia.

Conclusion

So, in the challenging context of inner city schooling, not only do leaders need to address the major school improvement issues but increasingly will need to work with partners to effect change wider than the school in a networked way. The context is likely to throw up a bewildering number of initiatives, often imposed from outside, which the school leader will often need to aim to co-ordinate to maximum benefit of local highly disadvantaged people in a subversive manner. At the same time, the role of school leader is likely to involve balancing personal values against external and internal pressures in a challenging way. In these circumstances, then, school leaders are likely to

be most successful if they aim for local solutions to these challenges, maximizing school improvement internally but at the same time also making an impact on the surrounding context itself.

The challenge locally for school leaders is compounded by a number of typical features in inner city contexts, such as: pupil disaffection, poor home circumstances, skewed ability and social mix of pupils because of negative parental choice, a managerialist policy push, and dilemmas concerning inclusion policy at school level. In these circumstances, effective school leaders subvert these external factors and bend the situation they face to their own advantage if possible. This way of working maximizes in-school linkages in an effective and shared way, putting values at the heart of a school's activities, with colleagues working together in a committed way because of those beliefs. At the same time, the focus needs to be on teaching and learning, as well as maximizing links with parents and the surrounding community.

This subversive type of school leadership also aims to promote community links to generate social capital, to engender a learning culture in the school and is wary of ascribing agency in a direct way to leadership alone. Finally, the school leadership role in inner city schools is also heavily micro-political, relying on effective navigation of the tough environment of groups and human relationships to make positive outcomes. This not only takes personal strength but resilience on a day-by-day basis.

Chapter 10

Concluding Thoughts

Introduction

This final brief chapter addresses a number of concluding issues arising from the research. Firstly, the claims for contribution to knowledge are briefly made in two areas:

- The "reality check interview"; and
- The Subversive School Leadership concept.

Secondly, possible areas for future research and examination, following-on from this research project, are outlined. Finally, a summary makes some final points arising from the project as a whole.

Final concluding issues

In Chapter 1, my personal values, stances and hypotheses were outlined. The democratic socialist stance of aiming for greater equity so that highly disadvantaged communities are empowered and enabled to maximise their potential was an underpinning point of reference throughout. In effect, the extent to which this greater equity and educational opportunity could be achieved by schools in current circumstances was the crucial issue for this research, in practice and leadership terms. Similarly, the extent to which people could be empowered, either within their working situation or as learners, was a central point of reference for the case studies. Elements of what needed to happen to bring about this greater equity or empowerment were hypothesised to involve a form of leadership that is shared, the exercising of strong values, and a way of working that involved micro-political skill.

The outcomes from the case studies tended to support these hypotheses but in specific ways. As outlined above, the extent to which school leadership could be effectively shared within an inner city context was variable and sometimes at odds with individual leaders' values about this issue. Values were strongly held and shared with colleagues to gain commitment to a course of action at school level, but with variable success and

with a different mix of values and outcomes in each situation. Micro-political skills were in evidence in both studies but each situation was different and what may have been perceived to be effective in one situation may not have translated itself to another set of circumstances. Nevertheless, a way of working that successfully negotiates the different structures and accountabilities of the 21st century inner city context is absolutely vital to future work. What has emerged strongly both from the literature and the case studies is the need to affect context at the same time as aiming to provide school improvement in challenging circumstances.

The research claims a contribution to knowledge in two particular areas: "reality check interviews" and the Subversive School Leadership concept. The "reality check interview" method is a way of conducting interviews that seeks to maximise longitudinal working during the period of a case study. It also adopts an informal approach to interviewing, to obtain as realistic an appraisal as possible of what is occurring in the school situation. Triangulated with other methods of data gathering this can be a source of crucial information about what is going on beneath the surface of a complex social environment. The Subversive School Leadership concept is a specific contribution to the current views of leadership in the literature. It addresses significant issues and features of school leadership in highly disadvantaged communities, particularly: how leaders can turn top-down policy to their own advantage and ways of working in complex partnership contexts. In that sense it is a new way of characterising the school leadership role, that addresses contextual and other central issues.

A number of possible future related areas of examination and research arise from this study. Development of the subversive way of working in the highly disadvantaged context is one potentially fruitful theoretical and practice issue. The linking of school improvement and the development of social capital in a locality is a relatively under-developed area of inquiry, with possible important practice spin-offs for the future. Also, whilst schools in highly disadvantaged communities have recently received some attention, this remains a relatively under-researched area of work. Given the crucial importance of all children receiving the standard of education that they are entitled to, and for society to maximise its skills pool in a highly-competitive world, the issue of providing greater equity of educational opportunity within a marketised context is particularly pressing.

Of particular personal interest in recent times has been the comparative educational context. This area of study appears to be relatively under-researched beyond the largely quantitative comparative work carried under the aegis of such organisations as the World Bank and the OECD. Just as individual schools and communities cannot simplistically be compared with each other, so countries/regions and education systems and their outcomes are rightly juxtaposed with great contestation. Nevertheless, in a globalised world where marketisation and commodification of education, coupled with managerial solutions to issues, threatens to undermine attempts to encourage greater societal equity and person-centred provision, looking for ways forward between countries where ways have been pursued to "subvert" this over-arching approach are worth pursuing. It is in this area of study where further work is urgently required of a small-scale, qualitative nature, capable of more generalised application in other similar contexts, particularly relating to the area of school leadership to achieve greater inclusion of young people.

Summary

The outcomes from this research presented in preceding chapters have dimensionalised the nature of the task facing schools and their leaders in challenging contexts. The research has also aimed to plot fruitful possible ways forward for leaders and practitioners in these types of environment. Clearly, the task facing teachers in these circumstances is a major one. It involves:

- strength of leadership;
- micro-political skill;
- a determined child-centred approach;
- a practical negotiation of the dilemmas;
- a linking of school transformation to community regeneration;
- working with parents as partners;
- raising of school reputation to create "genuinely comprehensive schools", particularly at secondary level; and
- inspiration for pupils and staff.

Particularly, the 21st century school leader needs to work with colleagues in a way that crosses boundaries in an effective manner, whilst aiming to bend the policy environment to the local needs and values. This subversive leadership approach is an essentially optimistic model in an arena often lacking hope and producing despair. Such contexts are fraught with difficulty and potential defeatism. The above findings and pointers from this research aims to provide a possible platform for positive hope that is nevertheless complex. Even though the task for practitioners is a major one, the urgency of action to help achieve greater equity in educational opportunities for all our children is an urgent one, meriting extra effort, additional resources and the best application of educational expertise that can be pulled together in coming years.

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Glossary of Terms

Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP)

The BIP was set up by the UK government as part of its Street Crime Initiative, running between 2002 and 2006. The aim was to improve behaviour and attendance in schools., with extra funding and staffing support to achieve this. The aim was "delivering the outcomes of improved behaviour, reduced exclusions, reduced truancy, increased attendance, providing key worker support for all children at risk, and providing full time, supervised education from day one of any type of exclusion" (BIP website).

Education Action Zones (EAZs)

EAZs were established by the School Standards and Framework Act (1998). Zones were built around groups of schools in challenging areas, with the aim of raising educational standards. There were around 15-25 schools in each zone, although some smaller zones set up based around one secondary school and its feeder primary schools. Government aims were:

- "to create new partnerships involving business, parents, local authorities, schools and their communities;
- to raise standards;
- to generate innovation from which the whole education system can learn." (UK government website)

Excellence in Cities

This is a targeted programme of support for schools in inner city areas. The programme aims to "transform urban secondary education in these areas" by providing resources "and a coherent programme of strategies focused on teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance and leadership" (UK government website). The programme is delivered locally through schools working in partnership with their LEA.

Extended Schools

A UK government initiative, where schools provide a range of activities and services, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community. These services can include: adult education, study support, ICT facilities and community sports programmes. The initiative is designed to encourage schools to offer these and further support services, to help provide a more joined-up approach to local provision, "teacher-free zones" in schools, and specialist provision extending to heathcare and social services.

Health Action Zones (HAZs)

Set up in 1998, they aimed to reduce health inequalities and to facilitate a moving away from a competitive market in healthcare. According to the BMJ (17th January 1998), "Health action zones are intended to bring together all those contributing to the health of the local population to develop and implement a locally agreed strategy for improving the health of local people". They were planned to run for five to seven years.

Local Education Authorities (LEAs)

LEAs are run/facilitated by local government in the UK and provide funding and support for schools and other education services. Non-school services include special educational needs, advisory and inspection capacity, logistical support (e.g. transport, ICT, teacher development, school meals). Their role is to encourage and facilitate the raising of educational standards at the local level, working with partner organisations/agencies to provide support to families, communities and individual children from ages 0-19. LEAs have traditionally also worked with the Learning and Skills Council and local organisations to ensure that adult education and training is provided for post-19 students. LEAs are currently being replaced by new Childrens Services at local level, encompassing childrens social services and elements of health provision, as well as education.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF)

"The NRF aims to enable England's most deprived local authorities, in collaboration with their Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to improve services, narrowing the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country" (UK government website). Following the government's spending review in 2000, targets were set for improving public services in inner city areas. Certain "floor targets" were established by government to bring about neighbourhood renewal across a range of local services. Additional resources targeted at local projects and services to achieve these targets was allocated to local councils through the local government grant regime.

New Deal for Communities

This government programme is aimed at some of the most deprived communities in the country. Inner city problems are aimed to be tackled in an intensive and co-ordinated way, with the aim of bridging the gap between these communities and the rest of England. Five key themes are tackled by this programme: poor job prospects, high crime levels, educational under-achievement, poor health, and housing problems/poor environment. The programme started in 1998 with 17 pathfinder areas, with a further 22 set up in 1999. The programme has targeted £2bn. at these areas. The programmes are devised and co-ordinated at local level, overseen by a partly-elected partnership board with local representatives working alongside local agency representatives.

Ofsted

According to Ofsted's website, it is "the inspectorate for children and learners in England. It is our job to contribute to the provision of better education and care through effective inspection and regulation. We achieve this through a comprehensive system inspection and regulation covering childcare, schools, colleges, children's services, teacher training and youth work". They are a non-ministerial government department accountable to Parliament. The full title is the Office for Standards in Education.

Pathway Scheme

This scheme was a dedicated route to be followed by students at Thurlby secondary school at age 14 onwards. It was to be a resourced programme dedicated to young people regarded at risk of exclusion. To this end, a tailored educational pathway was devised for a dozen or so young people in each year group to enable them to establish post-school ambitions and then set about getting the qualifications and experience to achieve those ambitions.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

The PFI provides a means of funding major capital investments in the public sector (e.g. schools) without immediate recourse to the public purse. Private contortia, usually involving large construction firms, are contracted to design, build, and in some cases manage new projects. Projects typically last for 30 years, during which time the building is leased by the public authority.

Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)

The SRB, which began in 1994, brought together a number of programmes from several government departments. It provides resources for regeneration projects in England, carried out by local regeneration partnerships. Its priority is to enhance the quality of life of local people in areas of need. Bidding guidelines are:

- "improving the employment prospects, education and skills of local people
- addressing social exclusion and improving opportunities for the disadvantaged
- promoting sustainable regeneration, improving and protecting the environment including housing
- supporting and promoting growth in local economies and businesses, and
- reducing crime and drug abuse and improving community safety" (UK government website)

Special Measures

Schools requiring special or having serious weaknesses is a category decided by Ofsted. Schools within this designation are regarded as having fallen below acceptable standards regarding pupil attainment, teaching quality and leadership. Schools in this category are given an ultimatum to improve or face closure. The LEA or an outside agency are expected to provide support to the school to enable them to make progress sufficient for them to be taken out of special measures. This designation has also been referred to as "naming and shaming" since its inception in the 1990s.

Surestart

This is a government programme in England to provide early years support for children and family support, in disadvantaged communities. Its aims are:

- "increasing the availability of childcare to all children
- improving health and emotional development for young children
- supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment
- helping services develop in disadvantaged areas alongside financial help for parents to afford childcare." (UK government website).

Surestart has been the vehicle during the current Labour government to unify pre-school provision at local level through partnership arrangements co-ordinated by local councils, and to direct additional funding into support for young children and their parents through the setting-up of Surestart centres in inner city areas.

Stages of data analysis

The aim in this process, then, has been to form a conceptually dense structure of data, initially using "domain analysis"/"axial coding", and then by moving to production of refined concepts that are linked together in an organized, compressed way. The process is by its nature evolutionary, growing out of the data and its gathering processes. I have tried to keep the node complexity and multiplicity all the way through to maximize its variety, density and richness.

The process of coding began straight away, to make links throughout the study between data gathering and analysis, so that the one informs the other. The first node summary was produced in early February 2003. Nodes are listed under each interview conducted up to that time: five in Thurlby and nine in Burntake. At the same time, seven "broad brush" categories are used to begin to group the nodes together under headings:

1. Specific educational issues emerging concerning children in disadvantaged communities;
2. Relevant historical issues concerning the schools/communities being looked at;
3. Interventions taking place concerning education of pupils and their perceived success;
4. How a school/family of schools approach(es) leadership values and team-working;
5. Emerging points concerning the critical issues of the case study;
6. The extent and perceived relevance of external intervention, inter-agency working and joining-up of initiatives locally to pupil achievement in school; and
7. Comparisons and contrasts concerning practice and issue perception across the two case study communities.

Care was taken not to rationalize nodes at this stage, even though some clearly had similar wording and referred to similar concepts, in effect. The nodes were then grouped under these headings, with tags to describe types of nodes: in vivo, descriptive, broad-brush, and concept nodes. These tags proved useful at this stage in identifying the

function of each emerging node, but grouping them later on according to type was not found to be a helpful way to do things. The early list had already 228 nodes. The number of nodes grouped under categories three and five was considerable whilst the final one did not have any nodes grouped under it.

In the "Case Study Report" (2/3/03), a general account was given of the outcomes from the fieldwork up to that time, by way of taking stock and focusing down the study. The outcomes were grouped under the seven headings, based on the early data display. However, a list of "emerging themes" are reported separately and in parallel.

In the next round of data arrangement (2/4/03), 371 codes were arranged under more exact categories that are nevertheless broad themes (e.g. "behaviour", "leadership", "community", "parents", "disaffection", "teaching and learning"). There are a total of twenty-seven of these categories, reflecting the main topics thrown up by the large number of nodes, and creating a more purposeful grouping of the data. At the same time, the "emerging themes" are included as "free nodes" and with data attached. These outcomes were arrived at through the synergy operating in a "grounded" study of this kind between: devising of checklists, conducting fieldwork, writing diary entries, identifying emerging themes from the data, and data analysis/arrangement. Each process informs the others, with the researcher being both immersed in the data yet aiming to stand outside it to a certain extent.

A further round of categorization was attempted on 30/5/03, with a number of node layers underneath, coupled with a node rationalization down to 291, and incorporating the "emerging themes". However, this appeared to be unsatisfactory at this stage in the work and lacking clarity, and was abandoned, reverting to the saved previous arrangement on Nvivo. When the fieldwork was finished (at the end of July 2003), I felt it was a good idea to leave the analysis for a while, to write a paper about outcomes from the work so far, explore more literature in connection with different aspects of the project, and to do some thesis writing, before returning to finish the remaining transcriptions, code the data and revisit the node structure a number of months later.

A number of revisions of the nodes took place in May 2004, based on a framework of emerging issues. Only with the completion of the fully coded fieldwork was it possible

to refine the theoretical structures that been developed since the end of the case study. In the first draft on 21st May 2004, nodes were simply listed under ten headings called "trees", which sought to encapsulate the major themes and emerging theoretical issues contained in the data.

By the 24th May draft, one heading was split into two, and the final two amalgamated to become:

1. Leadership strength but giving staff ownership;
2. Success is fragile and amidst hope there is despair;
3. Idealism and pragmatism: keeping behaviour subordinate to teaching and learning;
4. Idealism and pragmatism: total inclusion but helping the majority to learn;
5. Focusing on children's needs before staff's;
6. Hard to involve parents but it's vital;
7. Schools tend to be inward-looking but they must look outward;
8. Raising horizons/expectations has to involve the whole community;
9. Schools need to work with other agencies but co-ordination is very hard;
10. Schools needing to be genuinely comprehensive and "transformational projects" for their communities.

Below these, (child) nodes were grouped under specific descriptive node categories. This became the final basic structure over a series of revisions to make the (tree) headings, the descriptive nodes and the (child) nodes as closely fitting to the data outcomes as possible, both in descriptive and theoretical terms. At the same time the nodes were revised to avoid duplication and to merge them wherever this was methodologically justifiable, whilst keeping the density of coding overall (see appendix). The three-layered final version contains a total of 209 nodes. A balance has been struck here between identifying the major themes in the data and avoiding cross-over of material between trees. In that sense, the structure remains slightly "messy". For instance, a crossover exists between the areas of adopting child-centred approaches and issues concerning challenging behaviour and disaffection. However, important distinctions exist here too. Also, the final tree node is a mixture of issues which, nevertheless, hang together theoretically. In addition some of the tree nodes and aspects

of the sub-structure are less relevant in one community, compared to the other and vice versa. However, this node structure is, I believe, a credible framework for data display in this case, which makes possible valid and credible conclusion-drawing possible later on.

Development of "emerging issues"

During the course of the case study, theoretical outcomes have emerged as a result of the work. This has occurred in and through the data, by immersion in the processes of interviewing, transcription, writing of fieldwork diary entries, coding, reflecting on which issues to pursue with the next respondent, and reading literature. These processes can complicate and confuse but at other times make clear what the major issues are in the situation being studied. In truth, the process is often a mixture of complexity and clarification. However, constant reference back to the research questions/"areas of questioning", clarification of "underpinning issues" and speculation about the emerging theoretical issues and their component parts, whilst examining the existing data and planning next steps in data gathering has the effect, over a six month period, of helping to clarify which are the core issues. However, choosing the best theoretical framework available is no exact or totally scientific process. Rather, an explanation in theoretical terms that accurately fits the situation being studied, rather than infallible "correctness" is the kind of outcome outlined in this study.

The "emerging issues" were articulated in a number of ways. These included: personal reflection, devising of checklists for future fieldwork that related back to previous responses, fieldwork diary entries, case study reports and summative papers written after the completion of the case study. So I have set out below a chronological record of where the "emerging themes" were articulated in written form during the study, how they developed, the process of dimensionalisation of these issues, and how they related to the data. Quotations are taken from the fieldwork diary unless otherwise referenced.

23/1/03: comparison of the two case study communities
"Behaviour is not a zone priority [in Thurlby] in the way it is in the Burntake community". Also, "there appears to be a lively focus on expressive arts [in Thurlby] as a way of enlivening the curriculum, but are they going about it the right way, compared

to, say, the work being done in Burntake which seems to be much more geared to events and productions".

Later on in the day, in a second entry, I write about possible contrasts between the two communities: "there's possibly a stronger sense of central direction in Camcaster and a more ready adoption of the current national agenda, whereas Newhampton is potentially more bottom-up in its approach, with looser co-ordination of initiatives both centrally and in the individual schools. There's also less co-ordination and emphasis surrounding behaviour issues at Thurlby [secondary] compared to the approach in Burntake [secondary]. The feel of community involvement is different (and less) in the Thurlby context on the surface, possibly partly because of the multicultural dimension" (p.2).

3/2/03: emerging themes in the Burntake community
"There's a tension in Richard [Johnson's, head of Burntake secondary] approach and beliefs. He supports the new agenda of raising horizons and skills to bring about educational improvement for the vast majority of students but recognizes that the disaffected minority is requiring extra effort and innovation and targeting of resources to make sure they aren't "written off". Including them is also detrimental to the school's scores in league tables.

6/2/03: Major theme summary
A summary of all the themes and issues raised in the case study fieldwork up to 19th February 2003. This is effectively the first stage of the case study work, following which I write a report which focuses down the study and articulates "emerging themes".

2/3/03: "Case Study Report"
These themes were strongly emerging out of the data by this stage in the study. They are a mixture of emerging theoretical ideas from the fieldwork and strong themes that group together some of the nodes. This list forms the basis of focusing-down not only the node structure later on but of a developing theoretical framework:
- the fragility of leadership;
- the exclusion/inclusion dilemma;
- the child-centred/teacher-centred dilemma;

- the school-centred/community-centred dilemma;
- keeping behaviour issues subordinate;
- the struggle for coherence;
- hope and despair;
- being positive about the pupils means being positive about the community;
- pragmatism and idealism;
- disaffection and behaviour;
- disaffection:its causes;
- staff solidarity; and
- employing local people.

The report also briefly dimensionalises each "emerging theme", relating it back to its origins in the fieldwork data.

13/3/03: Focusing-down the study

"The two major action issues that have emerged so far are the B.I.P. initiative and the Pathway project and these should become the focus for the rest of the study", and "the focus now needs to be on interviewing individuals connected to the main areas of study". At the same time I note that "the study appears to be focusing down on leadership as it relates to sharp-edged issues. The Burntake [secondary] situation is a matter of concern in the sense that leadership failure concerning behaviour has been identified and the general feeling [about behaviour] when I visit the school is not good. I need to keep examining whether my perceptions are right and to what extent the claims of success in taking the school forward are correct. What appears to be a major issue at Burntake is the determination to include rather than exclude some of the most challenging children, an issue that destroyed Fairfield school. But my assumption is that Richard Johnson is far more astute and able as a head teacher than the previous head at Fairfield. After all, their value-added results are very good at Burntake".

3/4/03: Developing the "emerging themes"

This list is similar to the one in the earlier "Case Study Report" but with a few themes receiving less prominence:

- the school-centred/community-centred dilemma,
- the struggle for coherence,
- pragmatism and idealism and
- staff solidarity.

"Employing local people" is left out, and "the struggle against bureaucracy" is added to the list. Under most of the "themes" is a list of issues and categories that forms the basis of the later node review.

8/4/03: The types of conclusions required
"There exist expectations [from participants and the original project sponsors] for me to come up with policy conclusions and I feel that this might be worthwhile ... as long as any conclusions are grounded in the data". I also add that "one of the issues that is very apparent is that context is extremely important. There is a great deal of dynamism to situations in disadvantaged communities, with situations changing very fast". I add "I also need to decide which of the "emerging themes" are to be concentrated upon: e.g. leadership tensions and leadership dilemmas (with some of the themes being merged under there broader headings)".

12/6/03: Further development of "emerging themes"
Dilemmas become a strong developing feature. This list represents a revision of existing themes, which I am keen to keep as open and fluid as I can, to allow for theory development during the rest of the fieldwork and data analysis:
- "inclusion and exclusion;
- how to put the school at the heart of the community;
- children's learning related to the wider issue of lifelong learning;
- inter-agency dysfunction hampering the work of schools;
- community perceptions of the school crucial yet fragile;
- sharp-edged kids – how best to respond;
- work with parents a key to success, yet very difficult;
- top-down solutions hampering bottom-up approaches;
- schools tending to be inward-looking rather than outward-looking in spite of the rhetoric; context the key to success, yet very undermining; and

- a community-orientated mind-set is hard to engender and maintain for schools" (p.4).

10/7/03: Issues that have become clearer

These are to form a framework for pulling together the case study "work in progress" and its outcomes prior to the final round of data analysis.

"I feel strongly the need to advocate on behalf of schools in disadvantaged communities and believe in the need for progress of those communities in the future". I also add "the dilemmas encountered in the fieldwork are arguably largely about the school/community interface: (e.g. practice issues related to the inclusion agenda; how to put the school at the heart of the community; inter-agency dysfunction being a major problem; sharp-edged kids and the need to have a joined-up response; working with parents being a major key to educational success but being a massive challenge; top-down solutions hampering bottom-up responses; the tendency for schools to be inward-looking rather than outward-looking; how current developments require a community-orientated mind-set for schools)" (p.1).

August 2003: "Making Educational Leadership Count: At the School/Community Interface"

This paper seeks to bring together the major emerging themes and put them into a more coherent framework, with links back to the case study fieldwork. It is recognized in the paper, however, that this is "work in progress", with further data analysis required and subsequent revisiting of this rather loose theoretical framework. Nevertheless, this paper builds upon the issues identified in the course of the study and takes them forward in the sense that the concepts are dimensionalised in some detail, linking into matters strongly present in the data.

The themes include for the first time "the school as a transformational project" and groups the remaining issues under different types of dilemmas:
Dilemmas of Leadership-
- providing leadership strength and clarity but also giving staff ownership;
- even where there is success, it is nevertheless fragile;

- in the midst of hope there looms despair),
- School Dilemmas-
- keeping behaviour and disaffection subordinate to teaching and learning;
- needing to focus on the children when the tendency is to focus on the staff;
- the inclusion issue can go against the immediate interests of the school
- Dilemmas at the School/Community Interface-
- it is difficult to involve parents/the community but it is vital;
- lifelong learning is crucial to children's learning;
- schools cannot transform a community alone but co-operation between agencies is often poor;
- schools need to look outwards but also to concentrate on their "core business".

30/12/03 "Thesis Outline"

This provides a framework for planning the next round of writing. It arguably moves the theoretical ideas on further, but in advance of completing the data analysis. A distinction is drawn in the plan between the major issues found in both the early fieldwork and case studies, and major emerging theoretical outcomes with strong practice/policy implications, as follows:

Major issues from the fieldwork-
- in the midst of hope there looms despair;
- keeping behaviour and disaffection subordinate to teaching and learning;
- needing to focus on the children when the tendency is to focus on the staff;
- the inclusion issue can go against the immediate interests of the school;
- values of staff about the importance of community involvement and its reality; and
- the struggle to concentrate on "core business"

Major emerging theoretical outcomes-
- disadvantaged communities and the need for "transformation";
- the relevance and achievability of providing "genuinely comprehensive schools" in inner city areas;
- leadership dilemmas within a transformational context;

- schools as "transformational projects";
- strengthening networks in a disadvantaged community;
- school reputation and the inclusion agenda; and
- putting the child at the centre of school transformation.

However helpful this distinction may appear to be, it has only been with a revisiting of the data that a greater clarity of view has been reached concerning the node structure and emerging theory.

Scoping Study: Interview Questions

The interviews at this stage should principally aim to get respondents' views concerning the four issue questions, particularly examining matters such as: the role of leadership in effective schools in disadvantaged communities, the forms of leadership in existence and their consequences and where leadership is to be found in schools.

1. What does your role involve and how did you cme to do the job/take up your role?

2. What is the current position concerning education in your borough/local community?

Re. Issue Question 1 "how do stakeholders of schools in disadvantaged communities view educational success?"

3. What vision of educational achievement is likely to yield the best results for schools and their leaders in disadvantaged communities?

4. Is the process of delivering education in schools in any way different in disadvantaged communities, do you think?

5. Should we expect pupils in disadvantaged communities to achieve the same level of attainment as children in other areas?

6. Should educational success for pupils in poor areas be measured more widely in official measures than is currently the case?

7. What are the blocks to pupils in disadvantaged communities achieving in school?

8. What needs to be done to tackle these blocks?

9. Are there interventions currently taking place here that hinder school progress? If so, what are they?

10. Are there current interventions that are making a positive contribution to school progress? If so, what are they?

11. Re. issue question 2: Which local people do you view as being particularly successful in helping disadvantaged young people to achieve educationally?

Re. Issue Question 3 "What forms of/approaches to leadership are associated with successful schools in disadvantaged communities?

12. What type of school leader is required in a disadvantaged community?

13. Are different leadership skills required in the community context compared to the school context?

14. What leadership roles in this borough/community assist educational achievement of pupils, apart from those exercised by headteachers?

15. What types of help and support do school leaders need to raise pupil attainment in this borough/community?

16. Are there different types and amounts of help for school leaders required in this area to make a real improvement in the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

17. How crucial is a school leader in bringing about school improvement in disadvantaged communities?

18. What leadership skills are required to maximise staff morale and performance?

19. Is a school leader's role more or less crucial for schools deemed to have serious weaknesses or to be failing in disadvantaged communities, and in what ways?

20. Should leadership styles be different in schools facing difficulties in poor areas, compared to other school situations?

21. What are the most important issues for a school leader to pursue to bring about continuous improvement over a period of time?

22. How important is school culture and external pressure in affecting a school leader's performance in the job?

23. What can school leaders do to transform resistant cultures and tough environments?

Re. Issue Question 4 "To what extent is improving the surrounding community's social capital seen as a leadership task for the school?"

24. To what extent is the link between a school and its disadvantaged community crucial to pupils achieving in school?

25. Should more be done here to involve schools in community life? If so, what?

26. Is it/should it be a core function of schools in disadvantaged communities to help develop that community?

Case Study Fieldwork

The Thurlby Case Study

Reality Check Interviews

Roy Payne: headteacher of Far View primary school
8/1/03; 30/1/03; 11/2/03; 12/3/03

Matthew Garwood: EAZ co-ordinator
7/1/03; 19/2/03; 5/3/03

Graham Cummings: headteacher of the secondary school
17/12/02; 6/3/03; 18/3/03; 20/5/03

Informal Interviews

Raja Hussain: co-ordinator of the local multicultural centre
22/7/03

Norma Booth: EAZ expressive arts co-ordinator
17/3/03

Pat Webster: EAZ literacy co-ordinator
17/3/03

Maureen Wilkinson: educational psychologist
4/4/03

Angela Senior: co-ordinator of the neighbourhood management pathfinder project
10/4/03

Semi-Structured Interviews

Maureen Nash: learning support co-ordinator at the secondary school
20/5/03

Mona Robinson: adviser
30/7/03

Chris Grant: senior learning mentor at the secondary school
20/5/03

Suzanne Swann: secondary school assistant headteacher
12/5/03

Rashid Khan: parent governor at the secondary school
11/7/03

Meg Butler: governor at the secondary school
16/7/03

Erika Morton: guidance co-ordinator for curriculum at the secondary school
12/5/03

Observation Studies

Pathway Scheme planning meetings
9/1/03; 6/3/03

EAZ headteachers meeting
27/2/03

Community partnership meeting about the secondary school's PFI building plans
3/6/03

The Burntake Case Study

Reality Check Interviews

Richard Johnson: headteacher of the secondary school
14/12/02; 3/2/03; 12/2/03; 10/3/03; 8/4/03; 10/6/03; 9/7/03

Julie Brier: headteacher of Chatsworth primary school
4/12/02; 27/1/03; 13/3/03; 7/4/03; 3/7/03

Informal Interviews

Andrea Marriott: head of the support service at the secondary school
7/2/03

Vanessa Lunn: secondary school deputy headteacher
6/2/03

Robert Jones: secondary school mentor co-ordinator
14/2/03

Kirsty Meade: secondary school arts co-ordinator
7/2/03

Caroline Swift: LEA BIP co-ordinator
18/2/03

Donna McKeown: EAZ co-ordinator
10/12/02; 6/2/03; 9/4/03

Semi-Structured Interviews

Andrea Marriott: head of the support service at the secondary school
7/3/03

Mary Wood: governor at the secondary school
14/7/03

Deborah Davies: adviser
23/7/03

Alice Warburton: chair of the local regeneration forum
31/7/03

Observation Studies

A discussion between the headteacher of Chatsworth school and the local BIP co-ordinator
11/2/03

A meeting of local headteachers involved in the BIP/BEST initiative, chaired by the EAZ co-ordinator
14/2/03

A meeting of a local school cluster head teacher's group (to introduce myself and to say something about the proposed case study)
November 2002

Appendix 4

Criteria Used for Selection of Case Study Sites

Socio-economic

Multi-cultural

White working-class

Presence of initiatives

Small EAZ

Large EAZ

Not in an EAZ

Inter-agency working

Recent inter-agency working

Longstanding inter-agency working

Specific issues

School(s) in "special measures"

School(s) recently in "special measures"

School(s)/key players receptive/motivated

School(s)/key players not receptive/motivated

Stable school population

Unstable school population

Any critical issues/strategies re. school/community interface