THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

A study to define the key factors that lead to school
improvement in the secondary sector.

Being a Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of

EdD in School Leadership
in the University of Hull

by

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November 2008

Internal Examiner's Report

Candidate: Gillian Metcalfe

Degree: Doctor of Education

Thesis Title: A study to define the key factors that lead to school improvement in the secondary sector.

This thesis addresses an important topic, namely school improvement in the secondary sector. The main purpose of this research is given as 'to offer newly appointed Headteachers of schools requiring rapid improvement, a comprehensive menu of tried and tested strategies, which they may find useful to consider in their own local context' (p.2). It aims to identify the key factors which bring about whole-school improvement in secondary schools: 'The rationale is to discover which factors are most essential, and if any factors are linked together.'

There are five chapters: Introduction & Aims, Literature Review; Methodology; Analysis and Discussion of Findings; Conclusion and Recommendations.

The study draws on qualitative research interviews. The researcher enjoys good access to the key network of leaders. She provides a good account of the choice of methodology and the processes involved in data gathering and analysis.

The study uses a sample of eight schools. A composite model is offered, identifying eleven factors that the researcher says act as levers for improvement. The interview data is then approached with these factors/ conceptual framework in mind.

The literature review covers: developing a learning community; team-based cohesion; a culture of success; a research-engaged school; the quality of leadership; intervention at the learning level; Hopkins' model of improvement; involving students; key teacher behaviours; managing innovation; schools learning from each other; system leaders; improvements in schools facing challenging circumstances; and a composite model of improvement.

Though there is some good coverage of relevant material in this section, a number of criticisms can be suggested. These include: It lacks broader reading beyond literatures on schools. It needs to make more of a case for Hopkins' and Hargreaves' contributions - why do these writers emerge as being central? It has a high emphasis on teaching & learning and this emphasis on pedagogical improvement may suggest a narrow sense of school's strategic purposes. It makes little connection between learning and managers as learners. It is fairly uncritical in its approach to the writers reviewed.

More detailed points:

Hopkins model is outlined. Why is it given such centrality? What are the strengths and weaknesses it exhibits?

Collins 2005 is not in the bibliography.

Fullan (p.18) claims if relationships improve things get better. How does this relate to the previous concern about cosiness? Are the literatures ambiguous?

Literature on leadership is dealt with in six pages (17-22). Nothing is considered outwith school leadership.

The focus tends to return to pedagogical improvements. Examples include: Teachers designing and evaluating materials together (p.10), productive pedagogical dialogues (p.10); focus on teaching and learning and dialogues which alter teaching in the classroom (p.16), teachers improving materials (p.23), innovations in teaching and learning (p.30). There is one sentence on page 10 about teachers being able to take on wider roles but this is not elaborated upon. What place for schools as a community resource, wellbeing, managing partnerships, whole child agendas etc.? Are there strategic absences?

Elmore is quoted as a sceptical commentator. His point about challenges to the patterns of organising is powerful and merits further consideration (p.30). There may be parts of the interview data which can illuminate this idea and vice versa.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study.

There is good discussion of some key concepts including validity and reliability. There is a good description of the fieldwork carried out and the basis of its design.

It would be interesting to know whether the process of allowing participants to read the transcripts (p.62) resulted in any changes or had any impact on what was subsequently written.

The general characteristics of the sample (p.65). Output measures against national standards, value added scores, OFSTED inspection, SSAT consultant head or a mentor school, share good practice. Are these unproblematic criteria?

The coding includes networking, working with parents, rewards and incentives as emergent codes. None of these benefit from exposition via a literature review.

The Geertz reference p.47 is not in the bibliography.

Burrell and Morgan are quoted (p.48-49) on the importance of objectivity and the need to avoid being openly empathetic. On page 50 empathy is described as an essential skill. It is not clear what view the researcher takes of this. Which? Can the position be clarified? If B&M are rejected (and I think they should be) I'd like to hear why.

Chapter 4.

The quotations are interesting. However they would reward further analysis/ critical reflection. Their themes or discourses could be considered more fully, and from a critical perspective. It would be valuable to move beyond reporting the quotations ('Respondent 5 stated that... Respondent 6 had a desire to ensure that...') and provide more by way of critical analysis.

Reflection by staff is dealt with in one page. It is not clear that any reflection is happening. The key example (p.86) sounds more like monitoring of staff – going onto the classroom and checking for lesson plans. How is reflection defined? How is it described in the interviews?

It's not always clear that the content and quotations fit the sub headings and the overlap between sections should be more explicitly acknowledged.

The final sections.

Improvement seems to equal attainment. Perhaps this is related to the pedagogical focus. In the introduction, literature review (and beyond) the work would be strengthened by doing more to recognise the terms 'effectiveness' and 'improvement' as contested and problematic.

Pages 107-110 gives an overview of each respondent's approach. This is returned to page 124. 'There were real sequences of events.' It paints a neat, sequential picture of change and improvement. Is management not more messy than that?

A key conclusion is creating a 'can do' culture, but culture is not defined (literature unexamined) and this is not teased out on the interview analysis. Where does this come from? How could it be operationalised?

The thesis offers a number of insights into the experiences and practices of headteachers, but there are ways in which these could be strengthened. It has the potential to provide a useful basis for informing leadership development interventions. The study has the potential to make a contribution to scholarly research in this area and has the potential to be engage practitioners. However its capacity to do so would be strengthened by giving attention to the areas outlined above.

Kevin Orr, Hull, July 2008.

Abstract

This research has a focus on the identification of the key factors which bring about whole-school improvement in secondary schools. These are a set of dynamic processes which are evidenced in eight secondary schools in the north of England, rather than a checklist of short-term actions to act as a 'quick-fix' to counteract the low performance of a school. The rationale is to discover which factors are most essential, and if any factors are linked together. Do leaders of successful schools prioritise one set of processes over another ?

The literature review suggests there are many factors which research supports as intrinsic to improvement, however many of the schools previously studied faced challenging circumstances in areas of social deprivation. This study takes a cross section of eight school leaders as a sample. A composite model is presented highlighting eleven factors which act as levers for improvement, and the subsequent data generated is placed against this conceptual framework. The research methodology presented favours a qualitative approach as the intention is to capture those special features unique to each school context using semi-structured interviews, to discover if the original model could be validated.

In essence, the eight respondents favoured only seven factors which were highly significant. However, it is the inter-relationship between these factors which is most surprising. The respondents referred to the importance of articulating common goals, reflecting on possible courses of action, and then building capacity to create a 'can do' culture by challenging assumptions, whilst seizing opportunities. Improving schools have an achievement focus with students and teachers knowing how to improve their performance, using internal systems to ensure progress and accountability. The respondents operate in a systemic way, networking with other leaders to share and even create new thinking. It was recognised that real improvement processes take time to embed and may be unique to the school context and perhaps not directly transferable elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

The introduction sets out some main conceptual questions which the research intends to address. The focus is on school improvement in the secondary sector, and the actions leaders have taken to implement change. The key to the research is to question a number of successful secondary school leaders in the north of England to discover what are the main strategies and processes they have deployed to improve their schools. The researcher attempts to discover which actions have made most impact on improvement. Can these successful leaders pinpoint the processes they have explicitly engineered to make a real difference? If so, are there any common themes, and do they use similar strategies?

A study of recent literature about whole school improvement will present a theoretical perspective, encompassing some of the most common factors considered to be important for a school to improve. A range of theories will be collated to form a conceptual framework, from contributors world-wide. The intention is to critique these so that a comprehensive picture of school improvement is presented from a theoretical perspective.

The thesis will gather evidence from different sources and provide an analysis of data to obtain the range of triggers for school improvement. The next step will be to place the emergent research data against the conceptual framework which is generated by the literature review. It could be that the data from the sample of practitioners is so recent that they suggest new and creative ways to improve a secondary school. Alternatively, what emerges may simply echo the research already written and duplicate the main ideas in the literature review. The data will be interrogated to identify any common themes which present themselves across several schools and if some of the leaders questioned refer to similar processes. Is there a preferred order in terms of implementing improvement strategies? If so, why have certain strategies been prioritised over others, and to what effect? The research will seek out evidence to determine connections

between the different strategies implemented, to identify if there is a set of strategies that may be linked, or cause a chain reaction to effect sustained change.

Purpose of Research

The main purpose of this research is to be able to offer newly appointed Headteachers of schools requiring rapid improvement, a comprehensive menu of tried and tested strategies, which they may find useful to consider in their own local context. Should there be strategies that are interlinked, then leaders may wish to implement the next step in a process as part of their improvement cycle. As the research originates from across Local Authority boundaries in the north of England, it has the potential to be shared beyond current existing regional networks of headteachers, and therefore to a much wider audience. A summary of the main findings will also be submitted to the National College for School Leaders so that it can be offered as an additional insert in the 2008 literature for newly appointed Headteachers in the secondary sector.

This research intends to go beyond listing characteristics of 'effective schools', as this presents too narrow a perspective, only providing a snapshot of schools which were already effective, suggesting that schools are static. Brighouse and Woods (1999:2) refer to the nouns which make a school effective, such as a *'positive ethos'* and *'high teacher expectations,'* yet it is the verbs, the processes, which hold the key to improvement. In their Birmingham study they refer to *'the creation of positive learning environments, the exercise of leadership, and the practice of learning.'* Fidler (2001:66) poses other thought-provoking questions when he criticised work on effectiveness, believing that it did not provide any guidance on **how** the school had become effective. This begins to suggest that improvement is associated more with something that is dynamic and moving. It is those strategies which the research will focus upon as they underpin a school moving along a long-term improvement path.

The leaders questioned were advocates of change and felt there was external pressure to deliver high quality educational experiences for every child. At a personal level they each generated internal changes irrespective of the external demands placed upon them.

In preliminary telephone discussions with potential respondents, it was clear that their role as headteacher went beyond that of leading their own school. Several were School Improvement Partners or Consultant Heads, which gave them insight into the workings of other often less successful schools. The headteachers in the sample saw themselves as learners, not necessarily in a traditional academic sense, but as professionals who take ideas from elsewhere, and then adapt them to their unique context for the benefit of their own institution. Respondents refer to relationships that are built on trust, in order to share practical strategies and also new ideas to trigger improvements in specific areas, such as ICT. This fits in well with the work of Stoll, (2003:552) who describes school improvement as a much wider approach, where staff work collaboratively rather than operating as an island, but that it is also

> 'much deeper than raising standards and outsiders helping struggling schools to get themselves out of difficulties.'

This shifts the emphasis away from 'good schools' and 'bad schools' and suggests that every school can learn from the ways in which others operate. However, the reality is that the Government does publish an annual list of schools which are underperforming below 'acceptable thresholds' which at the moment stands at 30% five A*-C grades including English and Maths. There is an expectation that these schools will partner other, high performing schools to 'raise their game.' This aspect of judging schools by measurable outputs is maintained by Slee and Weiner (1998:1) who suggest that learning should be focused on outcomes, that are assessable, particularly those that can be compared between schools. However, this seems a very mechanistic way of assessing a school's success and does not take account of the journey the school has embarked upon, nor the quality of its intake. The researcher prefers not to subscribe to the ideas offered by Bell, (2003:96) which has a focus on school effectiveness as a *'mechanistic and a narrow view of what counts as achievement.'* In contrast to an effectiveness model, this thesis will study the real-life current situations facing leaders of secondary schools in the 21st century. The data which materialised between 2005 and 2007 had a focus on any improvement processes and strategies that may have evolved since 2003. It will not just concentrate on numerical statistical outcomes but take into

account the wider processes that have led to purposeful and positive results in the sample of secondary schools.

Research Sources

The research will be taken from a wide range of sources, not just schools within challenging circumstances. If every school has the ability to improve in some way, then it is important to include the full range of secondary schools in the sample, including 11-16, 11-18, inner city, suburban, affluent urban, catholic, and fully comprehensive. This will allow the strategies to emerge from schools where pupil backgrounds do differ, as do the challenges facing the schools. It supports the belief of Harris and Bennet, (2001:29) that schools do make a difference and that a poor family background cannot be presented as an excuse for poor outcomes. Some of the data presented will emerge from a school in the top ten in the country for adding value from entry at Year 7, and yet it is located in one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in Yorkshire. This study seeks to set out for headteachers, as Brighouse suggests, *'a set of processes or a compass by which to navigate'* (1999:10), thus giving other practitioners an idea of the conditions that can support and enhance learning, which could in turn improve their school.

Much of the previous research prior to 2002, such as The National Commission for Education (1996) did recognise the difficulties schools face. 'Success Against All the Odds' did attempt to describe eleven individual case studies, from primary, secondary and special schools in the United Kingdom. Although they highlighted the complex challenges faced in each school there was no blueprint for improvement, in its conclusion. It concentrated on 'Effective Schools in Disadvantaged Areas'. The steering group made reference to being unable to provide an instant recipe to transform schools, but their findings did provide a vision as to where the school should ideally be, but *'little insight as to how make the journey to that place.'* This research will recognise the challenges of different school contexts yet will offer some insight into the practicalities of 'the how', and 'what' can be done to promote improvement. It

attempts to identify what steps could be taken, as Hillman suggests (1999:9) and provide the *'underlying processes of change.'*

The sources for the sample are primarily from school based origins, and the headteachers do lead organizations of different sizes and have equally different partnerships operating. One of them is a full service extended school, where the leader operates as a chief executive in charge of a Sports facility, a training centre and adult learning base. His relationship with partners is very different to the association between two catholic headteachers in the sample who have firm links with the regional Diocesan Boards. As a result of this complexity surrounding the very nature of the affiliations each school had, it was deemed more appropriate to accept the links at face value, and try to ascertain the importance of working in a systemic way rather than assess the importance of each school's varied partnership workings. The latter course would have been more appropriate had the title of the thesis had a focus on purely systemic leadership and partnership models of working.

The leaders from schools in the sample could clearly articulate their vision, and in doing so they defined their common purpose. In each case they referred to improving the life chances of children, and preparing them for the future by removing any barriers to learning, whilst ensuring that there is success for all. Every respondent regardless of their type of school felt that they as leader could make a difference. It could be argued that this is a narrow sense of school's purpose, but this desire to ensure that every child achieves their potential, permeated through the research. In some instances it lead to such actions as changing curriculum, intervening in the classroom, or launching new systems. However it was this clear mission and concrete desire to make the school a better place which underpins many of the choices made by the headteachers in the sample. In attempting to realise their vision they accepted there would be obstacles in their path, nevertheless, their commitment to improvement was what drove them to make the necessary changes, even if at times these proved unpopular.

The school improvement movement emerged as a reaction to 'top down' externally driven changes in curriculum and organisational demands from central Government preferring organisational processes rather than outcomes. Hopkins offers a succinct definition of school improvement which is felt to be too general. (2006:2) He suggests,

> 'it comes from within, and is about the ongoing and sustainable learning of pupils and all those inside and outside schools who care about pupils' learning.'

However this could include almost anything that improves pupil learning, and does not make reference to teaching or their development, or whether the techniques are transferable from one school to another. With school improvement, one technique in one school to raise attainment might have positive results, yet used elsewhere with different students, staff and context, may not have the same impact or outcomes. Headteachers in the sample felt more at ease with knowing they could describe their commitment to changing the way they do things for the better. They subscribed to essentially a process of changing school culture. Stoll and Fink

(1989:12) conducted research in Canada stating

> 'Whilst there is a lot of common ground, each school's route to improvement is uniquely shaped by its context.'

This is an important point as the schools involved in the sample do have widely different contexts. The strength of this research is that it takes into account eight successful schools, led by experienced headteachers, and seeks to discover not only the common processes they have implemented, but the order in which they implemented them to have maximum effect. The purpose here is not to have a list of processes that are universal, to be copied unquestioningly, but to devise a menu of strategies that future successful headteachers can consider in the light of their particular context and select those processes they may feel are relevant. Weindling (1989:60) stated that

> 'School improvement is used quite broadly to include the pursuit of any goal that benefits pupils and has as its focus the classroom and the school.'

However this definition lacks clarity and seems to contradict what is described as the process of school improvement, and fits better with a definition of effectiveness. However the definition does tie in with Harris and Bennet (2001:34) where the school becomes

'the centre of change..... external reforms need to be sensitive to the situation in individual schools, rather than assuming that all schools are the same.'

On the contrary, the schools in this sample are not replicas of each other, yet one major Government demand placed on them is primarily to increase standards beyond National Challenge benchmarks, even if the intake is extremely challenging and the school has children with high levels of deprivation and faces challenging circumstances. This offers one starting point, yet Loncks-Horsley and Hergert (1985:54) describe a more pragmatic approach. In summary they state that school improvement is more than just planning, more than the headteacher's leadership, and more than a 'quick-fix.' Stoll and Fink (1989:13) agree and state:

> 'Quick-fixes will not work. It is inappropriate to measure change in student outcomes until the change effect has had time to take effect. This may take several years, because change is a process and not an event.'

For 'Fresh Start' schools who are given 100 days to turnaround, this may be somewhat difficult when research states that time is needed, yet it is time which is in short supply for such schools, who have to be able to demonstrate they have taken action swiftly to improve outcomes. Respondents widely believed that many strategies took a considerable time to embed within structures and then impact, such as curriculum pathways and co-coaching. This is because schools leaders in discussions did emphasize that timing the strategies correctly was important and had to serve the needs of their students, teachers and the community. Although now over 30 years old, the OECD International School Improvement Project (ISIP) by Velzen (1985:48) still has relevance in that it talks about sustainability within the learning environment as,

> ' A systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively.'

The research seeks out how learning conditions in the schools have altered, and ties in with the ideas of Hopkins and Reynolds (2001) who take the idea further with three important points. First and foremost, school improvement is concerned with changing the informal organisational processes, as well as the outcomes of the school. Secondly educational outcomes are problematic but they are not given or fixed. Lastly, improvement needs to come from the 'bottom up' so that it is owned by the very people

actually delivering in the classroom. Fitzgibbon (1991:172) emphasised the role of the classroom teacher and states,

> 'the greater part of the variation among pupils' achievements can be accounted for at classroom rather than school level.'

Brown and McIntyre (1993:15) believe that innovation has to begin where teachers *are*, rather than imposing a political model upon them. This has particular resonance relating to this research, as school leaders refer to being pro-active and responding to national initiatives, but turning the ideas into 'on the ground' strategies which will work. In scrutinizing research sources it became evident that it was almost impossible to arrive at a finite acceptable definition of school improvement. Some see improvement in terms of raw outputs, others as achievement where children progress from one starting point to another, and finally others envisage it as the full range of broad experiences which allow all children to move forward and reach their potential. This serves to support the researcher in accepting that school improvement is complex, chaotic and sometimes confusing. The study will attempt to reflect on the research sources, in order to present a conceptual framework against which the research findings can be positioned, thus trying to make sense of the wealth of emergent data. Care has to be taken not to oversimplify and separate out the factors, to avoid any dilution in the findings, at the expense of trying to sort and make some semblence of order within an already complicated topic for study.

Structure of Thesis

This introduction has set out the main questions which are being posed, and the purpose of the research. It will respond to the questions by starting to explore the theoretical framework of school improvement in Chapter 2, the Literature Review. This section will delve more deeply into the selected strategies and processes which are essential to school improvement, to be able to identify what it is that contributes to creating the ideal climate and culture of a learning organisation. Harris and Lambert (2003:14) state that for school improvement to happen, there has to be

> 'A commitment to changing the way we do things around here for the better. School improvement is essentially a process of changing school culture.'

The Literature Review will explore a range of views on school improvement and highlight positive and negative aspects as appropriate. In doing so, it will produce a composite model deriving from different sources. As many factors as possible will be included and should different researchers support the same processes, then this will be stated. These factors, will form the backdrop for the analysis of data.

Chapter 3 will consider the theory of methodology and a consideration of the most appropriate methods to utilize in this particular research, and whether quantitative data analysis or qualitative data analysis should be used and why. In support of the ideas presented by Bryman and Bell (2003:233) the researcher is advised to

> 'be aware of the ways in which you would like to analyse your data from the earliest stage of your research.'

In considering different approaches, the Methodology chapter will also indicate which techniques are to be used and why other techniques have been discounted. The methodology chosen will ensure that the collection of data considers validity, authenticity and reliability and that the chosen methods are 'fit for purpose'. The characteristics of the sample and its administration will form part of this section of the study.

Chapter 4 will form the Analysis and Discussion of Findings. It serves to catalogue the important processes and strategies emerging from the data, which school leaders believe have had impact. It will also strive to highlight which ones appear most critical for a school to improve. This may or may not duplicate the factors already highlighted in the literature review, by other researchers. The discussion of findings will also ascertain which factors could be inter-linked and really do work in practice to bring about a swifter improvement. The chapter concludes by the identification of 'New Thinking' which will centre on the unique factors which prove essential, together with a preferred order of process implementation, as an original perspective.

The final chapter will set out the conclusion to the thesis and make recommendations. It will recognize the limitations of the sample and provide a summary of strategies which

are felt to be most essential. This will be offered as a digest to new secondary school leaders in 2008 for consideration should they be wishing to consider some pro-active steps to improve. The chapter will also suggest any indication of potential future research which could continue beyond this study, where issues have been exposed and require further in-depth analysis and exploration.

Half of the respondents were already being asked to communicate their successes in relation to school improvement to a variety of audiences, by invitation of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, (SSAT) who have a number of programmes run 'for schools, by schools' to disseminate good practice and share expertise. In answering the conceptual questions highlighted in this introduction, the research will aim to produce a comprehensive study into the strategies and processes underpinning whole-school improvement in the secondary sector, which is a core purpose for many school leaders in 2008.

CHAPTER 2, LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to devise a conceptual framework to be used whilst collecting the data, it was useful to consider several key questions of researchers who have been exposed to large numbers of schools that have improved and are improving. What do theorists state are the most common processes a school needs to action for improvement to happen as a direct consequence? Are researchers able to offer significant evidence that in implementing some changes, the school culture has become more positive? Is there a preferred order in implementing the identified processes? Do they suggest that school leaders may wish to execute certain strategies first to evolve change more swiftly? Is there anything that leaders can do differently to bring about improvements? Do leaders need to shift their emphasis and refrain from implementing certain processes in preference of others? To what extent should school leaders use central influences creatively in their own context in school development? The literature review makes reference to a wide range of research from different sources, which when pieced together offers underpinning strategies that are perceived to make a real difference and trigger whole school improvement.

In essence, this chapter starts by taking school improvement research in turn and explores the positive and negative aspects of each study. In doing so it attempts to consider a breadth of inquiry and at the same time tease out the strands which appear most crucial for improvement. At the same time the literature review will acknowledge common processes, ones which are evidenced by more than one recent source. Once brought together, this will offer a framework which will consist of varied factors and preferred courses of action supported by the research.

Developing a Professional Learning Community

The work of Day, (1992:42) is a convenient starting point as it states straightforwardly that there are four main factors to initiate improvement. According to his research they are; engaging teachers to start talking to each other about what and how they teach, frequent regular peer observations of teachers with feedback, which leads to teachers

who plan, design and evaluate materials together, and finally '*the centrality of leadership in securing school improvement remains indisputable.*'

These four elements have a clear focus on teachers working together in different ways, and also emphasises the involvement of the leader in generating such change whilst supporting the processes with internal school systems and structures to facilitate these changes to happen. Day suggests that such productive pedagogical dialogues between staff are intrinsic to improvement. This culture may be more difficult to implement when, a school has departments who have a constantly changing membership, comprising non-specialists and possibly some fixed term temporary teachers who may be less committed to the school. There are also issues of training staff to be able to give constructive feedback, and developing their teamworking skills to work alongside colleagues to pursue common goals and take on shared responsibility for the progress of pupils.

Therefore, Day's work provides a clear starting point for a framework, and it offers the basis for the first section of the literature review. There is considerable research to support the idea that if teachers work together to learn together and share ideas they can make changes which will have a real impact on the learning for pupils. However the Day model is insufficient, and superficial as a framework for all schools to consider adopting. The research suggest an ideal way of working, but no specific guidance as to how best to achieve an ethos of colleagues working in highly effective teams. In essence, there appears to be some strength in the argument that schools need to develop systems which allow professionals to learn together and create shared practices to promote and impact on pupil learning. This coming together of educational practitioners collaborating with a common purpose is defined as a professional learning community by Harris and Lambert. (2003:98)

> 'There are shared norms and values among teachers and students.....and become the defining purpose of the school.'

They suggest that professionals are coming together to learn within a supportive and self-created community.

They do not state how staff move to a position of creating their own community with a defining purpose. It could be that a school does have a clear mission, such as 'Support for achievement', (respondent 6) but this is open to interpretation by potentially up to 150 colleagues. The individual response to this can vary from person to person, and need to be assessed in terms of their impact.

Harris and Lambert (2003) suggest that shared decision making, shared purpose, mutual regard and integrity, are constructive factors which assist in pupils and teachers learning together. According to Sergiovanni (2000:139) it appears that this cohesion is an important factor and possibly the single most important factor which can impact on the school.

Hargreaves (2002) supports this and states that

> 'professional learning communities lead to strong and measurable improvements in students' learning….they create and support sustainable improvements that last over time because they build professional skill and the capacity to keep schools progressing.'

However this just does not happen by chance. In order to facilitate this, staff need to be encouraged to have strategic conversations. Davies (2004) recommends they are encouraged and allowed to build up trust through frequent dialogue within open and fluid channels of communication. It is clear that some thorough consideration of the culture of the school is required, so that staff can consider ways in which it can be changed for the better. It is essential that this must make sense to those people involved in the change so they can in turn interpret how it can help them and their students.

Spillane (2005) offers an alternative dimension to this. He suggests that teachers need to be part of small teams that stay connected, to maintain cohesion. If this does not happen, then there will be patches of brilliance and areas where things do not operate well. He calls the connecting mechanisms 'boundary spanners.' This bonding together can potentially give staff strength to tackle new projects and take collective risks to make improvements. It will be interesting to ascertain whether the headteachers interviewed do indeed try to build teams with cohesion as a means of pushing forward improvements and also retaining staff. Hargreaves (2006) suggests that one method to

ensure meaningful communication and avoiding staff running the risk of operating in 'silos' is to build small teams but introduce linking mechanisms whereby one person is actually a member of two groups. This facilitates overlap, and allows information and ideas to be cross-fertilized from group to group.

Hargreaves suggests this as one particular strategy leaders could use to encourage staff to tackle the nine different gateways of the personalisation agenda. The components, are termed 'gateways' and comprise Student Voice, Learning to Learn, Assessment for Learning, New Curriculum and Technologies, Advice and Guidance, Mentoring and Coaching, Workforce Reform and Design and Organisation. Whilst each of these core elements can be deemed important in transforming a school, his research states that and at the same time schools need to make personalisation of the curriculum a reality. These nine gateways were therefore reconceptualised into four clusters, Deep Learning, Deep Experience, Deep Support and Deep Leadership. This reconfiguration is not helpful, it condenses certain factors which do not appear to sit comfortably together, such as curriculum and new technologies. At the same time there are omissions such as the learning gains to be derived from wider educational visits. The heading of 'Deep Learning' incorporates student voice, with little reasoning as to why this is intrinsic to learning. Therefore the four 'Deeps' as groupings appear false, as if made for convenience, yet the nine separate elements appear to have individual merit in themselves. If it is accepted that school improvement is a complex area of study, the reduction of nine gateways into four merely oversimplifies the main issues. The only advantage is to demonstrate the inter-relationship between the separate factors, and how they may relate together. The disadvantage is that this simplification loses the individually of the nine elements and has been adopted by some schools, unquestioningly, into their school design and structure. With little explanation and comprehension by junior staff and stakeholders there can be ensuing confusion. In particular, there is the danger that unless the community understand these new terms, parents may be quite mystified to receive correspondence from a 'Leader of Deep Support.'

School improvement has a focus of the 'how' of change, according to Stoll and Fink (1996) Schools have to be able to strike a balance between change and stability, and development and maintenance activities. Clear decisions need to be made so that the school on one hand operates successfully on a day to day basis, but at the same time carries forward its aims and adds value. Fullan's comments suggest that to make a difference the changes undertaken need to impact on student outcomes otherwise the exercise is one of staff development, and not improvement. Leaders need to consider developing the collaborative competence for problem solving and the capacity to engage in 'deep learning'. Carter and Franey (2005:2) believe that learners, whether they be staff or pupils should be encouraged to devise 'inside out' solutions to complex problems. This involves thinking creatively and rather than merely accept the nationally prescriptive imposed initiatives, these are turned into projects which have meaning and relevance for the school, which fits its context and impacts on attainment.

Chapman and Harris (2004:223) suggest that one particularly successful strategy for schools facing challenging circumstances is to have a clear focus on a limited number of goals. Potter et al (2002) suggested that there needs to be an orderly learning environment where the classroom is the focus. Harris and Lambert echo this (1999:96) by referring to *'purposeful collaboration'* and *'adults and students learning together.'*

Leadership processes must enable all those involved to engage in a sense of purpose, one that is made real by the collaboration of committed adults. The main rationale suggests a link between organisational change and pedagogical change. It appears that there is a connection between establishing a professional learning community and also 'deep teacher change' according to Toole and Seashore-Lewis. (2002:12)

Leithwood (2000:176) suggests that we need to

> 'stimulate staff to challenge and re-examine assumptions about their work and think how it can be done differently.'

This implies that the leader has the desire for things to be done differently, and suggests that the school leader adopts the mode of 'change agent.' This fits in well with the

section of findings relating to systemic leadership. Even though three of the eight headteachers in the sample have received 'outstanding' judgements by OFSTED, with no key issues to address, they are still keen to discover ways in which they can improve their schools further. They can point to instances in the past whereby they have had to place pressure on colleagues to move some teachers out of their comfort zone, and challenge their practice. Gray, Hopkins et al (1999:151) offer a brief summary of what the more rapidly improving schools have in common. The most important resource appears to be *'the unlocking of teachers' interests in changing their performance.'* This source implies there is a willingness on the part of staff to change, yet in reality this research suggests a resistance from some colleagues. Headteachers suggest that there needs to be systems which allow staff to reflect together on pedagogy through structured professional dialogue, and that teachers need to have the capability and training to alter what they are doing. There are examples contained in the analysis of headteachers putting mentoring and coaching programmes in place for staff, to support these desired changes.

Harris and Lambert (2003:15) take this one stage further and believe that their work demonstrates that a school culture which promotes trust and collaborative working relationships, and focuses on teaching and learning, is more likely to be self reviewing and responsive to improvement efforts. They discuss a five-step plan to improvement. Step one, the school leader creates a climate of healthy debate. Step two, there are opportunities for teachers to inquire, share and generate ideas. Step three, there is a change in teacher attitudes. Step four, classroom teaching alters and impacts on the learner. Step five and finally, the learning outcomes of pupils are improved. They do stipulate that the leader needs to be highly skilled at generating internal change and that the culture of enquiry has to be consciously developed by establishing structures and working arrangements that support it. This links back to the previous point made by Spillane about interconnecting teams. However it does not suggest what proportion of staff need to be involved in collaborative working to bring about the desired improvements. Neither does it state whether there needs to be a critical mass of many, or one or two key individuals leading areas which are underperforming. Are many

people with low status but a high commitment to the organization sufficient to bring about a sea-change to trigger improvement? Perhaps the meeting structure in schools has to be supportive and flexible enough to allow staff reflective time to consider what it is they need to do together to make an impact in a particular area.

Harris and Muijs (2005:48) state that it is necessary for teachers to have a shared sense of purpose and *'accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work.'* It appears that changes in just the organisational arrangements are insufficient. The context and conditions have to be right for mutual learning to occur, so teachers can develop and refine their own practice. The research points out that positive cultural change is at the heart of school improvement, and priority should be given to altering processes that ensure teachers have the opportunity to share norms and values, and agree a pupil-centred focus for their work.

The work of Harris and Muijs (2005:93) offers some illustrations of how schools in the study gave staff the opportunity to think differently and create favourable cultural conditions. This was done by *'opportunities to switch roles and responsibilities'* and also

> 'monitoring meetings with line managers and opportunities to meet together to jointly plan new initiatives.'

Lieberman and Miller (2004) see teachers as leaders who need to have a shift in their perspective and practice. Initially they float the idea of teachers having greater professional responsibility and accountability, moving away from talking about **my** students in **my** classroom, to discussing **our** students in **our** school. Then they are shifting the focus from teaching to learning and designing curriculum and assessment around pupils showing how they can improve. A final development may be that teachers are able to take on wider roles, and becoming engaged in inquiry whereby they can make a difference through innovation and change. The research points to a number of schools that have built capacity at different tiers in their organization to develop colleagues who conduct whole school roles, such as links with the community or extending the specialism to do outreach work with other schools. Many of them are involved in formal partnerships which have (as a pre-requisite of receiving funding) an

expectation that certain training events or host visits will occur. It is difficult to assess the impact of these activities, but leaders in the sample were convinced that injecting this extra capacity has triggered improvements and such key staff have 'large portfolios' and are paid 'additional allowances,' in recognition of the status they hold.

Hopkins (1994:36) in Improving the Quality of Education for All, states that school change brings ' *internal turbulence which is predictable and uncomfortable.*' He is of the opinion that some turbulence is absolutely necessary for successful and long lasting change, when resistance looms large. This is most definitely borne out by school leaders in the sample. They can cite examples of when staff assumptions have had to be challenged, so that the needs of students are put first. This was referred to on numerous occasions by the first two respondents who had inherited some staff who were extremely reluctant to change. Turbulence ensued but the improvement was a consequence in both cases. Desforges (2002) holds the belief that this instability is one potential characteristic of some networks of schools. He believes that *'Diversity is a challenge of cosiness.'* To survive, in some cases, teachers need support to break through these barriers. Hopkins (2000) suggests that the leader must

> 'consciously or intuitively adapt the internal conditions to meet the demands of the emergent priority, to alter the culture of the school.'

There is a wealth of evidence in the sample where leaders appraise a situation in their own school and then re-position people or re-allocate resources to be able to tackle the problem in a different way. The ethos of the school changes as the emergent priority is known by everyone and thus gathers a momentum of its own, such as highlighted in the case of Respondent 1 with assessment for learning.

Horizontal approaches such as flexible working groups containing committed staff at all levels in the organisation could be one such method to assist positive outcomes. This work is particularly pertinent as it could hold the key to solving some issues of retention. If staff feel that their views are valued, they may be more likely to stay in that school to be there to see the impact of their involvement. If the school starts to foster a culture of success this may act as a retention mechanism as staff may not wish to take up another

post. It will be interesting to note in the analysis if headteachers make the connection between recruitment and retention of high calibre staff and the establishment of a professional learning community. One premise could be, that working within a dynamic successful school climate where risk taking is encouraged and professional development is the norm, may serve to recruit and retain staff as they themselves begin to value the professional learning community they are part of. This can be linked to the ideas presented by Collins who discovered that great companies used large acquisitions after a breakthrough to accelerate momentum , ' *in an already fast spinning wheel.* '

Schools may be gathering momentum and the very fact that the professional learning community generates an energy, this secondary force may serve to drive through even greater improvement. One such example is the idea of 'the Research Engaged School.' This is not just about a teacher conducting some research which will impact on their class or target students, but where it involves all staff and intends to impact on whole school culture. By researching a key issue instrumental to the school's development, staff are able to take ownership. NCSL, in their advice to headteachers about Learning Centred leadership (2005) state that

> 'The schools that took part in the programme seized the opportunity to move forward in the way they want to, using their own professional expertise and knowledge. Rather than being told what to do, they have been able to take hold of the reins.'

A significant number of the twenty one case study schools chose to share their findings with other neighbourhood schools that have similar problems. These may in turn use the research as a springboard to develop the topic in their own context. Schools benefited from the project by having had an increased number of applications for vacant posts, from people stating that being a research engaged school has attracted them to apply. Evidence from the participating schools demonstrate that their schools are innovative, exciting places to be. An emergent concern might be the time and individual workload that is involved. School structures have to be flexible enough to build this in to their annual cycle, so that staff feel supported enough to turn data and experience into knowledge. The principal research officer from the National College responsible for

research engaged projects, Sharp, comments that *'Once the benefits start to emerge, most schools don't want to stop.'*

However, the research findings from this small sample, suggest that some factors are more important in influencing improvement than others. If the National College were aware of a potential 'chain reaction' of processes, perhaps the Research Engaged projects may select their focus to take account of such factors.

Sharp (2006:30) identifies four basic ingredients for successfully improved schools. In summary, they are

- Strong and enthusiastic leadership to set the tone.

- Good collaboration ensuring everyone contributes.

- Research mentors who train staff and ensure quality control.

- Choosing the right topics so everyone sees the purpose and benefits.

The National College of School Leadership and the Innovations Unit stress that schools must focus on self-evaluation, reflective enquiry and collaborative learning and have therefore devised a range of activities available, with resources and tasks for schools to use as a starting point. These can be accessed on demand dependent on the nature of the project. No longer do schools have to operate in isolation and weave their own improvement path without help and guidance.

It could be argued that such projects merely exacerbate a polarization of schools. Those who are deemed successful, already have the capacity to improve even more. They can direct time, staffing and extra resources towards innovations and are in the luxurious position to be able to describe themselves as 'risk takers' as they occupy a position of strength. For those schools who are deemed failing or given 'Notice to Improve', they my find it difficult to reflect, be collaborative and take risks. Evidence in the analysis suggests that strong, effective leadership is essential, and the study supports this finding, in that five of the eight schools were positioned in highly unsuccessful situations five years previous. Actions taken by the headteacher have made an impact.

To conclude the first part of the literature review it is important to consider and reflect upon any initial emergent processes that indicate factors and strategies to evoke whole school improvement. One such element is that it appears crucial that the process of staff actually engaging professionally with each other on some common purpose, which relates to improvement, is a key element. The dialogues which are co-constructed between colleagues are then linked into changing practice, developing shared tools and techniques which in turn alters the teaching in the classroom. The ultimate desire is that this will have as a consequence 'better learning'. This culture shift away from being told how to do it, or merely executing an initiative because it is a Government requirement, allows staff to feel empowered and push forward the boundaries of their pedagogy. If the school has an ethos which allows such ideas to grow and flourish then several teams could even cross fertilise their new expertise giving key players a new found confidence. This amalgamation of being clear about the schools focus, building cohesive teams of staff and also creating the right atmosphere and conditions to support creative thinking and risk taking appear as intrinsic factors and operates as a catalyst for change. The research evidence in this first part of the literature review also points out some of the more operational mechanisms and systems that schools have used to underpin successful strategies.

Developing a professional learning community will therefore form part of the conceptual framework as there is a wealth of research evidence to support it as an underpinning factor to whole school improvement. However the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning is implicit, but in reality this may not happen. This factor places the emphasis clearly on the teacher, rather than on outcomes on the learner, and there may need to be a robust system of monitoring learners to check that the pedagogical discussions between teachers are really making a difference to individual pupils. This is difficult to assess in this study as the interviews took place with headteachers and not middle leaders, classroom teachers, or pupils.

The Quality of Leadership

Reference is made throughout the literature review as to how the work of leaders is crucial to affect change. This leads into the second part of the literature review which has a focus on leadership. To what extent does the school leader's personal qualities and behaviours impact on improvement? Do they prioritise certain activities, identify key pieces of work and complex processes to implement, and in doing so, which of these are actually paramount in generating improvement?

Harris (2003:46) like Day (1992) acknowledges that effective leaders are instrumental in creating the right conditions for staff. She suggests that this will enable them to be motivated to work together, learn together and have shared goals, and also to become self managing. This research places more emphasis on the way in which school leaders need to demonstrate some consistent habits of leadership, such as placing a clear focus on pupil learning by building organisational capacity, articulating a vision and initiating conversations about it. She refers to underpinning systems which create time for staff to reflect. Harris suggests that the leader must be able to facilitate time, within the operating procedures of schools, for staff reflection about teaching and learning in order for this to happen.

The strength of her work is the pivotal role of the leader who 'sets the scene' with clarity and then facilitates structures and systems to allow staff the time to meet and plan action. The weakness is the lack of reference to lines of accountability. There is an underlying assumption that change will inevitably happen. What if nothing happens? Teachers could expressly continue to operate independently and not make any attempt to alter their practice, particularly since they are only formally observed twice per year via the performance management system.

In such scenarios it may be that leaders need to be able to manage conflict, challenge assumptions and if necessary have the confidence and competence to restructure, so that the staffing structure has key people in the right roles, in order to drive through improvement. In some cases, headteachers in the sample recruited more senior staff to be able to challenge the status quo and monitor changes. Harris appears to neglect the

fact that new headteachers taking on challenging schools, may have little access to support mechanisms and could lack the necessary expertise in dealing with personnel issues and as a result may find some of the human resource issues very challenging and time consuming. This can divert energy away from implementing the very strategies recommended for improvement of which the leader may have more expertise. However by offering time and establishing structures for staff to meet does highlight to colleagues that this is an important priority. It is how the content of the meetings are translated into action which will in turn make a difference to performance.

Fullan (2003:451) stated that in order to achieve deeper and more lasting impact, leaders must be able to *'selectively take on, integrate and co-ordinate innovations into focused programmes'* He recognizes that schools who improve do not necessarily take on the most innovations, but develop the tools which are most appropriate for them. In doing so, the leader has to develop commitment in others who may not be wholly supportive or accommodating of the idea. These negative colleagues or those resistant of change have to be converted into potential positive forces. Fullan (2003:455) believes that school leaders have to be able to forge productive relationships through emotional intelligence and *' if relationships improve, things get better.'* The research sample can cite evidence from the school leaders who give rich descriptions of the types of negative relationships they actively try to deal with and in some cases openly tackle, in contrast to the type of positive relationships that they are keen to generate. This supports Fullan's ideas in that school leaders have to be creative to promote like minded people, and also deploy such techniques as coaching and mentoring with colleagues. Their intention was to establish systems that could support professional dialogue about performance, and also to discuss opportunities for personal growth. Leaders in the sample made reference to using these as a means of reinforcing the vision, and implementing actions at all levels to lever improvement.

Fullan refers to the work by The Hay Group in the UK (2000) in their study of 200 highly effective principals and 200 senior business executives. They highlighted: teamwork and developing others, vision and accountability, influencing tactics and politics, and thinking styles. A year later (2001) Fullan conducted his own study and

came to the conclusion that leaders of successful schools demonstrated personal characteristics of energy, enthusiasm and hope, who were 'relationship builders' and that 'having the best ideas' is just not enough. They also need the skills to be able to implement dreams, often by getting through the 'implementation dip' when people discover the difficulties of trying out something new, and addressing the concerns of others, which will lead eventually to 'reculturing.' The strength of Fullan's work is that he has looked to other research to support his thinking and included reference to conclusions from studies by Collins (2001) Hay (2000) and Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002). This is a rich evidence base on which he states that emotional intelligence by leaders does impact on schools to make sustainable improvements. He describes some leaders who prefer to make swift changes that are structural and superficial, but it is the change in culture and people working together, as *'effective leaders must always work on connectedness or coherence making.'* A further positive aspect of his work is that he suggests that the development of leadership skills and characteristics that are key factors for improvement. (2001:453) This moves away from the idea of completing a checklist of tactics and step by step shortcuts to improvement.

One emergent hypothesis from this particular small scale study, aligned with Fullan's ideas, is that school leaders build relationships through the creation of cohesive staff teams, and ultimately aim to foster a professional learning community. Hallinger and Heck (1996) suggest that in order to influence people and culture, leaders try to build organisational and social networks which support their aims. This subscribes to the idea that school leaders need to create some capacity to be able to sustain year-on-year continuous improvement.

In the sample there is evidence to suggest that it is important to generate capacity, with the appointment of additional team members, who compliment the existing personnel and strengthen the headteacher's vision. Respondents admitted that changing the culture and challenging staff assumptions was not perceived to be easy, especially if their decision did not fit with majority opinion. They felt it was necessary to develop and increase their repertoire of skills in order to be able to deal effectively with those colleagues who preferred to remain with the status quo and resist change.

This second section of the literature review is not just concerned with the skills and qualities demonstrated by good school leaders, but it also considers how leaders use their expertise to develop and improve schools. Louis and Miles (1990) case studies reported that successful change makers consistently articulated the vision for their school and shared influence, authority, responsibility and accountability with the staff for sharing the vision. They orchestrated the change effort

> 'exhibiting enormous persistence, tenacity and willingness to live with risks. Teacher leaders required a high tolerance for complexity and ambiguity.'

Leadership, in recent years has been developed by Fullan, (1993) Hargreaves (1991) and Lieberman (1998) to go beyond its traditional meanings with a focus on relationships between people which is dynamic.

Chapman and Harris (2004:224) believe that effective leadership

> 'was a shared and dispersed entity, concerned with knowing how to motivate others, how to establish and manage teams and how to convince staff they can make a difference.'

This suggests that it is insufficient to have a charismatic leader, but what is needed is someone who can create positive relationships, challenge the status quo and bring about a climate where staff feel they themselves are the catalyst for change. This does in turn suggest that the leader is able to demonstrate some appropriate personal qualities such as honesty trust and openness. From the actual school leader perspective, one Headteacher, Mark Barney in Gray and Hopkins' case studies (1999:90) stated

> 'I see myself as being the inspiration of the school to have moved forward and to continue to move forward. I see myself as a facilitator in enabling my colleagues to move themselves, the school and the pupils in a direction which I have dictated.'

This seems somewhat vague and over-simplistic, in that he does not state exactly what this involves, or how he facilitates or inspires others to move themselves. Bhindi and Digan (1996:29) offer a more meaningful definition of authentic leaders as,

> 'Authentic leaders breathe the life-force into the workplace and keep people feeling energized and focused. As stewards and guides they build people and their self esteem. They derive credibility from personal integrity and walking the talk.'

This is echoed recently by the work of Caldwell (2006:7) who describes the qualities necessary for 'exhilarating leadership.' Such leaders are,

'animating, bracing, breathtaking, electric, elevating, enlivening, exciting, eye-popping, gladdening, inspiring, intoxicating , invigorating, quickening , rousing, stimulating stirring, thrilling, uplifting, vitalizing,'

Headteachers in the sample acknowledge that there are challenges to be addressed and problems to be overcome, but according to Caldwell, dealing with theses issues is what they find exhilarating. The research notes made during the interviews made reference to the fact that, without exception, all respondents were animated and easily stimulated to talk about the topic of school improvement.

However it is the work done by the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) which started to develop school leadership into a new arena and gave headteachers and school leaders the opportunity to be exposed to new training materials and read case studies about Learning Centred Leadership. In 2004 the college defined what this type of leadership requires.

'A shared sense of purpose, a willingness to change, energy and excitement, stamina and sustainability, recognition and celebration of success, and high quality personal relationships.'

In the pack of materials distributed to all secondary school headteachers in 2005 about Learning Centred Leadership, Southworth admits that this is a complex concept and it could certainly be the subject of a whole separate study, as the knowledge base about leadership is constantly growing. However the purpose of this particular section is to highlight how the leader can impact on improvement. The research and case studies have a focus on how leaders make a difference. They indicate leaders do this by having

'a focus on pupils' learning, progress and achievements and use this knowledge to support teachers and their development.'

Describing the characteristics of a good leader is a difficult task, but taking Southworth's definition, it is agreed that there are four main components which require stating. Firstly successful leaders use a variety of strategies and styles, adapting them to their context. Secondly, leadership is differentiated because of the individual leaders'

skills. Thirdly successful leaders are optimistic, 'can do' individuals, who are committed to making a difference. Fourthly, they are strongly person-centred, striving to build positive relationships, trust and collaborative ways of working. Caldwell (2006:39) enhances this idea by listing the aspects of the work which headteachers find most exhilarating. The 'top aspect' was successfully solving a problem or challenge and the second source of exhilaration was working with staff by coaching them thus developing certain colleagues.

There is a wealth of research that then serves to summarise the processes by which leaders execute these strategies. West-Burnham on behalf of the National College studied leadership in 21 secondary schools and felt that modeling, monitoring and dialogue were absolutely critical. Unlike earlier research of the 1990's, this research is specific in highlighting, (2005:1)

> 'The three strategies of modeling, monitoring and dialogue interrelate and overlap. Each makes a difference, but it is their combined effect which really matters.'

It is about initiating and then sustaining the changes, and *'leadership was generally perceived as being a collective capacity within the school.'*

A whole section of the report has a focus on distributed leadership. Headteachers act as facilitators, are supportive, maximise leadership across the school yet at the same time not diminishing accountability. Comments from staff at different levels in the organization are quoted making reference to the personal qualities demonstrated by the headteacher and members of the leadership team. They are described as

> 'a natural enthusiast.....has a spirit of optimism....... focused on the things that matter disregards the rest ......encourage reflection and ask questions.'

Caldwell's exhilarating leaders turned their attention away from the things they could not change, and used their energy to focus on *'the things that require courage.'* The leadership processes must enable participants to engage in a shared sense of purpose, a purpose made real by the collaboration of committed adults. Miles et al (1986) refer to building a shared vision, defining a game plan for getting there, finding solutions to problems as they appear and keeping good networks alive with those who can support.

Caldwell (2006) reiterates this by reference to the new enterprise logic in schools. He insists that schools cannot achieve transformation by acting alone, and their success depends on the capacity to join networks to share knowledge, address problems or pool resources. Headteachers in the sample who are successful, hold a number of roles simultaneously and felt that this partnership working is simply a part of what they do. Leithwood develops this through international research, some of which is based in Canada. He looked at five studies where the school superintendent made overt actions to foster improvement initiatives. He highlighted superintendents who were, *'explicitly articulating and communicating a vision.'* And visibly *'modeling what they believed in'* giving *'high expectations of excellence.'*

In keeping with the idea of 'connectedness,' Hargreaves (2003) makes his focus that of sustainability and by distributing the leadership it is not 'done to' people. He values the ability of others to lead, and attaches an importance to the interaction between individuals as much as individual actions. Hargreaves evidenced that schools felt more comfortable and staff more committed to improvement networks, rather than a *'command and control'* mentality which preferred mechanical accountability and imposed targets. The problem with this approach is that it does not recognize that Government, through the DCfS does issue local Authorities with targets for their schools. All children are expected to progress two National curriculum levels over a key stage and this is imposed, and is a very real expectation placed on the headteacher. It is impossible for a school to set low targets of below 30% of children achieving five A*-C grades including English and mathematics. Therefore as a result of making schools accountable in this particular way, senior leaders place increasing pressure on their Maths and English departments to deliver, and lead their staff to produce good results for every pupil. The school leaders in the sample accepted the imposed targets but felt that their strength was to adopt the most effective processes and those actions that would make a difference.

Another negative point of this approach appear to be that in some cases, the networks often depend on strong, dedicated individuals who are committed to making them work. Once these people move on, the network sometimes cannot sustain itself. Hargreaves

delivered a speech to secondary headteachers at their annual conference in 2006, and described situations that he had observed in schools that had been engaged in improvement efforts for a long time. He said that some of the improvements just could not last, because leaders were *'running out of gas after two years, because of high speed implementation driven by short term targets.'* Fullan, (2000) informed the National College that if we are to create more outstanding leaders there needs to be recognition that there are multiple demands placed on headteachers and dealing effectively with those resistant to change and acquiring the technical resources to deal with these requires insight and sophistication. He also described one negative side effect of rapid improvement where some schools were making gains at the expense of neighbouring schools and students. Hargreaves and Spink (2003:3) made a further suggestion and felt that for schools to improve they need to *'act urgently for improvement but wait patiently for results.'* This is important as children following a newly developed GCSE course will take two full years to obtain the accreditation.

Intervention at the learning level.

The third part of the literature review considers what interventions at the learning level can be implemented to make a difference. This is clearly linked into the first strand which suggests that the work of teachers and their focus on improving materials and their expertise is crucial to better practice. The second strand refers to the climate which the leader is creating to allow creative thinking to develop collaboration between staff, who become self managing. Yet this third section of the literature review emphasises the role of the learner being at the heart of improvement. This strand has a focus on what needs to be done to the curriculum, to be able to understand data about pupils and to share the improvement steps with them. Actively engaging students in the improvement agenda appears crucial if a secondary school is to move forward.

In a study of four schools by Taylor and Ryan, (2005) their research gave lessons which had much wider application. This is particularly relevant to the research in this study, as one of its purposes is to be able to offer leaders some up to date thinking about what

factors are absolutely key to improvement. Some of their factors do overlap with those later highlighted by Hopkins, such as the use of data to monitor progress, a sharp focus on individual learning, and curriculum innovation. Additional factors are suggested such as good leadership, retention of high quality staff, discipline and order, as well as the support of parents. Taylor and Ryan do suggest that the factors may need putting into place one at a time, but one weakness of the study is that they do not recommend which factors should be prioritised and how schools can develop on a continuous basis, once all the aforementioned factors have been implemented.

In contrast, Hopkins, (2001:17) describes an 'ideal type' of school improvement profile. He suggests that an improving school might not necessarily have all these characteristics and therefore one integrated theme of this study is to discover if other researchers agree with specific elements in the profile. The chapter will then input Hopkins' principles of authentic school improvement into the composite framework, thus making it more comprehensive as it then comes to light from a wide variety of sources. In this way, by the end of the literature review, there will be evidence from a variety of research sources to state that these are the main factors that appear absolutely essential for school improvement to happen. The analysis will be able to take each factor in turn and see if it is borne out by the data generated from headteachers who lead successful, improving schools. Their 'on the ground' experience will be valuable to explore and test out the framework as well as hopefully create new thinking.

In trying to understand fully the Hopkins model it is perhaps important to appreciate his definition of school improvement (1994:75) which is

> ' about raising student achievement through enhancing the teaching and learning
> process and the conditions which support it. It is about strategies for improving
> the school's capacity for providing quality education.'

This definition fits in well with the perception of school improvement by the respondents. They are all firmly committed to raising achievement, and finding ways to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was deemed essential. They engineered creative ways to change thing for the better.

The reason why this model is felt to be significant and is therefore outlined in careful detail is because, in terms of breadth, it appeared most comprehensive. The model has the advantage of incorporating distinct elements which relate to leadership, teacher involvement, the process of teaching and learning, network involvement and yet also has a clear student focus. This is very much what school leaders felt 'in tune' with. Hopkins does acknowledges the individual context of schools and suggests a range of processes that could be tried out to produce improvement. Each process is described fully, rather than appearing as a brief checklist. However the disadvantage of his approach is that it is viewed from a non-practitioner point of view and does not seem rooted in reality. The factors appear compartmentalized and separate, with little overlap or linkage between factors. They are offered as 'perfect' in themselves, with no priority order suggested, each assuming to have equal weighting to impact on improvement. One unique aspect of this research, is that it will offer 'New Thinking' which will focus on those key factors making most impact, especially when executed in a certain order, thus highlighting any important inter-relationships.

A model of school improvement offered by Hopkins.

There are ten guiding principles in the model given by Hopkins (2001:16) which characterise the majority of successful school improvement programmes as being

1. Achievement focussed.
2. Empowering in aspiration
3. Research based and theory rich
4. Context specific
5. Capacity building in nature.
6. Enquiry driven
7. Implementation orientated
8. Interventionist and strategic
9. Externally supported
10. Systemic

The intention is to explore each element and scrutinize the practical influences these factors could have. How will each component appear in real terms visible within an improving school, and how could less successful schools adopt one or more of the

processes to make a concrete difference to their own situation? What is it they need to do first, and do some factors seem to have more importance and impact than others? In a later part of the thesis it will be crucial to consider to what extent the most important principles have validity six years later than their conception, in relation to the latest data emerging from successfully improved schools.

1. Achievement focussed

The first factor is about the school being *'achievement focused.'* This refers to a successful improving school being concerned with more than just test scores and examination results. Achievement relates to the actual progress students are making from their own individual starting points, as children develop new skills and competencies as well as traditional knowledge. Hopkins and Reynolds acknowledge the shift away from just raw outputs towards seeing if the change processes and improvement strategies *'are powerful enough to affect pupil outcomes.'*

Hopkins suggests that leaders have a moral and social justice responsibility to enhance student learning, by developing an unrelenting focus on the quality of teaching and learning. The positive aspect of this factor that it does takes into account the educational advancement of every child and not just borderline students who may affect the standards that are published. He claims that it is wider than just standards and outputs, but the progress each child makes from their starting point at entry into the school. It considers the rights of every child having access to quality teaching, yet it makes no reference to educational experiences that take place outside the confines of a classroom. Also with the advent of new Diplomas courses and vocational accreditation, there is no mention of the quality of off-site provision or its measurement, as the school has little influence or control over external provision, which in many cases supplies a large element of the programme.

2. Empowering in aspiration

The aspect has a focus on the moral imperative of emancipation, of increasing the individual responsibility of all pupils, in particular the enhancement of their skills and

confidence. In some areas where staff have previously believed it would be impossible for students to achieve, there is now evidence to demonstrate that some children from disadvantaged backgrounds who have many barriers to learning can still achieve beyond expectations. This moves away from he 1980's blame culture where it was the fault of the pupils or their impoverished family circumstances that prevented them succeeding. This means that the leader makes individual teachers responsible for raising the aspirations of young people. By increasing the capabilities of staff and learners, they believe success is possible, which in turn leads to a confidence in the community about the school's success. It will be interesting to discover if emergent data confirms that by developing a school culture where staff and students believe that every child can achieve their aspirations, this is intrinsic to improvement. School leaders in the sample make repeated references to changing the school in terms of developing a more positive culture, where children take a pride in learning.

3. Research based and theory rich

The use of teaching and learning and organisational development strategies with robust empirical support for the developing of a variety of curriculum and teaching programmes models. The advantage of this factor is that some staff may be ready to adopt new models of teaching and learning and yet others may not have the skills to create research of their own, based on best practice. The disadvantage of this process is that staff may not be ready for changes, and require additional training. They may resent it being imposed upon them and these demands require them to work out of their comfort zones, which can create tension in teams. School leaders in the sample make reference to how they deal with such situations to bring people on board, and yet challenge negativity.

4. Context specific

Hopkins stresses the importance of the unique context of the school, and the fallacy of the 'one size fits all strategy.' One advantage of this is the focus on adapting some external demands and interpreting them as an opportunity, thereby seizing the initiative

to become a strong element of the school's development plan. The school, in realizing that an external pressure could be harnessed positively to secure an internal priority, may be able to use one initiative to drive through another, to make more significant improvements. This requires the leader to know their school well, in terms of strengths and weaknesses, and be able to work creatively with national priorities to see how they fit and work alongside school developments. The research will identify any strategies that are deemed successful to operate in times of 'initiative overload.'

5. Capacity building in nature.

For schools to improve Hopkins states that they need to ensure sustainability, by nurturing professional learning communities, and establishing local infrastructures and networks. This involves developing people through staff training, mentoring and coaching and securing any external support to grow and expand the in-house expertise, thus planning for succession. Hopkins suggests this has to be part of an overall game plan, and cannot be left to chance. One strength of this approach is that the school builds up a wealth of capabilities that by working collaboratively in different teams, across hierarchies, they can anticipate problems and solve them in a pro-active way, rather than being reactive. However, schools that are making slow progress who are consistently towards the lower end of the league tables may have colleagues within them who simply do not have the desire to contribute in this way, and prefer to remain insular, rather than functioning within a team or looking outward at making contacts outside the school in order to exchange ideas. The emergent data suggests that school leaders found it a useful exercise to build capacity and will state at what point they did so, and to what effect.

6. Enquiry driven

For a school to improve Hopkins states clearly they need to interrogate their data to energize, inform and direct some activity. Many schools are data rich and yet may not use the information to guide their next course of action. It would sensible to identify which groups and individuals are working below expectations in order to affect changes which will impact on their attainment. By creating time to create 'reflective

practitioners' who will take a step back to research what needs to be done is a completely different strategy to implementing quick fixes to boost sets of test results. The study will demonstrate that using both types of strategy can impact, yet the reflection is more productive when linked to some ensuing action. This is dependent on the school context and exactly which individual children are underachieving and why. One idea to test out is that once the data is scrutinized how do school leaders know which improvement strategy to select? Will the enquiry driven approach assist in determining what process needs to happen?

7. Implementation orientated

The school has to be committed to the management of change, and to aim for consistency within the classroom. There has to be some way of implementing the changes in an active way, by key players in the organisation. How this is done may differ, and the data collected will identify how strategies to effect improvement are actually implemented. Hopkins does recognize that just having good ideas is not enough, and to implement and review and alter strategies along the way can lead to improvement. It suggests that schools need have some 'risk takers,' yet at the same time have robust monitoring systems which ensure consistency and challenge mediocrity. Hopkins' research suggests that there is a need for monitoring systems to oversee where practice is changing and quality assurance procedures to check that in reality the new processes are happening school-wide. The study aims to identify which new systems are crucial to trigger improvement, and could it be possible to duplicate them elsewhere to make a difference in another school.

8. Interventionist and strategic.

Hopkins identifies a commitment to action research as important. This is done by first improving practice, then improving the understanding of the practice by teachers, and then finally the improvement of the situation in which the improvement takes place. This emphasizes that improvement and involvement go side by side. It appears to be aligned with capacity building whereby staff are challenged to think and act differently, and these new interventionist techniques are included in strategic plans and development

planning documents so that they become agreed ways forward for the school to which everyone is expected to subscribe. School leaders in the sample are able to describe numerous intervention strategies, in close detail which they are familiar with. As a consequence, everyone in the school knows where they are aiming to go and there are clear agreed strategies for getting there. One advantage of this is that it avoids giving mixed messages and also those who persistently fail to deliver quality can be challenged if they do not openly subscribe to the new ethos.

9. Externally supported.

Hopkins believes that schools are more likely to improve if they place an increasing emphasis on networking and external agencies to facilitate implementation of changes. He states that the ability of the leader to select the most fruitful partnerships is critical to improvement. The respondents in the sample can demonstrate how they have built meaningful relationships which engender trust and commitment. In some cases this could be through neighbourhood schools that are geographically close, and who face similar challenges but are not in direct competition. In other cases it could be via a specialist network, such as the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, (SSAT) which has an affiliation of members from different subject areas. The strength of such partnerships is to have access to a range of ideas and expertise that that can be channeled to good use, or even at least viewed in situ. The positive aspect of this is that all schools are encouraged to share and exchange strategies. In extreme cases, bespoke packages of support are made available and supported by Government funding for those 200 lowest performing schools in the country. All the secondary schools included in the sample are Mentor schools, and receive £60,000 annually and are therefore committed to offering training and guidance to less successful schools in their region. There is the expectation that Mentor schools have the capacity to be able to deliver results that continue on an upward trend, whilst they assist others to improve. Leaders made reference to how they had taken the time to invest in, and build trusting relationships with other partners for different reasons, and mutual benefit.

However there is hard data available from the SSAT to show that sometimes less successful schools do not wish to take up the offers that are presented to them. They may not have the capacity to allow staff the time to step out of school, and their focus may be operational, and day to day survival, rather than strategy and looking to the future. Their leader may not prioritise external working and have an inward looking focus rather than an outwardly looking view of seizing opportunities. In stark reality, schools are facing falling rolls and tough competition. Yet every school in the sample has gone from a situation where five years ago they had surplus places, but they are now all completely full and have a waiting list.

10. Systemic.

Hopkins believes that schools need to accept political realities, the use of pressure and support to exploit the creativity and synergies within the system. System leaders measure their success in different ways; some can distinguish clear improvement in individual student learning, others a leap forward in achievement for specific groups of young people. This could be executed by working in classrooms, or at whole school level and also by leading and having a care for other schools beyond their own. They create their own solutions to problems by mobilizing people to tackle adaptive challenges for which at the outset there may not be a tried and tested solution. The positive aspect of this element is that it presents new and exciting ways of working with colleagues, yet the potential negative aspect is how do school leaders manage to balance the immediate demands of their own school delivering improvements, alongside contributing to networks and conferences which take them out of school and allow them to participate in the wider educational picture. The data will elicit how headteachers of improving schools manage to execute this fine balancing act and to what extent acting as a system leader has brought about improvements in their schools. They do acknowledge that partnerships are chosen with care, and that leadership of their own school is not compromised, at the expense of making significant contributions elsewhere. The analysis will demonstrate that this factor is closely related to building capacity and using external support effectively.

It is not the intention of this literature review to identify one piece of research as a 'best fit' model against which to position the data. No one single piece of research seems to provide a perfect ideal summary of processes and strategies as a blueprint for improvement. The literature review has highlighted that school improvement as an area of study is complex, multifaceted and dense. The ten factors presented by Hopkins suggest an orderly way of engaging with the subject matter, separating out the individual elements. As a result, the processes themselves appear disjointed and fragmented. This particular study of the sample suggests that in reality school improvement is much more dynamic and chaotic, because schools take on all sorts of strategies simultaneously to tackle issues as they emerge. One process is not implemented at a single point, then followed by another after an interval of time. Activities overlap and involve people at different layers in the organization dependent on the nature of the problem and the proposed solution. One issue could focus on a large department which needs to improve, and by working with practitioners in another school in the same subject feel empowered to implement curriculum changes. This pairing together of department teams allows sharing of expertise and a forum in which to exchange professional views.

However the strong message and underlying philosophy, borne out by Hopkins is that all schools can improve. For this to happen there needs to be some consideration of what the learner is actually doing to make progress and how this in turn affects the culture in the school. Some researchers would say that this pupil confidence has other spin-offs. Smith, (2006) talks about pupils being resilient and as a result they are responsible, with good social skills and can make connections. This confidence will see them through difficult situations and allow them to take risks without feeling a loss of self esteem. He offers advice for staff to reclaim their core purpose. Suggestions include the involvement of pupils in their learning so they share the content and understand the benefits and relevance of the topic. He also refers to technology meeting the needs of learners and making it fit for purpose, building on their prior knowledge and skills, rather than just being used as a tool to engage the learner, it is what the learner does with the technology to aid learning which makes a difference.

Elmore takes rather a pessimistic view but one which is based on reality. His research claims that the principles of best practice relating to teaching and learning have difficulty taking root in schools because of two reasons,

> 'they require content knowledge and pedagogical skills that few teachers presently have and also they challenge certain basic patterns in the organisation of schooling.'

Elmore appears a more sceptical commentator, and he appears unconvinced that teachers are able to simply change their practice, and this research points to examples whereby resources alone are insufficient to make a difference. One school went down the route of purchasing wide-scale expensive technology, yet without staff training and a commitment to change teaching style, there was a lack of confidence in being able to use it, and the impact was patchy. Another school introduced a three part tightly structured lesson as standard practice, and although this improved student behaviour overall, it made the learners less independent and restricted creativity. In supporting Elmore there is an acceptance that professionals need to be learning constantly themselves, and in particular, being taught the appropriate skills and teaching techniques to deliver 'excellence' in the classroom. Unlike Hopkins he does not provide a list of factors to be applied to a school wanting to improve, he recognizes that school improvement may not be as clear-cut and uncomplicated as just finding the single solution to resolve a problem.

One possible solution to fill the knowledge and skills gap which had had some success is through West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998:86) who suggest forming Teaching Partnerships, which involve reciprocal coaching, joint project work, and possibly mutual observation on an agreed topic. Wallace (1991:49) identifies the following benefits, *'confidential mutual support, informal support and reflection and emotional support.'* This is one practical method of putting training and operating systems in place to develop staff, and could be used an improvement tool.

Involving Students

Hargreaves (2006) in his work around personalisation states that schools need to consider how the organisational conditions function, to support innovations in teaching and learning. In conjunction with this he identifies a need to engage students so they can highlight areas for change and make a positive contribution. It is highlighted that harnessing of student voice has tremendous potential when paired with assessment for learning and can in turn create what Hargreaves terms 'Deep Learning.'

It appears that engaging with student voice and coaching pupils to assess each others' learning coupled together can greatly impact on the culture and ethos of the school. It promotes the message that students matter most and recognizes that they have skills in assessing their own work and that of others. In this way they can articulate to others how best to improve their work, and this process of assessment **for** learning rather than assessment **of** learning is seen to be a high priority on the school improvement plans of schools who are aiming to raise standards and increase their value added measures.

It is this focus on formative assessment involving the pupil rather than doing it to them, which appears to have impact according to Hargreaves. (2006) Research data from eight successful headteachers of improving schools does confirm that giving the pupil the next steps of their learning and explaining how to improve their performance has an impact. All the respondents in the sample felt that this was a significant factor, and that individual student data can inform actions for improvements. Perhaps one essential aspect is that students themselves need to see learning as a priority and act on the advice given, in a climate where making progress is a positive part of the culture of the school. One school that tried to refocus student responsibility towards learning was Tolworth Girls School in the Beacon Programme. They improved student performance by Accelerated Learning techniques whereby 90% of their students voted on a charter which stated, *'I will take responsibility for my own learning and for making positive contributions to the learning of others.'* This implies that teachers for their part of the

bargain will facilitate that learning. A criticism may be; What happens when students do not take that responsibility, and who holds them accountable?

Key Teacher Behaviours

Hopkins, Reynolds and Wilcox (1999) studied a number of different activities that had potential correlations with school improvement. They were particularly interested in what was most likely to impact on progress, and although they recognised there were many different approaches, they identified ten key variables as having strong or moderate correlations with improvement. The top two were; tactics for maximising examination grades, and developing policies and processes of teaching and learning. They then asked teachers to identify the major changes leading to improvements in their school. The two areas where they reported substantial changes were firstly the quality of teaching and learning, and secondly the ethos culture and climate of the school. In the ensuing case studies they demonstrated a breadth of research originating from different types of schools, involving over 200 interviews with staff. The studies on Blackstone, Highdale and Rowland Secondary Schools, showed the sequences a school may progress through on its journey from ineffective to effective via whole school improvement. Blackstone concentrated on ' *school level changes*' and *'intervention at the learning level'*.

Highdale and Rowland stated that their improvement was as a direct result of

> 'the increased focus on lessons and on the quality of teaching and learning and on the consistency of pupil experiences' this led to a practice of *'talking about teaching.'*

All three headteachers believed that any reform efforts should be judged in terms of their impact on classroom practices. King and Young as described by Fullan (2000) stress the importance of student achievement underpinned by school capacity which they term as *'the collective competency of the school as an entity to bring about effective change.'* Gray and Hopkins (1999:147) stated that it was only recently that leadership teams had

'begun to identify key teacher behaviours ... and their insights into classroom processes were fairly rudimentary. Sometimes the ways in which these changes were expected to impact directly upon student achievement were unclear.'

Their work made slight reference to teachers working together transferring good practice in-house. However since 1999 much work has been developed under the auspices of the Leadership Incentive Grant (2003) and the Leading Edge Partnership (2004), initiatives which have injected large grants into certain schools for collaborative ventures. Their annual evaluations in 2005 and 2006 demonstrate from external audits that planned collaboration between institutions that share similar challenges can also learn from one another. Risk taking strategies were encouraged by the Department for Education and Science (DfES) as were new methods of delivery, by pairing up departments to consider teaching approaches to new vocational courses. This allowed practitioners the time to meet together and reflect with colleagues on a regular basis. The framework suggests that target groups of students are tracked to identify if the strategies have had an impact on both pupil motivation and results. Schools are encouraged to assemble their findings in a Directory of Best Practice, or dedicate a section of their school website to 'Successful strategies that make a difference.' These are showcased at the annual review events. This fits in well with the work of Fullan, (2003) who believes that the work of staff should be to primarily consider clear learning goals that are sustained over a period of time.

Managing innovation

This idea of innovation and giving information about which project to embark upon is highlighted in the Next Projects section of the DfES Innovations Unit. They are also able to broker partnerships to support joint work. However, although the projects are interesting in themselves and could possibly stimulate work elsewhere, it is important to consider the actual process of innovation. Hargreaves (2006) describes innovation as *'Doing things differently in order to do them more effectively'* He states that 'spliced' innovations are ideas that are minor transfers that do not interfere with systems, for example a masterclass or revision session. 'Segmented' innovations are when the task is divided up and each partner takes a section to complete and so the sum of the part is

greater than the whole. The 'sequenced innovation' is where one school starts a new project, after a year it describes any problems and passes it on to a second school. At the end of that year they feedback to the last school and move it on for further development to school three. It forms a three year sequence of development in three schools. The 'synergistic innovation' is when all schools in the partnership work on a different version of the same theme, and agree what they all need to push on together, such as assessment, or accelerated learning. This type of innovation may also require radical changes to structures in such cases as introducing vertical groupings or a house system.

This framework suggests that schools need to understand not just what they are going to innovate, but which process of innovation they intend to engage in. It brings into question 'the how' as well as the intended action. Schools need to consider if they have tightly coupled or loosely coupled organizational designs, since the latter will underpin greater innovation and experiment. Drucker uses the terms 'abandonment and displacement,' so that schools do not merely keep adding to the list of initiatives.

Chapman and Harris (2004:222) researching how schools improve when they face difficult and challenging circumstances, also recommend that schools should reduce the number of initiatives they are involved in.

> 'The school's staff development opportunities focused specifically on effective teaching strategies or approaches. The research showed that lessons were highly structured, with curriculum delivery in smaller packages, followed by rapid feedback.'

It may be that schools need outside help to do this successfully. Fullen worked (1990) with the Learning Consortium in Toronto, Canada, to help schools to focus on classroom instruction and the teaching-learning process by promoting positive strategies through external consultants acting as facilitators. Fullan (1999) later describes a situation where schools are bombarded by unconnected innovations, and that the most successful schools are those that *selectively take on, integrate and co-ordinate innovations and focused programmes.'*

He does not mention how and what the leader should prioritise, and to what extent consideration should be given to balancing external demands placed on the school by central Government and yet internal demands which may require a more flexible approach less dependent on outcomes. A leader has to know their school context sufficiently well to be able to disengage from peripheral activities and focus on the ones which are appropriate, and yet add value. He does not make any reference to the leader being absolutely clear about the strategic direction of the school and having strategic conversations at the same time as co-ordinating innovations and embracing new ideas. It would appear easier if these discussions were happening, as this provides a type of filtering system for the leader, and those with decision making powers, to ascertain which new programmes will fit with the vision and which will not. If the strategy is unclear then schools can be distracted from the core purpose through initiative overload.

School leaders in the sample could clearly articulate their common goals in a succinct and articulate manner. In doing so, this served to underpin which projects, ideas and opportunities were worthy of their time, resources and commitment. This also meant that other initiatives could be confidently ignored or given a low priority, as they did not show potential tangible benefits. Hargreaves does warn that there is a tendency in some organizations ' *to launch more change initiatives than anyone could reasonably handle.* ' Hopkins (2006:165) says that to be successful, schools *'need a co-ordinated response to the challenges of school improvement.* ' Both points have relevance to this research and will be considered during the analysis.

Perhaps a simple but practical example from Hopkins (2001) is the idea of ensuring consistency of practice from one department to another. This could involve a work scrutiny or a tactical response to an issue which one department has already solved. What stands out is the fact that the school knows when change is happening, can articulate it and say why, as well as being able to sustain it in the medium and long term. This is in stark contrast to the short term focus on things that are easy to change, such as the environment or uniform. These are highly visible tangible changes that show a new and different culture is emerging. One challenge may be to change the learning

experience so that every child in the school achieves their potential. This is why just tackling target groups and individual underachievers may only impact on those particular learners, not every child. For whole school improvement to take place it seems that teachers need to learn and grow together, which takes time. Senge (1990) supports this by stating that for this to become embedded staff need always to be striving to seek new ways of improving practice in the classroom.

Research by Collins (2005) compared 'good' companies showing good performance here and there, to 'great' companies which have sustained performance over 15 years. Good companies had effective leaders, like headteachers who possibly can demonstrate improvement in achievement test scores, which is perhaps short term non-sustainable reform. In contrast Executive Leaders develop leaders and leave behind those who can go even further than he or she did.

<u>Schools learning from each other.</u>

Fullan (2003) suggests we need 'system change' which means changing the conditions under which leaders work. This implies a readiness and an attitude to make it work, a leader who finds the challenge exciting, do-able, worthwhile and not beyond their reach. The executive Headteacher of the Chalvedon Foundation, leads two schools paired up to improve the performance of one school, whilst maintaining the great improvements of the other. He developed highly reliable systems, and tried to replicate them elsewhere. The language moves away from 'school improvement' to 'characteristics of a high reliability school.' The notion here is that once the school is on the road to improvement it is time to reflect on how it came about and begin to spread this to other less successful schools. Research may question whether this replication is possible because each school has its own unique context. Upon close scrutiny it appears that the transferable ideas are mainly fundamental systems that every secondary school would benefit from in order to function. One such example is that of having baseline data for every student and every colleague using this as a starting point for their teaching, together with a realistic and challenging target for every child.

The SSAT also launched a partnership programme in 2003 involving 120 schools partnered with high performing schools. It was deemed that 68% of the schools could point to improvements in results. The report published in March 2005 highlighted that schools had to look inwardly and see how others had made progress, and many cases adapted the good practice to suit them. It was crucial for the partner schools to be willing to share its practice openly and honestly and involve highly committed individuals in both schools. This was evidenced by the distances staff were willing to travel to host and attend meetings, to try out new technologies or discuss the best way forward for distributing complex pupil data. The SSAT supported the partnership by means of £6,000 when an action plan was agreed. The cornerstone of the plan had to be the belief that

> 'Even the most successful schools can learn from each other. It's not about weak schools and strong schools.'

Hargreaves (2002) believes that a group of schools working together might try to consider problems that are too difficult to solve alone. This is borne out by the fact that some schools choose to work with partners very different to themselves. The schools in the sample have leaders who are wholly committed to trusted partners and, to use Caldwell's terminology, they find such work 'exhilarating.' The SSAT research highlighted that although the context may differ, it was a partnership based on honest self-evaluation that matches need with appropriate concrete help. The external support offered by the Trust also came in the form of brokering the specific assistance through an examination of their database, and then this was offered to the school via the Trust case manager whose role it is to facilitate the partner activities and act as critical friend. Cook (2005) used his role as case manager as a springboard to becoming a consultant headteacher offering assistance and brokering wider packages of tailored support to schools as part of the UK East Network. He discovered that just sharing issues with other professionals who were not in direct competition helped colleagues find their own solutions. Evidence from the SSAT demonstrates that schools start to feel more confident even with small pockets of success and this has benefits for stakeholders. In

this movement, schools that play together stay together because they take responsibility together.

System leaders.

This is when leaders are fully aware of central influences but they harness them to their advantage and generate creativity from within. Hopkins (2006) puts forward a view that current leaders are constantly faced with adaptive challenges and the solution is outside current ways of operating. There appears to be no immediate solution and therefore people have to be mobilized to meet the challenge. Hopkins (2006:6) states three examples of today's system leaders who have made great strides in improvement because they *'care about and work for the successes of other schools as well as their own.'* They do this by having a sense of moral purpose, such as by making the learning personal to every child, or increasing achievement for all, or by building learning communities where everyone is a learner. To be able to do this he suggests that leaders need to understand the classroom, the Local Authority networks and the national and international picture. There appears to be little research evidence to suggest that whilst leaders are stepping out of their schools and helping others to adapt their practice there is an assumption that the 'improved' school has successful strategies embedded and will continue to sustain its improvements.

What seems to be omitted is the balancing act the headteacher performs to be able to function at all three levels. There needs to be a strongly committed and trusted team of empowered leaders 'in situ,' who are still energized and motivated even when the head may be absent from the school site. Fullan's moral imperative (2003) goes some way to supporting this idea. He recognizes that

> 'The top may provide the vision…. but to realize this vision, there must be lateral development, that is people at every level giving and receiving help.'

Fullan (2000:3) also recognizes the 'atmosphere' of education. He claims,

> 'It requires outstanding leadership to deal with persistently failing teachers and tackling those who are resistant to change.'

Other research appears to scratch the surface, and merely focus on the positive outcomes for Headteachers working in collaboration. There is little mention of the time invested to build up trust, mutual respect and reciprocity that does not happen overnight. In fact the converse is suggested by Desforges (2004). He believes that networks of schools can provide a forum in which a wide range of ideas can be created, debated and challenged and operate as *'a test bed for the quicker and thorough testing of ideas.'* This presumes that the positive working relationships are already in place.

Mumby, Chief Executive of The National College of School Leadership, has launched the 'System Leadership in Action' profiles of real life system leaders and examines their experiences of the role. He sets out the essential qualities of 'this new breed' as

> 'having a positive response to complexity, a high degree of self awareness and the confidence to influence at local and national level.'

There are several new models of headship emerging, such as executive heads, school federations, and co-headship which could be one answer to potential headteacher shortages, it appears that the National College are preparing leaders to get ready for the challenges ahead which will require a different type of leader, who can respond to improvement challenges in different contexts operating simultaneously. Such models of new leadership have often emerged out of crisis situations where schools have needed to make rapid improvements especially those schools facing challenging circumstances. These schools are trying to meet the needs of young people on the edge of the social mainstream, with families with poor financial status and communities situated in run-down neighbourhoods. Yet some do succeed in defying the odds and their students make exceptional gains despite facing incredible problems including the lure of criminal activity, a lack of parental support and subsequently a low value being placed on education. The DfES defined schools as 'low attaining' if they are *'failing to achieve adequate levels of attainment for their pupils as measured by GCSE results.'*

Improvements in schools facing challenging circumstances.

MacBeath (2007:4) led a study of eight secondary schools selected and recruited by the DfES, on the margins of national standards, with a disadvantaged intake, who presented fertile ground to show that ' *even in the most adverse conditions, schools could make dramatic improvements.* ' The schools were *'living on the precarious edge between success and failure.* ' MacBeath et al. (2007) used the octet of schools as a test bed for close examination of improvement. His work highlighted the successes and failures of the schools and concluded by making some broad recommendations for the future. He stated that for improvement to occur, there needs to be joined up thinking beyond just educational interventions, because barriers to learning may be linked to other external conditions such as health, housing, and employment. The research did demonstrate that few schools in the study introduced and managed innovations successfully, and so it will be interesting to discover whether the schools selected for this research study will be able to demonstrate the reverse. There was recognition of the pressure placed on schools to *'show quick results at any cost'*. Yet Macbeath (2007:138) recommended that policy makers need to recognize that the longer a school is left floundering, the longer it will take to get back on track. He notes that there is the added risk that if injecting extra resources does not secure success, there is the possibility that staff may feel that although the project works elsewhere, it does not work in their school, and this in turn adds to their sense of failure.

As the schools in the (2007) Macbeath study often faced such different challenges that were unique to their context then perhaps trying to identify common remedies for all was not helpful. Although this research offered some candid insights into the range of improvement strategies tried out, one negative aspect was that because each school operated in very different contexts and faced different challenges, and were tackling them in different ways, the conclusion was unable to highlight common strands and processes. However changes for the better seemed to occur when staff got hold of a 'powerful idea' and collectively felt committed to making it work. The research suggested that perhaps schools need to contribute towards developing a menu of

improvement strategies which other schools may approach as ' *a la carte.* ' There is nothing to stop schools developing their own ideas and ordering *'off menu'* should this be appropriate for them. The danger of this is that schools grow initiatives and adopt, as Fullan describes, (2001:35) a 'Christmas tree' approach. They have so many innovations that they *'glitter from a distance.......adorned with many decorations, lacking depth and coherence.'* He recommends that schools take time to consolidate and embed change, then evaluate its impact before moving on to the next development. The research emerging from this thesis will assess the time taken by schools to be able to say they have demonstrated sustainable whole school improvement, and to identify any common timeframes.

The Composite Model of School Improvement

It is quite difficult to assess the amount of success each strategy is able to demonstrate, however it is a function of the researcher to probe the data with this in mind. The disadvantage is that it is extremely difficult to ascertain which elements are crucial and which factors are peripheral. As a starting point to analyse the data it was felt important to distill from the strands within the literature review the common themes which could form a broad framework. This therefore presents itself as a new composite model which has the following components which have arisen from a variety of sources. These elements are dynamic processes which are evidenced to bring about change leading to positive outcomes. The summary below identifies each factor in turn, with a brief description and then makes a reference to the researcher in the literature review. Earlier in this chapter they have clearly offered evidence to support this particular factor as being one of the most important processes. These points will be translated into brief headings in the analysis section, purely as a means of navigating the reader through the discussion of findings. In essence they are :

- Developing a professional learning community where staff work towards common goals, through high level interaction and devise positive ways of working together to develop excellent teaching and useful resources and

techniques. This is highlighted by the work of Day, (1992) Sergiovanni, (2000) Spillane, (2005) and Senge, (1990) as described in the literature review.

- Building capacity from within so that the school generates strategic leaders at different levels, thus being able to anticipate any potential and future issues so they are well positioned to sustain improvements. This is supported by Hopkins. (2004)

- Empowering staff to commit to a 'can do' culture, which involves challenging assumptions, as highlighted by Hopkins. (1994)

- Staff as action researchers being given the opportunity to take risks and yet have agreed time for reflection, to devise creative solutions to problems. This is supported by the National College, (2005) Harris and Mujis. (2005)

- Developing innovative curriculum developments with personalization at the forefront of thinking, with learner needs identified, as supported by Hargreaves, (2006) Reynolds and Wilcox. (1999)

- A visible achievement focus within the school so that student data, and assessment for learning shows children how to improve, within an orderly learning environment, as described by Potter (2002) and Hargreaves. (2006)

- Supportive systems, such as meetings and monitoring mechanisms which assist communications, inform leaders and underpins strategy thus maintaining accountability as highlighted by Hopkins. (2001)

- Engaging student voice, and how their perceptions of effective and 'Deep' learning can make a difference, as researched by Hargreaves. (2006)

- Seizing outside opportunities for internal purposes and gains so that initiatives possess ownership, and colleagues feel confident to 'take hold of the reins,' as described by Carter and Franey, (2005) Desforges (2002) and Fullan. (2003)

- Learning centred leadership. How the leader effectively uses his or her personal skills and qualities to tackle problems, deal with staff issues and translate vision into action. This is borne out by Hargreaves, (1991) Bhindi and Digan, (1996) Collins, (2001) and Southworth. (2005)

- Developing system leaders, by harnessing external support or working within shared networks where schools learn from each other, as described by Hopkins (2006) and Hargreaves.(2002)

It is accepted that school improvement is complex, and every effort has been made by this research, not to oversimplify the topic, but to get a real sense of which processes have been tried and tested to bring about improvements in the secondary sector. The next step will be to identify the most appropriate methodology, and then generate the data from the appropriate sample of school leaders. The subsequent analysis of data will highlight which factors have actually made a difference in schools and identify any new factors not already present in the conceptual framework outlined above. It may also consider the order in which schools have tackled each factor and whether there are agreed combinations of factors emerging as being successful. As Hopkins (2006) states, each school may be at a different point on the improvement journey and therefore will make their choices for action dependent on their context.

CHAPTER 3, METHODOLOGY

Introduction - Focus of the methodology.

The purpose of my research is to develop further knowledge and understanding about the processes which lead to whole school improvement in secondary schools. The research intent is therefore to gain insight into the factors which impact most on school improvement, and to discover whether certain process are interlinked and perhaps better tackled in a specific order to bring about more rapid change. The previous chapter concludes by providing a composite list of factors which emerge from the literature review originating from a range of research sources. The factors are not a checklist but a dynamic set of processes which occur most frequently in the research already conducted in schools that have had notable improvements. Pettigrew, (1997:338) offers a useful definition of process as a sequence of *'individual and collective events, actions and activities, unfolding over time in context.'* This chapter will aim to identify the most appropriate methodology and consider a range of suitable techniques. The next course of action is for the researcher to then decide which procedures should be deployed to meet the research objectives. To generate and analyse this information, it will be important to formulate ways to collect rich data about those very factors which bring about improvement. The chapter will therefore start with a consideration of different research paradigms to develop a deeper understanding and also to justify a research approach.

Research paradigms

The two main paradigms viz positivism and interpretivism present opposing points of view. The first part of this section gives a digest of positivism which has influenced a quantitative approach.

Positivism

Positivism suggests that research on human beings can be approached in a similar way as research on inanimate matter, such as gases and molecules. A natural sciences research model stated that everything, including people could be researched scientifically. The focus was on experimental design, laboratory studies and statistical analysis based on natural sciences, in contrast to Social Sciences and Humanities. Giddens, (1975) states that positivism may be characterized by its claim that *'science provides us with the clearest possible ideal of knowledge,'* and furthermore, it is the main aim of scientists *'to formulate laws to account for the happenings in the world around them, thus giving them a firm basis for prediction and control.'*

Smith, Harre and Langenhove (1995:15) believed that measuring, predicting and counting led to statistical analysis which dealt with causation and frequency, where the research had a focus on numbers, preferring an objective approach which was context free. Relationships between measurable events generated predictions and explanations. There is a formal deductive logic used in positivism, which is predictive and moves from the general to the specific. The six steps of the deduction process, described by Bryman and Bell (2003:11) shows step one as movement from a starting point of theory, through to a hypothesis as the second step, which can be confirmed or rejected in step three, followed by a fourth step of data collection, then the fifth step as the discovery of findings which leads to the sixth and final step which could be a revision of the original theory. This could offer a useful framework to consider when dealing with an extremely large topic such as school improvement where so much research has already been conducted. The steps offer a mechanism for handling such far reaching subject matter which has emerged over a period of years. However, in this study the literature review has concluded with the presentation of eleven factors which provide a composite framework as the starting point. The way forward will be to collect data from a number of real sources to see if the views of headteachers 'on the ground' correspond with what existing research states about the important factors required for improvement.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:23) suggest a more detailed eight stage model, which possesses quantitative aspects.

'Stage 1: Hypotheses hunches and guesses
Stage 2: Experiment designed, samples taken, variables isolated
Stage 3: Correlations observed, patterns identified
Stage 4: Hypotheses formed to explain regularities
Stage 5: Explanations and predictions tested, falsifiability.
Stage 6: Laws developed or disconfirmation.
Stage 7 : Generalisations made
Stage 8 : New theories.'

Harre (1995) accepts that some forms of positivist research have useful value in what we understand, but these, whilst valuable, omit the deeper research on subjective human experience. In quantitative research the researcher tends to deduce and predict what should happen at a specific level if a given generalised theory is correct. In the case of school improvement it would appear that if all the identified elements were considered essential for a school to improve in 2008, then a starting point would be for secondary headteachers to check which of these processes were actually in place. One possible prediction could be that the school would be able to demonstrate improvement if these factors were mostly present. However, schools leaders are individuals and their contexts differ, as do the challenges they face, and this needs to be taken into consideration should a wholly quantitative approach be adopted. In a later subsection of this chapter there will be careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of using quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is an essential to appreciate, as headteachers do have autonomy over which factors they choose to deploy and in what order. This introduces an element of subjectivity into the research, as it is their chosen courses of action which influences the range and order of the particular processes they decide to implement.

Recent purists such as Schrag (1992) and Maxwell and Delaney (2004) also articulate assumptions that are termed 'positivist.' They believe that the observer has to be completely detached from the subject being studied. Nagel (1986) develops this idea and believes that generalisations can emerge from testing a theory if the researcher is

unbiased. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:239) describe succinctly the major characteristics of traditional quantitative research as being,

> 'a focus on deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, standardised data collection and statistical analysis.'

'Deduction' is defined by Bell (2003:70) as *'coming to a conclusion often without all the necessary information, but using what is known in a logical way.'* This can be taken into the field of school improvement, where the number of schools that have improved may be in the hundreds. By using a quantitative approach, it could allow the researcher to gather data from a large number of schools and then drill down in detail to a few key examples.

Quantitative research is preoccupied with measurement, but not just by description but through explanation and examination of its causes. The sample being studied has to be representative so that the results can be generalised beyond those specific subjects and the context being studied. There are numerous concepts that can be investigated, which lead to theories emerging and this adds to our understanding of why things happen, and in turn generates new concepts to be tested out. Measurement can be useful to quantify fine distinctions and small differences between characteristics, and offers the researcher a consistent instrument.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism is a contrasting paradigm to positivism. According to Bryman (2003:15)

> 'They share a view that the subject matter of the social sciences-people and their institutions-is fundamentally different to that of social sciences. The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order.'

A key difference is that the objects of analysis within social science, such as molecules, cannot attribute meaning to events and to their environment, whereas people do.

Within interpretivism there is an emphasis on the individual, in contrast to positivism where people are seen as objects. Therefore a different method is required to viewing

events and the social world, such as through the eyes of the people that are being studied. Lofland and Lofland (1995:16) suggest *'face to face interaction is the fullest condition in participating in the mind of another human being.'*

Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2004:19) outline the perspective of opponents to positivism, who reject the belief that

> 'human behaviour is governed by general, universal laws and characterised by underlying regularities....the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are part of the action being investigated; and that, their model of a person is an autonomous one, not the plastic version favoured by positivist researchers.'

They argue that the behaviour of an individual can only be understood if the researcher really understands the person's interpretation of the world, since people are deliberate, intentional and creative in their actions. Researchers operating within the interpretivist paradigm prefer to generate rather than test out hypotheses, as they do not sometimes know in advance what they will see, or what they will unearth. This suggests that:

> 'behaviour and, thereby, data are socially situated, context-related, context-dependent and context-rich. To understand the situation researchers need to understand the context because situations affect behaviour and perspectives and vice versa' (2004:138)

Lincoln and Guba (1985:42) believe that qualitative methods sit more comfortably with this notion of human-as-instrument, and that research designs emerge over time. This therefore would suggest that the researcher may then be able to gather data to be able to analyse, and thus ascertain which factors affecting whole school improvement were implemented at an early stage, and which may have happened somewhat later.

Interpretivist researchers produce theory which is emergent from data, and is described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004:22) as *'theory becomes sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people's behaviour.'* This can be conducted by examining situations through the eyes of participants, and generating what Geertz describes as *'thick descriptions.'*

Therefore interpretivism has influenced qualitative approaches and in the later sub-section of this chapter it will allow the researcher to consider how the practice of

headteachers of 'improved schools' is described to the researcher to develop an understanding of which processes have been implemented successfully to make such a difference to the schools in the sample.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Quantitative approach in relation to this study.

There is the view that the quantitative approach is too mechanistic and according to Nesfield-Cookson (1987),

> 'All they can do is to define life in terms of biochemistry, biophysics, vibrations, wavelengths, and so on; they reduce 'life' to conceivable measurement, but such a conception of life does not embrace the most evident element of all: that life can only be known by a living being, by 'inner' experience. No matter how exact measurement may be, it can never give us an experience of life, for life cannot be weighed and measured on a physical scale.'

This reductionist view of nature does not consider such elements as choice, and individuality, therefore as Ions (1977) describes the result is one of 'depersonalisation.' Hamden-Turner extends the criticism of this theme and adds that a quantitative approach can be too conservative as it ignores important qualities by concentrating on the *'repetitive, predictable and invariant aspects of the person.'* Each of the headteachers in the study have been in post for different lengths of time and worked with diverse leadership teams, in their own school context. Some would consider their school improvement journey to have been a slow process gathering momentum over recent years. Others demonstrate steep and swift improvements, over a shorter period of time. The essence of this research is to obtain the leader's own perspective through their language, and detailed responses, rather than a numerical or scientific reaction.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) considered how quantitative researchers are required to take an objectivist view, where the organisation is viewed from an external position. He believes that this objectivity is necessary regardless of whichever methodology is selected, since it is crucial that the researcher is not biased and does not place personal opinions and views on those being studied. Neither should they attempt to lead the participant in a particular direction or aim to 'shut down' the responses in any way. The

issue of empathy is a difficult one. If the researcher takes an openly empathetic style there is the real risk that the semi-structured interview becomes more of a 'casual chat' without any structure and could even degenerate into a cosy exchange of views unrelated to the topic. Alternatively if the researcher shows no empathy with the respondent there is the chance that this develops little trust or real understanding between the two people. This could potentially generate little relevant content, since the respondent may not feel comfortable being probed to give in-depth answers if no empathy is evident. Therefore Burrell and Morgan's notion is rejected in relation to this study. The respondents are approached with a degree of empathy, for the reasons stated, to ensure rich data is more likely to be guaranteed.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) believe that quantitative research is a useful tool to generalise findings when it has been replicated on many different populations and subpopulations. The data allows quantitative prediction to be made and the researcher is able to eliminate the influence of variables, so that they are more able to determine cause and effect. All research, whatever the approach taken, appears to be time-consuming and challenging in its interpretation. The generation of precise numerical data maybe less time consuming than qualitative data to analyse, if statistical software is used to facilitate this. Perhaps the most important positive aspect is that quantitative research produces results that are relatively independent of the researcher, and the terms such as effect, size, statistical significance are contested procedures and concepts. If a large number of people are to be studied, then often quantitative research is more feasible and acceptable. However in this study, the researcher had a set of criteria to use in order to select the participants, and this allowed the small sample to comprise secondary headteachers of different sizes of school with excellent inspection reports, as well as leaders who worked in a systemic way and simultaneously conduct other roles such as School Improvement Partners and consultants. The criteria for including headteachers in the sample will be described in more detail under the later sub-section of this chapter entitled, Research Techniques.

In trying to discover the processes that have made a difference to schools and which factors underpin significant improvement it will be necessary to probe responses and this

could be difficult if the data generated is purely numerical. From the literature review there appears no single blueprint for schools to implement in order for the result to be guaranteed improvement. There are several factors which appear as common themes and the research will tease out whether, in reality, in 2008 these are viewed by Headteachers of improved schools as significant. The research will also determine whether there is a preferred order in implementing certain key processes. Therefore a wholly quantitative approach appears unsuitable for the type of 'thick descriptions' to emerge, and these may be better obtained through a qualitative approach which will hopefully identify a new framework for school improvement strategies.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Qualitative approach in relation to this study.

Qualitative purists reject positivism and believe that all research is value-bound and that it is impossible to consider generalisations that do not concern themselves with time or context. Harre suggests that models of positivism do not address human individuality, and Giorgi suggests that we need to consider the effect of a conscious human subject as 'an object of study.' He believed that it is not possible to imitate one successful framework and replicate it in another context. Giorgi, (1995:31) refers to when respondents say things of significance to them, there is likely to be some connection between what they say and the beliefs they hold. The phenomenom, according to Giorgi is the essence of qualitative research, individual 'subjective' lived experience. This is exactly what the research in this study is aiming to achieve, in that headteachers will be encouraged to describe their experiences of the journey the school has undertaken, to highlight he factors underpinning significant improvements and illustrate what has been done to generate those changes for the better. Giorgi, (1995:30) proposes

> ' a general term to refer to the grasp that one has of the real things and events that exist in the world transcendent to that grasp or apprehension.'

It is important to realise that the human person being studied possesses the same type of 'consciousness' as the researcher. The human subject is however prone to the danger of a 'problem of subjectivity,' to use Giorgi's (1995:24) terminology. Personal wishes and

desires should not influence the description of outcomes. Empathy is an essential skill for qualitative researchers, and this deep understanding of the interviewee's perception, and a real genuine nature must not be confused with bias. The researcher is aware of the participant's life that they are describing, so that they can identify their subjective meanings, values , context and perceptions, but this does not mean that the researcher has to accept these values. In understanding this issue this makes the researcher more self aware, particularly in the case of dealing with eight different school contexts and potentially eight different personalities of school leaders.

Qualitative purists support a view that the theory is data led, and it is possible to identify cause and effect if the study takes place over a long period of time. Smith (1995:9) highlights one aspect of a qualitative approach as

> 'capturing the richness of themes emerging from the respondents' talk, rather than reduce the responses to quantitative categories.'

This is a distinct benefit of this approach which is particularly relevant to this study, so that the fullness of the data can give detailed accounts of what processes were undertaken and what impact they had. The qualitative approach can offer additional data by secondary questioning and presents the researcher with an opportunity to probe more deeply during a face to face interview. Some quantitative techniques do not offer the same flexibility, such as a questionnaire, as once the data has been collected in a particular way, there is a limited chance of returning to probe into the complexities of the situation

Howe, (1998) and also Guba (1990:81) believe that qualitative and quantitative approaches are incompatible and

> 'accommodation between the two paradigms is impossible.... we are led to vastly diverse, disparate and totally antithetical ends.'

Qualitative approaches favour 'deep, rich observational data' according to Sieber (1973:1335) rather than 'hard generalizable... data.' However it is possible for quantitative research to deal with highly complex phenomena such as multi-variate

models. A study by Rutter entitled '15,000 hours' is one such example where complex quantitative research takes into account context and emergent trends.

Qualitative research is also useful for studying a limited number of cases in depth, particularly if there are complex phenomena involved, such as the area of school improvement. The process associated with qualitative research is a dynamic one. This study involves interacting with school leaders, looking at patterns, and delving into the words and meaning of participants to understand how and why phenomena occur. It is this richness of data which takes time to transcribe and analyse. However qualitative approaches are not just concerned with description. Details within the transcripts allow the researcher to have an account of the context in which peoples' behaviour occurs. Loftland and Loftland (1995:164) warn against *'descriptive excess'* when collecting data. The researcher has to take care not to be influenced by their own personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Bryman (2003:299) warns against the researcher becoming *'too impressionistic and subjective,'* since it is their decision to make a judgement about what is significant and important, as the investigator is the main instrument of data collection.

In qualitative research the researcher is regarded as an essential and necessary participant who is involved. All research is seen as an inter-personal social-constructionist relationship. Therefore the subjectivity of the researcher is a crucial and necessary element of the data being collected. In making the collection of data by the researcher she must avoid asking 'leading questions,' yet ensure that the interpretation of findings is logical. It could be that another researcher with the same data could have a different interpretation, and this would also be logical and possible. In contrast quantitative research requires 'objectivity' and neutrality, claiming that research is 'value free.' On the other hand, qualitative research recognises that it is not value free as everything has a political undertone. Qualitative logic is inductive and quantitative logic is deductive, as highlighted by Guba, (1990) who believes that:

> 'logic flows from specific to general… and that the knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality.'

Qualitative methods generate data that is usually collected in naturalistic settings, and one advantage of this approach is that it can be responsive to local situations and

changes that occur during the course and conduct of the study. The process becomes cyclical, as the theory emerges new data collection is carried out, and from this another theory can emerge and so the research progresses. Each new piece of analysed data can contribute to the emergent theory.

A word of caution is that sometimes a narrow sample gives a skewed sample, which can generate a small quantity of data for analysis. This inadequate sampling may not allow the researcher to be able to tease out generalisations. The issue of being critical, and not just accepting information at face value, also comes into play when wholly reliant on qualitative research. In her work on cultural psychology, Much (1995:116) explains how sometimes we make assumptions when operating in unfamiliar cultural contexts. This is when the researcher may be at risk of taking certain things for granted or without critical examination and as a result does not obtain sufficiently thick descriptions to inform their analysis. Yet the advantage of the unstructured nature of most qualitative enquiry is that it offers a degree of flexibility as the researcher can pose questions asking why, as well as changing the direction of the line of questioning if the participant touches on something which requires further explanation. This makes the qualitative approach more 'fit for purpose' in relation to this particular topic of study.

A brief consideration of Mixed Methods

This can be offered as the third research paradigm, where both quantitative and qualitative methods are recognised as being important and useful, and these potentially draw from the strengths of both approaches and minimise the weaknesses of both. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:14) offer their definition of mixed methods as being a creative and expansive form of research,

> 'where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.'

It must be said that according to Sechrest and Sidani, (1995:78) both qualitative and quantitative approaches,

> 'describe their data, construct exploratory arguments about the data, and speculate about why the outcomes they observed happened as they did.'

Mixed methodology allows a freedom for qualitative researchers to use quantitative methods, and vice versa. This sounds like the perfect solution, yet the researcher is then faced with the decision as to which elements and strategies become fundamental to the principle of mixed research. It would therefore be possible to have qualitative interviews as a check after a questionnaire response to perhaps expand on the understanding of the data collected. The difficulty appears to lie in how exactly the researcher determines how to mix the methods in the most appropriate way. For the purposes of this particular research into school improvement it was felt that in order to do this effectively it would require a different person to conduct some of the quantitative techniques, as this would need to happen concurrently with the qualitative data collection and analyses. Therefore it was deemed too costly in terms of time to be able to conduct mixed methodology in this particular scenario. This therefore outweighs the fact that maybe together quantitative and qualitative research may have generated a greater knowledge base, yet there is a disadvantage; the potential risk of producing a set of conflicting results requiring interpretation.

Authentic Research

The two core aspects of authentic research are reliability and validity, and both are important if the research is to be able to impact on policy and practice. There are differences between the specific actions that need to happen to make the research reliable and valid, depending which approach is taken, either quantitative or qualitative. How reliability and validity are addressed in these two approaches does vary, as they use completely different instruments for data collection.

Reliability

With a quantitative research approach, reliability and measurement validity appear to be concerned with the adequacy of measures. In this respect, one relevant definition of reliability is given by Blogdon and Biklen (1992:48) as,

> 'a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched.'

Bryman suggests a number of decisions that could be considered by the researcher to ensure that validity and reliability are addressed, such as cross checking data, using respondent validation, finding a balance between open and closed questions, and piloting the research. The term reliability can be substituted by *'consistency and stability over time.'* It could be that in using quantitative methods, the test and retest is an appropriate measure of reliability. Yet, qualitative research can still strive for replication, by refining, comparing and validating their processes. In fact two researchers could study one setting and produce totally different analyses of the data, yet both sets of findings might be reliable.

The main intention of my research is to aim for accuracy and comprehensiveness so that the interviews capture in essence what actually occurs in the school by means of interviewing the headteacher. In each of the eight cases, the status of the respondent is the same, the setting is similar and the conditions are replicated as is the method of data collection. The researcher tries to collect data in naturally occurring situations. It is worth considering whether if a different researcher had interviewed the same respondents with the same questions, would they have drawn similar conclusions. Also, had I interviewed the respondents a month later, when circumstances in their school might have been different, would they have responded in the same way? The transcripts were word processed quite quickly after the interviews took place and then analysed once and then again on two further occasions. This second, more deep and thorough analysis happened almost three months after the original scrutiny, and brought about a deeper understanding of each of the separate issues. The third analysis took place to focus on the potential interlinking of certain processes. This 'chain reaction' of factors became much more evident when each transcript had been thoroughly studied and all eight respondents' transcripts could be seen side by side. This profound level of investigation occurred specifically with the intention of finding factors that could be deployed in a certain order to bring about improvement.

LeCompte and Goetz (1982:32) refer to internal reliability whereby different members of a research team agree about what is being observed to ensure consistency and

dependability. They suggest that external validity is also important and this is '*the degree to which the study can be replicated.*' However the advantage of conducting a study of the factors affecting whole school improvement in eight different schools may be to discover some unique processes present in one or more contexts.

Guba and Lincoln stress the necessity of persistent observations in the field, over a longer period of time, yet this suggestion was just not practical for this length of study in schools that were not positioned in close geographical proximity to each other. This facilitates internal validity, as described by LeCompte and Goetz (1982:34) where '*there is a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop.*' They also argue that an additional strength of the qualitative approach is if the researcher is able to spend a prolonged amount of time participating with the subjects in the research, it allows, '*a high level of congruence between concepts and observations.*'

Validity

Bryman states that some of the main types of validity sit more comfortably with quantitative methodologies, such as generalizability, predictability, replicability and controllability. Furthermore he suggests that,

> 'In quantitative data, validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of the data. It is impossible for research to be 100 per cent valid; that is the optimum of perfection. Quantitative research possesses a measure of error which is inbuilt and has to be acknowledged.'

Those who support quantitative methods often believe that giving a closed format or limiting answers to several options increases validity. However this does not give the researcher the facility to probe more deeply into the response to explore and ultimately discover the essence of what is behind the responses. If validity is to remain faithful to positivist principles then the research needs to be free of context, and the questioning needs to be clear, avoiding ambiguity and any dilution of the data.

By way of contrast the qualitative methodology deals with the natural setting being the main source of the data. Data is descriptive, socially situated and is presented in terms

of the respondents. The aim is to see the situation through the eyes of the respondent and therefore respondent validation is important to ensure that their meaning and intentions are captured. Mischler's definition, (1990) prefers to substitute the word 'validity' in quantitative research by the term *'understanding.'* The very essence of the semi-structured interview is concerned with subjectivity, the respondents' views, their opinions, and their perspectives and so these could contribute to their bias, which is difficult to eliminate. Hammersley and Atkinson emphasise the importance of the meanings and the inferences drawn from the data, rather than the data itself, or the methods of collection.

In order for qualitative data to have maximum validity, there does need to be a consideration of the potential subjectivity of respondents, their opinions and also attitudes, which can lead to bias. Therefore the instruments used for data collection are still important in order to ascertain a richness and scope of data by careful selection of the participants and objectivity of the researcher.

What appears to be crucial is that the researcher considers validity and poses questions before undertaking their preferred approach. In this particular instance, some attention was paid to the ideas put forward by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as would the researcher have made the same interpretations of the data if it had been conducted at a different time or place. Or would the same consequences and issues have emerged if the researcher had been paying more attention to other phenomena, and would someone else using the framework and observing the same phenomena have interpreted the data in the same way ? One method suggested by Oppenheim which can maximise validity, is the suggestion of pilot interviews. This allows the researcher to adapt and re-shape questions for subsequent interviews, to ensure that the interviewees selected will be able to furnish the researcher with all the information required.

Face validity appears to be linked to a more intuitive process, to ascertain whether the measure reflects the content of the concept. Therefore the researcher could ask the respondent or subject to judge whether the measure really does reflects the concept in

their opinion, and use this as a checking mechanism. Construct validity is when the researcher detects a hypothesis from a theory. According to Hopkins (2001) leaders believe they need to create professional learning communities in their schools, for it to improve. The researcher might anticipate that staff would be more likely to stay longer working in that establishment, where there is a real sense of the school making an improvement, and a positive climate for change. We could investigate the theoretical deduction and analyse the relationship between the length of service in that school and the identified period of greatest improvement. However if the deduction is that the two are linked, this may be misguided. There needs to be caution because there may be other factors influencing their decision to stay, not just because they are part of a professional learning community which has a shared purpose, mutual regard and integrity, and shared decision making. It could be proximity to home and a convenient journey to work, friends in the workplace, or just being comfortable working with colleagues and the children in that school, or even some unwillingness to start establishing credibility elsewhere. It could also be that measuring the length of service of key staff could be an invalid measure of the concept.

Research Techniques

The researcher did consider the possibility of the research objectives being met through a vehicle of small case studies. From an initial consideration the topic did lend itself to this as Platt (1995:63) suggests, *'a case study is justified when it is describing something intrinsically interesting.'*

Bromley (1985:8) elaborates by stating that the case study is

> 'a highly circumscribed account of persons in situations, giving rise to low level generalizations within relatively narrow areas of scientific and professional interest'

On balance, the idea of conducting interviews which form mini-case studies on each of the eight situations originally seemed to fit well with the subject of study. This technique was given serious consideration after reference to the strengths of a case study technique as outlined by Nisbet and Watt (1984:78) who suggest,

'They catch the unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data; these unique features may hold the key to understanding the situation.'

The intention of the research is to capture those special features unique to each school context which have brought about improvements, whether, for example, they are linked to enhancing pupil learning within classrooms, or by developing the expertise of teachers. The key factors will hopefully emerge by close in-depth scrutiny of what processes school leaders have executed. This ties in with Adelman's ideas whereby the data is *'strong in reality'* but *'difficult to organize'* rather than most research data which may be *'weak in reality'* but *'susceptible to ready organization.'*

Nisbet and Watt (1984:184) also add three further advantages of a case-study,

> 'they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases...... they can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team.'

The case study has a focus on quality and intensity, as even one single reference to a key indicator may have significance for that leader in their context. However for the researcher to able to access schools at such an in-depth level, it would require a significant period of time to be immersed in that situation, as a full time researcher. This would be crucial to be able to produce several hundred hours of participant observational material or alternatively non-participant observation lasting over a period of years. A future and subsequent focus could be to concentrate intensively on one or two of the most interesting scenarios, with key findings, rather than encompassing the breadth of eight institutions.

Leading on from the idea of case study, Miller's work on biographical research (1999) gave some other alternative research techniques which may be suited to the study. He refers to *'the realist, which is focused on grounded theory'* and *'the neo positivist, employing more structured interviews'* and finally *'the narrative, with its emphasis on using the interplay between interviewer and interviewee to actively construct life histories.'* In reading the work of Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) it became evident that the technique of a life history was more suited to a wider scoped project. There is simply not the time, facilities or resources available to be able to embark upon use of

this technique. However Connelly and Clandinen (1999) indicate several other techniques such as interviews, journals, letters, conversations, stories and oral histories, as well as personal experiences. Since the research will be in the public domain, and the conclusions of the study will be made available to headteachers via the National College for School Leadership, it was felt appropriate to steer away from detailing names, places, and events that might be an intrinsic, but intimate element of a life history. The object of study was identified as the headteacher, who was felt to be a 'good informant' having been the school leader throughout the period of significant change, and having made this decision to adopt interviews as the main technique for collection of the data, the next step was a careful consideration of the most appropriate type of interview. The semi-structured interview offered the researcher the most flexibility to collect rich data. This allowed the topics and open ended questions to be written in advance, but the exact sequence and wording does not necessarily have to be followed with each respondent. This meant that the main issues within school improvement would be covered by the questions, but the probes and prompts could vary, dependent on the participant's response.

By conducting the interviews in twos and then allowing a period of time to transcribe and then analyse each, the researcher has the opportunity to develop the questions each time the next two interviews come to pass. The process of testing, rethinking and then retesting can be utilised to its full potential. One alternative to consider was to conduct four, and then a further four semi-structured interviews, however it was felt that this allowed less chance to modify the questions and placed a heavy emphasis on the analysis of a large amount of data all at once. In terms of manageability and the access to headteacher colleagues nationally, it was a simpler process to conduct two separate interviews and leave some time before the next ones. This also allowed the timescale to incorporate the school holidays when headteachers were not available for interview due to other commitments

In this particular thesis the study and analysis of evidence will be restricted to eight participants and their responses which focus on the factors that they feel are important and are necessary to bring about whole school improvement. This is quite a small

sample which will be studied in depth, rather than a large number of headteachers across a region being studied for patterns across the sample. Should there be insufficient data emerging from eight respondents then it would be possible to extend the sample to ten. There are respondents willing to be interviewed should this be the case.

The questions in the interview were not explicitly linked to each of the eleven processes as it was felt better that the respondents could talk freely and not have the discussion directed expressly towards the separate strands in the conceptual framework. The researcher did consider that if an interview was insufficiently rich in data content then it could be useful to have some supplementary questions linked to the key elements which could be kept to one side, and only used if it was felt necessary to stimulate a more detailed response. Another advantage of not linking questions to the strands was so that the interviewee did not feel led or drawn in a particular direction, and also so that they could refer to their own ideas, and describe any 'home grown' strategies that were successful.

The framing of the questions in the semi-structured interviews did consider 'prompts' and 'probes' as suggested by Morrison, (1993:66)

> 'Prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions, whilst probes enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, thereby addressing richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty that are some of the hallmarks of successful interviewing.'

Smith Harre and Langenhove, (1995:67) suggest distinct steps, from initially proposing a tentative hypothetical explanation, by taking the first case and determining to what extent the hypothesis is said to be true, and then revising the hypothesis. The researcher then moves to the second case, assesses the revised hypothesis in the light of this, and amends it where necessary. This procedure can be continued through a number of cases and the final resulting hypothesis should then have a much stronger explanatory power. This process was used successfully having undertaken the first two interviews in fairly close succession. A series of new codes emerged as the interviews unfolded and the hypothesis was revisited and revised on an ongoing basis after each interview.

The timespan between the first two interviews and the final two interviews was a year. This had implications for the research and in considering stability and reliability it was not felt appropriate to re-interview the two respondents as they had provided some high quality data in the first instance. In the intervening twelve months, each of the two leaders have expanded upon their role as headteacher, which has led them to being out of their own school probably about two days per week on average, conducting work as national leaders. It could be that being out of their own school more, means they are less in touch with improvement strategies on the ground, or it could be they are immersed in strategy about improvement and have wider experiences to contribute outside of their own school improvement agenda. The researcher did take into account Marshall's literature (1995:336) on seeking validation and censorship and at the same time adopting a collaborative approach from the outset.

Therefore, upon reflection it was decided to attempt face validity by asking them to re-read the transcript of what they had said, to see if they wished to add or amend it. This was done at the end of the period of interviews, so as not to disrupt the planned timescale. It was interesting to note that the participants did not alter any of the text contained within the transcript, and in both cases they commented that they could not recollect giving such a detailed account. Perhaps as a result of the time lapse and their inability to recall the detail, they chose not to make any modifications.

The researcher made every effort to appreciate that the headteacher being interviewed has their own agenda. Part of the new role of secondary headteachers within the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust is to share best practice and commit to networking and brokering packages of support for schools that are struggling to make the necessary improvements in an agreed timescale. For a headteacher to be approached to take on an additional wider leadership role linked into another secondary school or schools they must be invited to take on the extra work and meet a series of criteria, one of which is the ability to demonstrate a sound understanding of school improvement and have a track record of moving a school forward over a sustained period of time. It is for

this reason that each headteacher selected for interview by the researcher was able to talk with a fair degree of ease about the topic as it forms part of their daily working life.

Administration of the Interviews

Lived experiences are better recorded by the exploratory method so that the researcher can really understand the meaning of the events and processes that have happened in the secondary schools selected for study. There was a desire to record 'real' and not manufactured information, derived from naturally occurring events within school settings and contexts where improvement is evident. The data was collected away from the school site wherever possible so that the interviewees were not disturbed by their daily operational or strategic work. All interviewees made reference to their own contexts and this could not be ignored. After collecting the data it was clear that the descriptions were vivid and originated from actual situations, this would have been more difficult to elicit via quantitative means.

A strength of using qualitative data was that in this particular instance it had the potential to reveal complexity. The issues to be raised were not simplistic and by recording the words that described how and why situations emerged in the schools gave the research a certain richness. I also hoped that perhaps I might be in a position to identify some causal relationships at a local level, and search out new ideas to develop the original framework that was presented at the end of the Literature Review.

The six steps outlined by Bryman and Bell, (2003.283) were followed. This involved agreeing research questions, selecting relevant sites and subjects, collecting relevant data, interpreting the data, doing conceptual and theoretical work and writing up my findings. This seemed to work as I had a tight timescale in which to operate since I needed to conduct the interviews and complete four of the interviews before schools ended for the lengthy summer break. Prasad (1993) suggested that it may be useful to group together incidents, events or pieces of conversation on 'concept cards.' Although I did not actually use this technique in the first six interviews I used it as a tool in the last

two interviews, as I became increasingly familiar with the different processes mentioned.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth responses from the headteachers, as I felt this would not be possible with a questionnaire, for the reasons outlined earlier on in this chapter. Standardised open interviews were also too rigid and inflexible as they required the interviewer to repeat the exact same wording and sequence of questions which are determined in advance. It was not felt that this type of interview would elicit the factors leading to improvement or a sufficiently rich description of the processes. The information to be collected was potentially quite sensitive, detailed and centred on which improvements had occurred and how these had happened. Respondents were asked why they, as a leader, had made those particular choices and how these strategies had been implemented to bring about positive changes. The sample was representative, with secondary schools that were 11-16 and 11-18, from different Local Authorities and all headteachers had applied for their post, rather than being drafted in to resolve a problematic situation.

Since the literature review had already presented a number of key themes, these could be used to frame some broad questions in an attempt to extract he knowledge from the respondents. Morrison's five sets of continua are helpful to picture where the interview technique is positioned in relation to other more formal and pre-planned practices. The advantage of using the qualitative approach is that it tries to capture and portray the uniqueness of the situation, and fine details can emerge in the interview once the researcher is in situ. It also gave the researcher more confidence in that the focus could be on studying the body language and gestures of the participants, knowing that the next question was planned. In the second interview this meant that the researcher was becoming familiar with the pattern and order of questions. However both respondents had the questions several days in advance and were extremely well prepared making the interviews longer than the forty five minute allocation. At a later point in time, when encountering Scheurich's work (1995:241) it really did became evident that *'controlling the wording is no guarantee of controlling the interview.'*

A list of prompts were noted separate to the interview schedule after conducting the first two interviews so that secondary questioning could be implemented to tease out more detail and at times ask the respondent to elaborate their answer and give more clarification. This ensured that each respondent understood the interview question, and, for respondent 1 and 2, these were sent out in advance of the interview. In fact Scheurich's adaptive method appeared to elicit more information, since the respondent appeared more relaxed and less likely to adhere solely to their pre-planned notes. I do not agree with Oppenheim's view that by changing the wording of a question it undermines the reliability. The whole idea of interviews is to get at the very heart of the factor behind what is making a difference to make a school improve. Each school leader and each secondary school forms a unique context, and the method being used has to be able to achieve the research objectives.

The technique of interviews, semi-structured in nature with some broad questions, prompts and probes, appeared to best meet the needs of the researcher in this case. In terms of preparing for the interviews, the researcher studied the risks summarised by Oppenheim (1992:96) and potential sources of bias which can affect validity and reliability. Every effort was made to enter into each interview with a clear and open mind, being well-organised and in advance of the timeslot so as to be able to test out the digital voice recorder in situ. This contributed to engendering a good rapport between researcher and respondent, using unbiased probing and careful prompting to elicit high quality research material. The in-depth study of methodology has greatly assisted the researcher improve specific techniques over the period of interviews.

General Characteristics of the sample

All the respondents did match the following criteria

- Leading a school that has increased output measures against national standards at both Key Stages over the last three years, and a value added measure of 1000 or above.

- A successful OFSTED inspection in the last three years with few key issues.

- Recognized by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) as either a consultant head, and /or leader of a mentor school

- Demonstrates a willingness to share good practice openly with colleagues beyond their own school, either as headteacher or School Improvement Partner.

The criteria were decided upon after consultation with the senior adviser of Wakefield Local Authority. Edwards offered guidance on how schools within the local district received support should they cause concern. In discussions he identified those schools at the other end of the spectrum, deemed successful and thus this four strand criteria was generated. It was felt to be comprehensive as it took consideration of numerical data, but also had an independent outsider's view of the school's performance namely OFSTED. The SSAT have their own rigorous standards to be met in order for schools to be able to mentor other establishments and receive a level of accreditation to recognize the level of support they provide. School leaders are required to pass extensive training and a test, at the National College, in order to function as a School Improvement Partner. Therefore some of the criteria have already inbuilt selection processes in place, to ensure that the most appropriate personnel are being highlighted for this type of work.

The criteria were unproblematic in that there were many schools that did fit, however the research was confined to the north of England for distance purposes, and this reduced the number of schools for inclusion. The aim was to interview those respondents within approximately a 100 mile radius of Wakefield, otherwise travelling time would have been excessive. It could be argued that perhaps this limit of distance did possibly reject a 'better' example, but the researcher was also working full time as a headteacher, and so the collection of data had to be feasible.

The respondents did fit the research objectives, selection criteria and also come from different types of school. The researcher did not wish to focus just on schools facing challenging circumstances, since much has been written and published around this

particular context. Through a study of such documentation it appears that these such schools are often given significant extra resources to achieve a 'quick-fix', a swift upsurge in raw outcomes, and the turnaround process will encompass methods which are usually more focused on the short term. The issue of sustainability is often not one of paramount importance, it is the levitation of a school from a 'sinking' scenario to one which is beginning to transform and then starts to make sustainable improvements.

Figure 1. Table of Respondents.

Respondent	Age range	Roll	Area	Yrs in this post	No of years Head-ship	Consultant Head	Mentor School	SIP
AY 1	11-16	700	Wakefield	11	14	Yes	Yes	Yes
MW2	11- 18	2200	Wakefield	6	10	Yes	Yes	No
AW3	11- 18	1015	Hartlepool	11	11	Yes	Yes	No
MWo4	11 -18	931	Leeds	9	9	No	Yes	Yes
SG5	11-18	1215	Newcastle	2	9	Yes	Yes	No
RB6	11-19	1800	Wakefield	10	10	No	Yes	No
PT7	11-18	800	Doncaster	8	8	Yes	Yes	No
JO8	11-18	1062	Darlington	14	14	Yes	Yes	No

This sample demonstrates different sizes and type of school, together with the experience in years the headteacher has been in post. This is in contrast to previous published research such as 'Success Against All the Odds'(1996) which highlighted case studies by the National Commission on Education, as to how successful school improvement occurs in schools facing very challenging circumstances.

The technique of semi-structured interviews allowed the respondents to have a great deal of leeway in how to answer. As recommended by Bryman, (2003:343)

> 'By and large all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewer to interviewee.'

I also followed his recommendation of using an interview schedule, by devising questions based on a list of fairly specific topics to be considered. Interview questions were formulated to elicit answers to the research questions, without them being too specific, using language that was comprehensible and relevant to the respondents, avoiding leading questions. I did not want to obtain mere confirmation that the process I had raised was indeed a significant factor for the participant. For the pilot interviews, involving respondents who were local, a venue was selected which was extremely quiet and tranquil, and prepared myself as suggested by Kvale (1996) using the ten qualification criteria of a successful interviewer.

Grounded theory was used to some extent in that I did not want to start out with too many preconceptions, and so the questions were designed to allow the emergence of alternative avenues of enquiry. In the case of the first two interviews, I gave outline questions to the respondents 6 days in advance of the interview, but for respondents 3-8 I asked the respondents to talk and reflect on the following three areas,

a) The main improvements in your school over the last three to five years.

b)The underlying factors, strategies and processes which have caused the improvements.

c) The sustainability of the improvements.

The more detailed interview schedule asked the following questions,

1) I would like to talk with you about school improvement. Can we start by asking you to briefly describe the main improvements in your school over the last three to five years?

2) What sorts of barriers and challenges have you had to overcome?

3) It would appear that an improving school has a number of distinct characteristics. Can you describe any specific strategies or processes which underpin your success? (probe about evidence of a changed ethos)

4) How have you built capacity to deliver such changes?

5) What major activities, resources or systems have you implemented to 'make a difference' with learners in classrooms?

6) Is there anything about your own leadership style which has made an impact on improvement?

7) Are you part of any networks or partnerships which have assisted you?

8) Is there anything else you would like to mention which has driven the improvement process?

In deciding to give out the interview schedule to the first two respondents, they had each made detailed notes and were extremely well prepared. I decided that for the next six interviews I would not give the schedule but merely outline the areas I wished them to consider in broad terms, listed as questions a) b) and c). One weakness of using a more prescriptive technique with the questions was the actual immense volume of raw data to process and analyse from each interview. This was also a real strength in that respondents talked freely, with emotion and candour, which provided a richness, depth, authenticity and honesty about their experiences. Bryman, (2003:355) suggests *'transcribe only those portions that you think are useful or relevant'* but this meant that the researcher was then making a judgement about what to include and what to omit from the transcript. In order to avoid this, it was decided that I would ensure all words were transcribed. I completed this task since it made the text familiar, but then passed to an administrative assistant to word process, as she is an accurate touch typist.

I did have concerns at the outset that I was embarking upon an interpretation of another person's 'lived experience', to try and get a deep and profound feeling for what had occurred. Several problems emerged as I conducted the first interview. Firstly the first respondent ran well over the length of time I had allocated. He gave some very lengthy answers and although I had done some preliminary reading on 'flexibility in semi-structured interviewing' it was difficult to respond to the direction in which the respondent was taking the interview. It may have been better to have been more assertive at a couple of points and curtail the information flow and intersperse it with other questions not contained in the schedule. This could have led the interviews into a

more investigative arena, particularly when trying to focus in on the key issues and eliminate lengthy details about school systems. I had allocated a separate tape for each interview, and both were numbered to correspond to each respondent. I was surprisingly nervous during the first interview and in my haste did not take the first tape out of the machine but went straight on to the next interview. This meant that the tape cut off in mid flow of the second respondent. I therefore invested in a digital voice recorder for the next six interviews. This was very successful except that the soft speaking tone of respondent 4 was sometimes difficult to hear. The device had to be listened to several times to ensure accuracy, and therefore transcribing this interview was particularly time consuming.

As mentioned previously , I could have managed the two interviews in a different way. Due to time constraints I had both interviews at the same venue, one following on from the other. It may have been better to have implemented a time gap between the two, then have had a period in which to reflect, and possibly changed the second interview schedule and used the first interview as a pilot. For the third and fourth interview I therefore purposely conducted them a week apart. In following the initial schedule I felt it was quite restrictive at times. I intend to make more use of Kvale's nine types of interview question, but only discovered his research after I had conducted the fourth interview.

In future work I also intend to follow the guidance given by Lofland and Lofland (1995) *'the analysis of qualitative data is not left until all the interviews have been completed and transcribed.'* This links into the volume of data issue. The more unstructured the interview became it appeared the more difficult it is to analyse. I made an attempt to record non-verbal material and made handwritten brief notes during the course of the interview.

Ethics

Healey and Rawlinson (1993) recommend a dual approach, firstly telephone contact followed up by a letter. I followed this guide, and whilst conducting the pilot, in the

absence of the written university guide 'Ethical Procedures for research' I devised my own letter to obtain consent from the first two respondents. After the research proposal was passed, and the University's Consent Form became available, this was used with respondents 3-8. Examplars of the letter and the consent form are included in the appendices.

Having a clear understanding of potentially different aspects of the interview, such as cognitive, ethical and interpersonal as well as being aware of the dynamics of the situation made the researcher conscious that the participants need to feel secure to be able to talk freely. This requires thought, sensitivity and careful preparation by the researcher.

Some advice that originates from Kvale (1996:147) was particularly useful,

- The interview is a social, interpersonal encounter not just a data collection exercise.
- The interviewer is not only knowledgeable about the topic but also an expert communicator.
- The researcher adopts an informed manner yet the participant must not feel intimidated in any way.
- Issues of consent and confidentiality are agreed in advance of the interview, so that the participant is aware that the researcher will not benefit at his/her expense.
- Active listening is a vital skill to be able to record and analyse facial and bodily expression.
- Consider how best to motivate the respondent to discuss their thoughts feelings and experiences, and how to maintain flow within the interview.
- The audiotape is selective as it filters out visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview.

When each interview was completed the intention was to turn off the recording device and pack away the equipment since the appointment was scheduled to last no longer

than one hour. In the case of the two pilot interviews both respondents then started a conversation relating to subject matter in the interview. It was made clear that this information was not being recorded and would not form part of the data analysis. It is interesting to note that this did not happen with any of the other later interviews. It could be for two reasons. Firstly the researcher knew the first two respondents better than the others, as they all work in the same Local Authority. Secondly, the headteachers were working off their school site and therefore the issue of time did not seem such a pressing matter. The researcher felt that there was a significant amount of data available to emerge from the transcript, without having additional difficulties of interpreting 'off the record' data. It was therefore made clear to respondents 3-8 that anything said after the recording device was switched off would not be included.

Data Coding

Before starting with the semi-structured interviews, it was important to identify a list of 'a priori' codes that emerged from the framework, as described in the literature review. This was fairly straightforward, except that once starting the interviews it became clear that the codes were insufficient and that more codes would need to be devised. However this did help as it gave a starting point for devising the questions to focus in on particular aspects and to try to ascertain the factors which really did make a difference to the school and what had made an impact.

The process to arrive at the codings was to review each transcript in turn, and giving a label to each of the component parts that seemed to be of significance. The original and newly emergent codes are included in the table as figure 2.

Charmaz states (1983:186)

'Codes... serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data.'

The words in the transcript are viewed as potential indicators of concepts, and the indicators are constantly compared. Phrases and sentences are coded as indicators which in turn relate to each strand in the conceptual framework. In fact each variable that

Hopkins suggested as an important contributory factor for schools to improve was given a code. This worked well in the first two interviews, yet new areas began to emerge and had therefore to be added to the coding mechanism. The emerging data was coded as it was collected, as soon as possible after the interviews took place, and done in batches of two, to maintain some flow and familiarization with the codes.

The guidance given by Delbridge (1998) offering an example of ethnographic coding from extensive fieldnotes was extremely useful, and one which was used in the first instance to tease out the main themes. Any type of event, interaction or comment which made reference to the eleven key factors was listed. The interview transcripts had been word processed and double spaced so that marginal notes could be added and then these were gradually refined into codes. In the first round of reviewing the data, the starting point was 11 codes, but then expanded after the first two interviews. Codes were grouped when they were concerned with a similar strand and process. Therefore PL refers to developing a professional learning community, and PLbc, means a reference to the school building capacity. These themes, equating to labels, such as, Il for intervention at the learning level, and SL for system leadership are the closest match to the actual wording, to serve as a prompt and ease the process of analysis.

Coding provides a mechanism for dealing with a large volume of data and thinking about its meaning ready for analysis. It is a stage that demanded reflection about the material, understanding its significance and deliberating on the research questions and the original literature that has driven the data collection. Miles and Hubermann (1994) recommend the use of a contact summary sheet to record themes that arise during a qualitative interview. This proved especially useful as it highlighted the main themes, concepts and provides a record of the frequency of occurrence. The example of a contact summary sheet used by Stiles (2001) stresses how qualitative researchers need to avoid such terms as 'many' 'often' or 'several' and inject a greater precision if possible, by the use of such a technique. See figure 2. The * denotes it is an original code. In the analysis other new codes emerge, namely working with parents, rewards and incentives, accommodation and the learning environment and funding issues.

Figure 2 : Original coding summary using a contact summary sheet.

Code / Key Heading	Respondent 1 (frequency)	Respondent 2 (frequency)
Professional learning community and common goals (PLcg)*		
Building capacity (PLbc)*		
Challenging assumptions (PLca)*		
Reflective in action (PLra)*		
Intervention at the learning level, curriculum personalisation. (IL)*		
Achievement Focus (Il af)*		
Internal Systems (ILis)*		
Student Voice (ILsv)*		
Seizing Opportunities (SLso)*		
Learning Centred leadership (SLlcl)*		
Systemic leadership (Sl)*		

The research material gathered from the first two interviews was rich, varied and experiential. It was based on the uniqueness of the school situation and subjected to the headteacher's interpretation. As identified in the earlier section there are several main purposes. Firstly to question to what extent the original themes did emerge as important issues. Are some particular factors mentioned more frequently than others, and if so is this significant? Do headteachers suggest a preferred order in implementing certain

processes and if so which ones? Are there any additional factors which emerge out of the analysis as having special significance in 2008 ?

As a conclusion to this chapter it is important to clarify the position of the researcher as a practising headteacher who is currently also leading an improving school, as defined by the DCSF as the sixth most improved school in the country 2004-7. It is necessary to clarify with respondents that the headteacher is operating in a research role, so as to avoid confusion and tension in future working collaborations. I disagree with research methodology presented by Hammersley (1987) who feels that practitioners and researchers may be interested in different kinds of research questions. I can confirm that three of the respondents interviewed commented that they found the interviews thought-provoking, and mentioned this in conversations after the recording had ceased. On a micro level it gave the researcher insight into that particular social setting, and on a macro level it was fascinating to see if common themes emerged as the data became available and was analysed. One respondent early on in the process, felt he had made a positive contribution, upon reflection, about trying to ascertain a blueprint for improvement, and was keen to know whether his ideas had been replicated in other interviews.

CHAPTER 4, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section the research findings will be discussed in turn according to each of the eleven elements of the composite model presented at the end of the literature review. These are common factors that emerged from a variety of recent theoretical research sources, to ascertain processes that impact positively on a school to bring about improvement. In essence they are :

1. Developing a professional learning community, where staff work with the school leader towards common goals.

2. Building capacity to develop leaders at all levels.

3. Creating a 'can do' culture, whereby staff challenge assumptions.

4. Reflection by staff to devise creative solutions to solve problems.

5. Innovative curriculum developments and personalisation.

6. An achievement focus, using assessments and showing pupils how they can improve.

7. Internal systems which serve to support improvement strategies.

8. Engaging student voice.

9. Seizing opportunities for internal purposes.

10. Learning centred leadership.

11. Systemic leadership.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and critique the conceptual framework defined in the final part of the literature review. It will also seek to discover if indeed these factors do make a difference, and what evidence, from their own experience, school leaders can offer to support their ideas. It may be that additional factors emerge, not listed within the eleven part framework. The analysis will also seek to describe the inter-relationships between processes and characterize the order in which some factors may have been implemented. The research will offer a preferred order of implementation relevant to more than one context, and see whether it would be useful to consider putting specific processes in place in a certain sequence to make impact. At the same time the research will seek to discover why some factors have been implemented at a point in

time in the sequence, to identify if this is chain of events leading to improvement is possibly transferable from school to school.

The sample of respondents covers a wide range of different types of secondary school, as it was decided to aim for breadth rather than concentrate on one particular context such as 'schools facing challenging circumstances.' This was because a large proportion of research material already originates from schools who face huge challenges and have made rapid improvements, particularly with borderline pupils. In contrast, this study, using qualitative techniques, will focus on a range of different types of school, whose school leaders take the improvement agenda as a real issue, and want to make sustained improvements to benefit all children. In these different secondary schools across the north of England, the real issue for the researcher, is to try and discover if there are any key factors for improvement which apply regardless of context. It also fits neatly with the current 2008 Government thinking that all schools are capable of making improvements, regardless of their intake, setting, and resources.

1. Developing a professional learning community, where staff work with the leader towards common goals.

The first theme has the purpose of creating and developing a professional learning community, where staff are able to articulate common goals, so everyone is clear about the school's priorities.

All eight respondents could clearly articulate common goals, and this was commented upon in the early part of the interview for every single headteacher interviewed. Often these were stipulated in a short sentence and were given in response to question one which asked about the main improvements the school had made over the past three years.

Respondent 1 replied '*We needed to get all people on board, believing in success*' and this was reiterated by Respondent 2 who stated that '*We want to be the best, and not be a one hit wonder.*' Respondent 3 stated that '*I suppose my aim was to create a grammar*

school ethos without selection, but this took longer than three years.' and Respondent 4 referred to '

> 'a catholic ethos based in community and cohesiveness, where moral values are important. It is about creating a different image and ethos, and about having that shared vision.'

Respondent 5 had taken on his second headship and stated,

> 'People thought I would change things after a highly successful predecessor, here for 21 years. But I am trying to sustain the improvements.'

Respondent 6 had a desire to ensure that,

> 'hard to reach children' have increased levels of achievement, because despite improvements with other groups of the school population they remain a real nub, and their performance stayed around the same levels.'

He subscribed to a vision that although some targets groups of pupils had made improvements, particularly with the help of their 'support for achievement' mechanisms, other pupils had a number of social issues which acted as barriers, and were much harder to make an impact upon. He made reference to the fact that although his vision had not changed, the circumstances making it happen were becoming increasingly more challenging.

Respondent 7 had a personal focus on *'recruitment and advancement,..... and the absolute number 1 priority was to make sure we were fully staffed with specialist teachers'.* He felt that without this focus on attracting high quality practitioners to teach in his school, his students just could not possibly make the progress necessary. Implementing this would make the vision happen, because the quality of teaching would improve. Respondent 8, the headteacher of a catholic high school with a large sixth form explained how the school mission statement had to be translated into real practical action on the ground. The statement *'every child is unique, translated itself into wider opportunities for all.'* In the past he admitted that to some extent he had sacrificed equity for producing good topline results, by concentrating on borderline students. However the emphasis in the last three years has shifted, the focus has become 'every child matters,' switching attention to offering different types of support appropriate for

the individual, and also making their curriculum more personalised. His inclusion department had been extended to cope with taking in more pupils as a result of trying to implement his vision.

It is respondent 1 who referred to his common goals and actually termed them as such. He describes the school as 'our school' and

> 'You need everyone on board feeling valued and wanting our school to succeed. I want people to think we can succeed, whether they sweep the floors, mend the toilets or answer the telephone. They need to be on board to achieve the common aims of the school. This is why we had a school planning day and we took the whole school away ..... to get cohesion and unity.'

He adds later in the interview,
> 'We've improved immeasurably. If you don't have cohesive staff teams well... I think cohesion is vital. The vital word is team, together each achieves more.'

This ties in with the research by Spillane who emphasised the need for cohesive teams and Liebermann and Miller, who recognised that teachers taking on more responsibility for 'our learners' has an impact on improvement.

Respondent 6 describes a ten year strategy to try and improve the life chances of those hard to reach individuals. This is a major challenge and he claims,

> 'We only chip away at it very slightly, in an everyday way, we see the next generation coming through, realizing that the relations of this family are in the same situation as it was 10 years ago, despite rising levels of prosperity and increased levels of improvement.'

It is this focus which drives him to implement 'Support for Achievement' which is his version of the national strategy of 'Deep Support' so that the school can map the provision which they offer to individuals and groups, whether they be short or medium terms interventions, and then assess the impact of what they put into place.

All respondents were clear about their primary focus and what they felt was their main driver for improvement. Respondent 7 felt it crucial to be involved in every appointment, his number one priority was

'to ensure that we were fully staffed and have no stand-in teachers. I just focused on that. Some of the other themes I could get other senior staff to do, but not that.'

This was his personal driver. His common goal was to create a culture without blame, so that '*we made mistakes and openly declared them*' and it provided the reasoning behind why certain actions had been taken as a consequence, in anticipation of making the common goals become more attainable. All respondents knew clearly the sort of ethos and culture they wanted to create.

In contrast Respondent 7 also referred to what he felt was not helpful in realizing his vision. He described his goal of recruiting high calibre staff, and for this to be achieved it was essential to keep some distractions out of his school. A major drain on his time were Local Authority officers who did not help, but rather slowed down the impetus and distracted staff from their core purpose of teaching high quality lessons and engaging learners. He questioned this intrusion, seeing it as a hindrance to improvement and felt strongly that,

'being at the bottom of the local league table some years ago meant that the rule of inverse proportionality worked. The more trouble you inherit as a new head, the more interference you got. I just needed them (Local Authority officers) to leave me to get on with things and realize my plans.'

Respondent 8 also referred to those coming into the school to give advice lacked a degree of credibility as their experience in schools was so outdated, such as School Improvement Officers, and again he felt this watered down what he was trying to do, soaking up his time with potentially unnecessary meetings. He felt these people were on a '*gradient which has a decreasing scale of credibility*' the longer they are out of schools. The idea of having common goals, meant that the respondents had identified what their priorities were, and this gave them the strength to actually reject those projects and initiatives which they felt would not be of benefit, and at the same time seize opportunities which could make the desired improvements. This linked very closely with identifying potential barriers and challenging assumptions, and will be detailed further in the later section of this chapter titled, Inter-related factors.

2. Building capacity to develop leaders at all levels.

The second theme is about building capacity within the school, and at what levels headteachers have injected extra capacity to ensure sustainability.

Respondents 1,2,3,4 and 6 had all built capacity by extending their leadership team. This had been through the development of newly created posts such as Assistant Headteachers, or Advanced Skills Teachers. It had involved reshaping the roles of the leadership team and in the case of Respondents 1, 2 and 3 it involved a post being created to take some responsibility for the directing and leading their specialist subject status, in either Mathematics and Technology. The purpose was to drive up standards in the specialism, but also to impact on raising attainment elsewhere in the school. A creative way of developing leaders was undertaken by Respondent 2 who also had a training school status. He created four posts of Associate Assistant Heads that did not receive any additional renumeration but allocated extra non-contact time to conduct a whole school project, and formed a part of the extended leadership team. The respondents felt that this had taken some pressure off the existing senior leaders and not only spread the workload but brought fresh ideas and new skills and energy to the team, as well as realizing the aims of the school more swiftly. The Headteacher stated that the new associates felt valued, and that they were being given a real chance to develop their skills and learn the workings of the leadership team at close proximity.

Respondent 3 had similarly expanded his leadership team and referred to bringing new people in and attracting them with additional teaching and learning responsibility points. He wanted to eliminate the 'club culture' whereby those closest to the previous headteacher received preferential treatment, and shared overtly articulated attitudes that resisted change. Respondent 3 made a conscious effort to recruit positive colleagues who were,

> 'outspoken and purposeful, who are very good. I've watched them, mentored them and encouraged them as they have improved, and tried to recruit the best I possibly can- I pay them well, allowances of £10,000 over and above a standard teacher, but it means they feel valued. They've got large portfolios....they challenge all the time and they are vocal.'

This allowed the headteacher to build capacity and at he same time have a group of people who did challenge the former ethos of *'it was ok to be coasting.'* The past prevailing attitude was to ignore the non attendance of lower ability children. The new focus was 'Achievement for All,' so that every child had access to quality learning experiences, not just a chosen few who were most likely to succeed. Together, the staff created a new culture whereby children in a deprived area of the north-east of England can and will succeed whilst at the same time are taking a leading role in showcasing new technologies. There appeared to be two reasons behind his desire to building capacity. Firstly, the new recruits shared the vision for change and could 'spread the word' and challenge negativity. Secondly, by bringing in highly effective new leaders at a senior level gave the headteacher the freedom to work as a system leader and share their successes, to mutual benefit.

At a different level, Respondent 1 chose to build capacity not just at senior level but had moved away from a system of Heads of Faculty to Heads of Department. In a relatively small secondary school of 700, this course of action made more people directly accountable rather than concentrating the power in the hands of a few. As a direct result it generated much more enthusiasm for new initiatives, and simultaneously gave an increased number of staff a say in implementing change. The newly created management board took on a really positive voice. This also tied in with the later theme of external networking, as by empowering a greater number of middle leaders it built capacity to link with other schools, and boosted the confidence of a number of key players in the school. Another outcome was the ability of the head to retain staff by reshaping their roles. This is underpinned by the head's mantra :

> 'mine is a staff centred school, which is why we have been able to recruit talented staff and have relatively low turnover, whilst having enough new blood to create a richness which comes with new staff.'

He believes that this helps to preserve a positive culture, and this is one crucial lever for improvement. Retaining staff who are 'outstanding' in the classroom, who have a 'can achieve' outlook rather than 'can't do' attitude, together with the creation of small, but

effective teams who make decisions, and take risks, are also what he feels to be significant factors for improvement.

Both Respondent 1 and 3 couple their creation of increased capacity to challenging assumptions in order to realise their common goals. Respondent 3 built capacity by extending his leadership team with the purpose of having more staff to challenge assumptions about how deprived children could not succeed. This in turn allowed him to work outside his school as a system leader, generating Government Grants and allowing his team to set up private companies within the school, to market innovative software and materials to support new examination courses. In doing so, a wealth of contemporary interactive materials were designed and launched, which brought a certain kudos to the school, and generated extra revenue to invest in new hardware. The respondent is convinced that this triggered the next leap in improvement, and can be directly attributable to his original idea of building capacity at a senior level. The common elements of these inter-related factors will be detailed in a later separate section towards the end of this chapter.

> 'We've established our own companies and our own software. OFSTED described us having a massive capacity to improve in 1999, with no key issues and then in 2005 we were awarded a grade 1 outstanding.'

Respondent 4 and 7 felt it was vital to build capacity internally as both schools were struggling to recruit staff just as their schools started to improve. Respondent 4 went down the route of creating Advanced Skills teachers, and Respondent 7 cultivated newly qualified teachers by training them to take on heads of department roles within the early stages of their career. He stated,

> 'We had decent heads of department, who didn't realize what could be done. It was interesting that some of our newly qualified teachers are now leading departments. We have 'grown' a lot of people.'

Respondent 4 and 8 used internal staff with skills in training and coaching others to take a lead on delivering whole school sessions on particular themes. This was felt to be cost effective and highly successful as they had credibility and empathy with colleagues. Respondent 4 felt that the recruitment of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) in key

subject areas such as Religious Education, had raised the profile of that element of the curriculum and created teaching expertise which had affected the positive classroom practice of others. He felt restricted by the deficit budget at the time and therefore concentrated on pushing forward specific areas such as the Technology faculty and Science Department as they needed new leadership and a fresh impetus to build and strengthen the existing team. Respondent 6 also concentrated on the development of middle leaders to create more coherence, with younger staff moving into more senior posts, and

> 'holding to account middle leaders. By putting in place high quality people there is greater coherence and more young staff so, in effect, the engine room of the leadership has shifted'

He draws a parallel with a high achieving and successful football manager who constantly has to reshuffle and redevelop his team. He reflected on the positive and negative aspects of a situation. On one hand he explained that in establishing what he considered to be an excellent senior team, he knew that some colleagues had the desire to move on and therefore aspire to be promoted to the next level. He acknowledged, *'We would all like to stay with those we know and can rely on'* and yet on the other hand he relishes the challenge to deal with constantly changing dynamics, and developing the skills of staff, who are new to a wider role.

Therefore the factor of building capacity at different levels seems intrinsic to improvement, and there is much evidence to support that this is an important factor. However the leaders had extended leadership at different levels dependent on where they needed to make impact. Also, headteachers had different reasons which acted as drivers to support their actions, by developing junior colleagues, middle or senior leaders. The consequences of building capacity were sometimes not always exactly as anticipated and the linkages with other factors became apparent as leaders could then highlight some of the benefits that the extra capacity had brought about. Already, even at such an early point within the research analysis, it is possible to identify certain key processes, (such as building capacity to enable systemic leadership) which, when executed in a particular order, is seen to bring about school improvement.

3. Creating a 'can do' culture whereby staff challenge assumptions.

This factor raises the idea of challenging assumptions, whereby the respondent decides that the status quo is not an option, and therefore it involves acting differently to create a new culture. This requires the leader to deal skilfully with those colleagues who are resistant to change.

Respondents 1, 3 and 7 referred most frequently to challenging assumptions. They each could state phrases that had made them feel quite emotional about their response. These three schools probably face the most challenging circumstances out of all eight of the schools visited. They were also near the bottom of the Local Authority league table at one time or another and the respondents felt strongly that the culture had to change in order for any sort of improvements to happen. They faced such issues as staff in respondent 1's school saying,

> ' There were barriers with staff, who looked out of the windows saying, 'They come from those council houses, and they're on free school meals, they can't learn, won't learn, most of them don't speak English, and I taught his dad and he was no use either'.

Respondent 3 inherited a school where 40% of year 11 were absent, and the staff were happy they did not attend. Whilst in contrast at the same school at the same time, ' *Nice kids got reasonable results so staff were reluctant to change.* '

Respondent 7 wanted to recruit staff who knew how to deal with young people and help solve their problems and work with them. In challenging those staff who were not able to come on board with the new culture, respondent 7 felt that staff had to be tackled if they refused to change, yet they could choose *'to leave with dignity'*. Respondent 8 reiterated *'challenging underperformance with teaching staff is critical.'*

However perhaps respondent 2 summarised the issue most eloquently when he said

> 'The bedazzled, yeah I'll go with you. The bemused, they think about it and then they go with you. The bedraggled, the ones who won't or can't be bothered.'

He knew which staff had to be challenged and which ones would fit and agree with his philosophy, who would embrace it and go forward at a pace. He was confronted with staff who said

'Well, these students can't do this, we've given them a chance to do their coursework and that's it, if they don't turn up it's their problem.'

However his response was,

'As enabling adults, as professionals, we have to go beyond that. My job is to see that the conditions are ripe for development.'

Respondents 1, 2 3 and 8 made reference to not just challenging assumptions but taking one step further, this resulted in making unpopular decisions, which were often not met with enthusiasm because it required colleagues to act differently. Respondent 1 stated

'If you do shoot you might score, if you don't shoot you won't score.'

He talked of the determination of the team, as did respondent 3 and about aiming to be the best. Respondent one had made unpopular decisions about single sex groups, the timing of the school day and not going with the majority. He described it as

' not a smooth passage, 60% of the staff were against some single sex groupings, 40% were for it. I went against the majority and used my professional judgment and intuition.'

This demonstrated the determination of the leader to take a calculated risk, who openly declared that although he consulted staff about their opinions, he ultimately felt it was *'not necessarily always right to go with the democratic.'*

Respondent 2 tackled an underperforming Science Department and the staff who did not agree that students came first. He consistently referred to staff 'raising their game' and his annual focus was to raise standards in a key department where he felt that staff underperformance was a concern. The direct nature of the headteacher made it perfectly clear to the researcher that mediocrity in his school would not be tolerated. Options were given those staff who did not immediately buy into the new culture.

'And that's our line. We will support people who want to do it, but if you don't want to do it then don't come to my school. I know that's hard, but I often say to people, if you are not happy with something you can raise the issue and work constructively with us to change things..... or you can leave. But don't moan about it and do nothing, because we haven't got time.'

Respondent 3 tackled the 'club culture' he inherited from his predecessor and brought in fresh people. Respondent 8 tackled the inconsistency in lesson planning across departments, by bringing in a new system which was computerized and meant that the planning process became transparent and encouraged professionals to share materials. This did mean that staff were often being challenged to come out of their comfort zone and in doing so they had to act and think differently. It appears that this knowledge of common goals and then the leader demonstrating a strong degree of challenge is necessary as some essential first steps, even before identifying exactly what action to take. This suggests that headteachers need time to assess their school in the first instance, to have clarity about their goals, and then reflect upon which assumptions to challenge in order to be able to change the culture and create a new school ethos.

4. Reflection by staff to devise creative solutions to solve problems

This relates to the respondent being reflective and trying to engender situations where staff become inquisitive about how children can learn best, and then naturally become engaged in strategic conversations about teaching and learning.

Respondent 5 had the highest frequency evidencing reflection. He made reference to continually posing questions to his staff, so that he had a thorough understanding of the school rather than starting his headship by making unnecessary changes. His major challenge was to *'move from a very visible head with quite a direct style to a system of distributed leadership.'* He took a strong view that *'Good teaching does not always mean good learning'* in that he had a focus of *'improving our own working practices'* and did this by creating triads, who conducted peer observations to look out for good practice, and then used coaching techniques to develop colleagues. He supported this strategy by closing the school earlier every Wednesday, and lengthening the other days, to compensate for the creation of a two hour weekly staff development and training period. This encouraged reflection, and at a practical level allowed staff the time to devise learning plans and amend schemes of work to take into account new ideas. He gave a clear message to staff that reflection linked to action and intervention, could be a powerful tool for the school to make improvements in their practice.

The only other respondent to make significant reference to this factor was Respondent 2, who asked four questions when he went into lessons, to make staff reflect on what they were teaching. Each member of staff is asked about their learning objectives and also learning expectations, together with homework records for the class and evidence of using prior attainment data. Their responses were collated by the headteacher and then fed into the discussion and debate at leadership team meetings, to allow senior colleagues the opportunity to reflect on where good teaching was occurring consistently and also to pinpoint where practice needed to improve.

Respondent 8 had the lowest frequency of this sub-code which was surprising since his tone, and measured response to questioning demonstrated a clear ease and ability to talk about the ten years he had spent in post of a community school with year-on-year improvement. It may have been that reflection was intrinsic to his way of working and that he did no need to carve out special time to be reflective. Respondent 4, through personal reflection, had come to the conclusion that one underperforming department did not need a new course to teach, but needed a new leader to drive the team forward and bring them together. There was much evidence to support the idea of bringing teams together to have learning conversations, which gave staff the time and space to reflect on their practice. However, therefore there is insufficient evidence in the eight transcripts to support this factor, standing alone, as being as important as other factors, for those respondents in the sample. However it is noted that reflection linked with other factors may have some value, and this inter-relationship could trigger part of a cycle of processes which are worthy of consideration.

5. Innovative curriculum developments and personalisation

This is concerned with classroom practice, what is actually happening on the ground, involving the teacher and secondary age learners, that can make a real difference. This also includes references to devising new curriculum opportunities suited to the needs of that particular child or group of children, which lead to pupil progress.

All the participants could highlight actual strategies which they had deployed to raise standards. Respondent 1 termed them 'classroom interventions' and more specifically respondents 3, 4, and 8 discussed in detail their investment in technology and what impact this had been on classroom practice and teaching. Respondent 4 had tried to:

> 'improve the access to ICT and to develop the teaching and learning in classrooms two years ago. There was a whole school focus on developing a pedagogy behind interactive whiteboards and developing resources...... with a varying degree of success. The fact that everyone had one did not mean that they necessarily all used them appropriately. There was a huge increase in use though, and it did impact on pupil motivation, which did take the school forward on many fronts.'

Respondent 3 had purchased tablet personal computers and data projectors in every classroom. He described the growing confidence of children in using ICT;

> 'children pass the tablet PC round the class and are accustomed to transmitting the information to the whiteboard so that everyone sees their work. Having IT in music creates a real buzz... that's the reality now.'

The enthusiasm for new ways of learning by children became particularly apparent in the interviews with respondent 2, 3 and 5. They were not only keen to increase the attainment of young people but also to ensure that learning became an enjoyable and meaningful experience.

Respondent 8 had a focus on making lessons much more interactive, with technology and digital applications being integrated into lesson planning. It is interesting to note that as a Technology specialist college, there is an expectation that the extra funding allocated to such schools is directed towards 'cutting edge' technology to make improvements to drive up standards in all subjects and not just Information Technology. Respondent 8 had

> 'introduced Learning to Learn as a separate course, to develop the idea of how to learn and being equipped to learn.'

Respondent 5 had some extremely interesting reflections on this matter. He stated,

> 'We have highly challenging young people, very structured teaching that minimizes disruption but it limits their maturity and their independent learning. We need to refocus our efforts on learning.'

He felt that in tightening up the structures of delivery and insisting on three part lessons with clear objectives, children's behaviour had improved, yet conversely their independent thinking skills and their overall learning had not improved at the same pace. To respond to this challenge he commented that all staff, including senior leaders needed to *'critique and refine our pedagogy'* This implies that there needs to be a refocus away from observing 'good teachers' towards increasing the amount of learning in classrooms, so that children know what they are learning and can plot their own progression towards personal targets.

Respondent 1 has refocused the staff on creating less passive learners, with more peer learning and less didactic teaching. Respondent 1 reiterated that *'If I don't get impact what is the point in intervening ?'* He felt that the school had implemented numerous methods of supporting young people, but if there were no tangible improvements then the strategies had to be redirected elsewhere.

Although respondent 6 and 8 mentioned less frequently how the activities in classrooms had changed over the past three to five years, they had a high frequency of the internal systems deployed, and were keen to describe quality assurance mechanisms. The purpose of this was to ensure that what was going on had made impact, although they made fewer actual references to the detail of any classroom strategies. They felt it was the role of the head to evaluate the practices and check that goals are being met, rather than have in-depth knowledge of the actual strategies at an operational level. This links in to the later factor which deals with the style of the leader, and how they prioritise which activities they wish to be involved in and which to delegate to others.

Respondents 1 and 2 made the most references to actual classroom practice. They regularly 'walked the school' and respondent 1 called this *'dipstick monitoring'*. This will be elaborated upon within the later section which deals with system leadership. Respondent 2 made reference to objective led lessons, with three or four parts, peer learning, and group discussions, all of which he felt had made lessons more interesting

and had driven up standards and raised achievement. Respondent 1 felt that they had made an effort to be 'sharp and effective' with their classroom practice:

> ' Students I think are less passive learners, there is more group discussion, more peer learning taking place and less didactic teaching going on in the classroom.'

Respondent 2 admitted to a clear focus on outputs as measures of performance, initially. Yet his next step is to *'tackle learning.'*

Respondent 7 felt that the greatest compliment he had ever received came from an external researcher who visited the school to audit enterprise in classrooms. He commented that *'classrooms had a primary feel about them, they were full of stimulus for learners.'* The headteacher had managed to create this by using 20 days in the year as topic days, to build teaching and learning capacity, where teams of staff from across subject areas had to work together. It involved them choosing a theme, working with one of the five ASTs and applying their subject knowledge to somebody else's teaching technique. Staff were left with no alternative to collaborate, devise materials and plan together.

Respondent 7 felt that an 'individualised' curriculum had really made a significant impact on improvement, as this valued everybody and switched children on to learning. Respondent 1 and 7 both felt that they were ahead of the game, in that they were 'personalising' the curriculum before the term even existed. Respondent 1 stated that

> 'changing the curriculum to a flexible and alternative one, had made a huge difference once four pathways had started to run through.'

All the respondents felt that a 'one size fits all' curriculum was no longer appropriate for secondary age students. The ways in which they had diversified the curriculum offer varied from school to school, such as pathways, early entry to some examinations or more vocational courses for students. This required staff to put the learner at the heart of the process, and these changes to the curriculum had meant new challenges for staff, yet there was a general consensus about a commitment by the leader to maximize every child's potential, by making whatever changes they felt were necessary.

6. An achievement focus, using assessments and showing pupils how they can improve.

This factor refers to the use of pupil data to generate discussions about where the child is performing, what their target is, and how a child may need to bridge the gap, by giving specific guidance about how to improve. This is often termed 'Assessment for Learning,' and is very different from the teacher assessing performance of a child at a given point in time, which is done 'to' the child. This code was utilized when the respondent made reference to having an 'achievement focus.' However the data demonstrated that school leaders have a number of different ways of interpreting this.

Each of the eight respondents made clear reference to developing a focus on pupil achievement, and made reference to the effective use of accurate data on pupil progress. Respondent 1 was very clear that

> 'previously we didn't make it particularly clear to students what the assessments were for..... they were purely and simply for the teachers to record in their markbooks and devise targets and they didn't share the information with the kids as much as they ought to have done.'

He compared this with the situation today,

> 'Youngsters now know what they are seeking to achieve. We show them where they are heading and more importantly they know far better how to improve.'

Respondent 1, 2 and 8 made many references to school data and its use. They could recite percentages with ease, recounting which group of students had reached their targets and what proportion had converted to reach the desired level of output set as the schools targets. This may have been because all three headteachers are consultants to other schools who are performing less well, and so a knowledge of their own school data, and that of others is crucial as part of this role. Each respondent referred to the pressure on schools to meet targets agreed with the Local Authority, which were becoming more and more challenging each year, regardless of the intake. Respondent 2 stated, *'Outputs are measures of performance.....not measurement of learning.'* Respondent 6 was clear about his purpose of using data, *'We want the coherence of data to inform our actions for improvement.'* Respondent 1 stated *'attainment has been*

transformed, through the confident use of data' and the very first improvement he had made was *'the comprehensive use of student data at all levels.'*

Respondent 8 gives a slightly different perspective on the same theme of personalising learning and using data to improve the performance of learners. He felt that the spotlight has to move away from just concentrating on the narrow band of pupils that are astride the C/D and U/G borders because they are the significant grades which affect top line percentage figures and value added scores. If the school truly values the individual then they need to widen out their support, and ensure that teaching encompasses every child being able to achieve their potential.

Respondents 3 and 4 referred to outputs and targets achieved but did not mention their internal use of data. It appeared to be more frequently mentioned, if the headteacher believed he/she had expertise in this field, could interpret it with ease and had an obvious fondness of data. For some this was evidently the case, in particularly Respondent 1 whose body language was very positive, leaning forward, and animated, with an enthusiastic tone when he spoke about this topic. This ties in with Caldwell's research on 'exhilirating' leaders.

However, he, like all the other respondents could recite their end of Key Stage output data, and what this said about which students had made most progress and who had made least gains. They all did feel that making the curriculum diet more appropriate to young people, together with the knowledge in detail of the data, had the effect of engaging them more readily. This, combined with offering almost bespoke packages of support to individuals, to overcome barriers to learning, meant that the expectation on students was to improve.

7. Internal systems which serve to support improvement strategies.

This factor is concerned with any internal structures or monitoring systems which serve to underpin improvements, so that the school is able to ascertain the impact of strategies and activities.

The internal systems were varied and referred to many times in every interview apart from Respondent 7. It could be that this respondent had recently retired, and therefore he was not regularly interfacing and using the systems to the same extent as other respondents who were actually in their schools as the interviews were conducted. Alternatively he could have not felt that systems and structures were sufficiently important enough to mention, or that the strategies he had implemented were so well embedded he did not need to describe them. Each of the other seven schools had refined their systems to a point where the leadership team could provide a good evaluation of activities, tasks and strategies, and furnish the headteacher with some high quality of information. In most instances it was held in one place, often with the assistance of a computerized management information system (MIS) and was used to chart progress against a plan and then direct the next part of the strategic process. These experienced leaders relied on emergent patterns and trends, to influence their subsequent actions. The frequency of response did vary from person to person. As indicated, Respondent 7 did not mention internal systems although it was implicit in his description of handling data. It was Respondent 4 who clarified why the systems were such a crucial factor to whole school improvement :

> 'To ensure that good processes are in place, rather than it being left to chance. The underpinning systems actually support what you are trying to do, and makes sure it is happening at all levels.'

Other respondents referred to systems which managed data, such as Respondent 1 who said the *'structures are in place....it gives us a stringent diagnosis on which to base action.'*

Respondent 6 and 8 referred to the different systems in place. Respondent 6 highlighted 'performance tracking' and 'quality assurance' and stated that *'You need the right systems to make sure they (staff) perform.'* He felt that internal systems and accountability had to be linked to actual action in the classroom and this then becomes part of the good repertoire staff have at their disposal. The school termed this the 'Teaching and Learning Challenge' which provides a baseline of performance to ensure

that standards in classrooms remain consistently high. One spin-off has been to enhance the quality and cohesion of teams and which led to increased departmental sharing and making a positive impact on subject staff.

Respondent 8 made reference to a *'mature tracking system'* and a method to track pupils with special needs called the *'Emmaeus'* and a focus on *'timetabled meetings purely to focus on school development priorities.'* Once again these underpinned actions the school had implemented to make improvements. It also meant that schools were basing their evaluations on evidence and not relying upon subjective feelings that a strategy had been successful.

Respondent 1 agreed and described one of his systems as a *'sophisticated target setting process, allowing us to monitor and track student progress.'* He has used elements of this process to share with partner schools as part of the Leading Edge initiative which offers schools some funding if they wish to develop their own in-house response to it. There are some links here between an internal system which evolves from the use of data, because the headteacher feels it is important to have a good grasp of data as part of realizing a common goal. Then, as a system leader he networks throughout the East of England with other schools to spread the word which in turn allows schools to develop their own in-house models and thus make improvements to their own systems. In some cases this involves other key players in the host school, in this case the head of mathematics, in schools of Respondent 1 and 3. A development of their role is to be seen as the expert practitioner who has been innovative, created a successful school improvement process and is willing to share their ideas with others. This appears to be a new factor in school improvement, whereby distributed leadership is being used to network and spread good practice beyond the host school, and by using other staff at senior and middle level, they are becoming regionally acclaimed leaders in this field.

Respondents 1, 2 and 8 had a common theme which appeared once the system was well embedded and staff and students felt at ease with its use. This was whereby an aspect of

the system is given new terminology. This is more easily described by explaining two of the processes, which operate in these schools.

Respondent 1 has a traffic light system which charts pupil progress towards targets. The nearer the child approaches the target, the colours on the spreadsheet change. This is called 'Going Green', as when a target is met, the colour green signifies their success. This is a very visual way of showing progress, and has facilitated discussions between pupils and staff to help them close the gap between actual current performance and a student's potential. It has made a huge impact in the Mathematics Department which was previously underperforming, but since having adopted this method as one of the strategies to raise attainment there has been a marked improvement in the faculty performance over the last two years. As a consequence the school has achieved mathematics and computing status, and an outstanding OFSTED grade. An integral part to the school's staff training sessions is the way in which the mathematics team take a lead role in sharing their 'cutting edge' practice. They provide clear systems for other subject departments, where children are underperforming, by demonstrating how students' monitoring of assessment and progress can be interactively colour coded and shared with pupils.

In the school led by Respondent 2, which has over 2000 pupils and is the fourth largest comprehensive in England, they have developed has a system called the 4 Is. These are information gathering, identifying where you can make a difference, intervention to get the child back on track, and the last one is impact, which defines what difference the action has made. As part of the identification they use the data from their 'Praising Stars' which are the rewards given to students, recorded on an individual basis. This focus on achievement and data links very clearly to a common school goal as described by the headteacher, *'what we need to do is to improve performance across the college, this helps us do just that.'*

The idea of using a system to underpin a strategy has the effect of reinforcing a particular common goal the school is trying to achieve. This link was clearly identified

by respondent 1, and can demonstrate the huge increase in examination performance from 57% 5 A-C grades to 90% over a three year period. It was felt that unless there were well defined systems and structures in a large school, there would be confusion and a lack of consistency which could be detrimental to the school making such advancements. Equally some of the smaller schools in the sample relied on systems to ensure accountability and certain delivery of key initiatives.

8. Engaging student voice.

This section of the analysis attempts to identify to what extent the eight school leaders take account of the views of pupils, and whether student voice is evidenced as a factor linked to school improvement. Hargreaves (2004) believes this is intrinsic to 'Deep Learning.'

Respondent 8 connects the use of an internal system for recording progress with the voice of pupils. He has a system of tracking pupil performance which is summed up by four words, before, towards, static and met. They have had discussions about the word 'beyond' if a student should exceed their target, but to date this has not been adopted as a fifth descriptor.

What the research highlighted, is that these three systems which have now been running for two years and are embedded with pupils have become part of the school ethos and culture. Respondent 8 described the unabashed way in which students talk about how far along the tracking system they are. The language of the system is used routinely by pupils, *'How many mets have you got?'* a child asks another, who replies *'I've got two befores and three mets.'*

Respondent 8 felt that this is much more than merely asking students informally about how they feel they are progressing, or even having a formal one to one review of their progress at a certain point in the year. The students are able to describe where their own performance lies within the parameters of the school system, and there is a desire to achieve an understanding of the systems used to track their progress. The students

themselves are an intrinsic part of the process which informs them about how they are improving.

This is echoed by Respondent 2 who noted that when the praising stars are published half-termly on plasma screens around the college students openly discuss, *'How many praising stars have you got?'* his friend replies *'I've got seven, that means I won't be identified'*.

Again this shows that the students are keen to improve themselves as there are consequences which they understand will happen, should they be 'identified.'

Respondent 1 referred to students who approach the teacher at the end of the lesson to ask *'Have I gone green now, after doing that piece of work?'* This shows that the pupil is motivated sufficiently to discover the outcome of the assessment and his effort means that he has reached his potential in that particular piece of work, which equates with 'Going Green.'

This common theme suggests that pupils know exactly how they are performing and can articulate it to others. Respondent 8 described it as a new emergent *'educational language'*. This appears to be a new and powerful tool for young people to describe their own improving performance and came to light through probing questioning in the interviews.

Once students feel empowered to be able to converse about their performance in terminology that means something to them, and know how to reach their next target it appears that this is the point at which the improvement comes upwards from the students, almost at a grass roots level. This is in reverse to teachers telling students their targets and leaving it up to them to achieve them. As Respondent 2 said animatedly at the end of the interview,

> 'If you can have over 2000 students talking knowledgeably about their own progress, that can't be bad.'

There was some acknowledgement that listening and responding to the views of students gives them a sense of ownership to their learning. This was acknowledged by Respondent 2 who had a school motto of 'students first.' He stated, *'We talk to students, we have high expectations of them, we ask 'How are you getting on?'* He added,

> 'We have changed our structures to reflect this, and everything we do should be geared up for them. It doesn't mean that they can do what they like, but what it means is that we should put them first in our thinking. Schools don't owe us a living - We are here for students. That's a big message that's been pushed from day one.'

However, the factor 'Student Voice' was the one element used the least, and its frequency in total across all eight interviews was less than the frequency of use for one sub-code such as 'achievement focus,' by a single respondent. Respondents 1,4,5 and 7 did not refer to using student voice at all. Respondents 3 and 6 made one mention of student voice, where each of them had a student council and had conducted surveys on their students to find out views about certain issues. However none of these two respondents linked this to improvement, as the main purpose of the strategy was solely a mechanism for collecting views.

Upon reflection this factor could be considered a very new idea, and perhaps insufficient time has passed for schools to be able to assess the impact of student voice on their improvement. An alternative explanation could be that the questions in the semi-structured interview may not have been sufficiently clear to elicit a response to student voice. It could also be that at this moment in time there is insufficient information emerging from the analysis to suggest that these particular respondents felt that in their case, student voice is not currently one of the most important factors for school improvement.

9. Seizing opportunities for internal purposes.

This factor was concerned with the extent to which the leader understood the school context and managed to seize opportunities that did fit with their agreed vision and goals. In some cases it was conducted through their ability to attract specific funding or

grants to push along an initiative, which will make a difference and thus create improvements. There is also a focus on how the leader takes a national initiative imposed on schools from Government thinking, or a central influence, and then shapes it to their advantage to fit their context and add to their portfolio of improvement.

Originally a new emergent code was added to deal with phrases or sentences that related to new accommodation, but with so few references it was felt better to incorporate it within 'seizing opportunities'. All the references to improving buildings and learning spaces were linked to leaders wanting to create an opportunity to improve the conditions for learning. Overall the frequency of this factor, seizing opportunities to promote improvement, was surprisingly low. Respondent 2 and 6 made no real reference to this, but with close scrutiny of the transcript it appeared that instead they referred to strategies which had been devised by them to resolve a problem. One such example was tackling low levels of literacy. This meant that simultaneously the school improved the literacy of its weakest pupils and also responded positively to the National Strategy, which places the expectation on schools for children to progress two levels over a three year period. It may be that at this particular point in time these were the 'hot' priorities which were felt to be making an impact whereas other opportunities may have been of secondary importance. Respondent 7 openly stated; *'You really have to learn about the place, the situation and the context.'*

This was in making reference to dealing with underperforming staff, where he felt it was essential to provide your own response to difficult and challenging personnel issues. He did not feel that a blueprint of ideas could be taken away from one school and replicated in a different situation in the knowledge it would work to the same degree elsewhere. He supported a view that although the same opportunities may be out there, schools are at different points on the improvement journey, stating:

> 'What is right for one may be completely wrong for another. Schools operate in different contexts with different leaders. There is a lot more value in the concept of successful people at all levels. It is often better to spread the word, look at the practice of others, and pick out the best bits to adapt to your school.'

Respondent 2 and 8 had both made conscious attempts to improve the condition of the buildings. Respondent 8 had managed to attract £10.5 million of funding from the Government and the Catholic Diocese to replace most of the teaching accommodation. A new technology block, learning centre and a main hall were the first phase to be completed. His philosophy was that children deserved to be educated in :

> 'bright welcoming environments, conducive to learning and good relationships. This means that the potential for conflict is reduced.'

Respondent 1 felt that his refurbishment programme had paid dividends and the opening of a new sports hall for school and community use was a major achievement. He felt that schools, far too often 'make do' with second rate equipment. He felt that these improvements to the environment had given the school a 'positive lift'. It may be coincidental that the school received an outstanding OFSTED report just after these alterations had been completed. This was echoed by Respondent 5 who had secured a new build under the Government project Building Schools for the Future. He felt the challenge was to come up with a design that has the extra capacity to transform learning, rather than merely accept a ready made examplar from a handbook.

Respondent 3 had an interesting view in that he believed that if a leader is clear about their common goals, it is easier to seize the opportunities and attract funding which will suit the purpose. He had set up his own software company within the school to resource new mathematics schemes and this was delivered via an electronic learning centre funded from some of the profits of sales. By building capacity within his leadership team, it allowed him greater flexibility to be ready to get involved when new projects were being floated. Often he was approached at an early stage as he was well known to be keen and receptive to trialing materials to promote the advancement of learning through new technologies.

Many of the opportunities seized tended to be related to building capacity and have therefore been mentioned at an earlier point in this chapter, and will be developed further under the later section where the inter-relationships are described in more detail. Respondent 1 had supported his Personal Assistant to retrain as a business teacher to be

able to teach Information Technology, as he had struggled to recruit specialist staff in this subject. This had been successful in the long term, but in the short term it had involved offering support and training to ensure she was capable to teach the higher grade work in the GCSE syllabus. Respondent 4 similarly had appointed a deputy head from an internal field, but had found that some internal appointments were not working out as well as he had hoped, because these staff, in new leadership roles, still had a tendency to be too operational and insufficiently strategic. Respondent 8 also described the limitations that the delegated budget from his Local Authority placed upon him. As one of the poorest funded authorities, the school struggled to be able to create and fund additional posts. The school was seen as 'comfortable' by staff and so there was little movement outwards to other schools. The new building provided a pleasant environment in which to work and colleagues enjoyed good relationships within the school. The headteacher used the funding generated from his consultancy work to support new additional training and development grants to diversify the somewhat rigid staffing structure.

10. Learning centred leadership

This factor refers to learning centred leadership, and the extent to which headteachers in the sample tackled problems and how they lead. It became increasingly clear as the interviews progressed the importance headteachers placed on their wider role in working alongside leaders of other schools as a consultant or in a formal partnership arrangement, but this aspect will be covered more fully in the next section, system leaders.

There are many examples of the behaviour, attitude and personal qualities which highlight their leadership style and how this appears 'on the ground.' Respondents 1,2, 6 and 7 made most frequent references to this, sometimes in great detail, about the far reaching changes each one of them has had to make. Respondent 2 referred to his walks around the school, dropping in on lessons and asking the same questions about learning objectives, learning expectations, and use of assessment data to elicit a *'feel for where we are.'*

He explains how he dealt with an underperforming department in that the leadership team conducted a Stoll analysis on each of the 18 staff in that particular subject area. He highlighted those who were positive and strong, those who were strong but negative, those who were weak but positive and those who were weak and negative. The last group were placed on the informal stages of the capability procedure with a support package to improve their performance. This gives insight into the leadership style of this headteacher, and fits in with the earlier evidence, where in challenging staff there were some teachers who felt uncomfortable with this ethos. He commented:

> 'You know... there are people who fit with the philosophy, embrace it and are up for change and go forward at a pace. Others will hang around for a bit and see what's happening saying, Is this bloke for real ? Is he really meaning this? Then they'll go with you. And then there are those who, unfortunately, whatever you do, they won't go with you. They are the real issue.'

Conversely respondent 7 felt that underperforming staff in his school had to be tackled in a sensitive way. He felt that pursuing capability issues fragmented teams, and he believed his staff were very cohesive, *'Cut one off and the others bled.'*
He preferred to concentrate on getting the culture right without blame, and stated:

> 'We made mistakes and openly declared them, to strengthen teams. I always went out looking forward to the positive rather than back at the negative.'

He believed that a leader has to not always follow the rules because, *'You don't know what you can get away with until you try.'* He suggests that the most successful leaders are the ones who do not replicate a training course solution, or adhere to a training manual for headteachers.

Respondent 1 reflects about being realistic about what a leader can impact upon. He says

> 'You instinctively know about what you can attempt to do something about. We don't walk on water and we don't solve all the problems.'

Yet he clarifies that one part of his leadership repertoire, is as he sums up *'being confident in my beliefs so that it's not always about going with the democratic.'* He personally admits to having moved to a more democratic style when appropriate yet,

'I don't lose sight of the fact that if I have to take unpopular decisions against the majority and make my professional judgement, that's what I'm paid for and I'll do that.'

Respondent 6 emphasised the need for a leader to have all the necessary information at his fingertips so that he or she can move between more operational work and then discuss and agree upon strategic priorities. Respondents 3,4,5 and 8 mentioned their leadership style less. Although it may have been implicit in some of their other answers linked to other codes there was insufficient evidence to make any clear conclusions about half of the sample. This may have been that the questions were not adequately probing from the researcher to tease out details, or that they were unable to comment having not completed any self-analysis on their leadership style.

11. Systemic leadership

This is where headteachers are committed to the development of other schools beyond their own and are part of external networks which can be crucial to their improvements. This final factor, supported strongly in the literature review, especially by Hopkins, (2004) was the degree to which leaders were externally supported and how they network with other schools in order to improve. This underpins the belief that even the most successful schools can learn from elements of good practice in another establishment, and sharing expertise can benefit two schools rather than one.

There is a wealth of evidence in the research material highlighting a vast array of networks which exist, at both a local, regional and national level. It is fascinating to discover which ones they subscribe to, what are the reasons behind their participation, and the perceived benefits linked to improvement. It did appear as a potential single topic that could be studied as a research proposal in itself, and this will be elaborated upon in the final chapter of the thesis when dealing with recommendations.

Every respondent could highlight relationships which they felt were beneficial.

Respondent 4 had taken on the role of School Improvement Partner in a neighbouring authority and felt *'It is interesting to see other examples of how it is done elsewhere.'*

This was perhaps the least detailed reference of what benefits the partnership had. At the other extreme end of the spectrum Respondent 2 has recently been nominated as a National Leader in Education. This involves placing members of his leadership team in another secondary school to drive forward improvements at a faster rate in the partner school. However his nomination had not been confirmed at the time of the interview and therefore no action had been taken as a result at this point in time. Respondents 1 and 2 were interviewed as the first two participants in the research and therefore as time has elapsed since that date, one extension of the research could be to revisit the school leaders and highlight what further developments have occurred since the interviews took place.

Respondent 1 is also a School Improvement Partner and a consultant head who writes reports on other schools. He also works as the lead school in a collaboration called a Leading Edge Partnership of five secondary schools, and identified the success of the joint venture as being dependent on having a clear focus and inbuilt trust between participant headteachers. Their development of strategies to improve performance of target groups, completing a directory of best practice and hosting training sessions on data interpretation and learning styles have been well received by participants. He has enjoyed the stimulus of learning from other leaders and taking away ideas which can be adapted to his own inner city context. Conversely respondent 7 feels that sometimes strategies may be unique to a particular context, and it might not work so well elsewhere. He prefers to *'spread the word and pick out the best bits'* and felt a personal motivation by observing and *'visiting a series of schools who have made the big leap in improvement.'*

The networks generated through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust were felt to have most value. These were highlighted by every respondent, except Respondent 6, who made a slight reference to being a representative on a steering group, to keep up to

date with Science college developments. Respondent 3, 5, 7 and 8 all participated in the North of England Achievement Network and this had been well facilitated by a consultant who had co-ordinated visits to improving schools, but each day had a particular focus. It was incumbent upon the headteacher to agree which member of the leadership team was most suited to attend the visit. Headteachers felt that they had gleaned a number of practical ideas. Respondent 5 was there when the group was first set up and described one of the starting points for the establishment of the network. It formally joined together schools, gave them £6000 to trial new ideas they saw elsewhere, and he agreed to join the association because he felt it was there *'to grow a future generation of measured risktakers who exhibited leadership by stealth.'*

In addition to this the Raising Attainment Transforming Learning Programme employs respondents 1,2,3, 5 and 8 as consultants to broker support to other schools. There is evidence to suggest that these headteachers did not feel it was about weak and strong schools. Respondent 8 felt it was his job to *'bring in new ideas and convince others to bring them on board.'* It was not always the consultant who had the answer to their problem, but a range of schools with capacity to give support and some expertise could be one way forward.

Both Respondents 3 and 8 felt that the catholic networks had been useful in terms of linking with schools with a similar ethos. Respondent 6 chose the regional opportunities open to him with care. He tried to select those that would offer him extra insight into an area which was particularly relevant to his context. One such example was the national working party set up to consider the issue of Care Matters.' Since his school has the highest proportion of 'Looked after children' in public care in the district, he felt it would be useful to have a say and perhaps influence the policy to emerge in the Green Paper. He hoped that this in turn would have a positive spin-off by having real benefits for his school community.

Respondent 6 also felt it was important for the headteacher to strive for a balance between being in school and visible, and also working externally to contribute and

benefit from networks. In working with a number of different audiences he felt it is vital to remember that ensuring high quality teaching and learning in his own school is the most important. *'It's up to you to manage your time and commitment.'* His primary concern though, was to be clear about the reason for his involvements out of school, so that they had benefits to the children in his school.

Respondents 6 and 7 felt that if the priorities of the school are well known, then it is easier to reject or accept opportunities which presented themselves. This confidence informs what would, and would not fit with their ethos and context. Situations arose when a leader had seized a national opportunity, such as a building initiative, a working party or a pilot project, and these can be a possible vehicle to deliver a strand of the school development plan.

Respondent 3 acknowledged the demands it placed on him, and stated that some networks, *' make unreasonable demands and place increasing pressures on you.'*
Therefore although the majority of the leaders felt it was important to work in some other role beyond their own school, they felt that it was a fine balancing act and they had to be certain that the school could function well without them. This is another set of linking factors where the injection of extra capacity can sustain the workings of the leader in their broader remit as system leaders. However on balance since every respondent demonstrated an open commitment to working collaboratively, and being part of a number of networks, informal and formal, local and national. These associations facilitated leaders to be able to conduct other roles whilst working beyond their own school.

The research did suggest that the respondents within the sample felt that systemic leadership was extremely important in order to make significant improvements. Respondent 6 encapsulated his views on this topic succinctly, *'It's totally a part of what I do.'*

Additional factors outside the framework

A further two factors emerged in a minor way, in that some of the respondents did mention them and felt they had some significance. The first was working with parents and the community, the second was the introduction of rewards and incentives. Respondents 2, 3 and 6 felt that bringing on board their community was important and that this gave them the chance to vocalize their goals. All three schools were oversubscribed and therefore they were in a position to refuse admission to a child if they lived outside the catchment area. Schools 2 and 6 also had significantly high rates excluding children for breaches of their behaviour code. School 2 had a waiting list of students who wanted to attend the school, but were slightly out of the agreed catchment area. When places became available due to a child moving out of the area or else being permanently excluded for breach of the school's discipline code, then these students on the waiting list could be admitted.

The references to rewards and incentives were mentioned by Respondents 1, 2 and 3. They felt that pupils needed to be absolutely clear about sanctions that occurred as a consequence of their actions, and how rewards could motivate students to perform better, thus linking to improvements. These two factors were outside the original framework and therefore it is important to include them as they were evidenced by the respondents.

Respondent 1 had his own views on school improvement, which summarise the key factors in his opinion:

> 'I think it is multi-faceted. You can put in millions of pounds of new technology, hardware and software, but if you don't have the talented staff, teaching, leading, monitoring, and encouraging them, then you won't get improvement.'

This highlights the complexity of school improvement and the variety and range of processes that have emerged through a discussion and critique of the conceptual framework, included in this chapter.

New Thinking

Inter-related factors

A unique aspect of this research is the identification of key factors to lever school improvement, but more importantly the inter-relationship between factors. It was never the intention to merely use the interviews as small stand alone case studies, but rather to focus on the main factors which appear across respondent transcripts. The order of implementation was also noted so that the research took into account an assimilation of the frequency and quality of responses.

In some cases there was deliberate and conscious decision to put into action certain processes in a specific order because an issue had to be resolved, such as an immediate strategy to change something which was evidently not acceptable, such as poor performance in a large department. Therefore one factor followed another. In other cases the respondent did not make reference to the fact that they had knowingly executed the strategies in a particular order, but they almost intuitively pushed through a process. One example of this was given by Respondent 2. He started out with a **common goal**, clearly articulated by different means to everyone, and that was: *'We don't want to be a one hit wonder.'* It was at the point when the interview transcript was scrutinised a second time in depth that the commitment to his common goal and sustaining the improvements he had made in one year was followed by successive factors from the framework as outlined.

His aim was to sustain the big leap in improvement he had achieved the previous year. In order to do this he **built capacity** and created a larger leadership team. One of the primary functions of this extended team is to spread the word, and **generate conversations about teaching and learning** and how good teaching, and pupil learning can get even better. This in turn makes more people committed to improvement and drives up performance, which then **feeds back in to the articulation of the next common goal**, and so the cycle continues. However as some staff felt quite

uncomfortable with this approach as it became necessary to step out of their comfort zone, this involved the headteacher **challenging assumptions** if they openly would not come on board. If the school was to continue on this upward trend staff had to subscribe to his belief of 'students first.'

Respondent 3 highlighted a different order to adopting certain key factors in succession. He **built capacity** first with a view to using those new like-minded recruits who felt confident to **challenge the assumptions of others**, which has the consequence of **reinforcing the common goals**, and placing improvement or every child at the heart of the school's agenda. He acknowledged that he alone could not make the school improve. The new senior staff had the credibility to deliver, they were vocal and keen to make changes on a number of fronts by bringing people along, but always stating the benefits for all children, not just a few targeted pupils.

Respondent 4 **built capacity** from within his staff, having little choice as he had difficulty attracting high quality external candidates, to fill his vacancies. As a result of this he was able to develop some key players on the staff and **then reflected with them** about the next course of action. What emerged was a system of coaching and developmental opportunities for a wider group of staff thus giving some staff a high profile to work alongside colleagues to eliminate underachievement. They felt re-energised in new roles, knowing the challenges and issues, and felt supported by the headteacher, and thus felt empowered to **implement changes at the learning level** with immediate effect. Respondent 7 had the same issue in terms of appointing high quality staff, particularly as one his goals was to attract talented practitioners who could deal positively with challenging young people. This **common goal** was supported by promoting young inexperienced staff to head up small departments and therefore **building capacity.** He then looked to other schools who had 'made the leap in improvement' and rejected some offers of assistance from the Local Authority, and decided which strategies were transferable to his situation, and **seized those opportunities.**

Respondents 2, 4 and 5 offered different inter-relationships with elements identified across the propositions to assist them in making improvements. The research can offer three examples of how these linkages have worked together to make a significant improvement. Respondent 2 took **reflective time** to consider his actions by building 'Blue Sky' thinking time into his diary. He generated **strategic conversations** around where he wanted to impact, after collecting evidence. He then set about putting the **intervention strategies** in place at an individual student or group level to make a difference. This involved altering classroom practice to have impact.

Respondent 4 used local **external networks** to involve staff at all levels being brought together to share subject ideas and to talk about teaching and learning, in an effort to develop a **professional learning community.** This had an impact on classroom practice and had what he called 'tangible benefits' because small groups of colleagues were meeting frequently to discuss how teaching could engage pupils more, to improve their learning.

Respondent 5 reflected on where action needed to be taken, particularly a 'hard to shift' department or colleague. He then **challenged them,** and **built capacity** by bringing together a diversified group with some external support. This worked well when he created a lead practitioners group to solve the situation in Information Technology. He **harnessed external support from a network** he was involved in at the National College of School Leadership, to give the project status. The ideas were implemented with a confidence, proving invaluable and timely, by making some changes in practice and led to significant pupil improvements in this subject.

As the analysis progressed, more evidence emerged to demonstrate links between different factors leading to impact. The **common goals** are reintroduced when headteachers mention **systems** to underpin tracking pupils and the use of data, as well as using Focus Days which is a system to ensure that teachers are brought together to share ideas, promoting better learning and became one characteristic of **developing a professional learning community.** Respondent 1 and 2 are definitely aware of the

planning elements needed to create some of these linkages and they both indicated that without such purpose, whole school improvement was unlikely to happen.

It is impossible to ascertain if these combined factors make a more substantial improvement possible. Respondent 2 has the highest value added scores out of all eight schools. He highlights a process which is a three layered approach. Firstly he put **an internal structure and some systems** in place to analyse the data, then **he focused on the achievements** that students were gaining, and **finally he changed classroom practice** to counteract underperformance. This almost echoed the process that Respondent 1 outlined with his intervention process resulting in impact, by introducing a system, focusing on achievements, then assessing the impact of the process. Therefore it appears through the research that some successful leaders do reflect upon the order in which they choose to put strategies into place. Three of the Respondents, namely 1,2, and 7 felt that there was a vital link between the use of **accurate data** when coupled with **specific interventions at the learning level**, and this pairing of factors is evidenced as a key driver to generating improvement. It is the actions taken as a result of the data that was deemed important, not just the amount of data on each child.

Those operating as **system leaders** had already **built capacity** from within to ensure that the school would continue to make progress if a senior leader was out of school for some time, promoting an aspect of good practice or supporting another school. This allowed them to not just **focus on their achievements** but that of other schools. They in turn **seized every opportunity** to fit with their school priorities and drive these forward at a pace. This connection of working systemically outside their own establishment had often been the trigger for developments to take place back in their own school. School leaders felt that the practice they observed elsewhere made them reflect on the processes they were currently implementing themselves. In some cases they adapted or changed their practice, in other cases they were convinced that the processes they had already developed were the right ones and were making a real difference. The interest taken in other schools and their leaders was a genuine one and emerges from close collaboration and trusting relationships with professionals in similar situations. It appears from the

research that systemic leadership is a critical lever for building a professional learning community. The wealth of expertise that is derived from linking teams and ceratin individuals across schools has had evident benefit to both partners. Ideas generated from an external source and adapted to a different school context where risk taking is encouraged is seen to be making a difference to learners in classrooms. The work of the SSAT has been instrumental in encouraging leaders to step out of their own school and become consultants with credibility.

In some schools the reasons for the 'chain reaction' of factors had different sources. In the case of respondent 3 and 7 it was to resolve staff shortages, and maintain a balanced budget that capacity had to be grown from within. The leaders were creative and pro-active to find a solution to improving performance in a particular subject area and developing staff into coaching roles. Respondent 2 and 3 promoted a systemic role because it generated resources and a confidence in the school. For Respondent 1, the systemic role came later as a result of being recognized as outstanding by OFSTED and therefore being asked to contribute and share their expertise and practice in the national arena. Fortunately the school leader had built sufficient capacity to be able to respond to the requests to become a consultant head, and also to offer his school as a mentor establishment to host workshops on strategies to raise achievement in an inner city context. This involves large numbers of staff working with colleagues from different schools on key themes.

The inter-relationship between key factors creates a 'launch-pad' for improvement, and serve to reinforce the positive ethos leaders are wanting to create. Since colleagues at all levels in the organization are being involved, this raises the profile of 'improvement and learning.' The composite model offers an alternative way of proceeding, as it demonstrates preferred actions which have been implemented in recent years in eight secondary schools that can evidence their improvement journey.

The next chapter, the conclusion, will seek to set out to validate this composite model of school improvement and decide to what extent the eleven factors within the conceptual

framework were critical. The order in which some factors were considered has been described and these specific inter-relationships, if found to be replicated by different leaders will be highlighted, as potentially significant to improvement. The evidence originated from a sample of some of the most successful current headteachers in the north of England, with experience totaling 85 years as school leaders. By teasing out the most significant factors, it could assist a newly appointed headteacher of a school needing to make significant improvements. Just by having a tried and tested set of processes to consider, could support the leadership team as they take on the challenge of a school with a 'Notice to Improve.' This is a fairly new category of inspection judgement issued by OFSTED, and formalizes the necessity to improve to reach a 'satisfactory' standard. Schools judged as being within this category need to make radical changes to impact on teaching and learning, and also achievement and standards. This research could prove a useful tool for leaders of those particular schools, regardless of their context.

CHAPTER 5, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will deal with the conclusion. This has emerged as the discussion of findings progressed, as the research will indicate that there are certain conclusions to be drawn from the analysis and the evidence which emerged as a result of conducting interviews with headteachers of improving secondary schools in the north of England.

The conclusion will highlight what I have understood about the principal factors which affect improvement. It will also state which findings are significant, and those factors most crucial to whole school improvement, as identified by the respondents in the sample. The conclusion will also mention those factors which appear less important.

A timescale for improvement

The research from the eight respondents suggest that the improvement culture in a school can take time, and that if a school has to make rapid improvements the leader needs to be aware that evidence shows a time delay between action and the impact. Respondent 3 and 5 actually preferred to give examples of their factors for improvement which extended beyond the 3 year period requested. This echoes the literature review framework, whereby Collins supports the idea of learning communities that are collaborative and empowering, but especially ones which can build enduring greatness. One significant conclusion from the research findings is that the headteachers do believe in the idea of pro-active and long term sustainable improvements, rather than a 'quick-fix' which is immediate and responsive.

This was perhaps best summarised by Respondent 4 who referred to school improvement as a process rather than what the current Government appears to consider is an outcome. He stated:

> 'I think there are things about the process that take place over a long period of time I have real doubts that you can suddenly transform a school.'

This was echoed by respondents who talked about the developments in their school over a decade, which had led to school becoming a specialist school or community college and described a totally transformed culture of the school. The length of time it takes the school to change its ethos and become 'an improving school' was difficult to judge although none of the respondents suggested immediate one-off quick wins as a preferred solution. If this is the case then the processes highlighted might not be appropriate for headteachers wanting to see the impact of strategies that have rapid results over a short period of time such as a year. This point has significance as the processes headteachers are suggesting as useful, may need to be offered as medium or long term strategies, rather than a checklist of 'things to do' in a few months.

A Summary of key factors.

Articulating common goals, reflecting, building capacity to change the culture.

I have assembled this heading, incorporating four factors because the research shows these are so closely inter-related. All the respondents interviewed in the sample all set their scene by articulating their common goals and this provides a platform and a firm basis for action. They each could detail their personal focus and vision for the school in simple terms, often in a short sentence. This clarity of where they wanted to move the school to be, and then taking actions which realise the vision is significant because it allowed the leader to push ideas forward and at the same time ensuring there is the capacity to deliver. This makes a difference to the situation and effects changes. Such actions as recruiting high calibre staff or launching new rewards systems, are clearly underpinned by the vision of becoming the best.

However, the evidence emerging from the interviews and its analysis suggest that the five step plans to building improvements as outlined by Harris and Lambert is inadequate. Also, it was felt that the four basic ingredients outlined by Sharp are also insufficient to guarantee improvement. What appears to be crucial is the initial step of **articulating a common goal**, linked to what is the real priority for action in that school.

Once this is clear then the leader needs to have **the resources and reflective time** to think and **create the capacity** needed **to create a 'can do' culture.** The research strongly suggests that without these elements, even with highly flexible arrangements and healthy debates, it may be that nothing different occurs. Staff need to be supported by key individuals modeling the 'can do' culture for the 'right sort' of strategic conversations to happen. The evidence from the research fully supports the idea that challenging 'cosiness,' as described by Desforges, is all part of 'raising the bar' and changing the culture to one where improvement matters.

Respondents were open about their reasoning to build capacity. In some cases it was out of sheer necessity in that the school failed to attract a high calibre of good quality professionals who they felt were essential for the headteacher to drive through improvements to the school. Respondent 7 felt that the Local Authority help he received was sometimes not desirable. He commented that:

> 'There operates a system of inverse proportionality. The more trouble you are in, the more interference you get. You need to be left alone to get on with the job.'

He concluded that this left less time for reflection, but he insisted on not being distracted from his common goals and creating a supportive team. A primary aim was to appoint a young, ambitious, very well-qualified and enthusiastic deputy who would support what he wanted to do. This seemed a common thread, in that all eight headteachers of improving schools recognized that it was not the role of a single charismatic person making the school improve. Respondent 3 stated this most overtly by saying '*I don't subscribe to the idea of a superhead'* and Respondent 6 believed in *'Leading from behind.'*

The respondents wanted quality and coherence in their leadership team, and people who would challenge where necessary. The idea of building capacity at different levels within the organization was deemed to be crucial to be able to sustain improvements, and to avoid potential burn out of a few key committed individuals. All respondents made frequent references to developing relationships which subscribed to the idea of

collective competency, so that together, leaders would strive to bring about the positive changes that were necessary.

Although the respondents built capacity in different ways, either at senior or middle leader level, their aim was to challenge inadequacy and negativity and be surrounded by like minded people who wanted to make a difference. Their focus was to drive up standards in a place where mediocrity is unacceptable. In trying to create a more positive culture where students are at the heart of any changes, some unpopular decisions were taken by the respondents, but the research analysis demonstrates that resistance was tackled because the leader was convinced that this had to be done for their vision to become a reality. They acknowledged that this was not easy, and in some cases they made a professional judgement that went against what numerous other staff felt, but the courage of their convictions drove through the change, and all felt that improvements had resulted because of such decisions. Subscribing to a culture of calculated risk-taking was prevalent, and yet at the same time, not always doing what others in the school expected was also a significant feature.

All respondents in the sample felt that in order to bring all staff on board there had to be some method of internal coaching. This was executed in a number of ways, underpinned by flexible and creative timetabling, in the case of Respondent 5 and 7, or the appointment of coaching leaders by Respondent 8. Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 created part of the new role of Advanced Skills Teachers or Assistant Heads to have oversight of in-house staff development, in an effort to model and demonstrate good practice in a safe and non-threatening setting The key principle was to reinforce a common goal or message about promoting improvements in classrooms, and encourage practitioners to increase the pace of learning, thus realizing that they are the ones making a difference. Respondent 8 did mention that there is the real risk of leaving some people behind. These were often the ones who he felt needed *'reinvigorating and remotivating.'* His task as headteacher was to use his repertoire of leadership skills to get people on board.

One spin-off of building capacity at senior level was that in some cases it allowed the leader to operate in a more systemic way, which was a further advantage. However respondents felt it was crucial to maintain a balance between their workload derived from in-house developments and sharing their successful practice beyond the school.

Seizing opportunities

If the vision is clear, as it was in the eight interviews perhaps it is then easier for leaders to seize opportunities or reject those that come their way. What could be a real opportunity to one school, could be an inappropriate diversion for another establishment. Respondents referred to their willingness to turn national agendas into something that works for them, in their context with their students and staff. They enjoy seeking out creative solutions but want them to be owned by the staff delivering the initiative and were reluctant to accept help that was not deemed useful, or coming from a non-credible source.

There is a range of evidence to suggest that the respondents highlighted ways in which they were constantly striving to improve their practice and by seizing opportunities that serve their purpose as they move on to the next priority. This energy for improvement was prevalent in six of the eight interviews. Some respondents were more reflective than others but their commitment to leading a school which is 'a good school' where they would have been proud to send their own child, sits firmly in their thinking. The leaders could refer to numerous opportunities, even creating their own private limited companies, to fit with their vision. This could be likened to almost having an inbuilt 'radar' which seeks out openings and good prospects to fit alongside what the school is hoping to achieve. All schools had a specialism and this has brought increased funding and formal occasions to network within subject areas.

Developing an achievement focus, improving learning and effective internal systems.

In creating a professional learning community, headteachers felt they had to create systems which ensured that the interventions at the learning level would make a positive

difference. Strategic conversations do not just happen. In the same way they subscribed to common goals for their school yet this had to be linked to action which would make impact. The more teachers talk about what learning is taking place then the more likely they felt young people were likely to learn.

The evidence is far reaching and indicates that leaders feel it is crucial that what is happening in the classroom is central to improvement. Sometimes this involves having multiple interventions at the learning level. The strategies which have an achievement focus and change classroom practice are numerous. Some of these emerge as 'home bred' systems, whereby a school devises a common process. This serves to underpin identification of underperformance by individual or target group and then uses a technique of 'assessment for learning' to allow the pupil to make the next step from where they are currently performing to their potential target level. 75% of the sample schools identified this as one way in which assessment has changed over the past five years. Children need to be involved with assessing their learning, through self assessment, peer assessment or by preliminary drafting of answers and then being involved in knowing what to do to improve to the next level. It was acknowledged that this builds on primary practice and children are already familiar with this sort of dialogue having been exposed to a similar type of process at Key Stage 2.

It was recognized in the interviews that schools are extremely data rich. However it is the skilful use of the data to target interventions, which appeared to make impact and be significant. Improving schools in the sample felt confident with what the data is telling them and how it can be interpreted to implement future actions by people who are committed to change and a strong belief that the school's common goals will be achieved. The whole school systems highlighted are one mechanism whereby those less committed individuals are monitored so that there is an equality running across the school. Quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms were seen as intrinsic to success. This was wholly supported by respondents, whether this be to extend work out beyond borderline students as in Respondent 8's school, or to encompass 'hard to reach'

children in respondent 6's school. Respondent 5, felt committed to a sea-change from a focus on good teaching to good learning.

However one piece of emergent thinking surrounded the copious systems introduced to monitor changes implemented in learning. The systems had certain common features including identification and intervention, plus a clear focus on impact. Schools had devised their own terminology with students to be able to discuss together their performance with an ease that also engaged the learner to participate. In half of the schools in the sample the systems had begun to create a new school language, such as 'Going Green,' 'Support for Achievement,' the 'Four Is,' and 'Tracking Targets' described as 'before' 'towards' 'met' and 'static.' This had led to students generating performance related conversations which headteachers felt had put their staff under considerable pressure from young people to inform them what they needed to do to improve. This groundswell from large numbers of learners, over a thousand in many cases, directed at between forty and a hundred staff, meant that the culture had shifted to one where students really wanted to know how to improve, and had a belief that they could improve.

Respondent 1 described himself as *'passionate about learning'* and *'highly visible.'*
He describes some essential qualities of the team as:

> 'a determination and bloody mindedness within the leadership team, that we aim to be the best and we are not going to let anyone get in the way to stop us.'

This belief was upheld by all the other respondents, if articulated somewhat less vociferously. They had a clear focus on what needed to be done and equally felt that others, such as Local Authority Officers, Advisers, School Improvement Partners, and her Majesty's Inspectors did not possess credibility or the knowledge. There was some resentment that these people offered inappropriate support, often untimely, and distracted the school's capacity from its main business. The research here concludes that perhaps leaders are best left to do what they are appointed to do, that is lead. This part of the conclusion brings into question the effectiveness of external advisers to the

school and whether their involvement does indeed become a help or a hindrance to improvement.

Systemic leadership

There was explicit evidence from three respondents, that they wanted their successor to take the school forward even further than they had done. It is interesting to note that the respondents who said this most overtly were the ones closest to retirement, and so perhaps had spent more time reflecting on what the school would be like in their absence. They had also build capacity to allow them to develop as consultants to broker support to other lower performing schools, and therefore they recognized how the school functioned in their partial absence. As an associated point, Respondent 8 did feel sometimes there were hidden costs associated with building capacity, which emerged at a late date. He summed this up as *'building capacity is not cost neutral.'*

All the respondents worked in other roles as well as being employed full-time as headteacher of the school shown in figure 1. They had a wealth of networks ranging from DfES and Government level, including Respondent 2 who had become a National Leader of Education, only one of fifty in the country. They also felt a commitment to work at local level even in embryonic collaborations which met to try and resolve difficult neighbourhood issues such as the shared delivery of the new 14-19 diplomas. These respondents chose their partners with care and were keen to find mutually beneficial pairings or groups which engendered trust and commitment to improvement regardless of published figures or size of school. To conclude, they wholeheartely subscribed to the improvement of other establishments. Respondent 1 stated

> 'When the results of my partner leading edge school come in.. I'm as nervous about them as I am about my own. I want to share in their successes however large or small, and feel that in some way I have been part of that journey.'

This highlights the commitment to Hill's 'increasing interdependence between schools', yet it appears crucial to exist not just at headteacher level. The partnerships which emerge as having significant impact are those which also involve linkage at different

levels in more than one school. One example would be the selection of a network by the headteacher, (as in this case, Respondent 4) to bring together colleagues from small departments. This generates working collaboratives on themes which impact on classroom practice and serves to pool ideas across a local area. It supports individuals and also reduces workload as tasks can be shared out amongst the group of professionals.

This evidence from the research shows that an element of **systemic leadership**, which is **using an external network**, leads into **taking some reflective action** which contributes to **building a professional learning community**. In many cases, this leads to **altering classroom practice** as a result of the intervention. The core of this, and almost a common denominator, is that staff become engaged in discussions about learning and teaching which generates more strategic conversations. This becomes the norm and therefore it is more likely to generate potential further improvement. It has all the characteristics of an emerging cycle of events, and once schools begin to see impact, leaders have noted that their rate of improvement becomes owned by staff and the pace of change increases. Staff may demonstrate a keenness to join in with other collaboratives that interest them.

Less significant factors

Hargreaves, in his work on Personalisation in 2006 suggests that the area of student voice has great potential, in that it involves learners more and results in 'Deep Learning.' This was the factor with least frequency out of all the interviews conducted. It could be that the questioning by the researcher did not probe sufficiently deep enough, or that this is a newly emerging factor and so there is not enough evidence to actually record any significant impact at this moment in time. It therefore forms part of a recommendation for future research beyond 2008, and will be mentioned in the latter part of this chapter. The respondents did refer to canvassing the opinions of students but in a quite superficial way about items that were of minor consequences. None had incorporated student voice in terms of the curriculum offered, or major new facilities.

As a consequence this particular theme is to be considered an area for scrutiny at a later date.

What is surprising is that many of the schools had introduced new technologies and different curriculum offers, all of which must have had some impact on the students. The respondents referred to how pupils can converse about their performance yet there was no evidence to suggest they had been asked about their opinions about curriculum changes. So although students were encouraged to discuss their progress there was no evidence to suggest they had any input to the learning process that may have led to positive outcomes. The whole area of 'student voice' and giving students open channels of communication with teachers, to share ideas and create change is quite a new theme.

The issue of finance and funding initiatives was only raised by Respondents 1 and 8. They both felt very strongly that their accommodation was inadequate for their learners, and that a high quality environment would make their improvements even more sustainable. A key priority would be the development of learning spaces and calm learning zones for independent work with access to technology and support from adults as a way forward. They felt penalised by a lack of funding, and had been raising achievement despite very poor buildings. This success had made them slip further down the list for being allocated major spending. Other less successful schools, with better accommodation, who were struggling to make improvements in achievement were being prioritized for a new building because this was deemed a factor to speed up their pace of improvement. Respondents 5 and 8 had secured some new buildings and this they felt could really transform learning if they were allowed to put their ideas into the debate. This could depend on the architect's willingness to agree to involvement of secondary leaders.

Respondents did not share much detail about the curriculum changes and personalisation on offer. It could be that they were more interested in the monitoring mechanisms and strategy rather than the individual features of the changes, as this would probably be a responsibility delegated to a deputy head or assistant head.

Half the respondents made no reference to their own particular style of leadership. However the researcher did note that on the whole all eight respondents were highly confident, and demonstrated a positive outlook and optimism. They were willing to take risks, and made reference to the senior team, and being part of that team. However, it was not possible to draw any real conclusions about the style of leader required as a significant factor for improvement.

Transferability

Some respondents raised the issue that perhaps some successful improvement practices can be adapted and applied to less successful schools elsewhere. Other headteachers in the sample felt that each school context was different and that just 'lifting' a system or strategy might not be appropriate. They were keen to look elsewhere at how improvements were being implemented, but accepted it might be just an idea, or a fraction of a system which they would take away, rather than replicate a whole strategy, such as a pupil data identification system. Some of the ideas 'showcased' had taken years to evolve and in doing so had secured commitment and ownership. A direct transfer of the finished article was not felt to be wholly workable in another school situation. Respondent 7 articulated this the most frequently,

> 'It's not a formulaic approach...you need to value your context. If you look at those who have made the leap, it might be that some of those ideas are just not transferable. It's not a matter of.......If you do this...... your school will be successful.'

He continues by questioning the reasoning behind some formal partnerships and Federations, and poses the question, rather than actually finding out what needs to happen is this just a superficial method of putting two schools together 'to paper over the cracks.'

The respondents felt that they wanted to choose who best to collaborate with, knew which networks had potential, and stated that it was often down to the individuals asked

to participate. They chose informal networks that were 'fit for purpose' that met their needs, and if at a later point they were not felt to be worthwhile, felt no compassion to merely abandoned them.

During the interviews, the respondents did make many reflective comments. A number of them highlighted an issue and the action they had taken as a leader of a large organisation to effect change. However what emerged was the ability to consider, 'What if ?' This meant that in several of the interviews they could clearly work out, in advance of implementing action, what the possible outcomes would be. This meant that although the strategy might incorporate some risks, the respondent had carefully thought through the best and worst case scenarios. They felt it was part of their role to consider risky avenues but could sometimes see both positive and potentially negative effects. This was evidenced in a number of situations. Respondent 6 explained that if he, as head, was out of school for a number of different reasons networking over the course of the week, there is always the chance that a negative group may use the opportunity to try and promote something that would not have been favoured had he been there. He had to carefully weigh up the potential advantages and disadvantages of his networking. Respondent 8 talks about his strong leadership team, yet this created a gap between them and the layer of middle leaders. A system of line management by each leadership team member to a head of faculty ensued, but where the head of faculty is coasting or is less keen to embrace the improvement agenda, there is a real risk that the senior person starts to take on some of their work and responsibilities, which was not the intention.

> 'The health warning is not to do the job for them.... in their drive for the department to succeed.'

Respondents felt that it was important to recognize that networking and extra responsibility brings extra pressure and demands to the role of the leader. Yet Respondent 6 felt that his first priority was to staff and pupils and he always assessed the network against the potential benefits to these two priority stakeholders in the first instance.

The research has therefore highlighted some complexities which did not seem to appear in the literature review. The semi-structured interviews produced evidence to show that there were real sequences of events, highlighted in the sub-section 'Inter-related factors' in the previous chapter. Sometimes these were executed in a planned and purposeful way, on other occasions they just happened almost by coincidence. What emerged most strongly was that these professionals knew their schools well, and had prioritised their common goals, built capacity and challenged assumptions and negativity in an open way.

In communicating their vision, it allowed them to seize opportunities, and by reflecting with their team, could devise creative solutions to their problems, in some cases using entrepreneurial skills to pursue a project. Through their distinctive achievement focused strategies they had implemented a range of actions to make a positive impact. Ideas were not always imported direct from elsewhere, but could be adapted or amended from national thinking or local priorities. In many cases it had taken years for systems to become embedded, even evolving a common educational language to discuss performance and progress. Their work as 'sytemic leaders' is crucial to maintain the energy and enthusiasm for new ideas, where sharing expertise benefits both parties. These leaders are totally committed to a 'can do' culture and a series of 'next events' are already planned so that the improvements will not be 'quick-fix' to resolve one-off problems but sustainable improvements for the young learners of tomorrow.

Recommendations

The study had a focus on headteachers who ran successful secondary schools having achieved a good or outstanding OFSTED report. Their results had demonstrated a trend of improvements over a period of three years and these leaders had embarked on a role outside their school which involved being part of a local or national network. This outreach work often took the form of working with underperforming schools where the pace of improvement was not deemed sufficient so that they needed support to raise achievement and transform their school. All the respondents interviewed were wholly

committed to shouldering wider roles for the success of other schools as well as their own.

The recommendations are not listed in any priority order, but as they emerged from the analysis. In fact the recommendations were noted as almost 'unanswered questions' by the researcher as the conclusion was formulated.

Some of the recommendations are considerably complex potential pieces of work. The research proposal purposely selected a narrow focus namely the factors involved in school improvement and so these recommendations may appear somewhat diverse and far reaching. However it would be the task of the researcher to again narrow down any future project to a manageable size to fit a thesis brief.

- At the other end of the spectrum from improving schools, there are a minority of secondary schools in receipt of a 'Notice to Improve' where leadership is described as 'unsatisfactory' in OFSTED terms. A leadership team will be given a clear brief to implement actions which will lead to wide-scale improvement. It would be interesting to interview a similar number of respondents to identify if the same factors were prevalent in this situation. This research would consider once again the same eleven factors, but in a different context. Emergent evidence from the research would be able to identify if, when the parameters of time are constrained, and the school is at a lower starting point, the same improvement factors are implemented. Another starting point could be a scrutiny of some of the schools in the latest cohort of the Raising Achievement and Transforming Learning Project (RATL). Included are the 50 lowest performing schools in the country where children score the least in terms of adding value from entry. Their progress is analysed by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and the expectation is that with some targeted support over a 12 month period they should made great strides in improvement.

- Several respondents interviewed felt that the time had come whereby the borderline students had been concentrated upon at the exclusion of many other individuals, in

an attempt to improve performance figures likely to be published. With an agenda of 'Every Child Matters' and 'Contextual Value Added' taking all children as individuals, then the focus has to be spread wider. One respondent felt that his school was at that tipping point within the Sigmund curve, and if he did not redirect his efforts from teaching to learning, then the school may lose momentum and achievement could dip. Further thoughts need to be directed towards the idea that in observing good teaching does not necessarily mean that there is good learning taking place. Additional research may need to be undertaken to see if schools that are making this shift are deploying other factors to increase learning, outside those already identified, to make a difference.

- There are a number of views about whether tracking systems really can be successfully transferred from school to school. The research could have been extended to include some study of each school's data system which tracks pupil progress. Half of the schools in the sample had an emerging 'educational language' adopted by pupils to describe how they were performing at any given time. It appears that this has taken some time to evolve and embed as part of the school culture. It would have been useful to see if this was a common theme across a larger sample of respondents, to identify the impact on improvement. A secondary issue could be whether the systems have to be re-launched and refined over time, as there is evidence to show that sometimes pupils become tired of certain systems, and then, in the eyes of students they become devalued.

- Linked to the previous recommendation is future research about the impact of utilising student voice. This factor appears to be in its infancy in secondary schools and it would be possible in a year's time to consider whether pupils do indeed agree with senior leaders what are the factors making a difference and leading to improvements in their school. For students in the new Year 11 in September 2008, they will have been through the school with its specialism and had access to all the strategies to make an impact on them as learners. Perhaps some short, focus interviews with senior students could triangulate the findings described, and offer

another conclusion from the perspective of young people having been the subject of improvement.

- New formal arrangements such as Pathfinder Trusts and National Leaders in Education are coming to the end of their first year in existence. This means that the host school has to be able to build up sufficient capacity to assist another school. These are such new developments that there has been no evaluation of the impact of working in such a formal partnership. One of the first Pathfinder Trusts, which is fairly local and involves three secondary schools, does have two of the headteachers involved as respondents in this research. It would be interesting to interview them in a year's time to identify the impact made by the Trust on improvement, as these two schools are already deemed as outstanding by OFSTED, with no key issues to address.

- The Government initiative to Build Schools for the Future (BSF) suggests that underperforming secondary schools could benefit from a brand new building. Those Local Authorities with the most underperforming schools, such as Hull and Sheffield receive the funding first. This was an issue of frustration for some respondents, who felt that they were driving forward improvements despite wholly inadequate accommodation. It would be interesting to revisit an already successful school with a new build, such as the one planned for respondent 5 in Newcastle in late 2008, and to ascertain its impact on improvement a year after its completion.

The issue of Local Authority external support and its impact was raised by respondents. With the advent of Trust status, Academies, Foundation Schools and Executive Heads, there are many secondary schools that will cease to operate within the conventions of the Local Authority, within the near future. It could be that in an effort to retain some local control there is the constant requirement that schools need to be visited by School Improvement Partners and Link Advisers. Headteachers felt that not only did this not assist with the improvement agenda but it created an added burden on them in terms of soaking up valuable time for no additional benefit. It could be useful for research to be

conducted on the actual benefits of this costly input and identify which improvements have been gained as a direct result of Local Authority work with the school.

The research set out to discover the most significant factors within secondary schools that create whole school improvement. Although this may be considered quite a small sample, the semi-structured interviews produced a wealth of data to analyse and produce a discussion of the findings. It was appropriate to have a narrow focus of study but at the same time have breadth of context by using respondents from different types of schools. This allowed the research to focus on the salient issues and at the same time meet the necessary criteria regarding the length and parameters of the study.

Meeting the research objectives

It is felt therefore that the research objectives were indeed met and that the study could identify some important factors of improving schools. The research indicates that some of the factors are more significant than others. A new conceptual framework to start further research would include the following essential factors:

1. Articulating a vision and developing staff to align themselves with that vision
2. Building capacity to ensure there are sufficient like minded people to make things happen, who seize opportunities and take calculated risks.
3. Creating a 'can do' culture where staff are confident to challenge assumptions, mediocrity, and negativity.
4. Reflection which leads to actions with a purpose, linking to the vision.
5. Developing an achievement focus where data informs effective interventions.
6. Far ranging systems which underpin the changes and increase accountability.
7. Systemic leadership, which provides a further stimulus for high performing schools, and support for low performing schools.

The research amended the conceptual framework in that it suggested some factors that were not particularly helpful to schools wanting to improve. It also identified some factors that were inter-related and could be harnessed simultaneously to make significant

improvements on a number of different fronts. The order in which these were tackled depended upon the leader and the context they found themselves in. However there were communal threads running through the research that are identified in the conclusion to this thesis. The recommendations are a suggested way forward that may begin to investigate further some of the emerging issues this thesis has presented.

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Dear Colleague

Thank you for consenting to be interviewed as part of my doctorate research on school improvement. My thesis is about developing a theoretical perspective of some major factors that result in school improvement. I now which to extend this by using qualitative research in the form of a semi-structured interview to elicit whether the headteachers of rapidly improving schools agree that in reality these theories do relate to their practice.

The interview will last 45 minutes. I am sending you a framework outlining the topics that I intend to cover. This does not discount any other related issues you may wish to raise. I also attach the code of ethics by which the University of Hull requests we adhere to when conducting interviews.

I would like you to talk and reflect upon the following areas:

- The main improvements in your school over the last three years.
- The underlying factors which have caused the improvements.
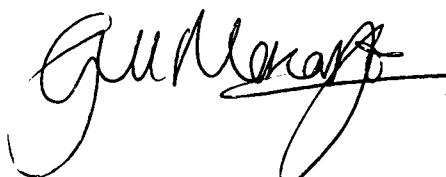- The sustainability of the improvements.

For the purposes of my research I have taken school improvement to be

'the pursuit of any goal that benefits pupils and has as its main focus the classroom and the school'

'a commitment to changing the way we do things round here for the better. It is essentially a process of changing school culture'

I look forward to meeting you at your school.

Yours

Gillian Metcalfe

(~~~ _illegible handwritten text_
Headteachers who will be
involved.)

The IFL ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSENT FORM: (*For other forms of teaching and research*)

(*Please amend to suit participants*)

(*delete italics before use*)

I,   of

Hereby agree to be a participant in this study to be undertaken

by   GILLIAN   DIANE METCALFE

and I understand that the purpose of the research is *(to be completed by researcher)*

to discover the most significant factors within
secondary schools that create whole- school improvement

I understand that

1.   the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study, have been explained to me.

2.   I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in such research study.

3.   I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.

4.   Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and on my authorisation.

5.   I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Signature: Date:

The contact details of the researcher are: gillmet@aol.com.   c/o The Freeston Business
and Enterprise College, Favell Avenue, Normanton

The contact details of the secretary to the IfL Ethics Committee are Mrs J Lison, Centre for   Wakefield
Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.   WF6 1HZ.
Email: J.Lison@hull.ac.uk tel. 01482-465988.

In some cases, consent will need to be witnessed eg. where the subject is blind/intellectually disabled. A witness must be independent of the project and may only sign a certification to the level of his/her involvement. A suggested format for witness certification is included with the sample consent forms. The form should also record the witnesses' signature, printed name and occupation. For particularly sensitive or exceptional research, further information can be obtained

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