The formation of a cross-town Multi-Academy Trust: A case of policy enactment in the local organisation of education

Alexandra Laura Hay

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

Keele University

March 2021

Acknowledgements

Thank you;

To Steve Cropper and Derek McGhee at Keele University.

Steve, for encouraging me to find my voice and articulate it, for sticking through this with me despite retiring, for always pushing me forward with your questions and valuable musings.

Derek thank you for the advice regarding the 'little tweaks', they have made me a better writer.

To Manchester Metropolitan University for introducing me to teaching, and for my senior lecturer post. You have given me the one thing I couldn't give myself when I was a teacher. The gift of time. I cannot thank you enough for this.

To Nottingham and Manchester University, who made me love learning and taught me my first lessons about culture, inequalities, injustices and people.

To the schools that I called home for so long and the staff whose tale this tells. You continue to be my inspiration.

To Rich, I hope you enjoy this story about your little town. Yes, I am going to make you read it.

And of course, to my parents, for your constant encouragement, your words of insight and wisdom, for raising me to strive for the best and never give up. This work is indebted to you in so many ways, I hope it makes you proud.

And finally, to my students past, present and future who make the battles worthwhile. You are the reason.

You are all of my reasons.

Prayer of the Woods

I am the heat of your hearth on the cold winter nights, the friendly shade screening you from the summer sun, and my fruits are refreshing draughts quenching your thirst as you journey on.

I am the beam that holds your house, the board of your table, the bed on which you lie, and the timber that builds your boat.

I am the handle of your hoe, the door of your homestead, the wood of your cradle, and the shell of your coffin.

I am the bread of kindness and the flower of beauty.

'Ye who pass by, listen to my prayer: Harm me not'.

From the Portuguese [1]

This work is dedicated to the family I found to the west of the wood.

[1] http://www.coldsplinters.com/2011/09/prayer-of-the-woods/

Prologue

The wind is moving through the trees.

I am waiting for my class to arrive, sat at my desk looking out of the stretch of windows that makes up one side of my classroom.

A squirrel runs across the lawn and up a tree and in the distance, I hear a shout followed by laughter.

The sun is breaking through the clouds; but it is blustery, and the rays do not last for long. It is a degree or two colder today than it has been, and the students feel it as they move hurriedly between the buildings.

Heaven forbid they should bring a coat.

I can see my class approaching from afar, they are smiling. One of the girls shoves a boy as they walk. The others laugh as he stumbles theatrically.

The leaves will be turning soon, and some have already started. Soon they will fall and gather in great clumps by the old door of the mobile classroom where I sit. The wind picks up briefly and I hear a few shrieks from students taken unawares.

The wooden building around me creaks.

My lot have arrived and are waving at me through the window, I wave back and gesticulate for them to enter.

It is easy to lose yourself as a teacher. Locked in a cycle of denying your own needs in place of demands from the exam boards, the DfE, Ofsted, SLT and the students in front of you. The students in front of me now are hungry, thirsty, annoyed by some perceived injustice that occurred during their last lesson and two of them need a wee.

I just want to teach my lesson, but even that is mediated by the exam requirements, the syllabus and how Ofsted and SLT determine that this week we should mould our pedagogy.

I am tired.

But it is warm inside my classroom. The class slowly begin to engage, and a few pick up their pens. Several do not have a pen and I root around on my desk whilst attempting to ignore the flying stationary over my head.

I look up. ‘Are we all ready?’

The wind makes the building creak again and the students feign alarm.

I become embroiled in a discussion considering the likelihood of the classroom blowing away. I reassure them that this is unlikely as it has stood on this spot for nearly one hundred years.

I reflect privately on the irony of a classroom built as a temporary measure still in use a century later. A metaphor for England's flagship education system and the promises of the Multi-Academy Trust…

My attention is drawn by the squirrel on the lawn. It is very busy, running up and down one of the trees. Squirreling something away presumably, ready for winter. The students haven't noticed it as they are watching me.

They ask why I am smiling.

It is warm inside my classroom but approaching time for me to leave.

My days of squirreling are almost over.

My research is complete.

The time has come to draw conclusions, to present my findings.

It is difficult to go. But I must, and there will be other teaching rooms.

Some may even be built of brick and contain more than one plug socket.

The wind is moving through the trees again and the sun has broken through.

Soon the leaves will fall.

I will not see them grow back.

But they will, and the cycle will continue.

Miss Hay

October 2018

The formation of a cross-town Multi-Academy Trust: A case of policy enactment in the local organisation of education

Abstract

This research investigates two high schools and one middle school in the grip of a seismic policy change as they set aside generations of rivalry to work together as a newly formed Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). It adopts an insider case study approach; I taught at one of the schools during the research process and experienced the policy changes with those who participated in the study. The case study uncovers the different sensemaking processes employed by senior leaders and classroom teachers regarding the rationale for the MAT and examines evidence of the enactment of the MAT's strategic intent to work together. Actor- Network Theory is utilised as a sensemaking tool and revealed the socio-material factors shaping the enactment of collaboration. The research consisted of seven interviews with 'elite' senior leaders, two sets of teacher focus groups at each of the high schools and analysis of key national and school specific policy documents. The year spent conducting the research coincided with academy conversion and captured the experiences of becoming a MAT and how this altered established work practices. The findings revealed the MAT was a network rife with ambivalent belongings at all levels and material 'actants' stalling relations. The shape and extent of collaboration between the schools was mediated by contextual factors and their historical relationships. In this case study the same phase relations between the two high schools was more problematic to establish and maintain than the relations between one of the high schools and its feeder middle school. This can be attributed to the confusing policy priorities of the national MAT programme that continues the Neoliberal promotion of market values, whilst also pushing for school collaboration. I found that the policy decision to convert to an academy had paradoxical qualities; it secured the shape and direction of the three-tier educational provision in the town (for now), but resulted in policy changes that increased workload, accountability, stress and uncertainty. The thesis concludes with suggestions for future policy direction regarding the forming of local multi-phase MATs, whilst also highlighting the difficulties faced when enacting such policy into practice.

Key words: Multi-Academy Trust, school collaboration, insider case study, sensemaking, policy enactment, Actor-Network Theory,

Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

My academic background and other influences

My first degrees in Social and Cultural Studies and Women's Studies and Feminist Research provided me with a particular epistemological framework and way of thinking about society and my place in it. British Cultural Studies assumes the concept of 'culture is ordinary' (Williams 1989:4); a focus on culture as everyday lived experience worthy of investigation. It regards cultural practices as 'texts' and treats them as such, using deconstruction to uncover the shared meanings within them. Women's Studies has a similar focus on lived experiences, but with the injection of issues concerning how power affects gender relationships. Both are broadly interpretivist in nature, they seek to uncover not just patterns of behaviour but meanings and motives and that underpin everyday lived experiences and interactions. They tend to embrace qualitative methods such as textual analysis, deconstruction, life histories and ethnography. They are political; advocating social emancipation and the belief the purpose of social research is to reveal inequalities and generate social change. This is part of a social action philosophy suggesting research undertaken should have a purpose, to uncover a form of oppression or inequality within taken for granted structures in society. This forms the backdrop of my motivation to research this area of social life; the everyday policy experiences within a group of schools, uncovering the ongoing external pressures, motivations and philosophy that has driven change and policy enactment.

However, once I qualified as a teacher other influences began to affect my research outlook and interests. I remained concerned with the exercise of power within social life, but as a practicing teacher my interest in this area became more policy focussed. I began to realise how even the most micro of decisions I made daily were constrained by wider policy initiatives. I was puzzled by how many of the policies shaping the experiences of the students in my classroom were subject to rapid policy change, and it must be said, often a total lack of research-based evidence. In addition to this many of the changes inflicted by policy, such as Gove's A Level and GCSE reform and the academies programme seemed doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past by the damaging marginalisation of creative subjects and the attempted privatisation of schools. Thus, my

interest into the effects of educational policy on practice began (this shift is typified by *Fig.9* in the appendix B.2).

Educational policy and practice

Educational policy is powerful, paradoxical and all pervasive. It dictates the fundamentals of schooling, what is taught, to whom, for how long and how. It controls how schools manage their finances, their staff, and their students, how schools engage with the wider community and the purpose that they serve. Frequently, policy acts to constrain and constrict schools, but also may open new possibilities for growth and development. It can, and does, ratify the direction of future decisions and provide the motivation for change. Policies also layer up, and often contradict. It is the work of an effective leader or educationalist to navigate such contradictions.

Stephen Ball (2008) describes education as suffering from 'policy overload' and that the 'depth breadth and pace of change' and amount of government involvement in education is unprecedented (Ball 2008:2). Such interventions into the organisation of schooling, the content of the curriculum and educational provision has gathered pace since the 1980s. Ball argues this is because governments have 'to be seen as doing something, tackling problems, 'transforming' systems' (Ball 2008:2) and often education is an easy target for such interventions. However, policy is often slippery, tricky and difficult to implement, it is '...not 'done' at one point in time; in our schools it is always in the process of 'becoming' (Ball *et al* 2012:4). It is this process that this thesis aims to uncover.

My interest in the group of schools that are the focus of this research stems from the fact that I worked in one of them as a teacher until December 2018. I experienced the policy changes with the respondents and researched the effects from the inside.

As such this is, in many ways, as much my story as it is theirs.

The insider and her questions

During the decade I spent working in one of the schools (The Primary Research site or PRS), I watched it adopt policy change after change. I watched as it forged relationships with neighbour schools that only a few years previously would have seemed impossible. I also looked on as it attempted to manage a financial shortfall and a demographic dip in student numbers, resulting in several cycles of staff redundancies. I felt the culture of the school change as workload increased and goodwill began to erode.

I sat in my classroom and I wondered; **what are we going to do?**

Then, I watched the leaders, I listened to their rhetoric, and their ideas. I saw the solutions they introduced transform the school from a Cooperative Trust model, to a Hard Federation and finally a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) all within only 6 years. I heard them explain that schools would be stronger together and that we must take control over our destiny.

I sat in my classroom and wondered; **why?**

Why all these changes?

I realised I couldn't sit in my classroom any longer. I needed answers to these questions and like many teachers I was dubious of the academies programme. I had concerns about this chosen direction binding the town's schools together and wondered with resources already so stretched; **how will it work?**

The MAT conversion took place during my year spent researching in the field. The three schools experienced leadership changes and were encouraged to build upon relations formed during the hard federation and collaborate with one another to improve standards. As my research progressed, I spoke to the leaders and the teachers about the rationale for the academy and their plans for and experiences of working together. I sought to understand what this policy change meant for them and how this had changed their day to day practice when coupled against a backdrop of redundancies, staff shortages, national curriculum change, job insecurity and a particularly vicious battering from the national press and government.

As the academy took shape a final question began to emerge:

What have we done?

This was both a question relating to the schools in the MAT, but also a wider observation about the current educational landscape in England.

Posed by a teacher sat right in the middle of it.

These four questions provided the inspiration for the theoretical research questions that are set out later in this chapter. Before I explain the theoretical approach, a brief history of the relationships between the schools under investigation helps to clarify the specific character and status of the research case and to provide the context in which I sought to make sense of policy enactment in education.

Context of the case

There are three schools involved in the collaborative relationships that this research focusses on, all situated within a market town in England with a population of approximately 25,000 people.

1. PRS (Primary Research Site). A 13 – 19 high school with approximately 770 students on roll including 6th form.
2. SRS (Secondary Research Site). A 13-19 high school located 2 miles from PRS. Approximately 370 students on roll including 6th form.
3. MS (Middle School) an 8-13 middle school with approximately 425 students on roll. Part of the SRS catchment area.

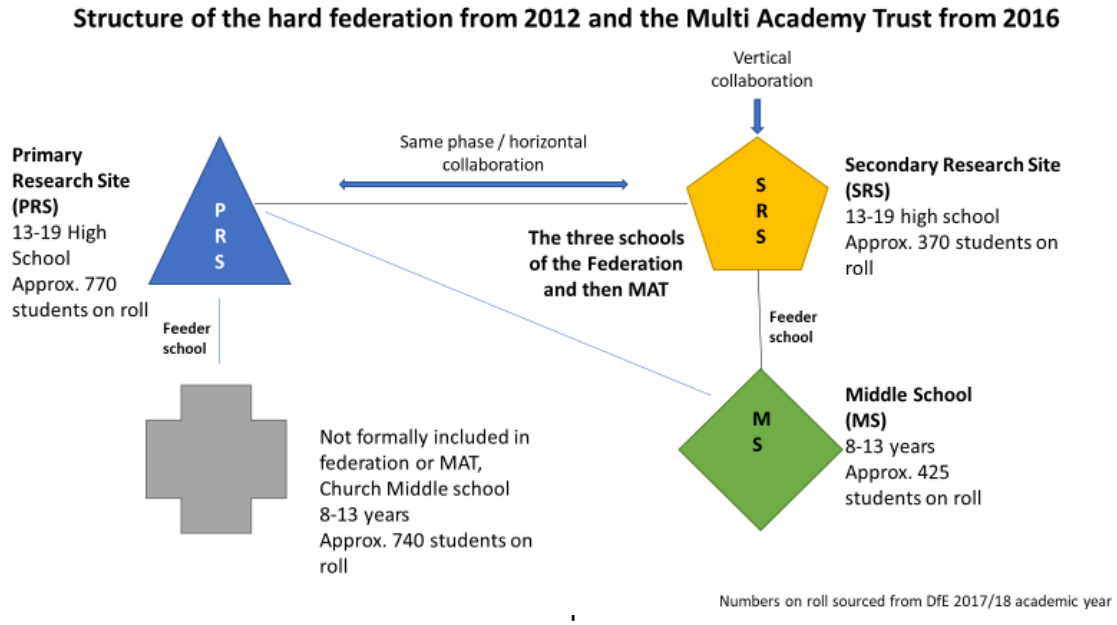
See *Fig. 1* below for structural diagram of the collaborative relationships.

There are three key structural changes the schools have experienced:

1) The move from community high school to Co-operative Trust school in 2010, just PRS initially – SRS and MS converted in 2014
2) The establishment of the hard federation including all 3 schools in 2012
3) The conversion of the federation to a Multi Academy Trust in 2016.

As the academy conversion occurred during my year in the field it will be the dominant focus as I report the experience of those leading and receiving the changes that represent the enactment of school policy.

Fig. 1 *(larger version in appendix B.1)*



Cooperative Trust school

This story of structural change begins in 2010 as with the conversion of PRS from Community High School to a Co-operative Trust. This signalled the first steps in the move away from Local Authority (LA) control. A charitable trust/ foundation was set up with the intended purpose of safeguarding the school premises and grounds from unwanted development by the LA. In 2011 Mervyn Wilson the chief executive of the Cooperative College described it as a 'quiet revolution' and promised by 2012 there would be over 200 schools' part of the movement. By 2017 800 schools were Cooperative Trusts and 8 were academies sponsored by the Coop (Mansell 2011). The other two schools in the group became Co-operative Trust schools in 2014 once the hard federation was established.

The hard federation

By 2012 PRS had established a line of communication with the neighbouring high school (SRS) and that school's feeder middle school (MS). This set-in motion the set of relationships that would begin to alter the educational provision in the town. There were several historical examples of PRS working with others, encouraged both by the Cooperative principles and predating them. The original Executive Principal had a long history of working with other schools in special measures as part of his work as a National Leader of Education (NLE). However, there was very little direct collaboration between the two high schools in the town beyond a loose 'pyramid structure' with their feeder middle and first schools facilitating termly meetings between senior leadership teams. This changed in September 2012 as PRS entered a hard federation with SRS and their Middle School (MS) as allowed by section 24 of the Education Act 2002. This move was marketed to staff and the community as a move to protect the three-tier school system in the town (First, Middle and Secondary schools). The students on roll at PRS and SRS together, totalled a relatively small secondary school and each was facing the real and rapid danger of becoming unviable.

The missing Middle school

As *fig. 1* illustrates the federation comprised of two high schools and one middle school and thus is a 'cross phase federation' (Chapman 2011:3). Unfortunately, the feeder middle school for the PRS was already a convertor academy and was prevented from becoming formally part of the structure by their governing diocese. This created an ongoing problem for the group of schools as it created inequality in the relationships and

continuity of provision on one side of the town. By 2016 communication between the church middle school and PRS had broken down almost completely.

The conversion to Multi-Academy Trust

Just 7 months into the existence of the new hard federation the joint governing body voted unanimously to convert all three schools to academy status. The conversion encountered several difficulties before being finally approved by the DfE. Firstly, the two high schools had an ill-timed dip in results and did not 'fit' the 'good school' MAT model favoured by the DfE where one stronger school leads other schools to drive up standards. In 2010 the DfE invited all 'outstanding or good with outstanding features' schools to convert with the commitment to 'supporting at least one weaker school in return for Academy status' (DfE 2010a:55). There was recognition that 'schools working together leads to better results' (DfE 2010a:57) however, sustained good results were required to be approved for conversion. A second bid was submitted 2015, which was successful once land issues at the SRS were reconciled. Academy conversion took place in April 2016. This model took the form of a 'convertor academy', part of a Coalition initiative to encourage 'outstanding' or 'good' schools to become Academies without a sponsor. Unusually for a small MAT of only 3 schools, it included both vertical relations between feeder schools and horizontal relations between the same phase of school, in this case high schools.

Navigating the policy climate

Andrew Adonis, former Minister for schools', states 'if all a successful school needed to do was stand still academies wouldn't be relevant. But for today's school leaders standing still is not only – as for the cyclist on a busy road – unwise, it is potentially fatal' (Adonis 2012:195). The changes experienced by the schools here reflect a political climate in which they must adapt swiftly to an ever-changing political and policy landscape. The frequent changes to the Ofsted framework, exam requirements, DfE guidelines and related expectations and measurements of progress further compound this. The dominant discourse for schools in England is that of standards improvement and it is on this that the policy of the MAT programme is based. Barker calls this the 'relentless pursuit of the unattainable' (2010:100), and yet, the discourse of 'good teacher' and 'good school' (Ball *et al* 2012:141) is so powerful, schools will go to great lengths to subscribe to it, even changing their fundamental structures and direction by enacting policies such as a MAT conversion.

I turn next to the theoretical tools I have found helpful to understand this case of policy enactment. Sensemaking (Weick 1995), policy enactment literature (Ball *et al* 2012, *Clarke 2015 and others)* and Actor-Network Theory (Callon 1992, Latour 1987, Fenwick 2010,2012 and others) are utilised in this thesis to shed light on the emerging relations between the schools as they attempt to enact the strategic policy intent of the MAT to work together. This will be followed by the theoretical research questions.

Theoretical underpinning of the thesis

Sensemaking and the enactment of policy

Ball suggests that 'policies cannot just be implemented, they have to be translated from text to action, put into practice' (Ball *et al* 2012:3). The enactment of policy, and the ongoing process of sensemaking and sensegiving that feeds all policy decisions in schools is complex. Policy in schools comes from all directions, it is driven by external bodies such as the DfE and Ofsted and is also created by schools themselves based on their interpretations of wider national and local educational priorities and performance measures. Dependent on where the origins of the policy lie, it holds different meanings and is treated differently by those entrusted to enact it. This can explain why policy outcomes and consequences can be unpredictable as they are mediated by the local context. Clarke at al state 'Policy matters' as it 'involves social processes that are intertwined with people's lives, often in very profound, sometimes oppressive, even violent ways' (Clarke *et al* 2015:9). Ball suggests that 'schools make careful and sometimes painful decisions about where policy priorities lie' and 'policy enactments is inflected by competing values and ethics' (Ball *et al* 2012:10). The extent to which this has been the experience of this group of schools will be investigated here in relation to their joint decision to convert to a Multi-Academy Trust and actively work with and collaborate with one another between and across school phases. This decision to work together, and the process of MAT formation frames the case study created by this research.

It has become a key element of the work of educational leaders to read the policy landscape. To decide on a policy route, initiate change and to remain in control of the changes. To make sense and give that sense to their 'followers' as 'direction'. How sense was made, given and taken and how sense eluded those involved in the schools of the newly formed MAT form a central focus of this case study. The ways in which this experience is mediated by the nature of the collaborative relationships is also of interest, and I distinguish here, between schools offering the same phase of education (horizontal relations) and those among feeder schools offering different educational phases (vertical

relations). The former, we can imagine, might hold as much a competitive charge as a collaborative sentiment.

Actor-Network Theory

This thesis is also an account of my own sensemaking, and an attempt to give sense to an experience that for many participants, seemed to lack any continuity of rationale. Actor - Network Theory provided the sensitising tool to identify the processes involved in forming a functioning MAT in what has, and continues to be, a tricky, unique and at times strained situation. The ANT concepts developed by Callon (1982, 1986); translation, enrolment, problematisation and interessement and mobilisation resonated with my early attempts to make sense of the data and explain how the leaders redefined the future of all the schools. In addition, ANT helped make sense of the way in which proposals, actions and efforts to organise for change could be frustrated by practical barriers, and specifically by material realities. ANT recognises the influence of material factors in the constitution and on the functioning of a network or assemblage. It does this by decentring agency; the human influence in networks that is so central to our everyday explanations of phenomena is given no more status, at least in the first instance, than the influence of material factors such as classroom resources, timings in the school day and physical distance between the schools. This goes well beyond the idea of distributed leadership (Spillane et al 2004) and the prevailing image of the hero headteacher 'who raise to afore in times of crisis' (Senge 2002:22) found in leadership literature. In examining the processes of change that have resulted in the cooperative relations among the schools in the town, I try to explain what holds, and has held, influence over the emergence and lived experience of the enactment of this MAT.

A network is defined by Fenwick (2010a:119) as 'simply webs that grow through connections' it places no distinction on macro or micro actors with regards to importance or influence. I imagine the network not as the structure of the 3 schools but as a messy web or cloud, so complex that the individual connections sometimes are not visible. ANT offers the potential of illuminating these many connections and the force and effort that goes into maintaining them. It provides language to describe the process involved in the initial sensemaking, then the enactment and maintenance of the MAT and cross school collaboration.

Sensemaking and Actor-Network Theory; tools to reveal policy enactment

I have selected the combination of sensemaking and ANT to act as tools revealing the policy enactment process occurring among these group of schools for several reasons which will be explored more fully in chapter 3. In brief, the ANT stance of 'radical symmetry' that does not prioritise human actors over material ones in the forming or functioning network is useful. It speaks to my own experiences as a teacher where I found my own agency was somewhat blunted by material factors such as lesson length, classroom layout, organisation of the school day, classroom location and so on. This notion of materiality allows insights from the theory to illuminate network function and disfunction and this can be attributed to both human and non-human actants. These insights can be applied in a way that goes beyond criticisms of leadership and opens up the potential for wider applicability of the difficulties and successes faced by these schools as they enact the MAT policy to work together. However, the MAT policy to work together cannot be enacted without first being made sense of, by both the leaders and the wider staff body and local community. Sensemaking is the first part of the process here, and the success of the sensemaking, and indeed sensegiving by the leaders will determine the success of both the Actor Network and by association, the enactment of the policy. In order to explain how I envisaged these theories working together I created a conceptual diagram. This is found in the appendix (*fig.4*) and is explained in more detail at the end of chapter 3. This combination of these theories and the conceptual framework is one of the theoretical contributions of this thesis.

Theoretical research questions

At the beginning of this chapter I posed four questions that provided the inspiration for this piece of research, formed during my time working as a professional in the field.

They were:

a) What are we going to do?
b) Why have we chosen the MAT structure?
c) How is this going to work?
d) And then latterly – what have we done?

Using insights from Actor- Network Theory, sensemaking and policy enactment literature I pose the following research questions that will form the case study investigating the processes involved in forming this MAT:

1. ***How have this group of schools attempted to make sense of national policy drivers of the Multi-Academy Trust and the associated cross school collaboration in their local context?***
   This links to Question a) and b), the sensemaking and sensegiving of the MAT revealed through the analysis of the work of the leaders and the experiences of the teachers, the narratives they weave during the interviews and focus groups. The 'local context' is dealt with sensitively, in recognition of the potential for different priorities and tensions between the different phases of school relations in this MAT group.

1. ***How has this group of schools enacted these national educational policy drivers (put them into practice) and what contextual and sociomaterial factors have influenced this?***
   Question c) is tackled here, the different ways the MAT is being enacted or brought into being through school collaboration is investigated. Difficulties faced during the enactment of the MAT at each educational phase are also explored.

2. ***Do the priorities of the MAT policy in relation to market values and accountability conflict with the development of collaboration in practice?***
   This encapsulates question d) what have we done? The various ways MAT policies have changed day to day practice and the operations of the schools is illuminated. This is placed in the current policy context of collaboration and competition to raise standards that forms part of the national design of the MAT programme and questions the extent this is workable in practice.

These questions will guide the analysis of the data and help to construct the case study; an investigation of the forming MAT and the ways in which it has made sense of and enacted the policy to work together.

Thesis context and plan

Chapter outlines are as follows:

Chapter 2 examines key historical national policy developments and the impact they continue to hold over the educational landscape in England today. These include: the end of the Tripartite system and the origins of the three-tier system; The Education Reform Act 1989 and the effects of Neoliberalism; the Education Act 2002 and the

introduction of school collaborative structures such as hard federations and Academy schools. It examines the policy aim of the MAT closely and questions the viability of cross school collaboration in a political culture that remains driven by market values.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical underpinning of sensemaking and sensegiving literature (Weick 1995), how individuals make sense of change, and how leadership sensegiving is privileged in this process. Policy enactment (Ball *et al 2012*) and translation (Clarke *et al 2015*) literatures are also explored. These explain how the policies come to be put into practice or translated from one place to another. Finally, Actor- Network Theory (Callon 1992, Latour 1987, Fenwick 2010, 2012, Mol 2010 and others) is introduced as a way of revealing how sociomaterial factors may help or hinder sensemaking and enactment of the policy. A conceptual framework of how these three perspectives complement each other and add understanding to this research case is also proposed. The chapter ends with a reinstatement of my research questions.

Chapter 4 offers an overview of my methodological influences and research design. The research uses an insider case study design, to allow my insights as insider researcher to form part of the interpretation and analysis. Conducted over a one-year period in 2015-2016, fieldwork included semi-structured interviews with the 'elites' or leadership teams, two sets of teacher focus groups revisited a year later and analysis of key school policy documents to build the contextual background of the case. This chapter also considers ethical issues from an insider perspective and plans for the data analysis.

Chapter 5 combines both data and analysis. It addresses the research questions and presents rich contextualised accounts of the experiences of working in this forming MAT from multiple perspectives. The chapter is divided into three sections that relate to the three research questions respectively. Firstly, it considers the work of the 'system builder' (Cressman 2009), an actor who, in ANT terms, positions them self as an obligatory passage point or, in the more standard terms of educational leadership, the 'system leader' (DfE 2014, and Fullan 2005) taking control of the forming MAT. Secondly it examines the enactment of the MAT through two moments of policy translation; the joint 6th form and the relationship between SRS and its middle school. This suggests how vertical or horizontal relations between the schools mediate the collaborative relations in the complex MAT policy framework that incorporates the opposing notions of collaboration and market values. Finally, this chapter considers the MAT from a broader

perspective, asking if it has helped protect the schools or if it represents a policy paradox introducing more problems than it has solved.

This chapter aims to add to the (still limited) body of knowledge about Multi-Academy Trusts and the effect such policy structures have upon the lived practices of those that work within them.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis, summarising the contributions made by the study and implications for policy, it will assess and reflect on my use of theory and method. The difficulties associated with the dual role of researcher and teacher are discussed, and how they were managed, or at least reconciled. The chapter concludes with a debate regarding cross-town MATs, a specific variant of the wider movement towards MATs designed to improve standards, and suggestions and justifications for policy changes in this area drawn from the research findings.

Chapter 2: Policy

In this thesis policy is understood as central to the practice of schooling and, specifically in relation to my own interests, to the practice of being a teacher. This chapter will present a particular history of policy change and how policy has shaped and reshaped the local organisation of schooling in England. I look back at the major changes that have given schools a sense of increasing autonomy including the end of the Tripartite system and the origins of the three-tier system; the Education Reform Act 1988 under the influence of Neoliberalism, and the Education Act 2002. I also review the series of different versions of academisation and the introduction of school collaborative structures from hard federations to Multi-Academy Trusts, these being the most salient aspects of recent education policy. This chapter asks whether, and to what extent, it is possible for schools to collaborate with one another meaningfully and sustainably, particularly those serving the same phase of students, given the enduring culture of competition that accompanies the standards discourse of English schooling. This chapter forms the story of the England's schools as they move from one policy arrangement to another demonstrating what Ball (2008) called the 'hyperactive' nature of educational policy.

In the beginning: Comprehensivisation

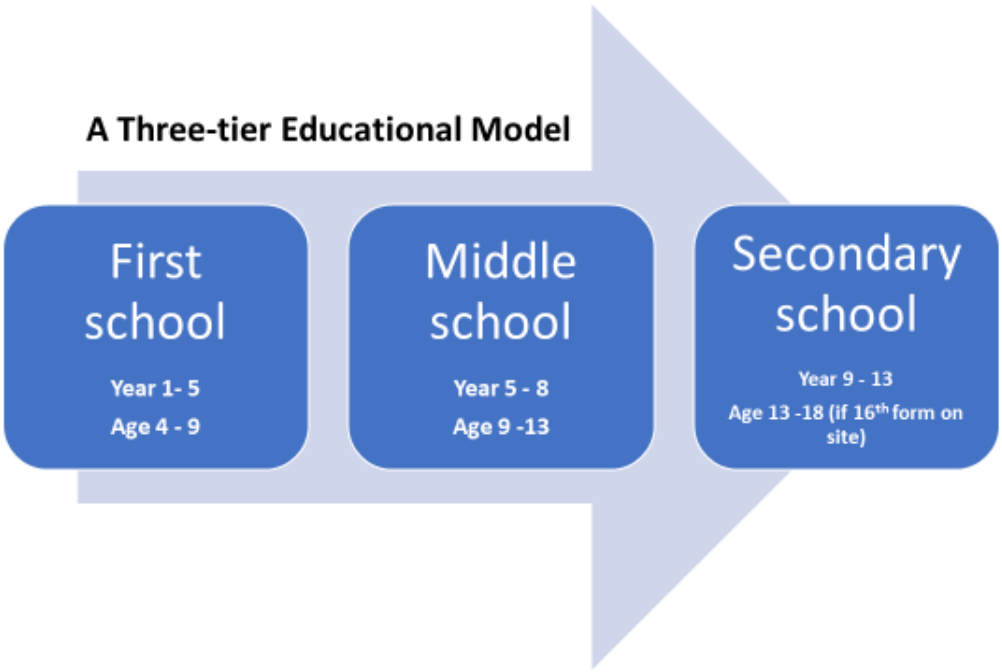
I begin in 1965 and the roll out of comprehensive schools across England. This marked a significant turning point in the post war philosophy of education and paved the way for the introduction of the educational organisation found in the town under investigation today. Comprehensivisation of English secondary schools in 1965 weakened (in most local areas, but not all) the tripartite system involving student selection at age 11 into grammar schools, secondary moderns and technical schools. A DES circular explains the aim was to 'end selection and 11+ and eliminate separatism in secondary education' (DES, 1965). The 11+ exam was criticised for being 'inefficient and unfair' (Simon 1953 in Jones 2016:47) a view supported by the DES in 1958 who claimed '10 and 20 percent of children allocated at 11 would turn out to be wrongly placed' (DES, 1970). In addition to inherent problems with selection at 11, secondary moderns and technical schools were criticised for their low-quality educational provision; in 1961 '73% of students in England and Wales left school never attempting a public exam' (Jones 2016:47). This situation affected student life chances and opportunities and led to the 'untapped abilities of the mass of the population' (Jones 2016:58) becoming a concern for educationalists, psychologists and politicians alike. Comprehensive non-selective schools were introduced that required no

entrance exam and were in principle open to all. The philosophical objective of these schools was to enable class mobility and blur previously held class divisions, however how far this was achieved has been debated by many subsequent governments.

The three-tier system

In 1965 the DES gave local areas the freedom to adopt an education model that would best fit their community stating 'while the essential needs of the children do not vary greatly from one area to another, the views of individual authorities, the distribution of population and the nature of existing schools will inevitably dictate different solutions in different areas' (DES, 1965). Some local authorities felt strongly that selection at 11 should be abolished rapidly, and as early as 1968 created middle schools to act as a bridge between primary and secondary education, See *Fig. 2* below for the organisational model of such a system. These types of schools grew and in 1970 the DES published guidance on how they could be organised. The popularity of such schools grew further as the school leaving age increased to 16 in 1972 and some schools were not large enough to house the additional pupils thus opting for reorganisation. The schools in the town under investigation operated as traditional comprehensives until 1982, when they adopted the three -tier model. This remains in operation today.

Fig. 2 *(also found in appendix B.6)*



However, the educational landscape and expectations placed upon schools and students have altered distinctly since the introduction of the three- tier model. This style of educational provision now has limitations, the origins of which lie in the changes brought about by the 1988 Education Reform Act including the introduction of SATs, GCSE exams and performance measures such as league tables.

Educational Policy from 1988: marketisation, standardisation, accountability

The Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) centralised the control of education, removing much teacher discretion in the classroom and began a 25-year trend of weakening local authorities (LA's). It did this by increasing provision for the local management of schools; introducing policies such as the national curriculum and standardised GCSE exams. The introduction of exam league tables permitted students to be compared nationally creating 'a whole new competitive world' (Lawton 1988:11) and a way to 'operationalise… professionals' accountability for their work' (Jones 2016:127). The ERA marked the beginning of the big changes of increased centralised control, monitoring, accountability and autonomy that has 'established enduring ground rules for the 1990s and beyond' (Jones 2016:138).

The ERA represented a significant shift away from the educational social policy that characterised most of the twentieth century. Jones suggests it was based on the 'basic assumption that by making institutions responsible in a competitive environment for their own success or failure standards would be driven up' (Jones 2016:120) Crucially 'what counted as an achievement would be determined not simply by consumer demand but by government decision' (Jones 2016:121). The introduction of the principles of autonomy and competition between schools, particularly those of the same phase (such as high schools) dramatically and irrevocably changed the system.

Glatter (2012) suggests there is a paradox relating to the concept of increased autonomy introduced by the ERA. This is based upon three principles; 'the nature of school autonomy, accountability and the quasi market in which they operate' (Glatter 2012: 564). Firstly, the ERA gave schools a confusing relationship with autonomy. Marketisation and related financial deregulation (that has continued to the present day with academies) allowed schools more control over their finances. However, this was contradicted by tighter controls over curriculum design and delivery. Secondly accountability is complicated; schools are held to account by the results of national tests and performance

indicators, over which they have limited control as they do not write the exams or have a say in how they are measured. Finally, the nature of the market in which schools operate demands they compete for the highest achieving students, in return for high performing exam results and league table positioning. The market has created a disjuncture between the purpose and the operation of schooling.

This competitive culture became engrained and continued beyond the 1990s. A DfE research report in 2014 found that in some cases 'school leaders, particularly of secondary schools, expressed a feeling of being in competition … with other local schools'. When this related to attracting pupils 'this often influenced the choices that they made about partnerships' (Sandals and Brant 2014:33). I will return to this tension between competition and collaboration later in the chapter. Attitudes of contention were not limited to between high schools, this culture permeated all phases from primary upwards. Evangelou *et al* (2008) found relationships between secondaries and their feeder primary schools were not always productive. For example, 'previous experience or achievement [of pupils] is often disregarded by secondary schools' and 'few secondary schools have sustained linking arrangements' or continuity of provision between primary and secondary schools for their pupils (p4). This implies a gap in relations existed (certainly in 2008 prior to the expansion of the academies programme) between the two phases of school provision in some local areas. The relationship between feeder schools (primaries and secondaries in particular) is crucial to ease student transition between one school and another, and to ensure they are educationally and pastorally prepared for the change.

The following section outlines research into the detrimental effect of transition on student progress and justifies why it is important for schools to overcome their historical differences and work together, particularly in a three-tier system, a chain of three feeder schools in vertical relationships with two points of transition.

Collaboration to ease school transition

In September 2015 Ofsted published a report 'Key stage 3: the wasted years?' resulting from their judgement that progress in secondary schools had stalled when compared to primary, and that the poorly handled transition was to blame. Findings of the report were based on a sample of just under 2000 inspections of various kinds, 14 good practice visits, interviews with senior leaders and just under 11,000 questionnaire responses from year 7 and 8 students. Key stage 3 encompasses year 7-9 in a traditional secondary school. The main issues Ofsted found included the lack of priority given to key stage 3 by senior

leaders due to pressures of key stage 4 (GCSE) and 5 (A level) and the high likelihood the top key stages will be timetabled and staffed before key stage 3, rendering it less of a priority and having to fit it in around the exam classes (Ofsted 2015).

There was an admission in the report by some senior leaders that progress in key stage 2 is not built upon effectively and some students may repeat some of the work they had already done, pupil questionnaires revealed this was most likely in English and Maths. There is very little corresponding research into the effects of transition on first or middle school pupils in a three-tier system, presumably due to the low numbers of such an arrangement. However, 'Key Stage 3: The wasted years?' is an equally important question for the three-tier system as it is for the traditional two- tier. It provides strong rationale for a cross phase or vertical school federation or MATs whereby school leaders and teachers work together to design an 'all through' curriculum that avoids repetition and logically builds upon the progress made in each key stage. In 2010 the DfE suggested 'curriculum coherence' was vital to ensure a 'high performing' school system, suggesting 'a system achieves coherence in this sense when its national curriculum content, textbooks, teaching content, pedagogy, assessment and drivers and incentives are all aligned and reinforce one another' (DfE(b), 2010:15). The concept of 'curriculum continuity' has its roots in an early study conducted on behalf of the DfCSF (Evangelou *et al* 2008) that found several determinants of successful transition, a coherent curriculum between feeder schools being one of them.

Policy support for school collaboration

In the late 1990s and 2000's there was a shift in attitude among policy makers from the 'competition to raise standards' promoted by the ERA in the early 1990s to a recognition that 'no school can meet the needs of all its pupils alone' and 'partnership must become central to the organisation of the system' (DfCSF, 2009). Bell *et al's* (2005) systematic review of networks of 3 or more schools found 'evidence that networks can be a highly effective vehicle for improving teaching, learning and attainment' although 'more effective networks had more specific and narrower aims than less effective networks' (p6). The success of collaborative ventures rests upon the emergence of 'a new type of school leader' a 'system leader' a head or member of the senior leadership team 'who works directly for the success and wellbeing of students in other schools as well as their own' (Higham *et al* 2009:2). The National Leaders of Education (NLE) programme was developed in the mid 2000's to encourage the sharing of good practice and to formalise the support of 'outstanding' heads for disadvantaged or schools in Ofsted difficulties.

Higham *et al* claim that 'together with their schools they represent system leadership in action' (2009:7). System leadership is explored in the following chapter, it pertains to the leadership of more than one school to improve educational standards.

Examples of school collaborative leadership policy include the City Challenges, initially in London (2003) and subsequently Manchester and the Black Country led by 'consultant leaders' (Higham *et al* 2009:108) who built upon work of former Labour policies such as Education Action Zones and Excellence in Cities to improve educational standards particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Interventions and activities were specific to the school and area, however, they all were 'characterised by a belief that school-to-school collaboration has a central role to play in school improvement [and] a recognition of the importance of school leadership' (Hutchings *et al* 2012:v). Evaluation of the success of the City Challenges found that the majority of the schools involved improved their attainment for free school meal (FSM) pupils and the proportion of good and outstanding schools increased in all three areas. Although 'a great many factors contributed to this improvement… the most plausible explanation for the greater improvement in Challenge areas is that the City Challenge programme was responsible' (Hutchings *et al* 2012:v). This provides some tangible evidence that collaboration between schools and educational leaders can actively improve the outcomes and attainment of pupils.

Support for school collaboration is not limited to Labour policies. The House of Commons Education Committee Fourth Report of Session 2013 -14 'school partnerships and Collaboration' states that 'school partnerships and cooperation have become an increasingly important part of a self-improving or school-led system… such collaboration has great potential to continue driving improvement to the English education system' [2]. In addition, O'Shaughnessy argues that Independent groupings of schools have been a feature of our school system for hundreds of years' beginning with faith schools and loose federations of schools they 'are the most sustainable route towards a continually improving school system' (O'Shaughnessy 2012:14).

More recent formalised (policy mandated) school collaboration began with school federations and city academies in 2002 and expanded to included MATs in 2010. The following section explores these policy developments and how they evolved from the

[2] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmeduc/269/269.pdf

original Labour initiatives in the 2002 Educational Act to the return of the Neoliberal principles of market competition under the Coalition government.

Federations and Academies: formalising school collaboration

School federations

The Education Act 2002 allowed school partnerships and collaboration to be achieved in several ways. The 'soft federation' model of schools working together informally, not bound together legislatively but working together publicly to support one another by sharing CPD or resources. Alternatively, the 'hard federation' model which binds schools together under a joint governing body with an executive head teacher. Usually the schools retain their identity and staff but will share business decisions and remain under the jurisdiction of the LA. Executive head teachers usually 'lead two or more schools' in a 'common federative model … a lead school working to support or improve a partner school' (Higham *et al* 2009:91).

There are many advantages of becoming a federation including but not limited to; 'economies of scale' or the ability to buy goods and services in bulk for several schools and get a better deal, enabling more funds to go to the classroom. Cross school collaboration; sharing of resources, staff or joint CPD can be offered. This can save money, allow additional courses to run across sites with shared staffing and ease transition issues. Federations usually operate with an executive principal who oversees all the schools works closely with the school head teachers and can ensure consistency of approach and standards. Exam results are reported separately, schools retain their individual DfE number and are inspected separately by Ofsted. Hard federations operate with a joint governing body which means (some) decisions should be made as a collective group.

The concept of school federations was based on the Labour educational ideals 'that promoted collaboration as a key driver for school improvement' (Howarth 2013:2). Howarth states that there was an expectation in 2002, that by 2007, all secondary schools would have joined or formed a partnership, primarily to assist struggling schools. Yet this 'ambition never came to fruition, with Labour's promotion of federation having far less impact than the coalition's drive to convert all schools to academies' (Howarth 2013:2).

Were federations effective?

There are no easily available figures of the number of school federations in the England. Many have now been converted to MAT's, but this is not necessarily an indication that federations were not a successful model. Ofsted's 2011 study 'Leadership of more than one

school' investigated 61 schools in 29 federations and concluded that all demonstrated improvements in pupils' attainment, cost efficiency and governance[3]. Ofsted mentioned the good practice found in the best federations including 'a single system of assessing and tracking progress… improvements to the governance of weaker schools… pupils enjoying a more enriched curriculum… easing academic transition due to similarities between teaching and learning styles across schools and phases… a clear vision of the benefits of the federation' (Ofsted 2011). Three reasons were given for federating: high performing schools helping others; small schools facing closure; a cross phase federation (primary and secondary for example) to improve the education provision for the community. Unsurprisingly the biggest improvements were found in the first type, high performing schools helping others.

Similarly, a National College for School Leadership conducted a comparative study in 2011 investigating the impact of federations on student outcomes, this was a follow up to a 2009 study and attempted to use the same schools. The National College found that federations do 'have a positive impact on student outcomes. However, there is a time lag of two to four years between formation of the federation and when their performance overtakes their non-federated counterparts' (Chapman *et al* 2011:4). Supporting the Ofsted findings, the most successful federations appear to be those led by high performing schools. Chapman suggests that other types of federations (such as faith or cross phase) may be successful but the sample was too small to be meaningful, and they may be successful in ways that are not captured by school attainment data. For example, Ofsted found in their 2011 study 'pupils were more confident because of the greater opportunities open to them and a larger circle of friends' (Ofsted 2011 quoted by the BBC 2011). Although clearly beneficial for the young people, it is difficult to measure the success of this in quantifiable terms. This highlights the enduring issue in education about the ways in which 'success' is measured, and how the often-blinkered statistical data driven approach obscures value for students from initiatives difficult to traditionally measure.

Ofsted stated in 2011 "As we seek to ensure that every school is a good school, the government is looking at federations as a way to help turn around underperforming schools." So why move the policy initiative from federation to Multi-Academy Trusts? The answer to this is largely political. The academisation of England's state schools increased

[3] https://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/leadership_of_more_than_one_school_-_summary1.pdf

in momentum in the five years from 2010, first with secondaries and then with primaries culminating in the drive towards universal academisation as the Conservatives took power in 2015. Some school federations continue to exist in parts of the country. Statistics from the National Governance Association campaign 'Federations first' indicated in 2016 1000 schools remained as federations. The growing momentum of the MAT programme could indicate more about the tricky financial position of some LAs in the grips of austerity rather than meaningful acceptance of the academies programme over the federation model by school leaders.

That said, federations have taken a backseat to academies, and Schools Minister Lord Nash referred to federation as a "second best model" in a speech in 2013 as it does not provide the "clear financial autonomy and feeling of ownership that comes with academy status." (Howarth 2013:3). Federations and MAT's are similar structures organisationally; both include a group of schools and a joint governing body and executive principal. However, they differ significantly in terms of the 'financial autonomy and ownership' described by Nash. Academies relinquish all LA control and their funding is fed directly from the DfE to the Academy, with no LA interference. Their governance operates differently to a federation as they have a single board of trustees, and thus have a different legal framework to a federation. The type of academy my research schools adopted had its roots in an earlier model; the Labour governments original sponsored academy school.

Academies: history and development

The 2002 Education Act allowed the first sponsored 'city' Academy school to open, a Labour initiative intended to 'raise standards while breaking the cycle of underperformance and low expectations' (Blunkett 2000 in Leo *et al* 2010: 9) perceived to exist among some of England's comprehensives. The 'forerunners of Academies' (DfE 2010a:51) were City Technology Colleges (CTCs) introduced in the early 1990s following the 1988 Education Reform Act. Based in cities and focussing mainly on science and technology CTCs were intended to provide a 'new choice' for students (Gerwirtz, Whitty and Edwards' 1992:207) and a way of tackling deprivation. The cost of these colleges was met by government and external sponsors, they were independent of LA control and forged close links with businesses, all components of the academies that followed. Gerwitz *et al* claim the creation of the CTCs was indicative of the wider political movement to dismantle welfarism and make state-controlled systems such as housing and education 'subject to market forces, with 'sovereignty' being transferred to the consumer' (Gerwirtz, Whitty and Edwards' 1992:208). Of the 15 CTCs created most have

converted to academies following Labour's abandonment of the programme in the mid 1990's. However, their organisational and philosophical legacy was revisited in the original model of academy schools.

These original academies were designed to tackle the 'failing comprehensive' which Labour deemed to be 'a cancer at the heart of English society' (Adonis 2012:xii). Comprehensivisation had not fulfilled its promise to remedy educational inequality; in the 1990's in some areas Adonis claims the typical 16-year-old left school with only 2 or 3 GCSE's (2012:xxii). Two hundred and three sponsored academies were opened by Labour 2002 – 2010 (there are 3,333 secondary schools in England) and these 'tended to be in deprived areas where school performance had been persistently low. 'Initially they were sponsored by businesses or philanthropists. Later, charities, universities, other schools and even some local authorities acted as sponsors' (Powell 2014:online). These were a new breed of business orientated schools that were to change the educational landscape and culture of schooling in this country.

The Multi – Academy Trust

The political leadership change in 2010 gave rise to a rapid expansion of the Academies programme fuelled by the Academies Act 2010. Introduced by the Coalition government, this Act encouraged Ofsted 'good and outstanding' schools to become academies with no sponsor. These new 'convertor' academies operated with a charitable 'Trust' rather than a sponsor and were encouraged to work together in groups forming 'Multi-Academy Trusts' (MATs).

Baker states this vision of convertor academies bore a striking resemblance to Grant Maintained Schools (GM) introduced by Margaret Thatcher in 1988 and disbanded by the Labour government a decade later. 'GM schools were mainstream schools, which were already performing well and opted out of the local authority fold. They took control of their land and buildings and ran their own admissions and were funded by a grant paid directly from central government' (Baker 2010:online). When Labour abolished GM schools in 1998 and schools could choose their new status, some opted to return to the LA as community schools and others opted to retain some independence (continuing to own land and buildings) as foundation or Voluntary Controlled schools.

The GM programme provided evidence that competition does not always increase standards for all schools. Baker (2010) accused it of causing inequality in the educational market and causing some neighbouring schools to sink due to falling rolls. Many GM

schools operated both overt and covert selection policies and some introduced entrance exams to effectively ensure the cream of the best students were in their schools. Supporters of the convertor academies programme argue that this will not occur again due to the expectation that high performing academies will work with other schools. This had not been a requirement of the GM programme and academies do not usually employ selective admissions (unless a faith academy). Interesting to note again that 'in education, if you wait long enough, most ideas come full circle' (Barker 2010:online); the fundamentals of convertor academies are not new, but perhaps the success of federations demonstrated the need to increase the element of collaboration in the MAT structures to avoid the mistakes of the GM programme.

Forced academies and coasting schools

The Coalition government changed the nature of the academies programme by introducing convertor academies with no sponsor, and in doing so damaged the ongoing viability of school federations and other loose collaborative arrangements in some local areas. Good and outstanding schools were invited to convert without a sponsor and the programme expanded to include primaries. Most significantly they introduced new powers of 'forced sponsorship' and increased the risks of 'coasting'. A school deemed to be failing (usually flagged by Ofsted) could be forced, by legal means if necessary, to accept a sponsor. The DfE in their updated guidance (2016) states 'The Secretary of State has a duty to make an academy order in respect of any maintained school that has been judged inadequate by Ofsted, to enable it to become an academy' (DfE, 2016). Powell describes this 'as a waste of money that alienates teachers, parents and the local community, absorbs time and resources that could otherwise be spent on improving leadership and teaching, and makes a mockery of Conservative claims to champion parental choice' (Powell 2014: online). However, it does encourage schools to become academies on their terms and encouraged many federations to convert to MATs.

Another category of school given legal force by the 2016 Education Adoption Act; was the 'coasting' school. Schools deemed to be coasting, that is, not making the required progress (under the new progress 8 measure) with exam results that remain consistent year on year – may also be forced to convert and join a MAT. When the 'coasting school' was announced it was estimated 800 schools nationally would fall into this category (Dickins 2016). However, a report by the TES a year later stated despite there being 500 'coasting schools' identified by KS2 and KS4 results in 2016, none have been subject to an academy order (some will already be academies of course). Wolton, a lawyer specialising

in academies, said the "coasting" school's agenda involved "biting off more than you could chew". (George 2017: online). Yet regardless of the validity of the 'coasting school' threat, Ofsted reported that by 2018 72% of England's secondary schools were academies (Ofsted 2019).

The MAT momentum

Alongside the threat of forced sponsorship and coasting schools there was considerable political momentum encouraging all schools to become academies. In March 2016 the government published a white paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' outlining its plans for most schools other than in 'exceptional circumstances' to join Multi-Academy Trusts. There was particular emphasis on 'coasting schools' those schools that have failed to students to reach their potential for three years. Thus:

> '…By the end of 2020, all schools will be academies or in the process of becoming academies. By the end of 2022, local authorities will no longer maintain schools'
>
> (DfE 2016:55)

The white paper described MATs as the 'only way' to bring together systems in an 'enduring way':

> 'MATs are the only structures which formally bring together leadership, autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of academies in an enduring way, and are the best long-term formal arrangement for stronger schools to support the improvement of weaker schools' (p56)

The paper outlines the benefits of MATs; robust governance, improved career opportunities for teachers, sharing of excellent practice and workload, more efficient 'back office arrangements' freeing up funding for the classroom. MATs are deemed to be superior to the old LA structure as they prevent 'geographical monopolies' offering parents and students more choice, complete accountability to the one leader of the MAT, direct funding to the MAT, avoiding the top slice being removed by the LA, allowing it to be spent where needed (ibid, p57). There are also warnings however of 'swift intervention' should MAT's be deemed to be underperforming.

This announcement of universal academisation was very controversial among educationalists and politicians. In May 2016 the DfE backtracked and said it would no longer require all schools to become academies but 'would take new legislative powers to trigger area wide conversion to academies if the LA is deemed to be underperforming or

no longer financially viable' (Greatbatch and Tate 2019:12). By October 2016 Justine Greening (then education secretary) adopted a more conciliatory tone by claiming the focus would be on 'building capacity and encouraging schools to convert voluntarily' (Greatbatch and Tate 2019:13).

Nationally there are many different types of MAT structures. A study conducted by Ofsted in 2019 revealed a large amount of variation exists in terms of 'what MATs did' (Ofsted 2019:10). Some MATs perform little more than 'health checks' where as others 'direct almost all aspects of school life' (Ofsted 2019:10) There are large geographically spread MATs, for example, that adopt a common branding and ethos to mark them out as partners, but rarely meet with colleagues from other schools due to barriers such as distance between them. In contrast many smaller and geographically closer MATs, comprising of a handful of schools that serve the same community of students may enact the MAT in an alternative way. The origins of their relationships with one another may stem from a perceived local need to improve standards, for instance, or to reduce costs. They may choose to actively collaborate and work together, share resources including material goods and staff and promote active and regular staff meetings to discuss an 'all through curriculum' benefiting students at every key stage. Ofsted call them a 'family of schools with similar values and ambitions' (2019:13). The cross-town MAT in this research has adopted this latter kind of working relationship. The original aims of the MAT were to save money through economies of scale and resource sharing, but also to improve educational standards through collaboration.

Neoliberalism revisited: Rejection of middle-tier system in favour of the 'self-improving school led system'

The 'self-improving school led system' (Greany 2015:125) has become the defining feature of educational policy since 2010 and is epitomised by the expansion of the academies programme, (also the teaching school alliances and the National and Local Leaders of Education programmes). It symbolises a rejection of the 'middle-tier system' (Simkins et al 2015:2) which involved a 'strong role for the mediating layer' (Greany 2015:129), the LA acting as a buffer between the school and the DfE. Through the promotion of the academies programme the Coalition government systematically 'reduced the role of central government' (Greany 2015:129) in education. The 'self-improving school system' (SISS) (Greany and Higham 2018210) was based on the principles of 'maximising school autonomy' whilst also 'raising the accountability bar for schools' (Greany 2015:129). The move to reduce local government involvement in public services is a hallmark of

neoliberal thinking and has its legacy in the Thatcher era. The loss of the 'middle-tier' or 'third-tier' in some local areas is significant. Simkins et al (2015) explains 'in large systems, middle-tier structures can play important administrative and democratic roles' (p2). In an academized school system the line of responsibility is direct from the school (or Trust) to their Regional Schools Commissioner and the DfE. In a middle-tier system 'devolving responsibility to local agents …makes equitable schooling in a particular local area more manageable' it is also more democratic as 'local people are given influence over their locally elected representatives about schooling in their town' (Simkins et al 2015:2). The middle- tier system can also help to 'reduce the risk of fragmentation and dangers of isolationism' (Gilbert 2017:3) that is emerging among some academy schools, run by chains, cut off from local needs.

Another defining feature of the politics of this time was austerity measures, the shrinking of state spending as a reaction to the economic crash of 2007/08. Austerity 'meant more than a temporary slowdown of state spending, it signified an attempt to shrink the social state and convince the population this was a good thing' (Clarke and Newman 2012 in Jones 2016:184). Jones warned that 'the long Conservative revolution that began with Thatcherism resumed, in both economic and ideological form, this time with goals that were even more ambitious' (Jones 2016:184). Such changes were most acutely felt in England due in large part to the secretary of state for Education at the time (Michael Gove); a politician described as having 'uniquely repellent qualities' (Jones 2016 194). He re-established the 'policy paradigm of neoliberalism' pushing for a system of 'financially autonomous institutions reporting to a centre with… set targets… the power to close underperforming schools'. He celebrated freedom yet also strengthened existing forms of central control and invented others' (Jones 2016:195). The expansion of academies and introduction of self-led free schools helped to re-establish competition as the key driver for improvement.

There were four main aims of the academies programme from 2010. In brief:

1) Removal of the power of local government over education
2) National framework of performance targets
3) Collaboration between schools to provide impetus for school improvement
4) Successful head teachers to be 'system leaders'
   (Simkins *et al* 2019:333)

Points 3 and 4 indicate the policy shift towards school collaboration and the work of 'system leaders'; heads or principals of outstanding schools who have 'experience of supporting other schools in challenging circumstances' (DfE 2014 in Armstrong and Ainscow 2018:616). This support could be offered through a teaching school, or the leadership of a Multi- Academy Trust. Usually such individuals will be recognised National Leaders of Education. This has strong echoes of the system leadership discussed by Fullan (2005) and Higham *et al* (2009) and is designed to extend the influence of effective leaders across school settings for collective (system) benefit. It also resonates with the emergence of distributed leadership theory (Spillane *et al* 2004) that focusses on the interactions between leaders, followers and their situation (Harris 2012:545); pertinent in the work of heads who lead more than one school. The work of the system leader and distributed leadership is explored in the next chapter.

Points 1 and 2 can be viewed as an extension of the principles introduced under the ERA. Accountability (for finances and standards) has now shifted entirely from the LA to be managed by the academy schools themselves and performance targets continue to be centrally set. The extent to which increased accountability and responsibility, coupled with a requirement to work with others to improve standards is workable in practice is investigated in this research. The first; accountability, has the potential to distract from the second; collaboration, as it may not encourage the risk taking needed to meaningfully invest or work with others, particularly among schools of the same phase who are victims of mixed policy messages. On the one hand, same phase schools are encouraged to work with one another preferably as members of a MAT, yet they also continue to be fed the policy directive of competition to improve educational standards, improve exam results, move up the school league tables and attract the most able students. It is paradoxical and confusing to navigate. As Armstrong and Ainscow point out 'it is easy to maintain cooperation until the moments when hard decisions have to be made, most particularly regarding the setting of priorities and the allocation of resources' (2018:630). For same phase MATs that share the same local area, collaborative relations are built on precarious foundations, mostly due to the contradictory policy priorities.

Approaches to standards improvement

The history of the GM schools, and the ongoing problem of the 'failing comprehensive' highlighted by Adonis and others in the 1990s suggests there is limited evidence that competition raises standards (Barker 2010). Muijs and Rumyantseva describe the impact of competition as 'mixed' as 'evidence suggests educational actors respond to competition'

(2014:3) and practice does change as a result. However, competition may also exacerbate existing inequalities among educational providers and benefit those groups with high cultural capital and the wherewithal and resources to shop around for the best provider. Similarly, Muijs and Rumyantseva (2014) reviewed evidence to examine if collaboration between schools raises standards and discovered conflicting results. This was reinforced by Armstrong (2015) in his review of the evidence of the effectiveness of various types school collaboration for the DfE. This review was extensive, 'drawing predominantly on knowledge pertaining to the English school system' (p10) dating back to 1999. It found 'the evidence for direct impact of inter-school collaboration on student outcomes is limited' (Armstrong 2015:4).

Evidence that school to school collaboration had positive effects, introduced earlier in this chapter, suggested performance federations comprising of a strong school paired with others needing support appear to be the most successful model to improve standards of the whole group. Initiatives directly tackling areas of educational deprivation and underachievement such as found in the City Challenges also appeared to be successful. However, the extent to which that was due to financial investment or to the sharing of expertise across the group is difficult to ascertain. Associations between less highly performing schools appear to have variable impact (Ofsted 2019, NCSL 2014, Chapman *et al* 2014). Thus, neither competition or collaboration can be marketed indiscriminately as the answer to failing schools, or *the* solution to improve the system. And when paired together, they appear to be totally at odds with one another.

One reason why the evidence for standards improvement is conflicting could be related to an important, and largely overlooked mediating factor; school context. Gray *et al* suggests that may studies of institutional change ignore the prospect that the nature of the context may 'enhance or restrict aspects of the change itself' (2012:124). School contexts vary with regards to facilities, local area, budget, cohort, local norms, values and culture, staff levels and commitment, leadership, history, size and distribution of catchment and so on. These contextual factors affect the ability of leaders to initiate change and mean that an approach that works in one school, may not work in another. Gray *et al* (2012) state that if leaders do not account for these contextual factors it may 'distort their interpretation of the ease of change in the particular context' (p125) as context has a huge role to play in the dynamics of organisational change.

Context and leadership

The relationship between leadership and context has been defined as inseparable by Clarke and O'Donoghue (2017). Their understanding of 'context' is based upon the work explained in the next chapter by Ball *et al* (2012); who argue there are four types of school context which are often interlinked; 'situated, professional, material and external'. The situated context forms part of the schools locale, history and type of student cohort, the professional context relates to the values held by the individuals working in the school, the commitment of the staff and so forth, the material context is the resources available to the school, staffing, budget, facilities for example and finally the external context is the pressure felt by local and national policy and bodies such as Ofsted. Ball *et al* (2012) use these types of context to illustrate difficulties schools can face with policy enactment which shall be explored in the next chapter. Clarke and O'Donoghue however, examine the effect of context on leadership and argue that leaders should be sensitive to the context of their schools, acknowledge the complexity of context and flexible in their approach (2017:176).

As typified by this research case, context is rarely straightforward. The complexity of the school relations being investigated here are based upon an amalgamation of factors including leadership, history, geography, politics, material inequalities, public perceptions, national policy drivers and interventions and so on. The national policy drivers, particularly those relating to austerity, have made the situation volatile and increased feelings of uncertainty among all levels of the staff. This is a tricky situation that Clarke and O'Donoghue argue must be handled sensitively by the leaders, if desired change is to be brought about. The ability to be able to 'read' (2017:177) the context of the school and local community and decide on appropriate priorities and interests is vital. Relating closely to this, leaders must also be flexible in their approach and prepared to shift tactics should the context change. The rapid changes to national educational policy explained earlier in this chapter demonstrate how fundamentally school context can alter beyond the direct control of the leaders, and why it is important for leaders to remain open to shifting their leadership style and approach.

Similarly, Armstrong and Ainscow (2018) discovered that context has a mediating effect on the effectiveness of school partnerships. Collaboration between similar phase schools was found to be most challenging in rural contexts where distance between schools became a barrier. Thus, 'Urban contexts can have a natural advantage … in that movement between schools tends to be easier because of shorter distances… [yet] at the

same time proximity is likely to lead to greater competition … not least regarding the enrolments of students' (Armstrong and Ainscow 2018:628). Despite this, their research study cautiously found that schools were 'able and willing to support each other, even with a policy context that uses competition as the major driver for improvement' (2018:629). They use Muijs and Rumyantseva (2014) concept of 'coopetition' to describe the current education situation promoting collaboration between schools in the competitive policy climate. Although they deem 'coopetition' to be achievable 'it is difficult to achieve and remains fragile as a result of policy decisions that pull stakeholders in different directions' (Armstrong and Ainscow 2018:629). The directions the stakeholders are pulled in will differ depending on the context, for example vertical relations (between feeder schools) or horizontal relations (between same phase schools). This 'role conflict' is often apparent in small rural schools such as the ones that form part of this research, as the demands of teaching conflict with the demands of leadership and management (Clarke and O'Donoghue 2017:174).

Conclusion

This chapter has tracked the policy developments that have influenced the educational landscape in England and affected the context influencing decisions made by this set of schools. It portrays a landscape of educational policy that is pushy and at times punitive. Schools must work hard to keep up with policy developments and have done this by altering, several times, their organisational structures in order to maintain some form of continuity. This chapter demonstrates the cyclical nature of educational policy, for example the city academies had their first incarnation as CTCs, and MATs are structurally similar to GM schools. This chapter also reflects the extent to which shift towards collaboration between schools remained underpinned by principles of marketisation regardless of the politics of the party in power. The Conservatives began the trend towards marketisation via centralising the control of schools and the introduction of league tables, standardised exams and new schools such as CTC's in 1988. The Blair government of the late 1990's and early 2000s continued the trend towards greater school accountability to raise standards with GM schools and sponsored city academies and, in 2002, introduced formal school collaboration in the form of federations. The Coalition policy led by Gove increased school accountability for finances and standards by removing them from the LA and also increased the expectation of school to school collaborations. They expanded the academies programme encouraging all schools to

convert or accept a sponsor (by force if necessary). Not only were schools expected to form chains with other schools, whilst continuing to raise standards in their own, they had to adopt financial responsibility for their budgets during a period of strict austerity. The paradox of increasing one form of autonomy, for example in curriculum choice, whilst centralising control in other areas, for example budget allocation and distribution, has not only confused the direction and organisation of schools but as Jones (2016) argues, has damaged a generation of teacher identities. The burden placed upon senior leaders subjected to MAT conversion, or an academy order, is vast, as they attempt to map out the strategic direction for their school and anticipate the significance of such changes. This burden filters down to those in the classroom, Jones observes that teachers have become 'operationally central but strategically marginal; accustomed to government generated innovation' (Jones 2016:171). They are side-lined in their own classrooms by a constant wave of policy change, agency interference and monitoring. Jones suggests that, whilst most adapted, this has left a 'residue of discontent' (2016:171). This certainly speaks to my own experiences. The coalition resumed the policy direction begun in 1988 but did so by 'raising the intensity of educational change to a new level' (Jones 2016:208). This is the political context in which this research is set and why this moment of change is important to investigate.

The following chapter explains how national policy comes to be made sense of and enacted by individuals working in schools such as these and in doing so focusses particularly on the contributions of ideas of sensemaking and sensegiving, policy enactment and translation, and Actor- Network Theory.

Chapter 3: Sensemaking, policy enactment and Actor- Network Theory

'There is no "one best way" to represent reality, and even if there is some order 'out there' in the world, we can never be sure we have discovered it. For any situation, then, there are an indefinite number of useful and arguably plausible representations. This chapter sets out the theoretical tools chosen to investigate the organisational change experienced by the schools under investigation; sensemaking and sensegiving theories, policy enactment literature and Actor-Network Theory.

This chapter will begin with an explanation of sensemaking and its contribution to the understanding of organisational change. Weick's (1995) conception of sensemaking as a collective, retrospective process often precipitated by crisis or puzzlement is adopted. The importance of narratives and the development of trust in the process of sensemaking is also discussed. I then expand the literature to focus on the role of leadership in the sensegiving process. How leaders can control the sensemaking of their employees during organisational change using sensegiving.

Following this will be an assessment of policy enactment and implementation literature and links made to sensemaking and sensegiving. Beginning with a critique of the traditional policy studies approach, and an exploration of the interpretivist views of Clarke *et al,* Ball *et al* and Bell and Stevenson who highlight the complexities involved in the implementation of policy, the sense making and translation that occurs on multiple levels as a policy becomes enacted. It will use Ball's work on context to consider how policy is enacted by schools and the factors that influence this.

Actor-Network Theory offers additional insights into the forming set of relations, to make sense of the policy enactment in this case. Its sometimes awkward stance of radical symmetry, the decentring of human influence in the formation of networks sheds light of material factors that shape the relations here. Or, rather, how the material context and organisation of the schools mediates the policy enactment and forming school collaboration. Latour, Law, Callon 1992, and Mol are discussed, with additional educational contextual insights provided by Fenwick.

It is my aim that the combination of insights from sensemaking, policy enactment and Actor-Network Theory allow the processes, actions, sociomaterial mediators involved in the policy shifts brought about by the MAT to come into sharp focus and enable the case study to take shape.

This chapter concludes with a theoretical framework illustrating how I envisage sensemaking, sensegiving and ANT will work together to reveal the process of policy enactment. I then present an explanation of the research questions drawing on the theories above.

Sensemaking - structuring of the unknown

Sensemaking is quite simply 'the making of sense' (Weick 1995:4) or rather, the process where people 'work to understand issues that are novel, ambiguous, confusing or in some other way violate expectations' (Maitlis and Christianson 2014:57). It is not surprising then that it has often been used to explain organisational change, or at least how people make sense of change occurring in their places of work which explains its relevance here. The 'father of sensemaking' Karl Weick suggests that 'sensemaking goes beyond interpretation and involves the active authoring of events and frameworks for understanding, as people play a role in constructing the events they attempt to comprehend' (Weick 1995:5).

There are many divergent views on the ways in which sensemaking takes place. Some scholars view the process as an individual and cognitive undertaking (Klein, Moon and Hoffman 2006 in Maitlis and Christianson 2014:58), whereas others view it as more social, occurring as a result of interactions with people (Weick 1995). Weick views sensemaking as fundamentally a retrospective activity, a way of making sense of what has occurred; however, others believe it to be anticipatory or prospective (Maitlis and Christianson 2014:58). Some scholars also suggest sensemaking takes place on a daily or moment to moment basis (Brown 2015:268). However, for Weick sensemaking 'is triggered by much rarer cues that occur most notably in times of crisis and puzzlement' (Weick *et al* 2005:409). In this study, my understanding of sensemaking aligns with Weick; as a retrospective social activity that occurs because of environmental cues signifying change.

Sensemaking can be thought of as a process of invention and discovery where 'people 'construct realities' and then 'retrospectively make sense of them' (Brown *et al* 2015:267). One useful scheme identifies three stages in the sensemaking process; 'noticing or perceiving cues, creating interpretations and taking action' (Maitlis and Christianson

2014:58). Sensemaking is often revealed through the stories people tell of their experiences, and the narratives they construct reveal these three stages.

Narratives and the role of leadership

Sense is made through the stories we tell, these narratives involve 'looking for a unifying order even if we are not sure if one exists' (Ancona 2012:5). People naturally strive for order in their working lives, and a level of personal control. Weber and Glynn argue that 'people internalise scripts for action early on in their working life, through socialisation on the job… when such scripts are internalised employer and employee take them for granted and they from normative expectations' (2006:1643). It is when these expectations are no longer met or are under threat that cues sensemaking to occur. The human is 'essentially a storytelling animal' (Brown and Humphreys 2003:124) and groups in organisations 'evolve a shared narrative' (Brown and Humphreys 2003:124). Maitlis and Christianson state that 'meaning in an organisation is best captured by a multiplicity of stories' (2014:95).

In their research on an FE college in a post-merger situation, Brown and Humphreys found that senior leaders painted themselves as heroes, and instigators of epic change whereas the subordinates, the teachers, told a more tragic tale of hopelessness and betrayal. Such characterisation and tale telling draws upon familiar western literary genres and is a cultural tool of sensemaking. Brown and Humphreys also found sensemaking occurred through self-categorisation into ingroups and outgroups. This helps provide a psychic attachment to the new organisation, or at least the individuals in the group, as the wider identity of the organisation is shifting or threatened by the merger. This research drew the conclusion that to successfully lead change 'requires the manipulation and moulding of peoples understandings' and creating a narrative that 'contains explanations of management and future projection' (Brown and Humphreys 2003:139). To apply their will more effectively, leaders must focus on the hearts and minds of their work force, or at least be mindful of all the narratives being constructed about the situation.

Balogun et al (2015) found that senior leaders often adopted a dual role in the leadership of organisational change; that of both change agent and recipient. This will lead them to adopt two sets of narratives about the change, one focussed on a broader picture of the change required (relating to national policy or similar), and the other rooted in the local context. It is through this understanding of the locality, that the leaders become change

agents. The mediation between their understanding of the locality and context, and the wider picture is a key feature of leadership and will determine the ultimate success of the change being initiated. Balogun also argues that to truly understand the dynamics of change, one must go beyond notions of unitary leaders and their actions, and see organisations as 'interpretive communities' (2015:975). This can explain why change is made sense of, enacted and evaluated in different ways across the organisation regardless of the sensegiving efforts of the leaders.

Fuglsang and Jagd further develop the link between sensemaking and leadership suggesting a key component for effective management of sensemaking (and thus organisational change) is trust. They distinguish between 'process-based trust' developed from previous experience, 'characteristic based trust' based on specifics of the individual such as age or sex and 'institutional based trust' that comes from legitimate sources such as accreditation. Robust sensemaking is needed for trust to develop, particularly the institutional kind, as the actors 'relate to the environment and reproduce institutional features of trust' (Fuglsang and Jagd 2015:35).

To effectively manage change, elicit collaborative working and produce the level of trust necessary to allow this, leaders must regulate the sensemaking of the stakeholders. Sensemaking develops through the narratives people tell themselves and these narratives can be controlled to a degree by the careful use of 'sensegiving' by the leadership team.

Sensegiving – the work of the system leader

The role of the leader is often that of 'sensegiver', the strategic shaper of the sensemaking of others 'through the use of symbols, images, and other influence techniques' (Maitlis and Christianson 2014:68). The 'attempt to affect employees' sensemaking … is a crucial leadership activity during organisational change' (Kraft *et al* 2018:71).

Gioia and Chittipeddi explain how sensemaking and sensegiving can be used by a CEO to elicit strategic change in an organisation. Firstly, the leader must understand the change in a way that 'makes sense' or fits an established system of meaning, they must understand the context of the organisation and develop a revised conception of this using sensemaking. Follow this the 'vision of the changed organisation evolves and is disseminated to others via sensegiving'. 'Symbols and symbolic action are used to communicate' the old ways are no longer appropriate (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991:434).

Sensegiving by the leader is a cycle of 'negotiated social construction activities to influence the stakeholder… to accept that vision' (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991:434).

Kraft *et al* (2018:71) suggest a similar model that is receptive to differing employee needs at each stage. Their research sampled employees from large private companies experiencing episodic change. They found the change process begins with 'receptive sensegiving' by the leader, responding to the employees needs for reassurance. It progresses to 'participative sensegiving' responding to the need for orientation, to know what is going on. This progresses to 'compensating sensegiving' as employees need balance and a belief that the change will be worthwhile. Finally, the move to 'evaluative sensegiving' acknowledges employees' efforts to implement the change (adapted from p81). This model presumes sensemaking is a wholly collective process and that employee needs are largely predictable at each stage. However, organisational change precipitated by fast paced national policy changes, as found in education, is more complex to manage, as often changes are not fully embedded before another comes along.

Kraft *et al* also stress the importance of symbolic and discursive strategies in each phase. Similar to Maitlis and Christianson and Gioia and Chittipeddi, sensegiving requires effective use of language and symbols to be transmitted. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) take a comparable view regarding the need for careful use of discourse for sensegiving. However, they also attempt to address what they consider to be a gap in the understanding of sensegiving; the triggers and enablers of it. They investigate why leaders partake in sensegiving on some occasions and not on others. Maitlis and Lawrence conducted a large scale longitudinal comparative study on British symphony orchestras. They found sensegiving is triggered by a disjuncture or 'the perception or anticipation of a gap in organisational sensemaking processes' (Maitlis and Lawrence 2007: 58). Sensemaking is enabled by motivated actors who possess 1) 'a discursive ability … to fashion persuasive accounts' and 2) 'process facilitators – organisational routines, practices and structures providing time and opportunity for sensegiving' (2007:58). Once again, the position and abilities of leaders is paramount. As 'through evocative language and construction of narrative, symbols… leaders help shape the sensemaking processes of organisation members towards some intended definition of reality' (2018:58). The leaders provide the tools to help others enact the organisational change.

This particular leadership skill is important in schools that operate in a 'chaotic competitive environment full of threats' (Coldron *et al* 2014:391) due to rapid policy

change. Leaders are 'institutionally empowered for sensegiving' as they represent the organisation and 'have privileged access to internal information' (Kraft *et al* 2008:72). Coldron *et al* (2014) examined 'well positioned headteachers' and their management of policy change including academy conversion. They found a recognition among the heads of the 'precariousness of prestige' for both them and their schools. This was based upon a 'complex symbolic and material processes that confer various forms of capital' (Coldron *et al* 2014:393). The capital of schools is precarious as it is based largely upon changeable performance indicators, inspection frameworks and policy initiatives. Therefore, constant sensegiving is necessary by the leader, to guide others through this difficult working landscape. In addition, it can explain why some schools may be reluctant to work together, or fully enact the MAT policy to do so, due to the concern 'preservation of their position of their school might be put at risk as a consequence of supporting other schools' (p.393). This fear is a product of the confusing MAT policy that combines neoliberal principles of competition via league table position and exam results, with the impetus to collaborate as discussed in the previous chapter.

System leadership or 'system thinking' as conceived of by Fullan (2004, 2005) and Higham *et al* (2009) and used in the MAT policy aims, suggests qualities required for leadership across more than one school. It necessitates other leaders to accept the sense provided by the key leader; the Principal, and to adapt their practice accordingly. Federation and MAT structures rely on the effective distribution of leadership across head teachers, business managers and other subordinates at each respective school. Fullan suggests system thinkers have a dual role, 'one to make system coherence more evident and accessible' and two 'to foster interactions – horizontally and vertically – to promote system thinking in others' (Fullan 2005:81). This leadership work across schools involves a 'highly sophisticated balancing act' (Fullan 2005:81).

This links to the body of work on distributed leadership (DL), and although the focus of this thesis is the enactment of policy on the ground and not leadership per se, the sensemaking of the new MAT structures will be mediated by the change in leadership structure. DL theory signifies a shift in leadership thinking, from that of the individualistic great leader, or 'on the top of the hill' (Thorpe *et al* 2011:239) who makes all the decisions and decides on the direction. DL demands formal leaders rethink their roles as it 'underlines heads are only part of the leadership practice in any school as inevitably there are other sources of influence and direction' (Harris 2013:547). It leads to a different sense of their place in the organisation being made by them and others. However, Bolden

(2011:263) argues DL used in this descriptive sense does not explain the variety of leadership that may be at work at any one time within the same organisation as it is likely within schools some solo leadership prevails as ultimately the head (or principal) remains responsible for the school in the eyes of Ofsted and the DfE.

Sensemaking and sensegiving are interpretive processes. They rely on the interpretation of key individuals to guide others towards a common goal or change in established practices. Leader sensegiving is a way of standardising the sensemaking process among employees and can go some way to ensuring change happens in an efficient manner. However, interpretation, and the making of meaning is gloriously subjective, and notoriously difficult to fully control. When people are unsure about change, they create their own narratives. These narratives can be dangerous to the emerging new order.

Sensemaking and sensegiving are always at the risk of sensebreaking. There is little research on this process, but Maitlis and Christianson argue it is an important aspect and can 'motivate people to reconsider the sense they have already made, to question underlying assumptions and re-examine their cause of action' (214:69). Individuals are not presented as passive puppets in sensemaking literature; there is potential to resist the hegemonic message and make alternative sense of the situation. This is often the case as people construct their own understandings of the situation mediated by their own back stories and experiences, they create their own narratives. The work of the leader as sensegiver is highly important. However, what is not clear from this literature is whether sensegiving has the power to override individuals sensemaking. Actor- Network Theory may provide the tools to assist with that.

Additional problems with the sensemaking and sensegiving processes are discussed below.

Problems with sensemaking and sensegiving

Sensemaking often occurs at a point of crisis, in which existing norms and values, understandings and practice are changing. This heightens emotions and may hinder the sensemaking process. Sensemaking and sensegiving often are ineffective or left incomplete because the fear experienced when faced with change may 'reinforce existing maps and mental models, increase our reliance on old information and inhibit action' (Ancona 2012:12). We hold on to what we know and the attitude of 'this way of doing things always worked before' is prevalent in organisations such as schools. In a reality characterised by rapid policy change messages often get lost in translation, people

become confused, and they are anxious, which will not help effective sensemaking in practice. Fuglsang and Jagd (2015) suggest the effective establishment of trust in the organisation will allow sensegiving to occur and hopefully smooth the process of change. However, the development of trust, whilst important for effective organisational change, is often also not straightforward. Thus, this cannot be put forward as the sole precursor for effective collective sensemaking.

Can everyone take part in sensemaking? Or is effective sensemaking the domain of the few with specific knowledges and characteristics? Certainly sensemaking 'calls for courage' as 'illuminating the change is often a lonely and unpopular task' (Ancona 2012:4). In the hyperactive fast policy changing climate of education, sensemaking is required frequently. This allows little time to 'determine the outcome of your actions' necessary to fully make sense and enact the change (Ancona 2012 in Snook *et al* 2012:13). Perhaps sensemaking falls into the domains of everyone in the organisation, but sensegiving is reserved for the leaders as Chan suggests 'the most influential sensegivers are those with political or symbolic capital' (Chan 2007:327). If this is true does it suggest that agency over sensemaking is restricted (by the sensegivers)? We may feel we have control over the understandings of our own stories and our place in the world, but do we? Maitlis and Christianson propose that there can be 'very different stories told by different groups…. And …. Even a dominant organisational narrative can be embellished and modified by less powerful individuals in ways that significantly change its meaning' (2014:81).

Is sensemaking really collective? Weick seems to contradict himself stating that there 'is no such thing as a common, unified or shared representation in organizations: individual histories are too diverse' (Weick, 1995: 188). What organisations share in fact are merely 'actions, activities, moments of conversations and joint tasks each of which they then make sense of using categories that are more idiosyncratic (Weick, 1995: 188). Despite these personal idiosyncrasies, presumably people's sensemaking in organisations is facing the same direction even if they do not draw the same conclusions. Otherwise it would follow that cooperation would be impossible.

There is an additional problem with sensemaking. It does feel at times like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. In the attempt to make sense of sensemaking, I am effectively sensemaking, and sensemaking itself is a socially constructed process. I risk distorting the field of research by employing the very method – sensemaking- that I am examining as I socially construct or rather, objectify it, in an attempt to understand. There are

suggestions by scholars that sensemaking leads to an outcome, an objective understanding of the situation. This is a 'fundamental paradox' in the sensemaking research: 'it defines reality and meanings as socially constructed, yet it seeks to disengage from that experience and objectify it' (Schwandt, 1994: 119 in Allard-Poesi 2005:3). Allard- Polesi suggests two alternative approaches to avoid this paradox:

> The postmodern route… invites us, through deconstruction, to engage against our sensemaking as a way of uncovering both the constitutive and the undecidable character of sensemaking activities. The pragmatist (or participative) route, on the other hand, suggests that, through participative action research, we fully engage in sensemaking with organization members and recognize the socially constructed aspect of all sensemaking activities. (2005:1).

Arguably these approaches do not fully reconcile the problem. The relativist postmodern route emphasises multiple truths and understandings of any given situation and risks losing grasp of that which it intends to study. The pragmatist route's suggestions of participation and deep involvement with the objects of study risks losing all semblance of objectivity. Such immersion is notoriously difficult and risky to achieve in practice, even for me an insider researcher.

Sensemaking theories offer an understanding of the cognitive processes that people go through when faced with a crisis or change, it implies that this process is social and can be revealed by listening to the stories people tell about their experiences. However, these theories are abstract, and do not tell the full story of how the change becomes enacted and professional practices altered. Sensemaking is the initial focus for this research, understanding how the schools made sense of their changing circumstances and decided to collaborate formally and adopt national policy change. The interview and focus group data that is discussed in chapter 5 will reveal the different narratives held about this process; however, the story does not end there. The Federation and then MAT was enacted or brought into being by the actions of individuals who worked at the schools. This too is of interest to this study. Here the focus must narrow from broad conceptions of 'making sense' to specific theories of policy enactment in education.

Sensemaking to policy enactment

Sensemaking contains three elements; firstly, cues from the environment will set it into motion, something will change for example, or change will be perceived as approaching

or inevitable. This process should be recognised as 'gradual and cumulative rather than immediate and final' (Weber and Glynn 2006:1648). In practice such cues are not always clear, they may signal something vague or intangible, or perhaps the impact of the incoming change will not be fully understood initially. Sensemaking will then occur, or begin to occur, attempt to occur, in some form or other sense will attempt to be made of the situation. Then finally once some semblance of sense is made, action will be taken. A course of action will be enacted. The point here is that the 'link between noticing cues and action is neither immediate nor necessarily straightforward' (Weber and Glynn 2006:1648). The enactment of the policy change relies upon collective sensemaking which in turn relies upon noticing the cues in the first place. If sensemaking has not occurred, or if there has been a misinterpretation of the cues, or the sensegiving has been ineffective, then the enactment, (the action taken) will not follow the desired plan. There is some scholarly cross over between sensemaking and policy enactment literature, often sensemaking is inferred but not named as part of the enactment process. Degn (2015) describes enactment as the 'final characteristic of the sensemaking sensegiving process… as the sensemaker constructs his own environment and the premises for future sensemaking' (Degn 2015:904). Policy enactment literature provides an active application for sensemaking and sensegiving theory, a context and opportunity to see the making and giving of sense in action.

The literature that follows tracks the development of policy implementation and enactment literature. This literature sits alongside the sensemaking, as they both tell the story of what happens between the cues for change and the action. How the organisational change that warranted the sensemaking comes into being and national policy is understood and implemented in this local context (and the issues faced in-between).

Policy studies and implementation

Policy 'Implementation Studies' contains a whole wealth of work attempting to unpick the processes involved in putting policy into action. This work began in a positivist fashion, suggesting the success of implementation can be measured in terms of policy impact (Hill and Hupe 2003) or that the value of a policy can be 'measured in terms of its appeal and implementability' (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984:XV). The effects of policies have also been measured in statistical terms, for example, the success of a new curriculum venture measured by improvements in exam results. Policy was presented as a 'logical

outcome of a problem-solving process' and 'a linear and sequential process in which policies pass largely unproblematically from conception to evolution' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:147). Recently, however, policy implementation literature has shifted towards an interpretivist stance, recognising 'processes of sense making and translation' that occur before a policy gets anywhere near to implementation (Ball *et al* 2012, Clarke *et al* 2015) or put into action in the setting. The focus on the process of understanding and application of the policy is of relevance and concern for these scholars, and I would argue, offers more potential for action and change with regards to policy implementation and expectations than the work that came before. Policy is 'not seen as neat and tidy but rather as a messy process in which at any point in the cycle participants negotiate over future trajectories outcomes or implementation' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:147). This understanding of 'messy policy' fits policy experiences and interventions that come thick and fast, often layer up and contradict one another, as found in education.

Pressman and Wildavsky's seminal work 'Implementation' (1984) was one of the first attempts to investigate policy implementation and why policy fails, or rather the 'differences between actual and intended consequences' (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984:XV). Their research based in the US, made a bold attempt to track policy implementation, and although it focussed on broad public policy rather than education, did provide insights that inspired future scholars to investigate this area of social life. Pressman and Wildavsky highlighted that when examining policy even the 'apparently straightforward is really complex and convoluted' (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984:93) and investigates why some policies, even those with support from stakeholders, are not fully realised into practice. However, their concept of implementation as 'a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieving them' (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984:XXI), glossed over the complexities involved in such interactions and did not go far enough to demonstrate not only the way policy fails, but also how it is often reshaped by local contexts.

Policy translation

Clarke *et al* (2015) are critical of what they call the traditional Policy Studies approach that adopts a positivist rationalist epistemology, (Clarke *et al* 2015:13) on the grounds of being too linear, viewing policy over simplistically as something that moves in one predictable direction. In addition, they fail to capture the sense of policy that is 'always in the making, or under construction' they view it as a finished product, or object to be applied to any given context. Clarke *et al* adopt an interpretivist stance and claim that the crucial

element of policy enactment (or implementation) is a process of translation. Translation occurs as the policy is made sense of and applied accordingly to their context. This process of sense making is experienced by all who work in the organisation and is the key to policy implementation success or failure, it explains why some policies are bent and altered to fit the context.

Clarke *et al* use a variety of case studies to illustrate how policy moves from one domain to another. They state that 'when policy moves it is always translated or made to mean something new in its new context' (Clarke *et al* 2015:9). This understanding of policy as a dynamic entity allows a deeper understanding of why on occasion policy has differing effects in different places. The concept of translation provides both an 'orientating metaphor and conceptual lens' (Clarke *et al* 2015:35) to understand how policy is 'given meaning and life as it moves from context to context' (ibid p32). Translation mediates between 'what is and what is to become' and is a non-neutral 'deeply politicised' process or 'form of exercise of power' (Clarke *et al* 1984:37). Translation is identified as going one of two ways; either an oppressive transmission of dominant ideas or an act of resistance with the potential to reshape society.

Ball *et al* agree, stating that 'issues of power and interests need to be investigated' and that policy 'enactment involves creative processes of interpretation and re-contextualisation'. The potential for oppression or resistance comes about as 'policies rarely tell you exactly what to do, they rarely dictate or determine practice, but some more than others narrow the creative response' (Ball *et al* 2012:3). Often educational policies are written by individuals far removed from the reality of many schools, and thus Ball states 'cannot simply be implemented! They have to be translated from text to action – put into practice – in relation to history and context and resources available' (Ball *et al* 2012:3).

For Clarke *et al* (2015:160), translation is the key to the creation of societies, or at least some form of collective understanding and action. It is a way of making sense of the next course of action, as mediated by a policy. This process is political as it is through the decision-making process, and which policy to adopt, opportunities are simultaneously created and closed off. Clarke *et al* describe this as 'wayfaring' 'as we go one way, rather than another, we create the very places of our existence, and, in so doing, we both create and limit the future ways that we may go' (Clarke *et al* 2015:179). The decision to translate policy in such a way and enter a federation could have this effect as it opens up new

policy opportunities (including conversion to a MAT), yet limits other opportunities as all decisions have, from that point, to be made collectively. It is this aspect of policy translation and implementation that I find particularly interesting. It is what DeSousa Santos calls the 'sociology of 'not yet" considering 'not what exists as its object but rather the possibilities if what might be that are at stake in the present' (DeSousa Santos 2004: 24-25). It is this conception of what might be if policy is to be adopted into practice, or not adopted, that is risk assessed by head teachers and other stakeholders. It is this that makes their job so difficult as one can never really know what might be, or what might have been, particularly in the fast policy change climate of education.

Theories of policy implementation have also taken a more person-centred focus. Van der Vegt *et al* 2001 are critical of the focus of previous work (such as Clarke *et al*) on 'processes that make a new programme work rather than the impact on local users' (Van der Vegt *et al* 2001:9). They suggest there should be less focus on the processes involved and more focus on the experiences of, and impact on those who live with the changes. Van der Vegt's theories are focussed on educational policy and come from their own research in that area. They examine why change in schools (often policy led) is slow and difficult to implement. They argue 'implementation implies impact' and 'giving up familiar structures' policy thus has 'system unsettling potential' (Van der Vegt 2000:12). They claim that teacher's concern when it comes to new policy implementation often fall into three categories called 'activated concerns'. Firstly, the concern will have a 'dominant theme' such as that of the business model taking over education as has been levelled at the academies programme. Secondly it will create unease, nagging fears, doubts. Thirdly, it will be recurrent and may lie dormant for some time only to remerge. These activated concerns can explain why a policy is slow to be accepted and embedded into practice in an organisation.

In addition to this Van der Vegt *et al* identify 5 personal concerns that can further inhibit policy implementation (2001:16). Firstly 'identity inclusion concern' questioning one's ongoing place in the changing organisation. Secondly the question of 'investment or effort' given to the new policy, particularly in fast policy environments such as schools. Thirdly concerns about level of 'professional competence' needed to successfully implement the new policy. Fourthly, a concern regarding an individual's ongoing influence and role in the organisation. Finally, the question of 'fairness' with regards to promotions and the existing, and changing pecking order should new staff arrive.

Van der Vegt *et al* make valid insights for the organisation struggling to implement policy. However, their scope is narrow and their argument levels much of the difficulties of policy implementation at the individuals involved in the process, ignoring the myriad of other wider, sometimes material factors that slow or impede policy implementation. Although they attempt to create a universal script for organisations facing implementation issues, the specifics of each organisation is likely to be heavily context bound, influenced by the past present and perceived outcomes for the future. This approach risks becoming more of a manual for head teachers when managing change, rather than a scholarly approach to understanding to complexities involved when introducing a new policy. Both Ball *et al* and Clarke *et al* adopt the stance that policies 'cannot just be implemented, they must be translated from text to action' and by doing so 'put into practice' (Ball *et al* 2012:3). It is this ongoing work of translation that Van der Vegt *et al's* work fails to capture. Ball *et al* have also investigated contextual factors, and their impact on policy enactment is perhaps more relevant as it takes into account material constraints.

Policy enactment

Ball suggests that 'policy changes the possibilities we have for thinking otherwise' (Ball *et al* 2012:15) The decision to convert to an academy despite being part of an operational federation certainly indicates the powerful political forces at play and specific contextual driving forces. Ball argues that these external drivers form only part of the picture, and that the schools will have other contextual drivers that mediate the speed and pace of change; 'Policy is intimately shaped by school specific factors acting as constraints, pressures and enablers of policy enactments' (Ball *et al* 2012:19). These include 'situated context' 'professional cultures', 'material contexts' and 'external contexts' first mentioned in chapter 2 relating to leadership. Ball et al admits this is not an exhaustive list, and that they are often interlinked.

The 'situated context' is 'historically and locationally linked to the school such as school setting, history and intake' (Ball *et al* 2012:22). Aspects of the school reputation built up over many years can be factored in and will be considered when acting on policy such as conversion to MAT. The 'professional cultures' include the 'ethos, teachers' values and commitment within school' of its staff (Ball *et al* 2012:27). Ball argues this is not necessarily coherent and may be contradictory. But this culture will have an impact on the level of change the school can initiate. 'Material contexts' are the 'physical aspects of a school, the buildings and budgets, levels of staffing, information technologies and

infrastructure' (Ball *et al* 2012:33). Schools or MATs over two sites presumably have different capacities of this and thus an in balance of this nature could be damaging. These material factors will have an influence on how fully a policy can be embedded as they will link to the school's capacity, be it staff, facility of budget wise, to accommodate it. Ball mentions the 'differences in capacity to generate income' can have an effect on policy enactment. In addition, the 'geographical location, cost of housing for teachers and transport infrastructure impact on the staffing and calibre of applicants' (Ball *et al* 2012:36). The 'external contexts' are the 'pressures and expectations of wider local and national policy framework such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions… the degree and quality of LA support and relationships with other schools' (Ball *et al* 2012:36) in this context contradictions occur, and often difficult decisions have to be made with regards to policy decisions. Ball identifies the 'external context' and explains that in crude terms 'apart from policies that are mandated or statutory, schools and LA's that are performing well in national tests and Ofsted inspections will have considerably more freedoms to decide which policy initiatives to get involved in and to what extent' (Ball *et al* 2012:40).

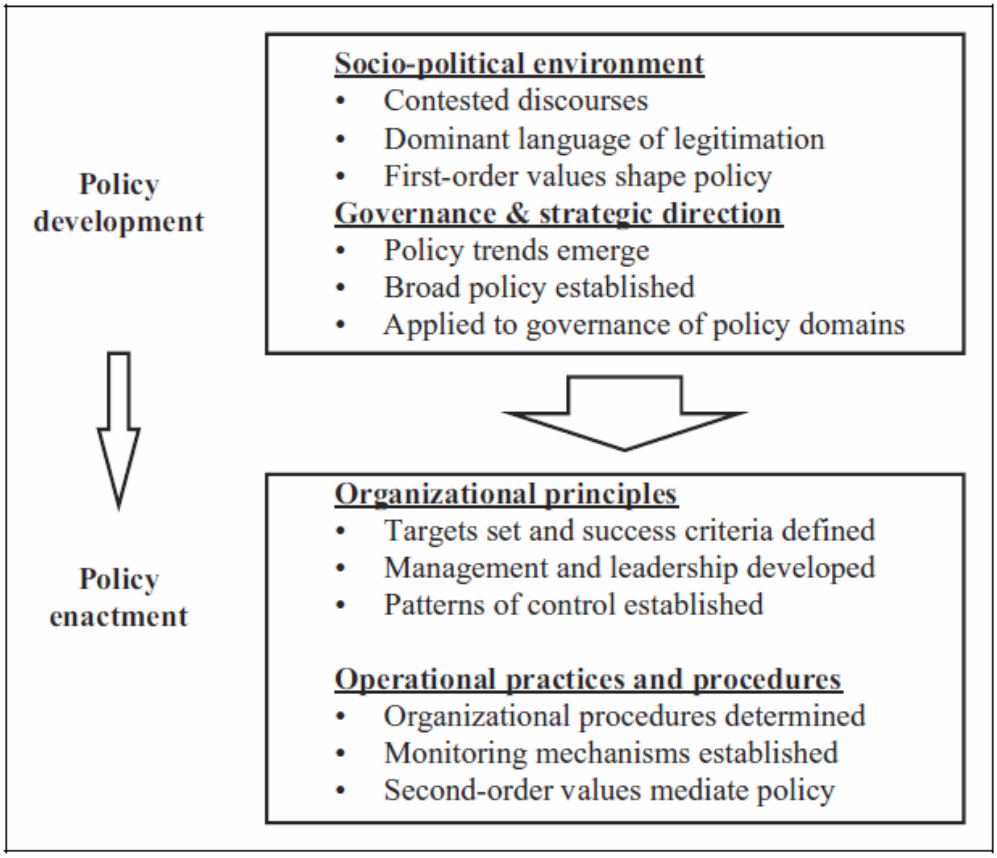
Ball's observations about the influence of context on policy enactment highlights the differing approaches, attitudes towards and constraints that schools face when deciding options to take. It expands work completed by Clarke *et al* covering the translation of policy, and broadens theories proposed by Van der Vegt *et al* concerning why change initiated in schools can be slow to implement. The influence of these contexts will be considered during the research and data analysis as they form part of the sociology of translation by ANT.

Bell and Stevenson expand Ball's use of enactment yet further. They incorporate Ball's understanding of policy enactment as 'different types of policy becoming interpreted and translated, reconstructed and remade in different but similar settings' but expand this to include 'the contested nature of policy implementation in which expected outcomes and experienced realities are often divergent' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:148). Bell and Stevenson accept context is important when understanding issues with policy enactment, but also reaffirm the focus on intended outcomes vs. reality.

Bell and Stevenson create a model, (see *Fig.3)*, to illustrate the relationship as they see it between policy development and its enactment in practice. They emphasise the political and ideological nature of policy in the socio-political environment element. This shapes the context in which the policy is developed, made sense of and enacted. A good example

of this is the ongoing 'policy commitment to accountability, competition, choice and economic utility of education is derived from a broader commitment to free market economics' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:148). The governance and strategic direction element is how the policy is shaped and made measurable, meaningful and accountability inserted, league tables or Ofsted inspections would be examples of this. The organisational principles element is found in the enactment section, as it is here where educational institutions are being shaped. At this stage 'policy becomes clearer and success criteria are clearly articulated' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:148). Academies, free schools and new grammar schools emerge, and teachers' roles change. The final element of operational practices and procedure is where 'the strategic direction of policy is manifested in the daily activities and experiences of those who work or study in the institutions' (ibid 2015:149). How quickly and successfully these changes are adopted is dependent on the organisation. Although this model appears to show a top down process they 'do not deny the extent to which policy is reshaped and contested from below or minimise the extent to which policy is subject to multiple interpretations based on the specifics of local contexts' (ibid 2015:149).

Fig.3 From policy development to policy enactment (Bell and Stevenson 2015:148)



This model was developed as a tool to aid the analysis of the impact of policy in educational institutions. It opens up possibilities for a variety of research focuses, such as the impact of the political climate on policy, the effect of competing, contradictory or paradoxical policies on practice, the difficulties faced at the enactment stage, the sense made of the policy and how it is made into a reality to fit the needs of the locality. Above all this model goes some way to illustrating the complexity of educational policy design enactment and implementation. It does not get close enough to reveal the assemblages that are helping or hindering the enactment of the policy, and that is where Actor-Network Theory can be utilised to demonstrate how sensemaking is translated to action.

These scholars show that policy enactment is rarely straightforward and its effectiveness, and indeed acceptance, is mediated by a myriad of different factors. This begins with some form of sensemaking. However even that is not a guarantee that policy, such as collaboration in this instance, will be effective. Actor – Network Theory is a methodological tool that can be used to reveal socio-material factors that are assisting or limiting the enactment of the policy. It does this by decentring the human, a radical approach that does not sit at odds with the sensemaking and enactment literature in this chapter, but rather complements it with the insistence that potentially the making of sense and subsequent enactment may be affected by material things as well as human actions and communication. I see ANT positioned in the murky waters between policy development and enactment. It is a methodological tool to assist (my own) sensemaking of the specific processes involved in making policy happen. In this case making the MAT principles of collaboration work (or not work) in practice across the schools. ANT offers the language with which to describe this process.

Actor-Network Theory

Policy enactment and ANT

Fenwick has outlined the ways in which ANT 'traces the mess, disorder, and ambivalences that organise policies and practices' in education. (2010b:118). She explains that

> 'when exploring the multiple enactments that comprise any one object such as policy, ANT provokes questions about the politics that constrain, obscure, or enable certain enactments to be most easily performed and recognised' (2010b:119).

In other words, ANT can provide a toolkit, or a set of sensibilities that helps understand the orderings of a social world, the ways in which the network holds together, (or does not), and the work that goes into such policy enactments. The network comes into being through enactments, by people and things acting in certain ways. The networks themselves act, they perform. Whether they perform in the way that was intended and why has come to be can be revealed by ANT analysis.

ANT does not 'consider the policy terrain as configured by the powers that be' that create and impose a set of standards' as would be understood by Bell and Stevenson, for example. Instead policy enactment is understood as 'effects that emerge through a series of complex interactions' (Fenwick 2010b:121). This provides the possibility for multiple types of sensemaking and different enactments of the policy as it is recognised not as a fixed entity, but open to interpretation and resistance.

ANT and the Sociomaterial

John Law describes Actor-Network Theory as method of analysis that 'treat[s] everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations.' (Law 2009:141). It is these relations researchers are interested in how they hold together, or do not. The data produced by ANT is descriptive rather than theoretical, and it is firmly rooted, and indeed best understood, when applied to specific case studies. Law describes it as a 'sensibility to the messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world' (Law 2009:142). Fenwick and others have used ANT to successfully describe processes in educational settings, as it decentres the human and highlights the 'things' that act upon relations, blocking or assisting them on their way.

ANT facilitates an important shift in perspective amongst researchers from one that privileges the human, and human agency, to a broader conception of actors and their influences. For me, this was triggered by a few years working in the public services. My experiences as a teacher made me question how much agency I had, and increased my awareness of the influence of structures, policies and 'things' (from ANT) constraining my practice. The statutory curriculum for example, Ofsted framework, DfE interference, even the shape and length of the school day, and the timetabling of my lessons, all restricted the actions and creativity of teaching and influenced the ways in which I made sense of

my practice and purpose. ANT adopts features that seemed to fit the experience of education and that I felt would serve to illuminate the goings on of the schools as they worked together to maintain and grow, make sense of and enact the collaborative venture of the MAT. As Fenwick states 'ANT analyses make visible the rich assortments of mundane things at play in educational events and how they are connected' (Fenwick and Edwards 2012:xxxi).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was born in the 1980's out of science and technology studies but has subsequently been adopted by many academic disciplines such as Cultural Studies, Management Studies and Education as well as wider sociology. It takes elements from material semiotics; the study of material things and signs, (ANT literature uses the word 'things') and the performative quality of such things that are familiar from my background in Cultural Studies and Women Studies. It is a complicated, and at times deviant theory that by its nature is slippery and difficult to describe. For Cressman ANT is 'notoriously difficult to summarise, define or explain' (Cressman 2009:1) and Fenwick and Edwards claim it might be more accurate to 'think of ANT as a virtual 'cloud', continually moving shrinking and stretching, dissolving in any attempt to grasp it firmly' (*Fenwick et al* 2012:x). ANT is best described by Baiocchi as 'a set of sensibilities, a disposition or an attitude- rather than a rigid framework' (Baiocchi 2013:324). Notions and concepts from this theory can be used as a methodology to 'draw closer to a phenomenon' (Fenwick *et al* 2012:x). By this token, it is rare for any two research studies employing ANT to be the same.

ANT is not easy to work with or even write about and describe. The very name 'Actor-Network Theory' has been mooted by those who founded the theory as problematic. Latour was noted to have said during a workshop 'there are four things wrong with actor-network theory: "actor", "network", "theory" and the hyphen'. This is because the theory is not about 'actors' as many would understand them - humans with agency, as it embodies the socio-material – including the non-human under the umbrella of actor. Additionally, it is not really a 'network' as they have become to be understood as a clearly defined structure, ANT proposes the network forms more like a web of connections. Finally, the whole premise is not really a 'theory' as such, it is more of a methodological tool, a way of encouraging close examination of the data. Latour in a later publication did reverse his criticism of the name commenting that the ANT acronym 'was perfectly fit for a blind, myopic, workaholic, trail-sniffing, and collective traveller' (the ant) all hallmarks of the

actor-network (Latour 2005). To understand ANT one must interrogate it thoroughly, as the name in itself can be, and is, misleading for researchers.

The word 'actor' suggests the classic centrality of the human, however one of the fundamental principles of ANT is the concept developed by Latour (1987) 'Symmetry'. Humans and objects are thought to be of equal importance in the forming and holding together of any network. As Fenwick states 'material things are performative and not inert; they are matter and they matter' (Fenwick *et al* 2011:4). Humans are not 'assumed to be treated any differently from non-humans' (Fenwick *et al* 2011:96). This is what Latour 1987 calls 'symmetry' as 'all things …[are] capable of exerting force and joining together, changing and being changed by each other' (Fenwick *et al* 2011:96).

As mentioned earlier ANT is best understood when used to describe a case study. For example, if the network under investigation is the implementation of a new GCSE specification (Syllabus), I as the teacher (and human) have an important role to decipher the curriculum, learn the material, design lessons and deliver it to the students. However, material 'things' also have their equally important part to play. For example, the length of the lesson time given for delivery of the subject, the number of lessons timetabled in a week, the time of the lessons in the school day (the first or last sessions of the day are usually less productive), the student accessibility of the textbooks purchased, the classroom and facilities used all will have an effect on the success or failure of this network – the new GCSE. ANT does not place any form of hierarchy on the importance of each of these factors and proposes that power produced by a network is merely a product of the connections made and their effects.

The Sociology of Translation and what to do with the data

ANT is described as the sociology of translation (Callon 1980 in Cressman 2009:2) as the concept of translation is central to the theory. **Translation** is the 'process of making connection, of forging a passage between two domains, or simply establishing communication' (Brown 2002:3-6 in Cressman 2009:2) and 'involves creating convergences and homologies by relating things that were previously different' (Callon 1981:211 in Cressman 2009:2). It the process of translation has several concepts that are useful to uncover events and processes that assist or hinder the network's longevity.

ANT suggests that an Actor can be a human, text, or building and is defined as something that 'makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates its will into the language

of its own… [they aim to] create alignment of the other actors interests with their own and when this process becomes effective it results in the creation of an actor network' (Cressman 2009:5). Prior to becoming an actor the entity is known as an 'actant' (Fenwick and Edwards 2012:xii), and only becomes an actor once translation is complete. Callon talks of 'moments of translation' and his concepts offer an analytical tool to identify them in the data. ANT can help to reveal how the network began to take shape using its terminology of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation and stabilisation (Callon 1986). Although I have found very little published on the subject, links to sensemaking and sensegiving are made within the following explanations to demonstrate the scholarly relationship between the theories.

Problematisation is where it all begins, something tries to establish itself as an '**obligatory passage point**' (OPP) that frames the idea, solution or something in such a way that to access it others must pass through them. For example, if the problem is budget cuts, falling student numbers, ongoing curriculum change, teacher shortages for example the MAT (or at least working together in some capacity) can be mooted as the solution. However, to access the solution one must first sign up to or at least engage with the network. Problematisation results from an effective sensemaking process and is successful if sensegiving is established by the OPP and received in a collective and coherent way. Cressman calls these individuals 'System Builders' 'the actors (for many ANT studies) who initiate scientific and technical innovation and exert influence over its direction and trajectory' (2009:7).

Interessement is the moment another actor accepts interests defined by the focal actor (Callon 1982) and detaches itself from its existing networks to join the new one. This process 'selects those to be included and those to be excluded' (Fenwick 2010:14). This is an important stage as it confirms the legitimacy of the problematisation through continuous sensegiving and begins to stabilise the network.

Enrolment then follows, as the name suggests this is the moment that roles begin to be given out to the members of the network and by executing them the network begins to function, and the policy is enacted (Ball 2012) or successfully translated (Clarke 2015). Callon describes enrolment as 'a group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany interessement and enable them to succeed' (Callon 1986:211).

Mobilisation occurs once the network has become 'sufficiently durable that its translations are extended to other locations and domains' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:14). This is indicative of effective and sustained sensemaking.

Stabilisation occurs when 'the network appears to be complete and durable and to exercise force while concealing the dynamic translations that created it and continue to maintain it' (Fenwick 2010b: 121). The embedding of new work practices would be indicative of this.

One of the benefits of ANT is that it proposes that networks are always in the process of formation, and huge amounts of effort go into keeping them viable. Networks can be analysed in this way at any point in their existence from their initial formation, old networks, and networks that are beginning to crumble. This approach 'enables us to trace the ways that things come together and become taken for granted, or '**black boxed**" (Fenwick 2012:4). This leads to the new features, policies, practices 'no longer need to be reconsidered … a matter of indifference… black boxed to the point that they cannot be problematized' (Michael 2017:33) indicating the stability of the network. ANT shows us how things are included and excluded, how some linkages work and do not work and 'how associations are bolstered to make themselves stable by linking other networks to things' (Fenwick 2012:4). Mol explains that 'in order for a network to form associations have to be made. This is hard work' (Mol 2010:259). Associations such as these are not 'introduced into an empty world' (Mol 2010:259); there are already other ways of operating, practicing, organising education and working together. Indeed, the schools under investigation in this research were already practicing one alternative – a federation. ANT is a useful tool to highlight the ongoing work that takes place to maintain networks, appropriate in a fast policy climate such as education which is subject to rapid and sustained changes.

Latour developed two further elements to the ANT analysis vital for translation; the role of intermediaries and mediators. These 'circulate around networks performing particular functions'. The **intermediary** 'transports another force or meaning, without acting on it to change it' they merely 'help the network to translate entities to perform particular roles' (Fenwick 2012:11). **Mediators** have a different role, they 'can transform, distort and modify the meaning in the elements', anything that 'creates possibilities and occurrences for connections' is a mediator (Fenwick 2012:11). These perform a similar function to the

discourses and symbols required for effective sensegiving during organisational change (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, Maitlis and Christianson 2014, Maitlis and Lawrence 2007).

Latour identifies '**quasi-objects**' or 'tokens' (1996:79) as an additional feature of an actor network. These are defined as 'a moving actant that transforms those who do the moving, because they transform the moving object' (Latour 1996:79). Fenwick describes them as 'entities constituting a reality like bodies and institutions'. Quasi objects are 'produced by networks and perform themselves as stable but are in fact highly precarious' (Fenwick 2010b:121). They are things passed between actors in the network that produce social order. For example the enactment of a new policy would simultaneously transform both the actor (through changes to work practices) and the policy through the actors different sensemaking of it.

Latour also talks of '**immutable mobiles**' (also known as **stable mobiles**), defined as 'representations of aspects of the world that are portable and thus can be accumulated and combined in new ways at a distance' (Fenwick 2012: 47). They enable the network to grow and strengthen through the transmission of the message and translation of other entities and act as symbols that assist with sensemaking. Callon suggests these mobiles act as 'stabilising devices that synchronise meanings and actions across space and time and multiple actors' acting as '**boundary objects**' and potentially obligatory passage points (Fenwick 2012:47). Boundary objects must be 'plastic enough to adapt to local needs… yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites' (Star 1989: 393 in Michael 2017:54) However Michael suggests the 'immutability of these mobiles is not guaranteed … they can be purposely misread – it all depends on the state of the network into which they have been entered and through which they circulate' (Michael 2017:44). Fenwick agrees and in her discussion of educational standards as immutable mobiles she claims they are 'capable of multiple unfoldings' (Fenwick 2010b:124). As 'every artefact at play embeds so many mappings of memory, association and performativity … immutability is impossible' (2010b:124). In this way she suggests 'ANT reveals the *uncertainty of standards'* (original italics) and thus has the potential to reveal the same for the policies under investigation in this research.

Callon claims that eventually a process called '**convergence**' will occur which will make the network durable. Once the 'roles of the heterogeneous elements are rendered complementary' they begin to work together (Michael 2017:47)

Why ANT rather than other social networking theories?

Bellinger and Krieger state that ANT is 'not referring to … traditional organisations that enter into partnerships of one kind or another and therefore be said to exist within a network of alliances' (Bellinger and Krieger 2016:12) ANT can be used to investigate any notions of things and people (actants) joining together, not those traditionally recognised as a 'network'. This is one of the ways in which ANT differs from other network theories, particularly those relating to social networks and relations which arguably, could also have been applied to this case study as the schools and their staff began to work together. Strangely, and perhaps ironically, there is little common ground between ANT and other social network theories, Vicsek *et al* argues that 'the different strands of these network approaches coexist in peaceful indifference, with no meaningful dialogue between them' (2016:77). Social network theories are often described as 'confusing' by scholars, who struggle to get to grips with their many divergent ideas and approaches to the understanding of network formation and human relations. I will however attempt to review a selection of such theories and assess their similarities and differences, as a way of emphasising why ANT was selected for this case study over other networking theories.

This study aims to uncover processes involved in the academy conversion and the policy shift to cross town collaboration, including the myriad of social relationships and interactions that bring this into being. Traditional social network theories have been used to explain the forming of organisational relations such as this, the creation of a recognisable network of individuals. For example, the work of Kilduff and Tsai (2003) examines relationships between actors and the elements that connect and separate them such as communication or friendship. Kilduff and Brass suggest there is some recognition, albeit borrowed from social psychology, in this body of relations based social network theory that investigates how relations link some but not all actors in a network (2010:321). This could explain the differentiated success of some levels of the network over others, as some actors are connected, whilst others remain distant. Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties (SWT) theory remains a seminal piece of social network theory. It suggests the stronger the ties between individuals the more likely their worlds will overlap; however, it is not in these strong ties that the most benefit lies. Weaker ties between individuals, perhaps between acquaintances for example, are most likely to elicit novel information and benefits. These are called 'bridging ties' (Borgatti and Halgin 2011:1171) Therefore, it is those individuals with lots of bridging ties, and thus higher social capital, that are likely to

be successful networkers. This provides some insight into the behaviour of successful leaders, those able to move between organisations and exert influence.

In addition, Social Network Analysis (SNA) offers some further insight into key actors, and their influence on the network that bears some resemblance to the ANT obligatory passage point. These actors adopt roles in the network based upon 'centrality, brokerage and prestige' (Vicsek et al 2010:87). Centrality can occur either by the actor establishing many ties with others, establishing a short distance between others, or being a component of paths to many others. It is the latter that is reminiscent of the obligatory passage point in ANT, where to access the network you must engage with the focal actor. Prestige or status and brokerage or persuasiveness also explain how certain individuals exert influence over networks. This understanding is rooted heavily in relationships, and adopts a different understanding of relations to ANT, which views them no more than two entities that affect each other.

An alternative branch of social network theory concentrates on 'embeddedness' (Kilduff and Brass 2010:323) for network formation and performance. A successful network is one based on profitable transactions. All transactional behaviour is embedded in social relationships, and this in turn is governed by trust. Fully embedded ties between people in the network are usually more cohesive and characterised by trust, and to grow the network these close ties must be expanded. Once again this could be used to explain the emerging relations between the schools and their differential level of success related to individually perceived costs and benefits of the union, however these approaches to social networks do not go far enough to explain the problems faced when bringing the schools together, especially those related to material factors or actors. The social network theories mentioned above place little emphasis on context and the mediating effect context has on network relations. ANT is better placed to do this due to its acceptance of the effect of materiality on the network. The social network analysis of organisations may investigate non-human actors however 'these connections are often maintained by human actors' (Vicsek et al 2010:88). This renders the understanding of the influence of the non-human ontologically different to the radical symmetry found in ANT. It is ANTs treatment of the non-human that adds to the understanding of this case study, and this was one of my initial attractions to it.

Social network theories such as those mentioned above take a top down approach, they ignore some of the effects of human agency and produce an image of the blind co-worker

passively joining the network. They are hierarchical in a way that ANT is not, ANT rejects the dualism of macro and micro as Latour (1999 in Fenwick and Edwards 2012:xv11) states 'there are no super structural entities, because big does not mean 'really' big or 'overall' or 'overarching', but connected, blind, local, mediated, related'. Actor networks layer on top of one another, extend, work together or pull against each other all the time. ANT gives credence to the complexity of the situation, when schools decide to work together and the processes, they enact to make that work (or not). ANT reveals the messy side of network formation and maintenance, a mess produced by the many 'different forces and effects (social, political, financial) [that] shape and construct these entities before they reach their 'final' form' (Vicsek et al 2010: 80). Traditional social network theories discussed above do not recognise this messiness, which is an important benefit of ANT, rather, they seek to hypothesise, test and simplify the workings of the network in question. As ANT does not distinguish between the macro and micro it would not understand policy coming from above as it may be traditionally understood. It would instead view this as indicating a longer or extended network 'functioning across far flung regions of space and time' (Fenwick 2010b:122). A network that has successfully enrolled other actors and operates across distances. In contrast social network theories would place physical limitations on network size, based on the communication capabilities of the actors involved. The ANT concept that actor networks can expand across time and space is an uplifting one, as it suggests the possibility for change is dependent only on a functioning actor network rather than power or positioning or inter relations between people.

The field of social network theory and analysis is not a coherent one, it encompasses a large body of divergent work. What is clear from the discussion above is that what these theories have in common is ontological differences with ANT. I have selected ANT to supplement sensemaking and help understand the process of policy enactment experienced by this set of schools due to its treatment of the non-human in networks, the way it embraces complexity rather than attempting to simplify, and the way in which it is flexible in its application. ANT is not without its problems however, as explained in the next section.

Criticisms and limitations of ANT: Where is agency? Where is power?

ANT views the social as a web of connections. Critics argue that ANT ignores the ingrained power that lives in social structures as it claims 'all things are relational effects'

(Fenwick 2010 and Edwards:17). The concept of symmetry is also problematic as its material focus downplays human agency and their human intentionality that marks them out as different to objects. Whittle and Spicer argue that 'A machine can therefore be thought of as having, in principle, the same degree of agency as a person' (Whittle and Spicer 2008:4) How workable is this premise in practice? The debate between agency vs. structure raises questions regarding what indeed shapes the social world. Do humans shape society as they build structures such as policies or laws? Or is it the laws, policies and institutions that indeed shape human action? Do some people have more power to do the shaping than others? ANT doesn't believe in micro macro, so structure is somewhat off the cards, but it does have something to say about agency and power within networks.

Michael addresses what he calls the 'thorny question of agency' (2017:47) and asks, 'do the non-humans possess agency'? In Callon's seminal ANT study tracing scallop farming he adopted 'radical symmetry' whereby the scallops were attributed as much agency as the farmers. This 'distributive agency' can be seen to 'flow or circulate amongst different elements of a network … enacted in the relations 'between' entities' (Michael 2017:68). The agency of humans and non-humans enable one another, this is known as the 'dance of agency' (p69). Agency can also be attributive 'ascribed to particular entities …part and parcel of rendering associations and building networks' (Michael 2017:68). Cussins (1996:576) suggests 'ontological chorography' rather than the 'dance of agency' to describe how agency is embodied in a network. Through her research she found humans could be both ontologically objects and subjects, as either a passive body to be examined or a human subject with agency. This could be applied to the student as an object to be imparted knowledge, as a source of funding and exam data etc, then the student as a subject with their ability to shape the system, by their success in exams.

Similarly, Fenwick and Edwards (2010:21) question whether symmetry is too radical in the early ANT theories as by their nature humans are different; they make symbolic meaning of events and exert intentional action in a way non-humans do not. Fenwick applies this to education with the claim:

'What appears to be the teacher's agency is an effect of different forces, actions desires and connections that move through her… her own actions, desires and so on are not determined by the network, but emerge through the myriad translations that are

negotiated among all the movements, talk, materials, emotions and discourses making up the classrooms encounters' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:21).

Agency is an effect of translation. The ANT notion that 'all things as well as all persons, knowledge and locations are, relational effects' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:17). After all a teacher is only a teacher when in a school surrounded by 'teacher-ish' things such as students, a classroom, a board, and large pile of marking. It evokes similarities with Goffman's dramaturgical model (1959) and the use of props as fellow actors. There is something that happens to the individual that marks one out as different when they step into the classroom and are surrounded by that network of actors rather than when they step into a restaurant where they would be part of an altogether different actor-network. Actors are members of many divergent networks that make up social life and the 'negotiation of identities within and across groups, is an extraordinary delicate task' (Michael 2017:60). In relation to the collaboration between the schools under investigation, multiple actor networks will exist.

Other scholars would argue that ANT 'misses the *meaningful* character of human action' (Whittle and Spicer 2008:621). They argue that humans should be treated ontologically differently to objects and material things because of their use of language and the ability to interpret. This limits the power of ANT's contribution to sensemaking as it lacks the tools to explain how actors can be enrolled using different strategies. This is why sensemaking appears as a separate section in this thesis, as it provides additional insights necessary as a procurer to the enactment of the policy in question and subsequent ANT analysis of this.

ANT theorists do not believe that actors intrinsically possess power and in fact the notion of possess rather misses the point for them. Cressman suggests that 'power (or lack thereof) and connectivity are intertwined … we should not ask if this network is more powerful than another; rather, we should ask if this association is stronger than another one' (Cressman 2009:4) Michael suggests the 'purpose of analysis is to trace how these actors wield influence, deploy various resources, marshal other actors (human and non-human), and establish and make durable a pattern of associations amongst those actors (2017:21). The process of translation is a persuasive one; power is enacted through it in the web of relations, hence one does not study power according to Michael but 'relations of power'. The web of relations that forms an actor-network creates by its conception certain key actors who act as immutable mobiles, obligatory passage points and system builders

and define the issue to be problematized. ANT does not adequately explain how these actors happen to be in this position in the first place, Marxists and feminists would certainly not accept the notion of "it happened through the relations" explanation as this ignores the power inequalities that exist within social structures. Callon speaks of 'translation of interests' of the focal actor – the Marxist reading of that would be someone already in power, with more agency than others. This highlights the precarious nature of power; as an effect of the web of relations, it suggests power is something given to leaders by others, and as such can be taken away.

The notion that social life is recognised as no more than effects of relations sits at odds with my background in feminist theory and also the classical Marxism found within Cultural Studies. Where is the power in networks? Undeniably it is there, overtly and covertly exerting influence. I saw it every day and I lived with it in my professional life. Sensemaking literature suggests that sensegivers often transmit hegemony, which has similarities with the ANT concept of 'obligatory passage point' and Cressman's 'system builders'. If to become part of the network you have to pass through an individual, then this to an extent indicates an acceptance of a form of hegemony. ANT does not deal with this well and lacks the tools to explain it, hence the need for additional theoretical tools such as sensemaking.

In addition Whittle and Spicer argue the ANT focus on effects limits the understanding of 'how and why the 'same' technology can be interpreted in different ways' (Whittle and Spicer 2008:7). This limitation is significant for organization theorists if we want the analytical tools to understand how and why technological artefacts can be 'enacted' in different ways in different organizational contexts (Orlikowski, 2000). It is because of this limitation that I have supplemented ANT with Ball, Clarke and others and their insights into policy enactment and translation. In particular the effects of context upon enactment and translation of the policy, are not dealt with well by ANT (beyond that of identify the material actors in play).

Callon's four stage model of moments of translation has been criticised as it tends 'to freeze and distort the complexity it was intended to liberate' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:14). ANT scholars suggest you should 'follow the actors' and allow the analysis to emerge out of the data which is usually ethnographic or case study in tone and design. Whittle and Spicer agree and warn against applying Callon's four-stage model of translation in rigid form (problematisation, interessement, enrolment, mobilisation). To

do so would fall into the trap that moments of translation exist 'out there' to be captured and represented by the researcher (Cordella and Shaikh 2006:3) This would be a deductive approach not in the spirit of ANT, which is an inductive approach allowing the network to emerge from the data. Whittle and Spicer suggest ANT be used as a 'sensitising concept to make sense of complex observations' (2008:13). There is also the question of motivations of the enroller and those being enrolled. This is presented in an overly simplistic way by ANT as it presumes the enroller's goal is straightforward and coherent, when during times of change this is often far from the case. Early ANT literature presented translation as a simple persuasion exercise 'the enroller is assumed to have a single motive (to construct a durable network) and inherent interests (furthered by the construction of the network), and the enrolled are understood to have their interests constructed or 'translated' as they come to see their situation in terms that allies them into the network' (Whittle and Spicer 2008:17). Reality is far more complex than this and many of the actors exhibit partial or ambivalent belongings to networks that leak.

Ambivalent belongings

The classical ANT theory analysed thus far portrays networks as things that come to exist through the translation of entities. What of those entities that are only partially enrolled, that sit on the periphery of the network as part and also not part of it? Does a network need complete translation of its entities to function? Or could there be benefits to having some entities partially translated, facing outward and open to new ideas?

Some of the after-ANT readings speak of the term 'ambivalent belongings' that comprises those entities not fully enrolled, but yet still part of the network. This also encompasses the 'otherness that cannot/ should not be colonised by a single (networked) account' (Fenwick 2012:98). Law 1999 states we should also concern ourselves with the 'otherings that occur: the fluid spaces and partial belongings that comprise what appears to be a powerful network' Law in Fenwick 2012:100). Michael states it is not necessary for there to be 'comprehensive' translation and enrolment… enrolment can be productively partial, and actors can be members of multiple networks' (2017:56). Fenwick mentions so called 'leaky' translations that hold together just about, producing with them ambivalent belongings where 'people things and collectives struggle to protect practices from inscription through new connections and at the same time work the connections for their own purposes' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:113). In these spaces the 'direction and nature of action is undecided and unpredictable' and it is in these spaces that 'creative possibilities emerge' (Fenwick 2010:113) potentially beneficial to the ongoing network.

Chapter 2 indicates the educational policy landscape is constantly changing, I wonder to what extent networks get beyond partial belongings before another policy driver comes in and sweeps it away. The notion of partial belongings could add to the discussion not only of network formation, but also to the ongoing sensemaking work that takes place to maintain (or enact) it and the discussion of the paradoxical nature of policy. It is that, in the confusing and at times controversial educational landscape of the MAT, that is particularly interesting. Afterall ANT understands that 'networks, and their products, can be re-interpreted long after they are supposedly stabilised' (Whittle and Spicer 2008:10).

ANT Conclusion

ANT has much to offer the understanding of the complex web of relations that is involved in this case, as the schools struggle to make sense of the policy changes and attempt to work together. ANT's recognition of non-human actors offers unexpected ways of looking at, and understanding difficulties faced in the sensemaking and enactment of the national policy and contextual driver to collaborate. The concept of symmetry between the human and non-human allows material actants, and their relational effects on the network to be brought into focus in a sway that sensemaking theory alone would not offer.

However, ANT is not always the most cooperative theoretical or methodological companion and is victim to its own limitations. Its refusal to distinguish between the macro and micro is problematic, as many of the policy drivers indeed come from the macro – they are national and require careful translation to make sense in the local. ANT doesn't make the distinction between here and there, it merely understands the enactment locally of national policy as an indication the network is long or has extended. Whether that is workable when applied to this research site remains to be seen. Additionally, the use of ANT raises issues regarding where to 'cut the network' (Fenwick 2010:122) and to establish boundaries around the object of enquiry. For example in my research there is much going on with regard to policy enactment; the decision to convert to an Academy Trust rather than remain as a Federation, the push to actively collaborate across school sites, the wider political climate and culture of austerity affecting schools, all of which form part of the actor networks. Which of these to focus in on specifically is a significant aspect of the challenge associated with this thesis and this decision will conclusively shape the story told here.

Sensemaking is ontologically and epistemologically similar to ANT as it suggests understanding is ongoing, always in flux, always being worked upon, this is similar to ANT's understanding of the network as always in creation and needing constant effort by the actors to keep it together and policy itself as 'always in the making, or under construction'. Similarly, policy enactment literature warns policy itself is not a stable entity, it requires ongoing work to maintain it. They are a trio that I believe will both complement and extend the understandings of each other in a way described below.

Conceptual framework: The interplay between sensemaking, policy enactment and Actor- Network Theory

This research utilised the connection between sensemaking, policy enactment and Actor-Network Theory to uncover the development, enactment and implementation of policy in the context of education. Designed to complement and extend the offerings of each other and a useful framework of theoretical understanding. Providing tools to allow insights into how the schools made sense of the policy, how effective the sensemaking and sensegiving was to allow enactment of the policy, and the factors that have affected the success of this.

The interplay between the elements is demonstrated by the conceptual framework *(Fig.4)* which can also be found in the appendix B.5. The diagram illustrates an idealised cycle of policy development, enactment and implementation using sensemaking, sensegiving and ANT processes.

It contains three phases:

1. **Policy development phase**

The policy is developed in response to a local need, in this case school collaboration. Sensemaking occurs by the leaders regarding how the policy is going to be designed and implemented. This leads to sensegiving of the rationale, direction and intended outcomes of the policy. This allows problematisation to occur as the leader becomes the 'System builder' (Cressman 2009) and obligatory passage point (OPP). This is inspired partly by Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) conception of the position and abilities of leaders who 'through evocative language and construction of narrative, symbols… help shape the sensemaking processes of organisation members towards some intended definition of reality' (2018:58). The leaders provide the tools to help others make sense of the organisational change at this stage, they are sensegivers.

2. **Policy enactment phase**

All being well this message is coherently made sense of by other staff members and interessement (system builder's intention is accepted) and enrolment (new roles adopted) take place. This leads to the enactment of the policy as action takes place, new working practices emerge, and accountability is established through the use of immutable mobiles, intermediaries and mediators.

3. **Policy implementation phase**

This leads to the final stage in which the policy is implemented, embedded and accepted and part of the everyday activity of the organisation. This strengthens the organisation and makes it more prepared for further policy changes. Mobilisation and stabilisation of the actor network takes place.

Policy stalling phase

The diagram also illustrates the pit falls of incoherent sensemaking and sensegiving, and how that can affect the enactment of the policy. This leads to an offshoot on the diagram into the red zone whereby policy is implemented partially, incorrectly or not at all. The policy enactment stalls, a verb I have chosen deliberately as it infers with renewed effort it will resume. The process must return to sensegiving and the leaders must try once again to effectively problematise the issue or need for, in this case, school collaborations. They must use symbols and discourse in a more effective way to allow others sensemaking to occur. There is the potential for the school to remain trapped in this cycle of partial enactment for some time, and yet on the surface still be functioning.

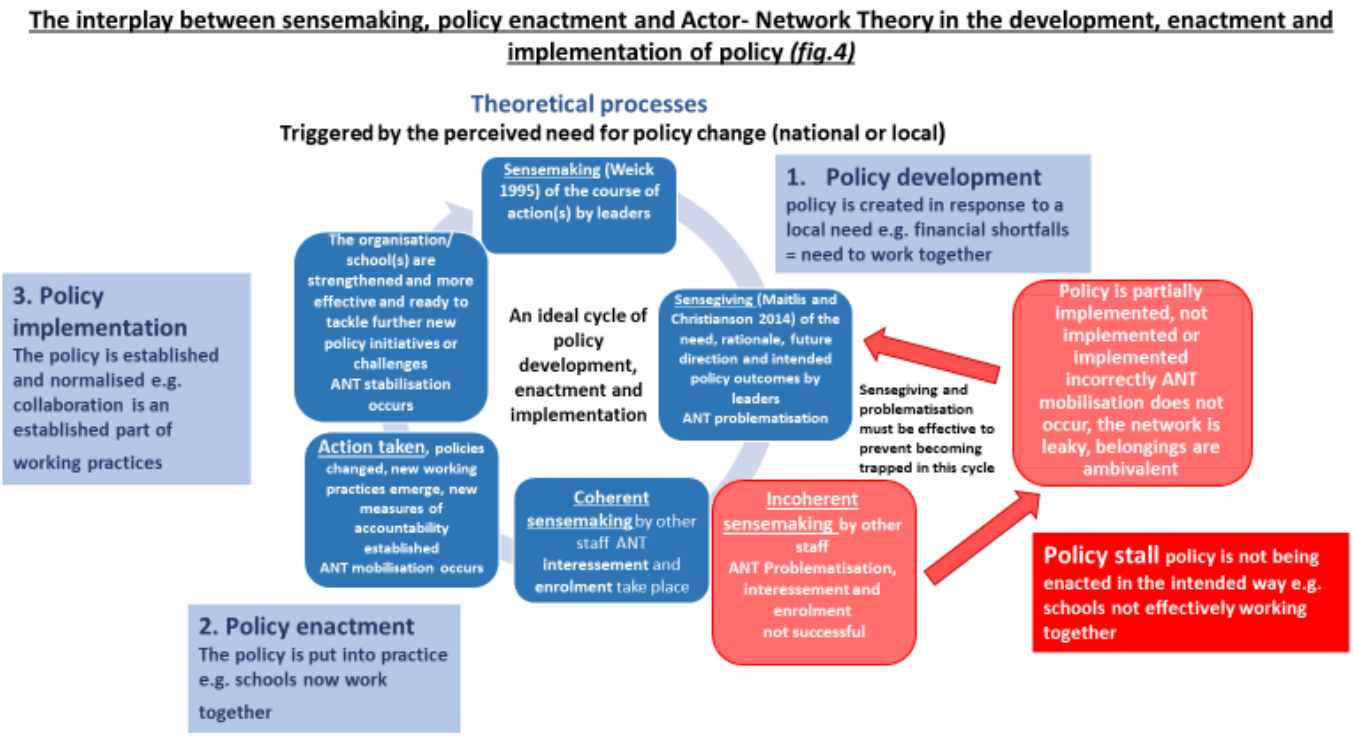
The process of policy implementation is mediated by:

- **Political factors** for example policy layers up over older policy and contradicts, counteracts or pulls resources away. The conflicting policy arrangement of the MAT including traditional market drivers of neoliberalism paired with school collaboration is an example of this.
- **Contextual** (Ball *et al* 2012) **factors** e.g. unequal status of key players, historical differences.
- **Human factors** e.g. weak leadership or lack of trust in the leadership or chosen direction. Inadequate sensegiving and problematisation.

- **Sociomaterial factors** (Callon 1986, Fenwick 2010 and others) e.g. physical distance between actors, time, resources.

I propose that there are many layers of this cycle operating simultaneously depending on the actors and actants involved. This mirrors the way actor networks layer upon each other with some leading to mobilisation and others operating in a leaky and less effective fashion only partially enacting the policy change.

Fig. 4 *(see appendix B.5 for larger version)*



I will reflect on the choice and use of these theoretical tools in chapter 6. See below for the research questions informed by this theory.

Research questions

This chapter has provided the theoretical framework to create a case study of the emerging relations between this group of schools as they convert to a MAT and formalise their joint working practices. In the introduction I posed four questions that provided the inspiration for this piece of research, formed during my time working as a professional in the field.

They were:

e) What are we going to do?
f) Why have we chosen the MAT structure?
g) How is this going to work?
h) And then latterly – what have we done?

Using insights from the literature contained in this chapter these were adapted into the following research questions. These will guide the analysis of the data:

3. ***How have this group of schools attempted to make sense of national policy drivers of the Multi-Academy Trust and the associated cross school collaboration in their local context?***

   This links to Question a) and b), the sensemaking and sensegiving of the MAT revealed through the analysis of the work of the leaders and the experiences of the teachers, the narratives they weave during the interviews and focus groups. The 'local context' is dealt with sensitively, in recognition of the potential for different priorities and tensions between the different phases of school relations in this MAT group.

4. ***How has this group of schools enacted these national educational policy drivers (put them into practice) and what contextual and sociomaterial factors have influenced this?***

   Question c) is tackled here, the different ways the MAT is being enacted or brought into being through school collaboration is investigated. Difficulties faced during the enactment of the MAT at each educational phase are also explored.

5. ***Do the priorities of the MAT policy in relation to market values and accountability conflict with the development of collaboration in practice?***

This encapsulates question d) what have we done? The various ways MAT policies have changed day to day practice and the operations of the schools is illuminated. This is placed in the current policy context of collaboration and competition to raise standards that forms part of the national design of the MAT programme and questions the extent this is workable in practice.

The methodological tools and the research design used to investigate these research questions will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design and approach of this study. This research adopts an interpretivist framework, it seeks to discover meanings attributed, and sense made of, the differing experiences of policy enactment for the senior leaders and classroom teachers during the process of MAT formation. I adopt a qualitative insider case study design comprised of several semi structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis. The data will be analysed using an adapted thematic analysis framework.

The following section will consider my methodological influences and tensions that arose due to my insider positioning. It will begin with a discussion regarding the use of ethnography to construct this case study.

Ethnographic influences in consideration of my positionality as the insider

The methods I used, interviews, focus groups and some preliminary documentary analysis are characterised in methods texts as one-off events that are suitable for a case study approach, or reflexive qualitative study design. However, I am also an insider researcher, and although technically only one year was spent data collecting, I worked at the school for ten years and as such was privy to knowledge and understandings that far surpassed just that one year. How to deal authentically, honestly and ethically with that additional knowledge was tricky to resolve. There are many advantages to an insider researcher perspective. It is accepted that insiders have a 'greater understanding of the culture being studied', 'generally know the politics of the institution' making access easier, 'an established intimacy that promotes the telling of truth' (Unluer 2012:1). These advantages relate directly to disadvantages however; 'greater familiarity can lead to a loss of objectivity', 'making erroneous assumptions based on prior knowledge' and familiarity leading to an 'illusion of sameness' (Breen 20017:164). These have been considered in the methodological design of this study and are discussed below, and in the ethics section.

As an insider researcher the write up of this thesis has become heavily influenced by ethnographic elements. This influence was not so much in terms of the methods selected

and used, but rather in the way the data is analysed thematically and how my metanarrative, or voice is articulated, as I move on now to explain.

Discussion of Ethnography as a viable approach

Ethnography is often the approach of choice for practitioner researchers. It attempts to create a picture, or represent a way of life of a particular group. It 'aims to uncover their beliefs, values, perspectives, motivations, and how all these things develop or change over time or from situation to situation' and to do this from '… within the group' (Woods 1986:4-5). Woods explains that ethnographic researchers 'go into the 'field' to 'observe' things as they happen in their natural setting, frequently 'participating' themselves in the ongoing action as members of the organisation or group' (Woods 1986:4-5). As a teacher at one of the schools under investigation it is clear how I could use this method of enquiry.

However, Atkinson and Hammersley state ethnographic research will usually work primarily with 'unstructured data' to investigate a small number of cases, or just one in detail; and relies heavily on participant observation (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994:248). I was a participant observer in the 'field' observing developments as they happened because the nature of my job meant I was participating and contributing to the changes I observed with regards to the federation and collaborative work with other schools. Deliberately, I did not seek ethical approval for participant observation, as I felt this method may have caused ethical conflict with my day to day professional responsibilities as a teacher at the school. Unluer describes this as 'role duality', the struggle for insider researchers to balance their insider role and researcher role (2012:2).

Additionally ethnographic approaches risk colleagues 'feel(ing) obliged to cooperate' (Costly *et al* 2011:31) which may colour their responses positively (social desirability bias) or negatively. Alternatively, Ghodsee warns that 'informants may be less cooperative and forthcoming if they think you know their history' (Ghodsee 2016:19). These issues do not exclusively apply to ethnography; however, ethnography requires a specific level of involvement which makes this more pertinent.

Ethnography is a 'family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with agents' (Willis and Trodman 2002:5). This has the potential to offer 'insights into complex realities of the setting' (Hinds in Wilkinson 2000:51). As a member of staff for 5 years prior to the beginning of the doctorate, I possessed insights and prior knowledge unrivalled by any outsider researcher. This allows 'better access to the meanings of the participants in

the research… participant's meanings are frequently opaque, misleading and incomplete' (Scott and Usher 2011:106).

Jones and Smith argue that 'Ethnographic methods are diverse, and a range of approaches can be adopted; they are based on observation, often complemented with interviews, and detailed analysis often at a micro level' (2017:98). This suggests that methodologically varied approaches to data collection can be acceptable. By their nature 'follow the changes, communicate the stories that matter' (Mills and Morton 2013:2) offering the level of self-reflexivity advantageous for an insider researcher. This is an approach that 'demands empathy' and to 'question the things others take for granted' making 'the familiar strange' by changing the scale on the lens (Mills and Morton 2013:4-5). Mills and Morton argue this approach is attractive stating 'the role of the writer is to help the reader quickly locate and understand [their] role in the school' and evoke 'a sense of immediacy and 'being there' (Mills and Morton 2012:6).

Ghodsee is a strong advocate of the first-person account, claiming the use of I 'brings life and vigour' to the write up and 'enhances credibility by establishing that you were there' (2016:25). Maanen agrees and suggests such accounts can be 'highly particular and hauntingly personal', they offer an insight into the 'choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life' (Maanen 2011:1). Somehow the written report must 'represent the culture not the field work itself' (Maanen 2011:4). The key to a successful ethnography lies not necessarily in the data collection, but the data presentation and explanation. For the insider view to have power and legitimacy careful attention must be paid to that.

Discussion of Case study as a viable approach

Alternatively, case studies offer a subtly different approach to ethnography which may be more appropriate to this research area. Although arguably not a 'methodology in itself' (Costly *et al* 2011:89) the case study approach is perhaps best described as a research strategy building a picture of the 'case' being investigated. Schramm (1971) describes the features of a case study as that which 'illuminates a decision or set of decisions - why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result' (cited in Yin 2018:14). Yin expands this definition to include other focusses such as 'individuals, organisations, processes… institutions and events' (Yin 2018:14). Yin describes the case study as 'an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context' (Yin 2018:15). Context is key here, by investigating the

phenomena in its environment, further knowledge and insights can be drawn. The 'aim is to understand how behaviour and/or processes are influenced by, and influence context' (Hartley 2004:323). Typically, case studies adopt mixed methods approaches, often mixing primary self-report methods with documentary or textual analysis.

Deem and Brehony argued for the use of the term 'case study' rather than 'ethnography' to describe their research of school governing bodies following the 1988 Education Reform Act. They argued that ethnography did not give sufficient recognition to the value of descriptive accounts of the processes involved at the expense of lengthy theorising. They also suggest that ethnographers who claim to describe actors accounts leave unanswered the question of interpretation of these accounts by the researcher. Deem and Brehony accept some notions of ethnography are present in their research, for example 'a cultural description of a group and its activities' however reject the notion that this description comes from the 'viewpoint of actors' themselves (Deem and Brehony 1994:163). This is a good example of the use of case study methodology including some elements of ethnography.

Case studies are better positioned to allow the study of events that happened in the past than ethnography which relies primarily on being 'in the field' as it stands now. Ethnography may touch upon events from the past in interview responses, however, this would not usually be the main focus of enquiry. Case studies would usually consider retrospective accounts and forms of data, a vital element of building a picture of the context of the case. Marinetto suggests the 'methodological value of the case study … is that it … generates detailed narrative like description … which allows researchers to gain theoretical insights' (Marinetto 2011:21). Usefully such 'theory work' may 'uncover the complex influences that impinge on public bodies and the context-bound, event-driven nature of policy decisions' (Marinetto 2011:21). Case studies are not prescriptive in the methods they use, thus can include interviews, focus groups, data and document analysis which allows the flexibility that is ideal for a study such as this.

The aim of the case study is to build a detailed picture of an occurrence and the design of the case study will allow for more detachment than an ethnographic study would permit. Hellawell states 'ideally the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the 'researched' … both empathy and alienation are useful qualities for a researcher (Hellawell 2007:487). Alienation can aid the defamiliarisation of an area and 'distancing

or making strange' could go some way to avoiding 'going native' or having my objectivity 'polluted' by the perspectives of subjects in the study (Hellawell 2007:485, 487).

Hartley suggests the value of the case study is in its potential for theory development. 'Case study theory building tends generally to be inductive' (Harley 2004:324) and thus this approach would fit the use of thematic analysis explained later in this chapter. To construct a case study is to engage in detailed construction of evidence in a way that generates new insights and broader interest.

Nonetheless the case study approach has limitations. By basic definition it is the study of one case which means generalizability beyond that particular occurrence can be problematic. The aim of the case study would be to 'illustrate and describe particular instances or episodes in a way that has relevance to other examples… rather than assuming the findings may be generalised' (Costly *et al* 2011:90). Thus for the case study relevance is more important than generalisation. This case is unusual, as it is made up of a three-tier system of middle and secondary schools and as such generalisation to other populations is likely not to be possible, and as such is not an aim of this research. However, the use of the conceptual framework (fig.4) found at the end of the last chapter aims to allow a degree of abstraction, the potential that other policy changes could be examined and theoretically understood in this way.

The insider case study

This study includes elements from both case study and ethnographic mixed method research designs. It is not a traditional ethnography, For I did not perform participant observation but by the virtue of my job role as teacher, and EdD researcher, I was participating in the life of the school, and observing what I saw, particularly when it bore some relevance to my investigation. Parthasarathy suggests ethnographic case studies can be conducted over shorter spans of time to explore narrower fields of interest to generate hypotheses. The critical feature of ethnography 'seeking to contextualize the problem in wider contexts also extends to ethnographic case studies' (Parthasarathy 2008).

Thus, this study adopts an approach similar to an ethnographic case study. I have the immersion required by the ethnography as I am an insider yet require the wider policy context provided by the case study approach. I was a teacher at one of the schools but not a member of SLT thus I adopt the position of 'insider in some contexts and outsider in other situations' (Sikes and Potts 2008:7). The ethnographic influences in the write up add power and immediacy to the account, allow the detailed narratives necessary for

sensemaking to be explored, and examples of the enactment of collaboration to be investigated. I have adopted an insider case study label for this research rather than ethnographic case study as I feel it better encapsulates the nature of the research here and my position within it. An insider case study should develop a reflexive and thoughtful account mindful of the researcher's position in the setting. Reflexivity 'extends notions of individual reflection and examines the ways that individuals are always socially situated and are embedded in complex social relations and discourses' (Burke and Kirton 2006:1). This describes my position in the research site accurately. Above all this piece of insider research is about 'learning and making a difference' (Smyth and Holian in Sikes and Potts 2008:35) to those who form part of the case, as the MAT forms and the schools begin to work together.

The risk of 'going native' is less of a concern for insider case study research, as the researcher is already 'native before the research begins' (Delyser 2001:442)'. However, Strauss warns that the insider researcher who actually 'lives' as study may 'know too much experientially and descriptively about a phenomena … and so end up literarily flooded with material' (Delyser 2001:442). To combat this, I have restricted my data gathering (interviews and focus groups) to a one-year period to control the amount of data collected. In addition, ANT analysis created a framework for my thoughts which helped to maintain focus during the data analysis and avoid becoming 'flooded with material' (Delyser 2001:442) I utilised ANT as a methodological tool and this led to a level of defamiliarisation of the data set or rather, a new way of thinking (this is explained further in the adapted thematic framework later in this chapter). This is useful to combat accusations of potentially 'knowing too much' due to my insider knowledge's and understandings and privileging one account over others due to my situatedness in the field. ANT concepts and ways of understanding interactions and the forming network allows a distance to emerge between myself as the insider and creates the potential for interesting and unexpected themes to emerge that stretch beyond my own experience (and situatedness) working at the school. For example, those related to materiality, or the influence of material actants offer a new way of thinking about things beyond my usual frame of reference from Sociology and Cultural Studies. However, because I did work at one of the schools in the MAT and my sensemaking of the emergent actor network ultimately is based upon this, the results will retain elements of the insider case study design mindful of my positionality. See **appendix E.2** for evidence of the use of ANT on the data and more information is found later in the chapter.

The methods used in this study are outlined below.

Methods and research process

Research Timeline

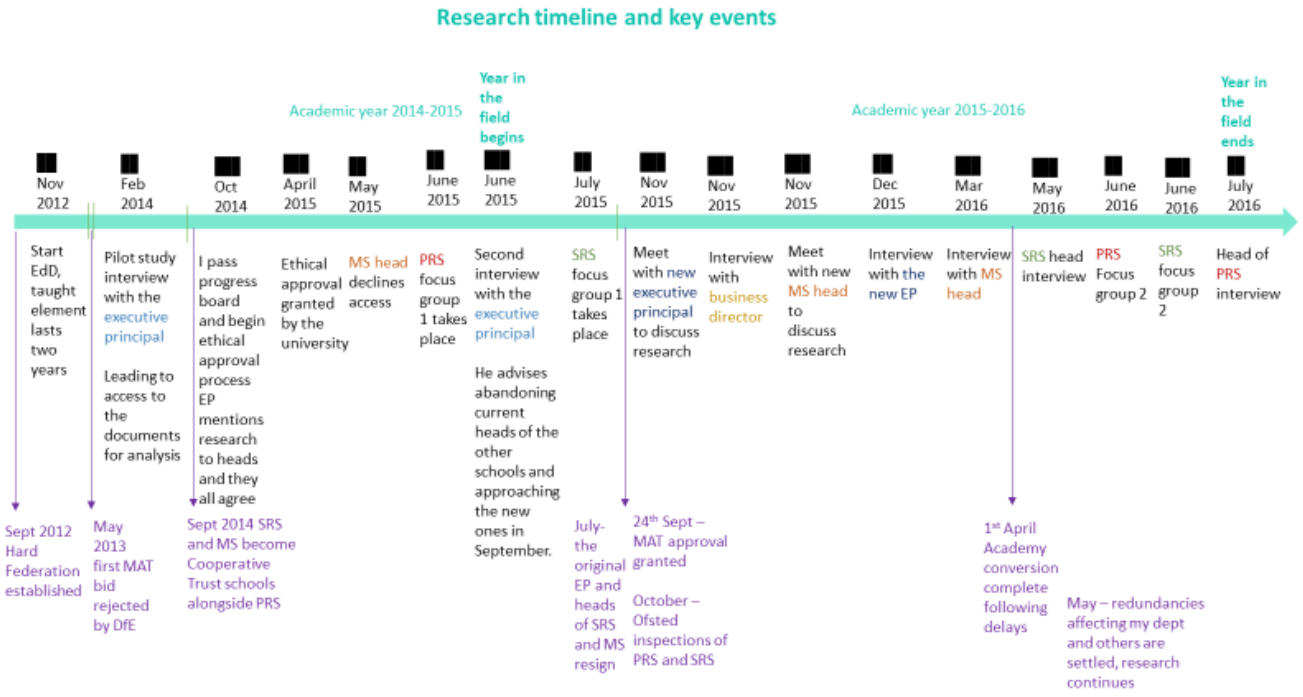
My year in the field began in July 2015 and was completed by July 2016. It covered several key events such as the change in executive headship and the academy conversion. *Fig. 5* details the research timeline.

Fig. 5 (larger version in appendix B.3)

A mixed method approach was designed to produce rich qualitative data. This allowed patterns and trends to be identified across the responses and provided a richer insight into experiences at the schools during this critical period.

Background and contextual information was gathered using key texts, documents, policies, letters, gathered by myself and provided on request by the original Executive Principal.

Seven 'Elite' interviews were conducted; the pilot study interview with the Executive Principal in Feb 2014, and a follow up interview with him in June 2015. Subsequent interviews were conducted with the newly appointed Executive Principal and the Business Manager late 2015, and the three heads of the MAT schools in 2016.



Two sets of teacher focus groups took place firstly in 2015 and then repeated in 2016. They involved staff from the two high schools and took place at their respective schools.

The two self-report methods allowed a picture of day to day activities and motivations to be communicated and facilitated discussion.

Dates of research completion are provided in appendix D.2.

Ethical approval process

Approval was sought from Keele University ethics review panel to progress with this research in February 2015 and was granted following some minor revisions on 25th April 2015 (see appendix C.1). The approval process allowed for interviews to take place with all the individuals mentioned above, for focus group including staff to occur alongside ongoing documentary analysis. The ethics panel accepted field work would be completed by 1st September 2016, which it duly was. The interview schedules and focus group themes produced for the review panel were the ones used during the study, as were the consent forms and information sheets for all the participants and the drafts of the emails

I attempted to be as thorough as possible with the ethics review panel application and consider all potential issues that could arise. All respondents were sent an information sheet outlining the aims of the study and ethical approval forms a week prior to the interview or focus groups. I began each interview or focus group explaining the paperwork and asking them to sign them. The consent broadly followed that outlined by the British Sociological Association. It confirmed I would keep their identities and that of the schools confidential as far as possible and asked for consent to use quotes. It asked that nothing be discussed about the study outside of the interview. It explained they were free to withdraw at any time and gained consent for recording of the session.

Ethics will be discussed throughout this chapter, and I designed the research schedule with it very much in mind.

It is impossible to plan for all potential ethical issues in any study but the main ones arising in this research were:

Potential ethical issue	Dealt with by
My position as employee of one of the schools and conflicts of interests arising from that and where to draw the line and cut the data.	I decided not to conduct a traditional ethnography, as participant observation could potentially conflict with my professional priorities as a teacher. Invariably the main field work lasted only one year but the history and story of the research sites tracks both before and the years after. This data is factual in nature and merely adds to the context.
The fact some of the research subjects are my superiors and the power imbalance resulting from that and potential difficult asking searching or provocative questions,	I had a good relationship with all the elites interviewed and found they were forthcoming with responses I elicited, potentially even more so than they would have been had they not known me. Certainly, the fact they knew me meant they were more accommodating and generous with their time. However, the redundancy process that my department was subjected to in the middle of data collection meant some of the interviews were delayed to allow this to be finalised.
The fact staff members may feel pressured into participating in the focus groups	I worded invitation emails to ensure they understood participation was voluntary. There were two members of staff who I invited who declined and several who could not attend the second group due to prior commitments.
Maintaining confidentiality of the participants	The information sheet outlined that as the research sites are a fairly unique set up this may be difficult, and I effectively identify it by virtue of one of the schools being my workplace however all names and places would be anonymised. Also focus group participants were aware senior staff at the school did not know who had been selected, so even if they read the data at a later point, they would not know who said what as names were changed.
Potential conflicts of interests arising from the interview or focus group responses	There is always the risk something would be revealed by a respondent that creates a conflict of interest between my role as researcher and that of teacher or employee. For example, if it had been revealed the schools were going to merge, when the party line always was that wouldn't happen. In this case I would have to honour my commitment to confidentiality.

The potential the focus group participants from the school I do not work at may feel uncomfortable being questioned by me	This was partially overcome by my gatekeeper's reassurance at the other school, and her presence at the focus group. I contacted them all via my Keele email to keep my distance from my role as teacher.
Maintain confidentiality of the participants in the focus groups (with regards to other participants)	Participants were asked at the beginning of the focus group to respect each other and not reveal the nature of the line of questioning or individuals' responses to anyone outside of the group.
Keeping the transcripts and recordings safe	This was vital to maintain confidentiality. I ensured that whenever I had my Dictaphone with me in one of the schools it was securely locked away. I never took transcripts with me to any of the schools except during the second set of focus groups (to refer to) and these were securely locked away during the school day. All the recordings and additional data is kept on a password protected computer and will be destroyed within five years of completion of the doctorate.

Anonymised information sheets, consent forms and invitation emails are found in appendix C.

Method 1 Documentary analysis – purpose and limitations

The purpose of the documentary analysis was to provide background information to help form the interview schedules and focus groups themes, contextual information for the thesis and assist with my own sensemaking of the unfolding situation.

The qualitative content analysis of two samples of documents were placed in two categories: objective and subjective. Objective documents include those that should (in theory) be free of bias such as strategic plans and letters to parents DfE policy documents etc. Subjective documents are those either written by the principal or articles from the press.

Sample 1 – objective

- Strategic documents including; School letters to parents dating from 2012 onwards, explaining the Cooperative Trust model, federation and Multi- Academy Trust and consultation meetings; Documents detailing the models of education, for example the federation five-year strategic plan and structure of the federation governing body; Public consultation questionnaire for the federation; DfE website comparing the schools results and finances.

Sample 2 – subjective

- Newspaper articles regarding the federation, Multi-academy Trust and Cooperative Trust and Executive Principal role.

Following the pilot study in February 2014 and follow up interview in June 2015 the Executive Principal sent me a huge number of documents. As it was his selection not mine it is open to bias and censorship on his part. I complemented it with official DfE literature available allowing school comparison and trends over time. The documents provided mainly covered the federation and not the MAT due to the time in which they were selected.

I used qualitative content analysis process, adapted from Hsieh and Shannon 2005 to analyse these documents prior to the primary data collection (interviews and focus groups). This process began with directed content analysis 'in which initial coding starts with a theory or relevant research findings' (Zhang and Widemuth 2005:2198) in this case coding will relate to ANT categories, for example, evidence of enrolment. The content analysis will then extend to 'summative' approach which begins with the content and extends to latent meanings and themes' (Zhang and Widemuth 2005:2198). So, the analysis will begin deductively but will remain open to inductive findings which may lead to other theoretical insights.

I dealt with the documents in two stages:

Step 1: read documents, build picture of the context of the collaboration

Step 2: coding using ANT concepts to build a picture of the actor network forming (this can be cross checked using the primary data from interviews and focus groups once gathered)

An example of step 2 is provided in the appendix E.1.

I continued to collect newspaper articles from the local papers that covered events such as the academy conversion and Executive Principal change in leadership. This added to the timeline that was created in July 2016 once the year in the field was completed (see *Fig. 10* in appendix B.4 for timeline). I found it very useful to date the events, as the order they occurred in invariably affected the staff reactions to them, and their ability to manage the change they were faced with.

The documents served as background and contextual information that assisted the design of interview and focus group questions and themes. Thus, they will not be discussed separately in the results or discussion.

Method 2 Elite interviews

Six Semi structured interviews were conducted with the following staff members (I call these 'elites' as they are the main driving force behind the organisational changes under investigation):

No.	Elite Staff Member	Date interview completed	Interview length
1	The Executive Principal	February* 2014 (pilot)	2 hours 38 minutes
2	The Executive Principal	June 2015 (main study)	1 hour 54 minutes
3	The Business Manager	November 2015	1 hour 13 minutes
4	The new Executive Principal	December 2015	56 minutes
5	Middle School Head Teacher (MS)	March 2016	1 hour 2 minutes
6	Secondary Research Site Head Teacher (SRS)	May 2016	38 minutes
7	Primary Research Site Head Teacher (PRS)	July 2016	46 minutes

*Specific dates removed for confidentiality reasons

Rationale for selecting these individuals

The Executive Principal was selected for the pilot study interview as he was the system leader at that time and thus could explain the context of the institution and subsequent changes. A second interview with him was necessitated by his resignation in 2015. I contacted the new Principal shortly after he took up post in September 2015 to ensure he consented to my study continuing in its proposed form and to invite him to interview. He was an experienced National Leader of Education (NLE) and an important elite to interview for an insight into the future direction of the federation and MAT.

The head teachers of the three schools were also interviewed. This allowed exploration of the understanding, experience and impact of the MAT from differing perspectives. These interviews also provided insights into how the policy collaboration in the MAT was being enacted.

The Business Manager was selected due to the technical insights they could offer into how schools begin to strategically work together in the federation and wider school partnership. In addition to this they had insight into the role and impact of the role, as it was the subject of her MBA thesis.

Please see appendix D.1 for the professional profiles of the interviewees.

Individuals of interest but not accessed for interview:

I approached other 'elites' to request interviews, however, was not able to complete research on them. The Chair of the Federation Board of Governors was in the process of stepping down and preferred to email her responses. She was the chair of PRS board of governors for many years and thus was a significant source of knowledge with regards to the steps taken, and steps to take to allow the federation to operate successfully. Her responses, not surprisingly, echo's those stated by the Executive Principal. The study focus subsequently shifted to experiences working in a forming MAT, and thus the governor's input and experience of this would have been more limited than the teaching staff. It is for this reason that I did not approach the new chair of Governors to request an interview.

I approached the two outgoing head teachers for SRS and the MS for interviews. Both had agreed to take part in the research when asked by the Principal in a head meeting in the autumn term, however both ended up taking redundancy in the summer term of 2015. The head of SRS initially agreed but I was unable to get subsequent responses and set a date for interview. The MS head declined citing that she had already been involved in research conducted by another school. I sought the Executive Principal's advice and he suggested I abandon it and approach the new heads as they took over in September. The new head of the MS was a former deputy of the school, and the new head at PRS was familiar with the background thus I was confident the data captured from both would still be relevant.

Interview process

Detailed interview schedules were written prior to each interview. These were informed by the original research questions and themes, or patterns raised by the analysis of the documents and focus group findings. The questions encouraged the respondents to talk about their lived experiences working to set up the federation and latterly the MAT. There was some similarity between the questions asked of each respondent, linked to their background and experience however some questions were personalised due to the differing nature of their jobs and to reflect the ever-changing circumstances faced by the schools. The first interview with the Executive Principal focussed upon the creation of the federation, processes involved and barriers faced. The second interview with the original Executive Principal, and interviews with the new Executive Principal and Business Manager shifted focus to the future of the federation, plans for the direction of the MAT and perceived barriers to implement this. The interviews with the three Heads adopted a focus informed by the other interviews, the Ofsted inspection in the autumn of 2015 and MAT. For example, the interview with the second head teacher was heavily influenced by the findings of the discussion held with the MS head as they were working closely together. Thus, rather him repeating what I already knew, part of the interview schedule explained what I knew and asked if he could add anything to build on this. The interview with the head teacher of PRS had his questions framed by the redundancies experienced in the school in the previous 12 months (of which he was one as his role was changed from head to associate head). This ended up being a more reflective interview than the others, and I deliberately left it till last to ensure all the redundancy business was resolved and my own new post had been secured.

All the interviews took place in the personal offices of the individual for their convenience. During the pilot interview I found it useful to take extensive notes as it signalled sustained interest in what the respondent was saying. It also assisted with any necessary reordering of the questions and prevented losing track of the discussion. It also speeded up the transcription process as the notes provided a map of the discussion. I took a notebook with me and recorded key quotes in each interview. All the interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and transcribed by me, I felt it was important to complete this lengthy process myself as the first stage of data analysis.

The aim of the interviews with 'elites' was to allow a more comprehensive picture of the federation/ MAT to be built with regards to its purpose and outcomes, from the perspective of key players, decision makers and drivers of policy change and to explore

how the changes were managed. They also allowed a fuller picture to be build-up of the social relations and policy enactments at work.

Access and ethics

There are many ethical issues raised by research of this kind, and I raised these during the process of ethical approval in February 2015. As the research is a small study on schools in a particular area it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality and anonymity to the interviewees, particularly as their job roles are identified. The organisational structure under investigation is slightly atypical by the inclusion of a middle school which is not a common school type making it more recognisable It is possible some of the answers may have been more guarded and lean towards perceived socially desirable responses due to this. I have removed the specific dates of the interviews to add a further layer of confidentiality.

One further ethical issue relates to the power imbalance between myself (as employee) and the individuals whom I interviewed. The interviewees are aware it would not be in my personal interest to report negatively my findings. This raises the issue of self-censorship, an issue when interviewing and reporting on individuals to which the interviewer is professionally subordinate. Walford suggests such issues may lead to 'the researcher being ultra-careful about what is written where there is any doubt about interpretation' this may in turn lead to 'a conflict with another ethical duty to report what has been said'. These are difficulties every practitioner- researcher faces if the research uncovers undesirable findings for the organisation. There is a need to remain reflective about the research and research findings and to remain slightly detached from the findings and the nature of ANT helps with this. Whereas it would be inadvisable to present those who have supported the research in a poor light, it would be ethically irresponsible to ignore negative responses completely. As the interviews progressed there was nothing raised that presented any of the participants in a particularly poor light. I found the focus group responses to be candid and honest, and thus any negativity in the findings has come directly from the voice of the staff group interviewed, and not myself. There was some recognition of that by the teachers in the group that many of the issues faced by the schools were the product of policy decisions made higher up, by the DfE and Ofsted and could not be solely blamed on the senior leaders.

Cambell and Gregor offer tips for the successful interviewing of powerful figures warning that 'professional language simply obscures what people actually do' (Cambell and

Gregor 2008:72). They suggest the interviewer must avoid 'conversational etiquette where people assist each other in making meaning' or 'plugging missing pieces from own knowledge' (Cambell and Gregor 2008:72). This is vital in studies interviewing superiors with a shared 'professional discourse'. There is a temptation to complete sentences for respondents not only to demonstrate how closely you are listening but also to impress them regarding your knowledge on the topic. Listening to the recordings there was the odd occasion where I slipped into this, however one could also read this as a rapport building technique and I do not think it dramatically altered their responses.

Use of names

Names are withheld during the write up of any research to protect confidentiality, however it is deemed good practice to rename participants to avoid objectifying them with the moniker 'participant B' or similar. I have reflected on this and why I found renaming the focus group participants, the teachers, straightforward but struggled with the elite interviewees. I made the decision for the elites to remain named as their job title as this reflected the distance between them and the other staff, (and me). This study examines sensemaking and sensegiving and thus I felt it appropriate the way I understood my position should be reflected in the way I addressed them. The teachers in the focus group were given names as a reflection of their status in relation to me, I was one of them, I felt more comfortable naming them, and subtly this reflects my differing relationship and status to them.

Similarly I found it difficult to rename the schools, potentially as I was too close to them and could not think of them under any other name. I also wanted to give the reader a subtle reminder of my positioning throughout the write up. Thus, PRS was so called as it was the Primary Research Site/ school; the one I worked at. SRS was the Secondary research site/ school; the other secondary school, the one I did not work at. Finally, the Middle School or MS was kept as a reminder that this was a three-tier system.

Method 3 Staff focus groups

Rationale and methodology

Focus groups were arranged for a set of teaching staff from both high schools. This method was selected to stimulate discussion and potential to 'raise consciousness and empower individuals' (Robson 2002:284). With skilful questioning and prompts a range of perspectives and experiences of the policy enactment of collaboration through the federation and MAT can be heard. The questions or discussion prompts were designed to

stimulate a discourse about lived experiences working in these groups of schools. Barbour argues that focus groups are 'better situated to capture the dynamic nature of change… than … interviews at specific points of the process' (Barbour 1999:199). For this reason, I repeated the focus groups with the same participants 12 months later to develop a picture of the nature and reactions to policy change occurring.

Contacting the participants

Participants were contacted via my Keele email. They were sent a standardised invitation – see appendix C5 and 6. I signed off these emails with my name and 'EdD research student Keele University', this was important as it differentiated me from my familiar identity as teacher or colleague. The invitations for the participants at the two schools differed slightly. As I knew and worked with the participants at PRS, to be totally impersonal would have seemed odd, and I accessed the participants at the second school through a contact.

As an insider researcher the politics of contacting the participants was slightly complex. Originally it was planned to perform focus groups using staff from all 3 schools, but access was denied to the MS in 2015 by the then head teacher (who was taking redundancy at the time), and although access was re-granted by the new head in 2016, the group was never successfully organised and as it would have lacked the comparative element of the others (as it was a year late by this point), it was abandoned. I asked permission from the original Executive Principal to grant initial access to the focus group participants from both schools, then I asked the respective head teachers. As a professional curtesy I asked the new Principal and new head of SRS to regrant permission for the second round of focus groups. Although the Principals and heads granted permission of access to their teaching staff the identity of those who took part was kept confidential. The research respondents were aware of this prior to agreeing to take part. This was designed to avoid any ethical issues relating to coercion or power issues leading to potential involuntary participation in the research. In addition to this I began each focus group reminding participants to not discuss with others beyond the group the themes that had been talked about. I hoped this would offer an additional layer of anonymity and trust between the participants and myself and encourage them to be open and honest.

Sample

Two separate focus groups were conducted, each lasting one hour at PRS and SRS. To avoid any conflict between the school staff, no mixing of the staff across schools occurred. Barbour warns of ethical issues involved in staff selection, particularly as the individuals work together the 'groups have a life beyond the research encounter' and discussions held could have 'potentially far reaching consequences' (Barbour 1999:123). I tried to avoid conflict between staff by use of a purposive sampling method in which staff were mixed across teams and experience, whilst avoiding any senior leaders. Bryman suggests the selection of participants should be made 'with the research question in mind' and that the individuals should 'differ from one another in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question' (Bryman 2012:418). The aim of this sampling frame was to achieve a broad spread of experience and viewpoints.

Sample composition:

1. Minimum of two **recently qualified teachers (RQT)** with a federation contract (thus can be asked to work in any of the federation schools, prior to MAT conversion only post 2012 staff had these contracts).

2. Minimum of two **established teachers (EST),** teachers who have worked at the school for 5 - 7 years

3. Minimum of two **significantly established teachers (SEST),** teachers who have worked at the school for over 20 years, but not part of the senior leadership team defined as heads, deputy or assistant heads or pastoral leaders.

I requested a mix of male and female participants where possible and, because these focus groups aim to capture the perspectives and experiences of the non-elite in the schools, that no one in a position above a head of department is included in the sample.

Both schools have a relatively small teaching staff and thus I was aware that achieving the purposive sample I had set was unlikely, particularly in the recently qualified teacher group. I was comfortable to make up the sample with individuals from the other categories if this was the case. I planned to ask the head teachers to act as gatekeepers and identify individuals to take part, fully aware this may lead to potential bias in the sample towards more positive individuals, willing to participate and speak highly of the school, Barbour calls this 'manipulation of selection strategies' (1999:122). I used a contact at SRS to arrange this for me, if there was bias in the sample I was not in control of it as I

did not know which staff would be waiting for me when I arrived for the first focus group in 2015. My contact was aware of the sampling frame and attempted to stick to it as far as possible.

Demographic breakdown of the focus groups

Year	PRS participants	SRS participants
2015	10	5
2016	7	5

Primary Research Site					
Participants	**Male**	**Female**	**RQT**	**EST**	**SEST**
2015	5	5	Ben Olivia	Claire John Jake	Judy Louise Sarah Ed Benedict
2016	4	3	Olivia	John Jake	Judy Sarah Ed Benedict

Secondary Research Site					
Participants	**Male**	**Female**	**RQT**	**EST**	**SEST**
2015	2	3	Kate Jen Stacy Robert	Philip	0
2016	2	3	Kate Jen Stacy Robert	Philip	0

The PRS group was large, partly due to the fact everyone I had approached via email agreed to take part. The repeat of this group in 2016 experienced a reduction in participants as two were unavailable. All the other staff remained the same. Two of the teachers in this group, a male RQT and female EST were also former pupils of the school, which allowed a little of the backstory and history of the relationship between the two schools to enter the discussion. The longest serving staff member participant had worked at the school for over 30 years, and the shortest serving member had worked at the school for four years, so there was a true spread of experience.

SRS had less of a spread of participants across the categories, and there were only 5 in total. I was grateful for any support I could get for the research and found the participants who volunteered certainly did not hold back their views despite my position at PRS. Three of the female staff members took up post after 2012 and were RQT's in the truest sense – new to teaching. One of the male participants had taught elsewhere before so was more experienced in the profession, although not with regards to this school – he had only been in post a term when I originally met him in 2015. The final participant was more experienced but not what I would define as 'significantly established' as he had worked at the school for less than 8 years, he had however worked in the other two federation schools which made him able to provide an invaluable perspective. Clearly for comparative purposes it was not ideal the focus group was half the size of the one at the first school, however as I did not personally know the staff involved, having a smaller group to manage did enable me to build rapport more quickly, and the discussion was still of high quality.

Focus group 1

Conducted in the summer term 2015

The focus groups took place in a neutral meeting room in PRS and in a classroom of the staffs choosing at SRS to allow the participants to relax and feel comfortable.

The discussion prompts in the first set of focus groups were based following areas:

1. What has the impact of the Federation been on you?
2. Can you describe experiences that have been specifically Federation related?
3. How much contact do you personally have with your colleagues from across the Federation?
4. What are the benefits of being in the Federation?
5. Are there any difficulties you have experienced that can be attributed to the Federation?

These questions were standardised for both groups and provided background information which highlights the key actors (material or human) and ways in which the network is beginning to form and the ways in which the policy of the federation to collaborate is being enacted in practice. Participants were provided with the consent form and information sheet by email a week prior to the interview, I printed these off for them to sign at the beginning of the session. The focus groups were recorded using a Dictaphone and I transcribed them myself, once again this acted as the first stage of data analysis. Thematic data analysis was performed, see later for the framework used for this. The findings from the first focus groups formed the basis of themes and questions asked at the second focus groups the following year. I took the role of 'facilitator' which requires a 'balance between active and passive' to 'generate interest in and discussion about a particular topic… without leading the group to reinforce existing expectations' (Robson 2002:287). Comparisons were made between focus groups and with the elite interviews to establish to what an extent a coherent understanding of the changes and future is held.

What is interesting about the design of these questions in retrospect, is that I use the word 'federation' as a synonym for 'collaboration'. This reflects the way the federation was presented to the staff as a whole as its main function and purpose was cross school collaboration.

Focus group 2

Conducted in the summer term 2016

The second set of focus groups took place in the summer term 2016, one year after the first set. The plan was to use the same staff and to pick up on points raised from the

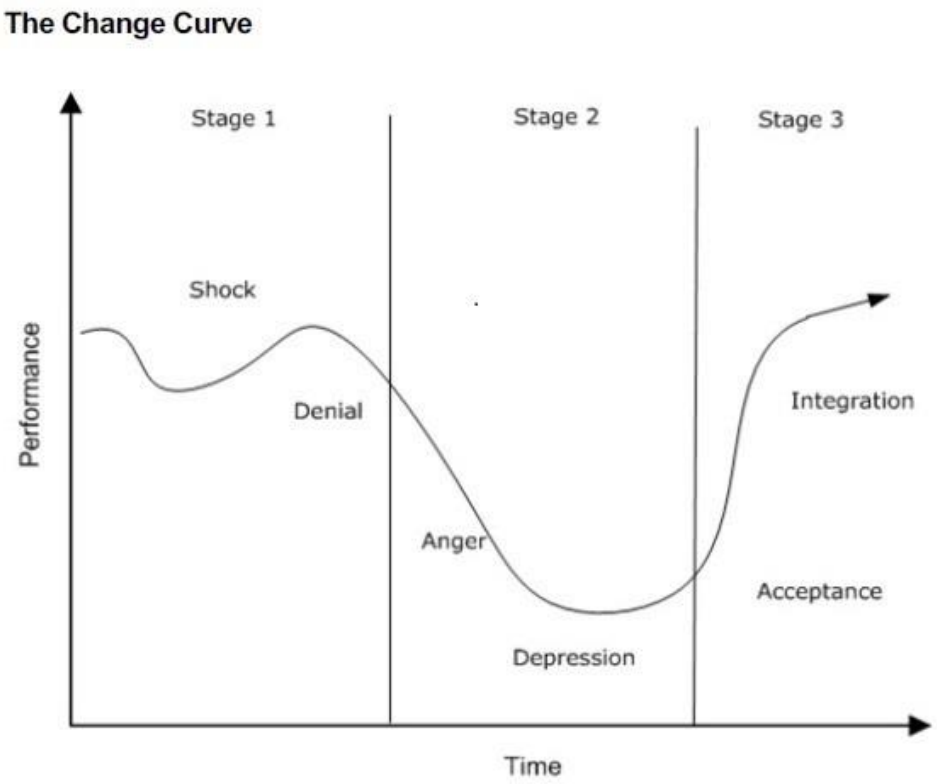
previous meeting, discuss experiences of and changes witnessed following MAT conversion.

To prepare for these interviews I analysed the transcripts of the previous year's groups and identified key areas to explore further. I ensured I was very familiar with the data and able to quote individual thoughts from the previous year back to them if necessary.

For this focus group I introduced an additional device to elicit discussion and narrative to reveal sensemaking processes. I asked participants to plot themselves on a change curve (Kubler Ross), where they were last year compared to this, and to articulate why.

This helped shape the discussion and made the participants reflect on the intervening year with more clarity. It also allowed for a comparison between individuals, and staff at the different schools in terms of their declared mind set towards the federation and the newly formed MAT (the enactment of these policies as the schools working together). It allowed the respondents to discuss their feelings in an honest way, and to discuss what could be done by the schools to improve the morale/ productivity of staff. This focus group design became what Barbour calls a 'therapeutic encounter' (1999:125) and deliberately so, to encourage more searching discussion and comments than the first meeting. It was utilised as a technique to allow them to form their narrative and the process of sensemaking to be revealed.

Fig. 6 [4]



The Change Curve was originally developed in the 1960's by Kubler Ross.[5] to describe the stages individuals go through when experiencing a loss. It was based upon her research into the reactions of patients with cancer. She states that people experience the following stages of reactions to change:

- Shock
- Denial
- Anger
- Depression
- Acceptance
- Integration

The acceptance or rejection of change by an individual has the potential to affect the productivity of an organisation and Ball *et al* 2012 would argue the context within which the policy can be successfully enacted (see chapter 3). Minimising the impact of the change or at least recognising staff difficulties coming to terms with it therefore is a priority. There are many action strategies suggested by management theorists to assist

[4] Image reference: https://www.impact-advisors.com/culture/big-little-things-big-projects/
[5] Sdl_managing_change.pdf University of Warwick

with the effective management of change, as they state that often people travel through a predictable cycle of reactions to change.

Kubler Ross splits the process into three distinct stages and tracks the process in relation to both time and performance. This is a useful visual cue and can be a helpful management tool as it suggests that even those employees in stage two (anger and depression), given time will move to stage three (acceptance and integration). It suggests that their state of difficulty is not permanent, and they will in time move on. Although originally meant as a model to assist cancer sufferers it is now utilised by many businesses to manage employees during the process of restructuring and redundancy and demonstrates the importance of taking the emotional aspect of change seriously. It is based on the premise that 'The easier it is for the employees to move along on their journey, the easier will it be for the organization to move towards success'[6]. And in this context – the more effectively the policy of the MAT to work together will be enacted.

Stage 1

Shock and denial – this stage usually does not last too long, people will initiate defence mechanisms here to allow them to process whatever change they are going to have to embark upon. Usually productivity drops here as people take time to process the change.

Stage 2

Anger – once the shock subsides and the realisation of the situation hits people they will often become angry. This anger can be directed in many ways, maybe at the boss, other co-workers or at the situation in general; the economy for example, or the Secretary of State for Education…

Depression – this stage will hit if the situation seems hopeless, like nothing the individual can do will make a difference. Productivity here will be at an all-time low.

Stage 3

Acceptance – people realise fighting or ignoring the change is not helpful and may begin to accept it. This may also take the form of resignation that the change will go ahead regardless, which a less positive but is a step forward.

Integration – the change becomes fully embedded in the persons work practices.

[6] https://www.cleverism.com/understanding-kubler-ross-change-curve/

There is a recognition that people progress through the stages at different rates and that some may never reach stage 3 and end up leaving, or resist the change completely causing difficulties for the organisation. However, there are steps that can be taken to enable workers to reach stage 3 and become fully on-board with the change.

I chose this version of the curve as it was fairly self-explanatory, I did not want to lose time during the focus groups (which only lasted 60 minutes) explaining a complicated diagram. This version worked well as the respondents immediately understood it and were able to effectively apply it to their own circumstances. As well as acting as a cathartic tool that built upon my rapport with the participants, it always revealed the extent to which the MAT policy was struggling to be implemented and why and the ways in which these respondents were making sense of this.

Focus group 2 July 2016 - Discussion prompts for PRS took the following form:

Theme 1: experiences of school collaboration

Summary/ recap of discussion last year:

- We discussed why the Federation was created and identified reasons to do with money, and it being a defensive move
- The amount of collaboration between schools was not consistent across subject areas and not always easy
- Feelings towards the Federation negative – money lost, redundancies, mistrust, discussion of SRS mistrust towards PRS
- Experiences of the Federation –problems communication and with A level specifications

Introduce change curve – plot yourself last year and consider where you are now with regards to the Federation/ MAT, experiences and purpose of it.

- Summary of last year's discussion – have your experiences changed? If so how? Has this change been beneficial?
- Has there been more communication/ collaboration this year?
- Discussion of MS relations
- Have relations improved? Deteriorated? Why is this?

Theme 2: succession of the Executive Principal and other changes in leadership

- How has the succession been managed? Has it been successful? How would you measure this success?
- How has this affected your working life? How has it affected the operation of the MAT?
- Are you clearer on what the purpose of the collaboration is now we have converted to a MAT?
- Last year – a wish for a new leader who is decisive – examples of that?
- Impact of the Ofsted inspections

Theme 3: the future of the MAT

Summary of last year's discussion – new Executive Principal an unknown, will staff move sites? Need for better communication of the aims – 'like a fog', issues of trust between the two schools, – have your views on the future of the Federation changed now we are a MAT? How? Why? What does the future look like now? Has the conversion to Academy an impact on the direction of this Federation?

What would make it feel like a true collaboration? Is collaboration still a good idea? Are we stronger together?

Return to the change curve – what needs to happen to be stage 3?

Focus group 2 July 2016 - SRS differed slightly as the findings from their first focus group was naturally different, but followed the same main themes:

Theme 1: experiences of school collaboration

Summary/ recap of discussion last year

- Why Federation was created – money, defensive, lack of options, external forces, 'forced'
- Recognition it was necessary
- Amount of collaboration between schools–not consistent across subject areas and not always easy- specs, little mention of the MS
- Recognition there was a need and responsibility of SLT to step up
- Integration between the students had improved but not perfect

Experiences of the Federation – some communication but problems with A level specifications, physical distance a barrier, need to know who is in charge- a clear hierarchy, too much speculation, no clear communication

Introduce change curve – plot yourself last year and consider where you are now with regards to the Federation/ MAT, experiences and purpose of it.

- Summary of last year's discussion – have your experiences changed? If so how? Has this change been beneficial?
- Has there been more communication/ collaboration with PRS this year?
- With MS this year?
- Have relations improved? Deteriorated? Why is this?

Theme 2: succession of the Executive Principal and other changes in leadership

- How has the succession been managed? Has it been successful? How would you measure this success?
- How has this affected your working life? How has it affected the operation of the MAT?
- Are you clearer on what the purpose of the collaboration is now we have converted to become and academy?
- How has your new head settled in – last year you wanted better communication from above – has that happened?

Impact of the Ofsted inspections

Theme 3: the future of the MAT

Summary of last year's discussion – the Executive Principal as an unknown, will staff move sites? Need for better communication of the aims – have your views on the future of the Federation changed now we are a MAT? How? Why? What does the future look like now? Has the conversion to Academy an impact on the direction of this Federation?

What would make it feel like a true collaboration? Is collaboration still a good idea? Are we stronger together?

Return to the change curve – what needs to happen to move to stage 3?

I was cautious in both focus groups to change my language from federation to MAT, as by this point the conversion was approved and the schools were officially academies.

Fig. 7 The set up for focus group 1 and 2 in PRS (larger version in appendix E.4)

I closely transcribed both sets of focus groups word for word, with pauses also recorded. The transcription formed the first stage of data analysis. I completed the transcriptions within 3 weeks of the focus groups taking place. I began by typing up the notes I had taken during the interview, then listened back to the recording slowly, filling in the gaps. Completing the transcription in this slow and careful way allowed me the time and space to begin to draw out themes, patterns and comparisons between the two sets of schools and the groups a year apart and begin to consider types of sensemaking, ANT processes, how collaboration was being enacted and changes to practice and attitudes resulting from the academy conversion.

Data analysis – narrative thematic analysis

There is no quick way or shortcuts to be taken when analysing qualitative data. I have read extensively on the subject and have investigated the relative merits of content analysis, portraiture, thematic analysis, coding, grounded theory and so on. As this study relies upon insights from sensemaking literature, and the narratives people tell or construct about change, a form of narrative analysis would seem appropriate for the data analysis. A narrative does not 'just describe reality, it constructs it', it is a sensemaking device that reveals how meanings are 'shared in organisations' (Maitlis 2012:492). There

are several ways this type of analysis can be performed. For example, the investigative focus may be on the whole story that is constructed, or alternatively select parts of what is said or the language used by the respondents. Maitlis (2012) identifies three types of narrative analysis; thematic, structural and dialogic/ performative. Structural analysis focusses specifically on the way the story is told, for example how it becomes persuasive to others and the language used. This study utilises elements of this, particularly in regard to the sensegiving by the leaders. Performative analysis focusses on the relationship between narrator and audience, and the processes involved in meaning making. This type is less common in organisational studies such as this and as I deliberately tried to keep my involvement in the interviews and focus groups to a minimum to avoid influencing the responses it would net seem appropriate. Finally, thematic analysis, an approach that allows both the content of the story to be explored and the specifics of what is said. Comparisons can be drawn between respondents' stories and as a result themes identified. This adds to the understanding of the change being investigated.

Braun and Clarke (2006:78) argue thematic analysis should be the 'foundational method for qualitative analysis' and may lead to the 'identification, analysis, organisation, description and theme reporting' necessary to make sense of this data set. A theme is defined as 'an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to recurrent experience… a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000:362) Novell *et al* (2017:2), warn that there is 'no clear argument on how to apply this method' it does have several advantages such as its inherent flexibility, theoretical freedom, and its ability to examine different perspectives and reveal 'unanticipated insights'. Problems facing researchers that wish to make use of thematic analysis include the general lack of literature on the method, ambiguity surrounding whether it is a method in its own right, and concerns that its flexible nature can lead to inconsistency in application. Maitlis also warns that the identification of themes may lead to the disembedding of the story from its original context (Maitlis 2012:495) a risk less common with structural analysis which focusses on the whole story. However, the systematic element of comparison, the potential insights provided from the emerging themes, and opportunity to consider ANT during the analysis (see below for explanation of this) I feel warrant the use of thematic analysis in this study over other forms of narrative analysis. Harley warns that 'a mistake in writing up case studies is to believe that the narrative is the most interesting aspect of the study… it is unlikely to be of

interest to those beyond the organisation… the wider implications of the case [must be drawn out]' (Harley 2004:330). It is that which I believe thematic analysis will achieve.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a 6 phase model of instructions to carry out thematic analysis:

1) Familiarise yourself with the data
2) Generate initial codes
3) Search for themes
4) Review themes
5) Define and name themes
6) Produce report

Each stage of the model involves discussion with the research team, triangulation of method findings and documenting of thoughts.

Novell *et al* argue however that thematic analysis is in practice 'an iterative and reflective process that develops over time' (2017:4). It is unnecessary to stick rigidly to the Lincoln and Guba model if that is not what the data set requires. Two approaches can be taken, either the themes arise inductively from the raw data or deductively from prior research or theories. My framework uses a combination of both, it begins inductively, allowing the data to speak and themes to emerge, then incorporates deductive elements in consideration of sensemaking, policy enactment literature and Actor- Network Theory and its relevance to this case.

Adapted thematic analysis framework

Initial preparation – close inspection of the documents provided by the Executive Principal and others that I collected from both objective and subjective samples coupled with policy from chapter 2. The purpose here was to identify key policy at work, those that influence and shape the lives of the individuals under investigation and to shape questions for the interviews. In addition, the secondary purpose of this was to familiarise myself with the area and site to enable more effective questioning and to demonstrate prior knowledge at the interviews.

Stage 1 transcription – I completed detailed transcription of the elite interviews and focus groups as soon as possible after they were conducted to provide deeper immersion, this will speed up the process and consolidate the data.

Stage 2 close inspection of transcriptions– read transcriptions and highlight sections of interest, controversial quotes, repeating themes, nuggets of juicy or interesting detail. Responses that potentially lack validity or may contain bias and question why.

Stage 3 diagrams/ maps and timelines – draw diagrams (spider diagrams or maps) illustrating key themes that are emerging. This has the benefit of assisting the process of really knowing the data in depth. Timelines constructed of research progress and significant events identified in the interviews. These were continuously updated and allowed progress to be tracked of both the research agenda and the school relations. Examples of these can be found in the appendix E.1 and E.2.

Stage 4 Name the themes emerging- develop categories and subcategories. Where are the successes and failures of the sensemaking and collaborative policy enactment? How can this be explained by ANT conceptual diagram (fig. 4)? Evidence of policy enactment and policy stall highlighted in the notes.

Stage 5 Actor-Network Theory analysis – What can be further drawn out by ANT from the themes and subthemes. What is the role of material factors in the sensemaking and policy enactment processes?

ANT applied as a methodological tool to discover evidence of translation and symmetry:

- Enrolment
- Problematisation and Obligatory Passage Points
- Interessement
- Mobilisation
- Mediators
- Intermediaries
- Immutable mobiles
- Boundary objects
- Black box
- Convergence
- Ambivalent belongings

Recorded in a notebook. I began with the elite interviews, and cross checked for shared patterns. Then I completed the focus groups and similarly cross checked for repeated themes or patterns. The aim here was not to use the ANT concepts as a toolbox, but rather to allow my understanding of the ANT concepts to reveal things to me about the

data I have collected (a sensemaking tool). This should enable a sense of 'defamiliarisation' to take place, or a different way of thinking, vital if it is to reveal the "taken for granted goings on". Additional themes relating to the third research question were also noted during this process. Evidence of this process is found in the ***appendix E.2.***

Stage 6 the Actor network(s). Decision regarding where to cut the network and what parts of the data are to be used. Moments of translation are identified, as are additional themes relating to research question 3. The diagram of chapter 5 planning is in the appendix E.1.

Stage 7 Write the report thematically and ethnographically- I began the write up and selection of selected moments of translation to demonstrate the process from policy development, enactment to final implementation. Ethnographic influences were explored through the writing style including rich contextual description. Sensemaking, policy enactment and ANT insights utilised as suggested by the *Fig. 4* below. The insider case study takes shape.

Stage 8 – conclusions

Stage 9 – methodological and theoretical evaluation

Fig. 4 (see appendix B.5)

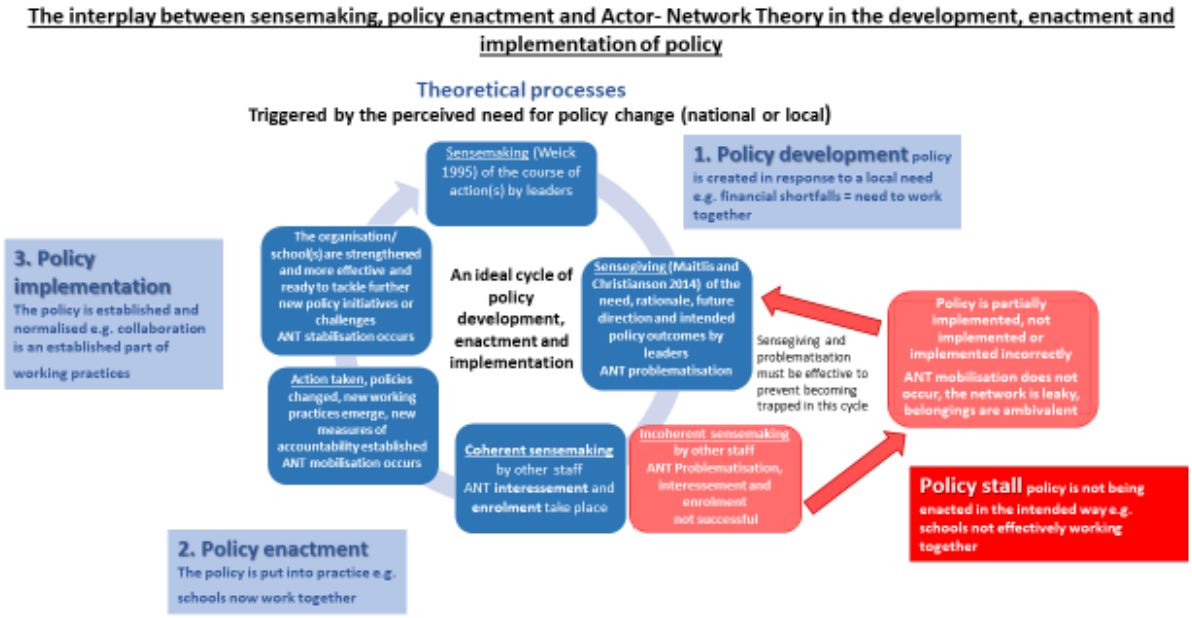


Diagram used to aid thematic analysis and write up.

The following chapter will discuss the research questions and the findings of the data collected.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

Research questions and chapter outline

I began this research with the following four questions:

a) What are we going to do?
b) Why have we chosen the MAT?
c) How is this going to work?
d) And then latterly – what have we done?

These were translated into the following research questions:

1. ***How have this group of schools attempted to make sense of national policy drivers of the Multi-Academy Trust and associated cross school collaboration in their local context?***
   This links to Question a) and b) what are we going to do and why? The sensemaking and sensegiving of the processes surrounding conversion and school collaboration related to the MAT. This was revealed by the narratives woven during the interviews and focus groups. The 'local context' is recognised as potentially different, due to mediating effects of the set of relations; vertical (between the feeder schools) or horizontal/ same phase (between the high schools).

2. ***How has this group of schools enacted these national educational policy drivers (put them into practice) and what contextual and sociomaterial factors have influenced this?***
   Question c) is tackled here; how is this going to work? The different ways the MAT is being enacted or brought into being through school collaboration was uncovered. The difficulties faced during the enactment of the MAT at each educational phase was also explored focussing on the joint 6th form between PRS and SRS and year 8-9 transition concerning the MS and SRS.

3. ***Do the priorities of the MAT policy in relation to market values and accountability conflict with the development of collaboration in practice?*** This encapsulates question d) 'what have we done?' I examine the various ways MAT policies have changed day to day practice and the operations of the schools raised by the interview and focus group respondents. This is considered in the current policy context of collaboration and competition to raise standards that forms part of the national design of the MAT programme and enquires how far this is workable in practice.

The thematic analysis of the documents, the focus groups and elite interviews produced the following themes that fit closely with the research questions above. These form subheadings in the chapter:

~Theme 1: sensemaking of the collaborative vision

This section begins with the account from the original Executive Principal as the 'system leader' (Armstrong and Ainscow 2018:616) or 'system builder' (Cressman 2009). It includes the rationale for changing the operational structures and organisation of this group of schools initially to a hard federation and then a MAT. The different sensegiving provided by the original Principal and the effects this had on the employees sensemaking is discussed. The sensemaking by teachers and other senior leaders regarding the need to collaborate is revealed to be divergent and not completely coherent as they struggle to convert the policy into action. This reflects the confusing nature of the policy itself.

~Theme 2: the enactment of the MAT – evidence of collaboration between all the schools

This section uncovers the practical practice-based ways in which the elites and teachers are putting into practice or enacting the strategic aim of the federation and MAT to collaborate. It pulls evidence from the head teachers and the teacher focus groups from both schools. This section is framed around two moments of translation that demonstrate formal evidence of policy enactment and school collaboration; the joint 6th form and year 8 – 9 transition. These moments were selected as they formed the basis of much of the respondent's discussions and were the two focal points of the schools working together where previously relations had not existed. They also demonstrated clearly the differing priorities and tensions involved between same phase schools and feeder school relations.

Actor-Network theory is integrated into the discussion, offering sociomaterial insights into the processes involved during the sensemaking, sensegiving and enactment of the policy.

~Theme 3: The welcome MAT or policy paradox?

This theme takes a broader look at the MAT, how it has changed practice for better and for worse. It examines how the MAT has made the schools' position, and the three-tier system and 6th form more secure. It also questions the processes of becoming a MAT, the distraction and concern it caused all levels of the work force due to increased levels of accountability. It looks at the contradictions faced during the enactment of the policy by the respondents. Four subthemes emerged related to this:

1. 'We could go to jail': Increased accountability and consequences.
2. 'I cannot do my job': Practicalities affecting practice on a day to day basis.
3. 'What are we here for?': Critical comment about what schools spend time and resources on.
4. 'The political becomes personal': the personal cost of academisation and collaboration in this setting.

Chapter formatting

Descriptive accounts of the interviews and discussions will be written in italics.

Theoretical interrogation will be written in non-italics.

Theme 1: sensemaking of the collaborative vision

Sensegiving and the work of the 'system leader' (DfE) or 'system builder' (Cressman 2009)

'I am driving it, it is me, it's my ideas but eventually the system will drive itself'

The Executive Principal's office was found in the attics of the old hall up a narrow set of stairs in an unusually quiet corner. Inside reflected one of the more opulent pockets of the school, wallpapered rather than painted, with a small leaded window found on the far wall.

It was lightly furnished with an antique desk in the corner opposite a sloped ceiling and a more modern low round table and several chairs where we sat to the left centre of the room. Our first interview took place in the spring term in 2014 and formed the pilot study for this thesis. It took place during the school day in an afternoon. It was a lengthy interview punctuated by several bells - the only reminder we were still in the school as I sat engrossed by his account.

The Principal joined the school in 1980 as a teacher of geography, he had subsequently become a pastoral leader, deputy head and then whole school head in 2004. His experience of executive headship (as it was prior to the federation) had been established as he worked closely with a secondary school in a town ten miles away that had fallen into special measures. This alliance lasted until the hard federation was established in 2012 and was successful, as that school was removed from special measures in less than a year. As a National Leader of Education (NLE) he had extensive experience working with other schools in Ofsted categories. These relations were different in character to what came later with the federation and MAT. He described initial interactions with one of them as 'I will show you my medals and you will bloody well do what I tell you'. He was the personification of the 'charismatic hero' that fills educational leadership literature (Senge 2002:22 in Thorpe et al 2011241). He believed he had the power to change the system and told me of his many recent attempts such as his effort to federate 10 schools under the power to innovate DfE initiative. Although this was rejected, he remained undeterred, claiming 'People who change systems don't do orthodoxy, they don't wait for the law to catch up'.

During this interview, he spoke of the careful approach he had adopted and tentative work that had taken place to convince not just the federation schools, but the first schools in the wider area that he was not 'an agent of the devil come to shut them as they have bugger all kids'. He explained the educational set up in the town was precarious; the three-tier system established in 1982 spit students into 3 schools (first, middle and secondary) rather than the traditional two (primary and secondary), this arrangement is expensive as it required more sites and staff. Secondly the county in which the schools are located is one of the most sparsely populated in the country and in addition suffering from the national demographic dip in birth rate that occurred in the early 2000s. There quite simply were not enough children in the schools to pay the bills. Although the Principal's school was oversubscribed it was an exception, many of the others stood half empty including the neighbouring high school SRS and several of the rural first schools.

As the Principal told this story he established himself as the system leader and demonstrated sensemaking. He adopts the traditional 'heroic' character inherent in educational leadership literature 'people who set the direction, make the key decisions and energise the troops' (Morey *et al* 2002:22 in Thorpe *et al* 2011:241). His account followed the sensemaking processes identified by Maitlis and Christianson 'perceiving cues, creating interpretations and taking action' (2014:58). The cues instigating change were many and varied, however he identified local specific concerns such as the fragile nature of the three-tier system, the reduction in student numbers and the undersubscribed position of his fellow schools as being key drivers towards the need for them to collaborate. He interpreted collaboration as the solution to these problems, as even if that did not serve to fill the schools with students, it would create economies of scale and reduce expenditure through flexible use of staff across sites. There were many national policies that could have been chosen to assist the formal collaboration between the schools. A hard federation was chosen initially, and this soon gave way to plans for MAT conversion. By the time of this first interview in 2014 the schools had been operating as a hard federation for two years, however collaboration remained in name only partly because of the historical legacy of poor relations between the schools.

The Principal described the perceived and real inequalities between the schools that coloured their relations and made the ongoing work of the federation, and the planned MAT conversion complex. His school possessed greater symbolic and physical capital, it had grand buildings and a larger student body and was for a time richer financially than SRS mostly due to his own NLE consultancy work and the skilful efforts of the business manager and others successfully bidding for extra funding. The exam results in PRS were traditionally higher, and although in 2014 both schools could be accused of 'coasting' should Ofsted look closely enough, on average PRS sixth form students achieved a grade and a half higher in their A levels than SRS students, and the average GCSE points score and % achieving 5 GCSE's including English and Maths was also higher. When I began working at PRS in 2008 there was little to no communication between the two high schools, they operated as separate entities and continued to compete with each other for students, a situation he described as 'needless and ridiculous'.

I asked him to identify the recent changes that brought the schools together. He explained how changes in staffing at SRS had alleviated some of the past grievances that existed and that that 'economic pressures' had brought them to him. The historical set up characterised by separateness and competition he explained was now 'unviable' as 'there is only enough

kids in [the town] for one high school'. This had lingered over the educational landscape in here for decades and previous attempts had been made in the 1990's and early 2000's by the LA to merge the schools. An outcry from the community had halted the process but he knew people power was unlikely to prove so effective a third time.

This reveals issues regarding the enactment of the MAT policy to collaborate. The Principal worked to alter the perceptions the two high schools held towards one another. This was bound up in historical rivalry between students, staff and the wider two sides of the town and echoes of the ERA push for competition. The federation had gone some way to soften relations through joint training days and a general increase in cross school communication, however, issues remained. Sensemaking is not a neutral act 'it is hegemonic' (Brown *et al* 2015:269). If skilfully utilised it can reproduce the system builders' will. Therefore, the Principal presented the problems faced by the schools in a way that connected with their particular context and sensibilities. To act as a 'system builder' (Cressman 2009:7) or problematise the issue successfully and become an obligatory passage point the Principal must tailor his sensegiving in a way that made sense to all (or at least a large proportion of) staff in the schools. Sensemaking literature suggests people 'look for a unifying order even if we are not sure one exists' (Ancona 2012 in Snook *et al* 2012:5) and they articulate this through the stories or narratives they tell. The narratives concerning the relations between the two schools were historically negative, influenced by neoliberal policies of the 1980's but also predating them. These fractious relationships were ingrained not only in the staff, but the students and wider community, inevitably impeding collaborative working.

Prior to qualifying as a teacher, the Principal had taught martial arts in a pupil referral unit. He had witnessed first-hand the devastating and destructive effects of deprivation and had been driven to tackle this during his career. The inequality and disadvantage he perceived the students at SRS faced in comparison to his own students bothered him greatly and he considered this union as having broader moral implications. Initially these advances were perceived by SRS as his 'empire building', however, through careful work 'smoozing' the chair of governors at SRS he slowly began to convince the senior leaders that collaboration between the two high schools, firstly as a federation and eventually as a MAT, could be a beneficial solution to the problems they were both facing. These problems were presented neutrally to SRS and included the premise of falling student numbers and competition from other sixth form providers. He presented working together as a MAT as a way to secure the three-tier system for generations to come with the claim that '30 years from now the shape

of education in this town will be what is being put together now'. By working together all the schools could benefit financially from economies of scale, shared staffing and other resources, joint CPD and sharing of good practice. In addition, it could pave the way for the 'square deal' educationally for all the students in the town with the view 'SRS is a good school it's just got no money'. Working together in this way was presented to SRS an opportunity to take control of the educational future of the town and improve educational outcomes for all the students.

In his school (PRS) the situation was presented differently. They were sold the idea of collaboration as a federation and then, by this point in 2014 a MAT, on the basis they would be the lead school, they would share the good practice and help improve GCSE and A level outcomes at the other side of town. The message had clear moral undertones 'Do you sit and watch children fail to progress in the deprived half of town?' the Principal asked. Morally he suggested, PRS should and could not. The rationale was framed with PRS positioned as the lead school in the MAT and the moral imperative to share their already established good practice.

By controlling sensegiving in this way for both high schools the Principal attempted to establish himself as a 'system builder' (Cressman 2009:7) and through 'systems thinking' linked to a moral purpose, (Fullan 2004). Also, by problematising the issue in a way that spoke to the key players he became an obligatory passage point; to take advantage of the opportunities on offer the other schools now must engage with him and his ideas. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) found sensegiving could be provided 'through evocative language and construction of narrative, symbols… leaders help shape the sensemaking processes of organisation members towards some intended definition of reality' (2018:58). The leader provides the tools to help others enact the organisational change. In this case the Principal cleverly pitched the advantages of the union differently to both parties. For SRS, a small and vulnerable school he offered them 'compensating sensegiving' (Kraft *et al* 2018:71) a way of taking back control and he appealed to PRS sense of superiority and moral values. For the relationship here to be truly collaborative, in the sense of 'pooling of personal resources and expertise and joint ownership of the issue being addressed' (West 1990:29) and not 'advice giving that is really saying you ought to do it my way' (Pugach and Johnson 1995:15) as had been his previous style, he needed to provide some reassurances of equity and this opportunity was an imperative step. He used the shared and accepted language of improving standards, developing effective teaching and learning, creation of a stable workforce to ensure consistency in lessons and student

behaviour. And by working together and becoming a MAT, the Principal was offering this to all schools, in the form of joint policies and procedures. His experience as an NLE, and the proven track record of success at PRS added weight to his claims.

In addition, he attempted simultaneously to influence the sensemaking of the student bodies and community using the local press and school newsletters. He knew when the editorial deadlines were for two local newspapers, using this to his advantage submitted positive articles at the last minute knowing there could be little time for them to be edited. He ensured the team of head teachers were visible together in the papers regularly, photographed smiling, shaking hands, launching a new venture and so on. Even the voluntary redundancy of the head of SRS in 2016 was given a positive spin to ensure the brand of the newly emerging MAT was not damaged.

His main sensegiving focus remained on the staff of the schools, however, and the interview and the teacher focus group revealed this had only partially been successful.

Divergent sensemaking and different actor networks

One interviewee who shared the Principal's vision for the MAT and had engineered her team to collaborate across all the schools fairly rapidly was the Business Manager.

The only female and non-teacher on the elite SLT team she had pioneered the Business Manager role in the school, completing her MBA thesis examined the Executive Principal and Business Manager leadership model. In 2008 this model was inspected and graded outstanding by Ofsted. She was a friend of the Executive Principal prior to taking up post and he once described her as 'the most important person at this school bar me'. Her role had grown during the past decade and she was by this interview in the autumn term of 2015 business manager of all three federation schools, working closely with finance and HR managers at each site. She would, following MAT conversion in 2016, sit directly below the Executive Principal on the leadership structure and be directly accountable for the finances of the Trust.

Unsurprisingly she categorically shared the vison of the collaboration. She explained how the original aim had been to ensure 'consistency in provision' across the town, but also highlighted falling school budgets meant the schools 'had to work together' if they were going to continue to operate in a similar capacity as before.

It was in her team that the first signs of cooperative collaboration began to emerge. 'I might be biased, but that team of support services managers since 2012 wasn't a slow progression

of trust and working together… and I think that comes from being business minded, not precious'. This group were all non-teachers whom she described as 'less institutionalised'. An inferred recognition of the sensitivities and difficulties involved when managing change in different groups of people within the same organisation. Led by her, these support services managers had made sense of the need for collaboration in business terms and had effectively got on with it.

According to the Business Manager her cross-school team are enrolled. The sensegiving had been effective between the Principal and the Business Manager and she successfully distributed this through her team across the schools. This demonstrates leadership as a distributed 'social process' stretched over people and situations (Thorpe *et al* 2011:241). This is one of the only fully enrolled and mobilised actor networks that I found in this data set. Why this should be so, is complicated to unpick. The business team are part of a different actor network to the teachers that formed part of the focus groups. The job roles of the business team and the heads and teachers are vastly different, the business team have a clear remit and although the policy changes brought by the MAT were not simple or easy to action, coming from a business background they are less likely to be offended by the surge in neoliberalism found within the MAT policies. Their job is not to teach, or to look after or even to care particularly. Their job is to balance the budget, and as such their sensemaking is strategically different to that of the teachers as found by the focus groups.

The first two teachers focus groups took place in the summer term of 2015 a year after the first interview with the Principal and a year before academy conversion. In contrast to the Principal's 2014 interview the MAT was not referred to by the respondents in either school, instead they spoke of the federation in the context of collaboration. They revealed subtly different sensemaking and sensegiving had taken place which had largely been ineffective; confusion regarding the direction and form of collaboration was extensive.

Sensemaking at PRS – focus group 1

The PRS focus group took place in a meeting room after school, all the respondents I had approached attended, it was a large group of 10 teachers, 5 men and 5 women all with a range of teaching experience at the school. They were upbeat, discussion flowed easily, they smiled at one another and seemed to enjoy the opportunity to talk. I asked them about the purpose of the Federation and collaboration, and their feelings towards it. I wanted them to explain their experience in their own words to get a sense of the narrative that was being

built around the collaborative working, at this point mainly with regards to the federation. Their understanding of the need to collaborate was mixed, most recognised the economic pressure for it, and Louise a SEST suggested 'ideologically it is good – every child [in the town] no matter who you are get equality of education'. This view was shared by Ed another SEST 'the idea is very good in a fanciful way… actual collaborations between the schools is a very good idea'.

However, evidence of actual collaboration between them and the other schools was scarce and there was widespread confusion regarding the actual purpose of the venture. This was articulated in the following exchange:

Ed an SEST with 25 years' experience at the school described it as a 'fragmented piecemeal experience … so it's hard to see its benefits… I am very confused by the whole thing'.

Jake an EST with 5 years' experience agreed claiming 'I don't think it has been articulated what the benefits are, I don't think people genuinely know what the motivation or purpose is … I certainly don't'.

Louise an EST with 8 years' experience at PRS, articulated a specific problem with sensemaking process stating, 'communication is so weak that because we only have one part of the story human nature is to look at the bits that are missing and make up your own tale to fit'.

There was agreement from the group that collaboration between the schools seemed to have stalled a bit or was at least slowing down from recent experience. This added to the confusion. The relations between the schools at this point were described by Judy a SEST with over 30 years' experience at the school as 'like a fog'.

This interaction demonstrates the purpose of collaboration had been understood by the teachers, however in practice the benefits are less clear. Their actual experiences of the collaboration as part of the federation is more difficult to make sense of, and at times seems non sensical as the amount and the quality of collaboration appears to be going backwards. The teachers are seeing and hearing less from their counterparts at the other school, and when they do communicate this is often difficult and unproductive. It is clear these teachers are a long way from being fully enrolled in the network and further work needs to be done by the leaders to carefully articulate not just the benefits of collaboration but the specific direction it needs to take.

Sensemaking at SRS – focus group 1

The focus group at SRS took place in the classroom of my gatekeeper after school. She had encouraged 5 teachers to attend, 4 were RQT's new to teaching and one, Philip, an SEST was unusual as he had had worked at all three federation schools at one point. Their understanding of the rationale behind the federation and collaboration between the schools, was more positive. They too recognised the economic need:

Philip the SEST stated 'yeah yeah we all realise it, it was necessary, it is necessary… for the survival of the schools…. The economic, financial situation of the schools relies on the federation [or collaboration] to work'.

However, sensemaking was different for this group, there was no mention of the 'square deal' or 'equality of education' rationale mentioned by the Principal and PRS focus group respondents. The SRS staff were not likely to accept that they are the school offering the poorer educational experience. For them the grand collaborative vision, and the secure future premise was made sense of in terms of safeguarding economic stability rather than equality of educational provision. They agreed some level of working together was necessary though, and this is important.

There was a similar level of confusion regarding how collaboration was going to be practically achieved as articulated by the PRS group. Phrases were used such as 'we heard on the grapevine it could happen I don't know if it is true' about shared teaching across the schools. And as 'nothings been specifically told' there are 'many unanswered questions'. Plus 'there was talk at one point' in reference to the 6th form moving to PRS.

The one and only SEST in the group Philip revealed the sensemaking process he was going through to interpret the changes experienced in his school explaining: 'I try to convince myself it doesn't have to be for the worse, it can be a good thing, a positive transition, a positive change'. He then outlined the practical difficulties associated with collaboration such as moving between the school sites, and the inconvenience of no longer having your own classroom.

Most of the teachers involved in this group were new and inexperienced this could explain their confusion. Yet as the staff body at this school was unusually small, they were all expected to pick up responsibility early career, and many were sole teachers of their subject. You would expect if communication was taking place, they would be a part of it. I found my role in this focus group began to transcend that of facilitator, as I was required to explain some of the terminology to them, including explaining that we were not yet an

academy. The sensemaking process here is different to that occurring at PRS, it is more straightforward, they are waiting to be told what to do rather than filling in too many of the gaps themselves.

The findings here reveal the two set of teachers are employing different sensemaking processes to interpret the new collaborative vision of the schools. Their divergent levels of acceptance are surprising. I expected PRS who had been presented the moral imperative behind the need for collaboration; to secure equality of education for all children, to experience a greater level of translation and be further down the path towards enrolment as Fullan suggests that 'moral purpose is the link between system thinking and sustainability' (Fullan 2005:87). However, this does not seem to be the case. It is SRS, who make no mention of educational equality, but understand the financial implications of not working together, that are exhibiting greater signs of acceptance, and greater willingness to engage with collaboration as part of the federation. This could be partially explained by the differing contextual situation of the two schools in 2015; a year before the academy conversion PRS had just experienced a round of compulsory redundancies to balance the budget (required by the DfE). Some of the teachers in the PRS focus groups and their head teacher had reapplied for their jobs that year and as such were more cautious and potentially less enrolled in the school itself and exhibiting lower levels of 'organisational citizenship' (Tschannen- Moran 2001:313) and 'process based trust' (Fuglsang and Jagd 2015:35) due to their own personal experiences.

The findings here indicates there is a way to travel if the humans involved are to become fully committed actors in the network. At present they are actants, exhibiting ambivalent belongings to the collective organisation of the federation and there is confusion at the root of the sensemaking. This section reveals sensemaking is occurring, but in different ways by different people despite the original Principal's efforts to control sensegiving and effectively problematise the need to work together in carefully different ways. This will inevitably affect the shape and success of the enactment of the policy to collaborate which will be explored below.

Theme 2: The enactment of the MAT – evidence of collaboration between all the schools

Cementing the system

The second interview with the Executive Principal took place in the summer term of 2015 at a similar time to the first set of teacher focus groups. He had resigned in the previous autumn and his replacement had been appointed. This interview occurred following a second set of compulsory redundancies at PRS which had damaged the collaborative vision by heightening distrust and reducing goodwill between the staff bodies of the two high schools. The MAT application had also struggled to get approved by the DfE and he was waiting for a phone call from them as we spoke. This phone call did not come for several days and was not good news. He left post without the DfE approval for the MAT, and the schools had to wait until April the following year for conversion. By that point it had taken 3 years from the decision to convert to become realised.

Nonetheless, despite widespread confusion from the teachers the schools had made some progress towards working together. The joint governing body had approved 80 federation policies covering broad areas such as bullying, health and safety, safeguarding and facilities letting. There had been a large push to get the business functions right (necessary to enable MAT conversion) and balance the finances. The schools remained functioning in largely unchanged form, and this had been the rationale for the hard federation; 'to preserve the three-tier system or decide if we want it'. A huge amount of work had gone into 'bringing systems together' this included standardised formats across the schools for the head teachers report, performance management and improvement plan documents. He described the governance of SRS as 'a thing of wonderment' however this too had now begun to operate in a similar way to PRS.

In his descriptions of staff attitudes he was more cautious and demonstrated a heightened recognition in this interview that not all were on board with the changes that had been occurring. He stated there was 'increasing acceptance of change and communication across schools', 'most subjects now speak to each other' he added, and 'most agree that change has to happen'.

This interview revealed many of the complexities and intricacies involved when bringing schools together for MAT conversion. This has two levels, firstly the business functions and 'things' required to make the schools operate in a unified way such as joint policies

and governance. These elements have experienced interessement and are locked into place. Separate to this sits the staff body, whom he recognises are more ambivalent in their belongings and acceptance of the collaborative venture.

The functions, systems and policies the Principal describes are 'immutable mobiles' (Latour 1997: online) as they allow the network to grow through the transmission of its message and the translation of other entities. They are also the symbols that aid the sensemaking of the organisations as entities that are formally joined, and the sociomaterial artefacts that allow the Principal's leadership to be distributed across contexts (Spillane *et al* 2004:9). Once a MAT, decision and policy making can no longer occur independently. Specific policies also may act as intermediaries as they will have the effect of translating other entities by changing practice. For example, a new bullying policy will change practices towards this group of students in the other schools. It will be written laden with specific values that the receiving schools may not share for example to do with sanctions. As it is a federation or MAT policy it must nevertheless now be adopted, and thus, the process of translation is helped along. Leading from interessement (the actor accepting the interests defined by the focal actor) to enrolment and the functioning of the network, in this case the enactment of the collaborative policy.

The Principal suggests that interessement and enrolment are incomplete with some of the staff. His use of the pronoun 'most' to describe the level of acceptance is telling. The actor- network of policies and procedures, business functions and systems are operational, yet, other parts of the network are less secure. This perception is echoed by the first set of focus group findings that revealed a struggle with sensemaking discussed earlier and suggests the immutability of these mobiles is 'not guaranteed' (Michael 2017: 54) in a similar way Fenwick found in her investigation of educational standards (2010b:124).

By this stage the Principal viewed himself as the main barrier holding up the active collaboration between the schools. He realised his sensegiving had not been entirely effective and that there were many, senior leaders and other staff who were ambivalent and confused about the direction and purpose of the drive towards MAT status and working together. He had succeeded in effectively problematising the issues; all I spoke to understood the economic need for collaboration, and many also recognised the moral imperative too. However, there was a disjuncture between the acceptance of the policy in

principle and the enactment of it in practice. The schools were not yet fully enrolled in the actor network and he left it to his successor to pick up that challenge.

'The MAT is real'– sensemaking of the rationale for MAT conversion

The new Executive Principal arrived in September 2015 and I interviewed him in December of that year. He too was an experienced NLE. The interview took place in one of the ground floor offices, a room I remembered from my interview at the school in 2008. A twisted bare trunk of Wisteria snaked around the leaded window, planted by a former head who was fond of the plume of purple flowers in the spring. The window looked out onto a well-manicured lawn and established trees. We were in the part of the building that had at one time been the great hall. The room was more sparsely furnished than I remembered it, there was just one antique table that we sat at, and a simple desk and bookcase on the opposite wall. The Principal moved around during the interview, jumping up to print an article or piece of exam data on several occasions, transmitting a positive energy through the room.

Prior to joining this set of schools, he had spent a year completing DfE projects, and before that he had spent almost a decade leading an 'all through' MAT comprising of nurseries, primaries and secondary schools. This was an innovative model including a core of schools that remained constant, then others would join and be helped by the trust to set up as academies, or helped out of Ofsted difficulties, then released if they so wished. The size of the organisation was therefore fluid. Within the core group of schools, he trialled the concept of an 'all through curriculum', whereby the staff at different phases work collaboratively to embed and secure learning throughout the students' time at the school and lessen the effects of school transition. I met with him towards the end of his first term in post. He had already led both high schools through Ofsted inspections within weeks of one another and against the odds was maintaining a sense of humour quipping 'I have had worse'.

He joined this set of schools when they were still yet to convert to academies, the original application had been rejected and he described the situation as 'a federation model with the truth being they had sort of done some of it, not really federated or lined up for academy conversion and that needed doing quickly'. The former Executive Principal had focussed his rationale for collaboration on increasing the quality of education in the town, specifically at key stage 5 and used this as his main mode of problematisation. This Principal shifted the focus to earlier transition issues namely those between the middle and high schools. He explained that people send their children to private schools for two reasons usually; class

size and continuity. And if 'we could have a state system that could do that you wouldn't have transition problems.' For him the vertical (all thorough) model linking different educational phases made sense as it was what he had experienced and built during his previous role. However, what he described as 'cross ways' collaboration between the same phase (such as that between the two high schools) 'is more difficult that is why you need and Executive Principal to point the finger and make a decision'. This Principal had more power than his predecessor, he had been appointed as the substantive head of all three schools and thus was a more effective 'finger pointer' as his role was more clearly defined. His predecessor had recognised that had been a key flaw in his leadership claiming his job spec was 'purely made up – I wrote it' essentially 'a head's job with knobs on'. Despite having more power this new Principal did not emit the 'heroic leader' guise of his predecessor. His work prior to joining the schools suggested he understood and could utilise more distributed form of leadership style which signalled a distinctive break from what had gone before.

This shift in leadership style and focus was a significant change of direction, it was the first time I had heard any senior leader mention year 8-9 transition as a core focus in all the years of the federation. All the energy of the teachers at PRS had been locked on the joint 6th form and this is reflected in the focus group findings. This demonstrates how a change in leadership can shift the sensemaking of an organisation. He had built an all-through MAT before and he had seen the benefits at all levels and phases of education. His job now was to problematise the MAT in these new terms to the staff. Many were unsure why we needed to convert to a MAT at all. I asked him why directly.

The Principal admitted there were fewer benefits of MAT conversion than there had been at the beginning of this part of the academies programme in 2010 however the economies of scale were still a big draw. He described 'a formality of being a MAT that gives people security to the organisation which makes a difference to people I think'. He also described the flexibilities in recruitment, employing teachers across schools for example.

When asked why to convert to an academy rather than remaining a federation he explained:

'... federations if they are still attached to LA's can be a bit tricky and precarious. There is a view with some school leaders that the LA's are a diminishing resource and there is not going to do any good – you are better off being able to make your own decisions. Which is a shame. The momentum is still there... and it's what is being promoted. If you are an RI [requires improvement -Ofsted] school and you are not doing it you will be sponsored, if you are a failing school you will be sponsored, if you are a good or coasting you will be

sponsored, and outstanding schools are generally already academies so… the writing is on the wall really.'

This view was shared by the two high school heads when asked the same question. The head of SRS described the 'federation as a bit of a nebulous thing, but the MAT is real' a perceptive statement reflecting the political standing of federations versus MATs. The head of PRS stated that 'the academies agenda means that is the logical place for the federation to go … the choice was to do it on our terms or wait until someone forces you to do it in a particular fashion, and the desire was to always do it on our terms'.

This rationale suggests that becoming an academy was not a choice, as *'the writing is on the wall'* in terms of the national policy direction. No mention is made here about how the MAT structure could help with local specific concerns, beyond financial issues which most schools nationally were experiencing at this time. There is also no mention of the educational disparity and moral obligation to work together that was pushed by the original Principal. There is a recognition that the local authority was increasingly weak and unsustainable and within two years of this interview they could no longer offer educational services. The ability to be able to '*make your own decisions'* factors highly here, as it did in the original Principal's account indicating an ongoing awareness of the 'precariousness of prestige' (Caldron *et al* 2014:393) that all schools contend with. The decision to convert is an example of what Clarke (2015) called 'wayfaring' 'as we go one way, rather than another, we create the very places of our existence, and, in so doing, we both create and limit the future ways that we may go' (Clarke *et al* 2015:179).

The initial blueprint of how the MAT schools would work together was initiated during the years of the federation. Joint staff meetings were held once a year and departments were expected to meet in addition to this to discuss curriculum-based matters as and when they arose. This quickly dissolved following the change in leadership and once MAT conversion although collaboration remained part of the strategic plan. There are many factors that have mediated the success of the collaborative venture between these schools and demonstrate the complexity of making policy work in action. A core issue is the confused experiences of sensemaking. Although it is universally agreed working together is a good thing (for different reasons), how it is going to work in practice and what the goal of it is was decidedly less clear. This was further compounded by the new Principal's alternative approach that pushed the benefits of an all through curriculum and forced the relationship with the MS to take more of a priority. This was particularly confusing for

PRS, as their MS remained uninvolved and uncooperative. The original Principal had situated PRS as the centre of the group, the new Principal shifted that focus, this altered the balance of power which had mediating effects on the enactment of the collaboration on both sides of the town.

Enactment of policy– collaboration in action

The data produced several examples of the ways in which the elites and teachers were attempting to make sense of the policy change to collaborate. The MAT was discussed in the elite interviews and the second teacher focus groups as they took place following the conversion and thus this data forms the basis of what follows. I have selected two moments of policy translation to focus this theme upon, as inevitably a decision must be made regarding where to 'cut the network' and these moments provide tangible evidence of the attempts to enact the policy of collaboration for the benefit of the students, and both are part of the strategic plan of the Academy Trust. These examples also relate to same phase and multi-phase or feeder school relations that add complexity to this research site.

The moments of translation are:

1. Year 8/9 transition; the relationship between the middle schools and high schools (Multi phase feeder school relations in the same part of town)
2. The joint 6th form; the relationship between PRS and SRS (same phase school relations occurring across the town)

This policy translation is recognised as experienced by the actors in a non-neutral way, it is 'deeply politicised' process, a 'form of exercise of power' (Clarke *et al* 1984:37). As such the respondents will have differing experiences of it. I attempt to represent all the voices in the sections below.

Policy Translation 1: The relationships with the feeder middle schools

The research conducted by Ofsted in chapter 2 suggests that student progress slows in the first few years of secondary school, and this is attributed to the disruptions cause by transition to a different school. In the three-tier system there are two points of transition that need to be managed; year 4-5 (one year before key stage two SATs) and year 8-9 (one

year before the start of GCSE studies). The new Executive Principal had experience leading an 'all through' MAT model and was a key promotor of its benefits to ease transition issues. The interviews with the MS and SRS head teachers revealed, despite being new to post that academic year, both were keen to work together to improve outcomes at key stage 4.

The Relationship between SRS and its feeder MAT Middle School

The middle school Head

The youngest of all the head teachers at 38, the head of the middle school (MS) was in his first year of post when I met with him in the spring of 2016. Formerly deputy head he was already changing the ethos and culture of the school. He had established a school council which had taken steps to change the school uniform to a more formal design and introduced school prefects to raise student aspirations and make a statement about student voice. In addition, he was developing a school farm on site to reach the most distant and switched off children. He knew his school well and was proud of it. I had met him before, several years earlier as he helped support a National College programme, I and several other several staff, completed on middle leadership. He had also led joint staff meetings and had always been considerably higher profile than his counterpart at the church MS despite not being part of PRS catchment.

The Head's office was a modern room, wallpapered with data and charts, and the GCSE flightpath model he explained was what would drive standards up of both his school and SRS. He planned to modify the curriculum by separating it into primary (year 5-6) and secondary phases (year 7-8). The intention being primary would focus on year 6 SATs and year 7 and 8 would implement the GCSE flightpath model tracking their progress in such a way that was meaningful for SRS.

Unusually the MS had a slightly larger student body than its feeder high school SRS as a number of students are lost during the transition at year 8. A small number annually opt to attend PRS at year 9 instead of SRS or they move to providers out of area at year 7. He talked to me at length about the importance of the GCSE flight path model, the benefits for the students and his secondary trained staff. He had effectively established a good working relationship with the new head of SRS, they visited each other's schools regularly and he hoped this presence would help ease transition for the students.

The Head of SRS

I arrived at SRS office at 8am and signed in. The head's office was at the end of a non-descript corridor next to a small staff room. It was a small thin room with one desk facing the end wall, and a couch of sorts at the side where I sat. This interview took place in the summer term of 2016, 3 months after I met with the MS head. He too was new to post that academic year and although I recognised him, and we had communicated via email I had not been formally introduced until then.

The head had previously worked as deputy at a local academy, which was not part of a MAT or federation. In this role he introduced a prototype of a GCSE flight path model and was keen for it to be implemented here. In his discussions with the MS head they had agreed that the 'through curriculum… taking the 3-tier model and turning it into a 2-tier model' was crucial to improve student outcomes. The aim was for 'the youngsters to feel they are in secondary from year 7 and view it as a split site arrangement'. He described at length the specifics of the flightpath model. It lacked the rigor he wanted currently but was still in the early developmental stages. The two schools were also working together on an accelerated reading programme, initially driven by the middle school. Literacy levels in both schools had been identified as weak, and the school day in SRS was in the process of being modified to allow time for reading. There was also initial discussion regarding shared heads of faculty, and the benefits of having one individual with an overview of subjects across the MS and SRS. This was felt to be particularly important in languages where very little was taught in the middle school, then students in year 9 at SRS were expected to pick up 4 languages and opt for at least one in year 10. Unsurprisingly GCSE outcomes for languages were not high at SRS, and as languages is a component of the English Baccalaureate (an additional performance indicator), an alternative approach to this was required.

I wondered what shared heads of faculties would mean for the relationship between SRS and PRS. In fact, I wondered if the relationship between the high schools should be a priority when the MS relationship was clearly so vital for student outcomes at this side of the town. The head was clear 'there was one way to improve achievement and attainment here and that was by collaboration with the MS. That is the cause of failure for many three tier systems and it is not acceptable to just sit in the high school and wait for [the students] to arrive in year 9, then it is too late'.

These two head teachers are working closely together helped by material factors working in their favour. They understand collaboration as part of their role and are new in post and relatively free of the historical difficulties associated with the relations of their predecessors. They share a common student body and describe being present and visible on each other's school site often. Their schools are close in distance, a 5 or 6 minute drive, shared staffing could be made into a practical reality with little loss of time. SRS is reliant on strong foundations set in year 7 and year 8 by the MS, but despite this their relationship had not always been close so the story told here, is indicative of significant progress. They are demonstrating active signs of enrolment as they are working together cohesively with a common purpose.

Interessement is also beginning to be evident as the two schools are locked into place. This is partly due to the MAT's legal structure. But also due to their own cooperation and willingness to work together, their collective sensemaking of the challenges faced by both schools and the active plans to enact the collaboration through the shared GCSE flightpath model, the reading scheme, the potential for shared heads of faculty that are being actively discussed and implemented. In addition, changes to the Executive Principal post has altered the directional focus and level of control, he is now responsible for all the schools and thus will facilitate and encourage the mobilisation of the collaboration in this area of the town.

There is also evidence of immutable mobiles and intermediaries; the use of MAT letter headed paper with all schools named on it, the use of common SLT lanyards, the increased physical presence of both heads at each other's schools all have helped transmit the core message of the MAT and active collaboration as a working entity. The MS head told a story of some of his former pupils, now students at SRS trespassing on his school site one evening. He said they got quite a shock when he strolled into the head's office at SRS the following morning to chastise them. It is this sort of action, being comfortable in each other's schools, that cements the cross-town benefits of collaboration.

I arranged the final focus group with SRS teachers for the last few weeks of the summer term in 2016. The discussions supported the tentative mobilisation of this actor network. *They described a developing relationship with their MS counterparts, particularly at head of department level and core subjects such as English and Science. The teachers were also aware of the GCSE flight path and although they were not really using it, they had received training, and several were able to show it to me. The relationship between the schools was*

described as 'quite good' especially with the English department and the joint launch of the accelerated reading programme. However, Stacy explained that in reality 'I haven't really got the time or made the time to go down [to the middle school] that is the problem I have officially got no real time to, other than lunchtimes.' The issue of lack of time, or not being provided time to collaborate meaningfully beyond email conversations was raised by many of the staff I spoke to and will be returned to later.

The SRS teachers reflect an actor network that is in the early stages of formation. Parts of the policy are being enacted, there is collaboration beginning to take place. More resources such as time need to be provided to cement this into everyday practice.

It makes sense that feeder schools will work effectively together, they share a common body of students and it is in both of their interests. However, the MS is not only part of this one actor network, it has others to contend with, that could threaten the stability of the established links with SRS. Middle schools are a bit of an anomaly, Ofsted struggle to assess them, they are classed as high schools technically but have no GCSE results with which to measure progress. This results in key stage 2 SATs taken in year 6 becoming the key performance indicator.

The MS head revealed that historically the results of key stage 2 SATs at this school have been below national average. This is due to many factors, some of which the school has control over, some of which they do not. For example, under the three-tier system the student begins MS in year 5, only one year before the SAT examinations leaving little time for preparation. The head also mentioned the vast catchment area of 300 square km and 14 feeder schools. Some of these feeder schools are extremely small, with only 3 or 4 students per class and 20 in the whole school. This will make the transition to MS containing over 400 students potentially daunting, difficult and disruptive for the students and must be managed very carefully.

In addition to this, he explained that the school is located in one of the most income deprived corners of the town. It had a large catchment, but a large portion of the student body came from this deprived estate. Many of the students had made limited progress at their former schools and at times demonstrated challenging behaviour.

The nature of the relationships between the MS and its 14 feeder schools is beyond the scope of this research. However, it is worth questioning the directional focus of this head, of course year 6 and 7 student outcomes are important, as is the relationship with SRS;

but is this relationship as important as the ones down the chain? This gives him only one year to prepare the students for their SATs when in a traditional system he would have five more. On the surface the network between the MS and SRS appears secure, but it will require work to remain so. The extent to which the MS invests in this will depend on the resources it has to deal with year 4-5 transition and the year 6 SAT's. Due to their underperformance in the floor standards expected this school has a restricted 'external context' (Ball *et al* 2012:36) and this could hamper their efforts to invest in collaboration with SRS and the other MAT schools. This echoes Armstrong and Ainscow (2018) who state 'coopition remains fragile' as a result of 'stakeholders being pulled in different directions' (p.629).

The church middle school and PRS

I did not include the church MS in my original research plan, as it was not part of the federation (or MAT). However, the discussions with the new Executive Principal, MAT MS head and head of SRS reveal an all through or coherent curriculum across schools to be a key part of the strategic intent of the MAT. For the basis of comparison, and to produce a rounded picture of the collaboration between the schools I include the discussion with the head of PRS here. This illustrates issues with the shape of the MAT, and the continuing and pressing need for collaboration in this area.

The Head of PRS

The head's office had a particular smell. This aroma although not unpleasant, was strong and was distinct to that room. I presumed was the antique furniture as it smelt like wax or polish. Only latterly I found out it was in fact the remnants of the smoke that had permeated the old stone walls. A fire had ripped through that part of the building in 1983 destroying the wooden staircase in the atrium outside the office and with it, I am told, a collection of staff disciplinary files and records much to their delight. The stairs were rebuilt, and the fire is immortalised by a stained-glass window halfway up. The aroma of smoke lingers in this office despite the numerous attempts to redecorate and refurnish and gives the room an almost stately feel and distinguishes it from the smells of the other parts of the school.

This was the largest office I interviewed in and the grandest, it doubled up as a meeting room with a large table to one side, a fireplace, large desk in the window and a low table and

chairs in the second window. It had at one point housed four admin staff and the business manager, and further into the past (shortly after the fire) had been a geography classroom although the teacher who used it told me the students had to climb over each other to get to their desks. It had not been used as a classroom since and was pleasantly decorated, with attractive art on the walls and polished wooden floors.

I asked the head about the relationship between PRS and its middle school (MS), and he explained its complexity. The church MS converted to an academy on its own in 2013 and the attached diocese has made it clear over the years that formal collaboration with PRS was not a priority or even an intent for reasons that remain unclear, even to SLT. In addition to this the church MS had experienced a period of leadership turmoil, and despite relations with the previous head mistress being productive during the leadership unrest, this had disintegrated to 'they are not talking to us at all'. It is considerably larger than the MAT MS holding 740 students on roll in 2018 (the MAT MS has 440). The school was placed into 'requires improvement' by Ofsted in 2018 on the basis of overall effectiveness, leadership and management, quality of teaching learning and assessment and outcomes. (source – Ofsted report).

The head openly admitted he didn't have the same relationship with his MS as the one in the MAT. He described the 'mechanisms for a coherent provision from year 5 onwards' in the other side of the town and articulated his frustration they were lacking at his side. He explained that the former head of the church MS had been an active part of the heads group that met regularly, and the MS staff regularly attended joint meetings at the beginning of the federation. However, relations had become more distanced following MAT conversion. There is a 'big cultural gap between us and [the middle school] … there is no mechanism for breaking it down… it's not a Mexican standoff but a [lack of] desire from them'. The MAT seemed to add to the problems regarding communication and ongoing relations 'part of the problem is once [the middle school] turned away from formal links to us there was an uneasiness about the relationships at the top of the process it was almost like having made the conscious decision not to join the group, an invisible non-existent barrier comes in'.

In contrast with the SRS head who claimed the definitive way to improve standards was to collaborate closely with their MS he claimed that although the lack of relationship with his MS was not ideal 'if you thought that was the only thing that was wrong you would be mistaken, absolutely mistaken'. He identified the variation between staff in terms of their best and worst teaching standards as being a core issue affecting student outcomes, and

although a coherent curriculum between years 7-11 would in no doubt be beneficial, the bigger difference in his opinion would be made by a more consistent performance from all his staff.

The communication breakdown between PRS and their MS has made problematisation almost impossible to achieve. The MS will be facing similar financial issues as the other schools (admittedly they may be buffered slightly by the church), they are without doubt facing staff recruitment problems, and hopefully should agree with the moral imperative and benefits of an 'all through' curriculum model' as offered by the MAT. Even if they do not officially join the MAT, meaningful collaboration that eases transition and helps students could be established. However, lacking a core consistent staff body, or leadership team in the MS makes it is difficult to enrol individuals, establish communication, shared goals or a collaborative vision. As this MS is not part of the MAT, and they feed into PRS they have less of an investment there is very little incentive for them to collaborate especially as they contend with wider issues of their own. The MS performance indicators are key stage 2 SATs and thus the relations between the first schools are likely to take priority.

The discussion in the staff focus groups primarily focussed on the joint 6th form rather than the relationship with the middle schools. So little regarding this was mentioned in the first focus groups when I revisited the group, I asked specifically about the nature, history and experience of the collaboration with the church middle school.

The first focus group at PRS revealed the contact with the church MS was very variable, some departments claimed they had more contact with them than with SRS despite the federation structure. Others could see the level of contact beginning to diminish. As this focus group took place in 2015, it occurred towards the end of the previous head mistress's tenure just at the point the head identified as a catastrophic breakdown in communication. I asked about the relationship with the church MS in the second focus group (summer 2016) and once again, the respondents did not have much to say about it. There was an observation from one of the RQT's that 'is it because [the middle school] are not really part of the proper federation and are not really that bothered?'. Once again, the conversation was pulled back to the relationship with SRS. This relationship seemed to dominate collaborative working practices and experiences for this group of staff and the MS barely featured. This is indicative of the sensegiving processes occurring at the time in the

federation (MAT schools) that insist on prioritising relations with one another over any other school.

There is an unequal set of relations occurring at both ends of the town. On one side, the MAT MS and SRS are beginning to work together effectively and develop the 'family of schools' culture promoted by Ofsted (2019:13). They have made sense of the MAT and their roles in it. There is evidence of the enactment of the MAT policy of collaboration, plans to expand this in the future and clear rationale of what the benefits of this will be for both students and staff. There is potential here for the development of an 'all-through curriculum' and improved educational standards and outcomes. At the opposite side of the town sits PRS and its largely uncooperative church MS. The relations between the two schools have deteriorated and will continue to do so until the MS has rectified its ongoing leadership issues. It is important the larger student population sits at this end of the town. The church MS is an awkward member of the network, an actant that is refusing to enrol. Despite what the head claims, I do believe this is a significant detrimental factor to the outcomes of PRS students. This moment of translation reveals that although relations between feeder schools should be more straightforward to establish and maintain than those between same phase traditionally competing schools, in practice they too are complex. The middle schools are driven by their key performance indicator, the key stage 2 SAT's resulting in their directional focus being pulled towards year 6 rather than year 8 and preparation for transition to high school. This is a flaw in the three-tier system, compounded by a market values driven educational policy landscape.

Policy Translation 2: 'uncomfortable bedfellows' - the joint 6th form and relationship between the high schools

In his first interview in 2014 the original Principal spoke of a time when 6th form numbers had been stable. The school had been able to recruit successfully from a neighbouring 11-16 high school and this brought in over £100,000 a year. The amount of money received per 6th former was generous and was further supplemented by other funding sources. A new 6th form diner was built, new subjects such as archaeology A level were introduced. This was all recent history, all within my time employed at the school. However, with the change of Government in 2010, and increased talk of austerity, and public service cuts the tide began

to turn. This was a slow burn and was not felt immediately. The additional sources of funding, such as the specialisms budget (both PRS and SRS had two each) ended, and 6th form funding was capped per student. It became increasingly difficult to provide the range of academic courses that had previously been on offer, and especially costly to duplicate these across both school sites. He explained how this was further compounded by smart and organised competition from other providers who had income from sponsors, and the national demographic dip in student numbers meant there was a smaller pool to recruit from. These were the problems the Principal explained that the joint 6th form was intended to overcome.

There are many benefits of maintaining a 6th form on the school sites. It allows aspirations, ambitions, success and opportunity to become more visible for the wider student body. Maintaining a wide variety of courses and options combinations further increases opportunities for further study and training. The question arises which site should this be invested in? Historically PRS A level results were on average 2 grades above SRS, although this gap had closed by 2017 to one grade. SRS is a smaller provider with 35 students completing level 3 courses in 2017 compared to 107 at PRS (source DfE compare schools). The inequality between the two 6th forms is based on more than just exam results, class size is also vastly different and thus too will be student experience. This is part of Ball *et al*'s 'situated contexts' (2012:22) that mediate the enactment of the policy, as it is unequally held these schools.

In 2015 the original Principal explained the process of setting up the joint 6th form in 2012 as part of the new federation, and how it was rebranded and marketed at all year 11 students in the town. A joint post was created; head of the federation 6th form and he moved between each campus. Students were encouraged to opt for the subjects they wished to take and then were informed which school site the subjects were run on for those that were not duplicated such as Sociology, Business Studies and Media Studies. A bus service was established, funded by the schools, that ran students between sites. The structure of the school day had been coordinated across both high schools to allow for this. During the period of national A level reform, subjects that were offered at both sites were told to discuss and decide on a common exam board and specification. This would in theory further boost the flexibility of student movement between the sites and attempt to create parity of experience and reduce rivalry between the schools.

The original Principal explained that the pace of the change (collaboration in the form of the joint 6th form) was governed by the new specifications and national A level reform, as it made little sense to coordinate specifications prior to the national changes as this would increase teacher workload and planning. When the process began 24 out of 28 subjects did different specifications. Some of the negotiations were tricky, two subjects had reached loggerheads only reconciled by one of the Head's involvement. The subject of A level specifications dominated the focus groups, in both the original session and the revisit a year later. Equally the heads of the high schools spoke at length about this, as it was the only tangible evidence of the schools actively collaborating and working together, however, it had come by this point to be fraught with difficulties.

In 2016 ***The Head of SRS*** *described the nature of the relationship as '… grown out of self-preservation, uncomfortable bedfellows…' 'very complex' and hampered by the 'absence of any real communication at times'. He recognised 'it does need more careful management' and blamed many of the difficulties on 'baggage in terms of the federation and MAT being established' and a 'lack of trust' among the staff regarding potential takeover plans. The 6th form he described as 'a great source of tension' with regards to the perceived intention to move all A level teaching to PRS and make SRS a vocational centre. He also identified the 'block at head teacher level and a block at subject leader level and subjects that wouldn't talk to [each other]'. The strong language he uses here is in stark contrast to that from earlier depicting the emerging relationship with the MS.*

The Head of PRS *described the 6th form as the only place where there was any real collaboration, but equally recognised it raised many difficulties. He hinted at some issues of a lack of professionalism at SRS leading to problems 'it does need to be more carefully managed by people who are fully professional'. He noted the timing of the collaboration was unfortunate, as it coincided with a 'whacking great budget deficit' and a perception of 'surplus at the other schools'. He was faced with balancing the budget by reducing staff numbers and the resulting effect of which, increased bad feeling between the schools and thus damaged the emerging the collaborative relationships. 'the timing … has set a dynamic to the relationships I am fighting all the time'.*

The head of PRS was unclear about the purpose of the collaboration or more specifically the form the collaboration should take. 'The point is we need to collaborate for the sake of the post 16 provision [but] what form should that take? Is it one school on two sites? …is it two schools with a distinct identity that happen to share a 6th form? Does that common 6th form

have an identity separate from the schools? What is the ultimate goal?' He stated 'it would be helpful to clarify for everybody where is the long-term future? What is the plan?' During this interview he seemed to need as much clarification as the wider staff body about the operational direction of the 6th form, and indeed wider MAT. This was despite the joint 6th form being in operation for 4 years by this point. I found this concerning.

On a professional level this head teacher had endured a difficult 18 months. He had accepted the redundancy of his role, from substantive head to associate head and was coming to the end of his first year under this new arrangement. He had worked at the school for over 20 years, first as head of science, then deputy and head teacher. He spoke of the 'personal cost of his job role change' but explained that at least it meant 'I am now operating in an environment where things can happen'. His counterparts at the two other MAT schools had opted to take redundancy but he felt a sense of duty to remain and support the new leadership team in the name of the 20 years he had already invested. The problem of balancing the budget had meant two years of compulsory redundancies, his commitment in the face of such unpleasantness was admirable. He said, 'I owe it to the staff and students at [school name] to… at least share my knowledge with the incoming group'. This indicated commitment to his own staff, not necessarily the collaborative relations between the other schools.

Both high school head teachers openly admit the collaboration between the 6th forms had not been managed effectively. Redundancies at PRS have led to suspicion and unease regarding co or shared teaching with SRS and a general dent in trust towards SLT. The head of PRS paints his counterpart at SRS as slow on the uptake regarding the enormity of the 6th form problems. It is not functioning as a working entity for a multitude of personal and material reasons. The head of PRS is struggling to make sense of what the future of the 6th form will look like, and his inability to do that is transmitting to staff. It is no wonder it is not being enacted in the way that was planned and is exhibiting 'system unsettling potential' (Van der Vegt 2000:12).

Tschannen Moran suggest that collaboration and trust are 'reciprocal processes, they depend upon and foster one another' (2001: 315) and form part of the 'social capital' of the school, affording it more potential and effective working relations. The head teachers and the staff focus groups revealed a high level of unease related to the joint 6th form, and a distinct lack of trust between the heads and their staff, and the heads and each other. Collaboration involves risk, and risk is more likely to be taken if there is trust between

individuals, and assurance promises will be kept, the vision is stable, all is as it seems. Continuous work must be invested to maintain trust and leaders must 'consider their management of communication, power imbalances, and credit recognition, joint ownership, varying levels of commitment, conflicting views on aims and agendas and so on' (Vangen and Huxham 2003:22). Fuglsang and Jagd even suggest sensemaking cannot occur effectively without trust, suggesting a key component for effective management of sensemaking (and thus change) is trust.

The issue of trust was discussed by all the focus groups and was experienced differently by each individual. The data focussed heavily on the lived experiences of the teachers attempting to manage the joint 6th form and as such reveals many of the stumbling blocks to its functioning, trust being one of them.

SRS and the translation and enactment of the joint 6th form

At the first focus group conducted at SRS in 2015 the teachers were quite positive. Despite some departments being told they had to change A level courses to 'step in line with' PRS, there was a general acceptance that as PRS was the larger provider it made logical sense.

Robert an EST described the situation in his department 'well it's alright… I mean you know … one side has got to back off you can't both have what you want you know'.

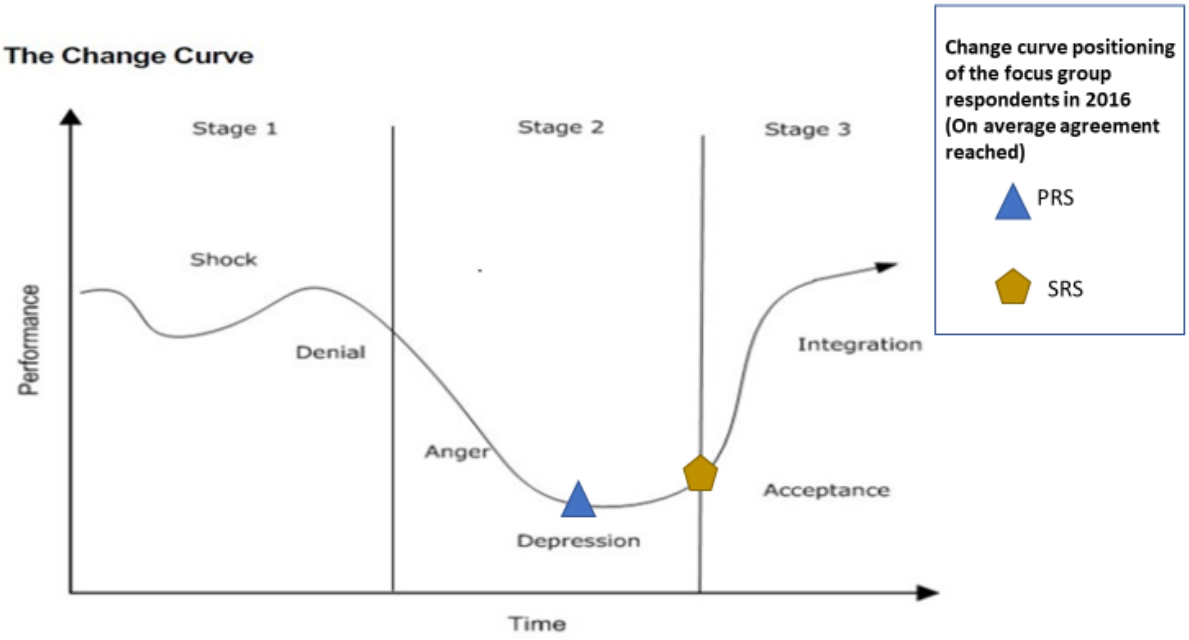
The English department staff were told that as they had changed A level courses to fit PRS, the resources would be bought by them 'which is awesome and saves us a lot of money'. At the time I found it unlikely PRS would find this given their financial difficulties, and during the revisit a year later was told their head of department had been annoyed as PRS '…were very very keen on doing a particular specification for A level and said they would resource it and they haven't'. This damaged trust between the two departments.

By 2016 the group had a more disappointed and at times anxious tone. Communication had not improved over the intervening 12 months. they had not received the clear leadership and direction they were hoping for in the new head teacher and Principal. They complained about not knowing their counterparts over at PRS, and who to contact let alone collaborate with on a 6th form level. They claimed to barely ever see the joint head of 6th form suggesting 'he always says he is going to come and see you then doesn't'.

By the time the second focus group took place the schools had converted to an Academy Trust. However, all bar one of the teachers claimed collaboration at 6th form level (or indeed

any level) had reduced between staff at the two schools in the previous 12 months; there was certainly very little evidence of the shared planning of the new courses that had been one of the motivations to coordinate them. The tone of this discussion was one of missed opportunity, the SRS teachers had presented themselves as willing participants in the first focus group, however by the second they were becoming more jaded and cautious. This was reflected in their discussion of the Kubler Ross Change Curve that I gave them, most remained towards the edge of stage 2, only just beginning to move out of depression and anger towards acceptance. They were notably further along the curve than PRS however, most of whom told me they were firmly languishing in the middle of stage 2 with no mention of the sight of stage 3.

Fig. 8 (larger version in appendix B.7)



PRS and the translation and enactment of the joint 6th form

In both PRS focus groups in 2015 and 2016 there was confusion regarding the 6th form. Not so much the purpose of it, but how it was going to ever practically function. PRS were at the receiving end of the students as the students from SRS came to them for lessons rather than vice versa. This forced the need for communication across the schools regarding attendance monitoring, raising pastoral concerns and report writing and student data collection (which continued to be two different formats, produced at different points of the year). Issues were

mentioned such as difficulties sending letters to SRS students' homes as their addresses were not readily available. Miscommunication regarding types of courses being delivered at PRS by SRS staff led to late changes such as Photography one year AS course being upgraded (at the cost of PRS) to a 2-year A level. This may in part explain the considerably more negative attitude towards the joint 6th form from PRS teachers, as they are dealing more directly with practical issues such as this.

One additional cause of confusion came from the dismantling of the one true cross school post; the head of 6th form role that was established in 2012. Ed a SEST commented: 'I just think that situation with the 6th form is so weird. I thought… [name of former head of 6th form] is the only example of proper attempts to federate and that is now being dismantled it seems'. This confusion was further compounded by the news the new Executive Principal was going to be taking a lead role with the 6th form management across both sites. It seemed odd to the teachers that he would have the time to do this.

The first focus group at PRS in 2015 spoke at length about the suspicion they felt towards the joint 6th form and SRS more generally. This was mainly related to the job losses suffered by PRS that academic year articulated by Sarah, one of the female SEST focus group participants had been through the redundancy process but had remained in post. She illustrated a level of insecurity aimed at working with the other high school that would become a theme in both PRS focus group findings:

'…fear from my point of view as I was part of the redundancy process this time – if you share too much am I giving you, are you going to have my job? Am I training you up and doing myself out of a job? You know that is a bit of a worry.'

She made it clear choices regarding which site to deliver 6th form courses were highly political and taken personally by teachers. She referred to the decision to deliver her subject at the other school 'like a slap in the face'.

Louise an EST reiterated this point describing how the decision of which school site science A level students would have their course offered had been thoughtlessly handled as 'could this potentially cost someone a job?' She claimed 'no one is being truly honest with us about what is going on. The way I see it - it is costing us jobs but not costing them jobs'.

In a similar incident indicating the lack of trust between the two schools, Benedict a SEST recalled a rumour that SRS were had approached a secondary school in the nearby city that PRS had traditionally recruited 6th form students from:

'Wasn't there a point where they were going over to [name of] school – they have never approached them before but as soon as the federation started they approached [the] school –which they have every right to, but seems they are encroaching the patch that [PRS] have traditionally done'

Louise a SEST agreed: 'They produced a lot of freebies for them this year saying [SRS] on, yet ours said the federation…'

Benedict concluded: 'that tells a story doesn't it - did we pay for it as well?' [ironic laughter]

The second PRS focus group in 2016 contained many more examples such as this where the purpose of the 6th form, or how it was meant to be working with the removal of the leadership position was struggling to be made sense of and this was inevitably affecting their willingness to enact the policy.

Ed a SEST commented 'The idea of collaboration, I don't think people trust that, [as] in the end people are going to be made redundant'

Sarah agreed: 'Yeah why would I want to share my resources with you [SRS]?'

Ed replied: 'Yeah its dog eat dog really'

This exchange indicates the teachers continued to be heavily distracted by their own experiences of redundancy and the disruption caused by national curriculum changes, and this became indelibly linked with the collaborative relationships. This is reflected by their different positionings on the Kubler Ross Change Curve in comparison to SRS. The willingness to enact the policy was mediated by different 'professional cultures' (Ball *et al* 2012:27) held by the staff at each school, and this was directly related to their different recent experiences as SRS were yet to experience redundancies. They were experiencing 'identity inclusion concern' (Van der Vegt 2001:16) as they questioned the sustainability of their role in the newly forming arrangement. The decisions regarding A level specifications had not been led well by management and had in several cases been the cause of conflict. The heads had somewhat naively allowed departments to negotiate between themselves, not taking into account the complex history of the schools or the mediating factor of job losses. Enrolment on a teacher level does not seem to be occurring for the joint 6th form at either school, but particularly at PRS. This is because although it made theoretical sense it was not making practical sense on a day to day basis. Students involved were not benefiting from increased opportunities, they were being forced from one site to another with very little cross communication. Problematisation had been more

than effective as the teachers were aware financial issues had brought the schools together. However, elements of the network were refusing to cooperate, were not fully enrolled or accepting of the way the 6th form was operating (interessement). This led to severe problems with the enactment of this MAT policy to work together to offer post 16 provision. A consequence of the confusing policy context of the MAT encouraging collaboration between the high schools yet still demanding competition between them to raise standards and league table positioning.

Discussions from the 2016 focus groups, the original Executive Principal and SRS and PRS head interviews revealed that it is not only the people or the lack of trust between schools involved that is stalling enrolment. There are several sociomaterial factors acting as actants and blocking the enactment and translation of the joint 6th form policy. These factors form part of the 'material contexts' identified by Ball *et al* (2012:22) that mediate the successful enaction of a policy change. I have selected two to interrogate further below.

Sociomaterial issues

Sociomaterial Issue 1: distance between sites

The two high schools are two miles and a 25-minute walk apart. Therefore, it takes too long to walk between them during the school day in which time is at a premium. The issue of distance between the two schools was raised by Robert from SRS with regards to issues between staff communication. It is also a huge problem with movement of students who may have one 6th form lesson at SRS followed by a lesson at PRS. Buses are needed to move the students; however, they are expensive, and the schools do not have spare funding.

The original Principal stated in 2015 that in addition to the issue that SRS catchment area is huge (approx. 100 square miles covering sparkly populated rural areas) the '*LA wont bus kids from SRS into PRS catchment*' Frustrated, he told me it '*took county 6th months to put in writing they wouldn't bus kids across the town'* causing a delay to the progress of the joint 6th form *'beyond our control'*. Inevitably the longer the delay preventing the effective functioning of cross site lessons, the less the venture makes sense.

As a result of the County's decision students that opt to take a subject delivered at PRS have to start their journey at SRS as the buses from the wide catchment area will only take them there, they will then have to travel on to PRS. They cannot be expected to make their own way to PRS, some students may drive but not initially as they will only be 16,

and it is unreasonable to expect them to have a car and drive themselves. As it stood in 2016 buses were financed by the MAT and transport students backwards and forwards between sites at designated times. Aside from the considerable additional expense this has a detrimental effect on timetabling as lessons must be offered in two hour or three-hour slots. In addition to this the bus must leave early at the end of the day to ensure students are back at SRS to get their connecting busses home, thus they miss the last 15 minutes of session 5.

The fact the LA will not transport students across the town also limits the scope for planning a cohesive 6th form on one site. Distance is acting as an actant rather than a fully enrolled actor in the actor-network, it is not completely confounding the network, but it is not helping it either.

This is further compounded by the LA refusing to provide buses across the town that the students can use their subsidised bus passes on, and the prohibitive cost of a private bus the schools now must provide.

Sociomaterial Issue 2: Time as a resource

Many of the teachers mentioned lack of time as being a huge barrier to the effective establishment of collaborative relationships with the other schools. John a SEST from PRS explained that he had been acting as head of department across both PRS and SRS for a period, however this had fallen by the wayside as *'no one wants to make the decision and give me time to do it'.* Both sets of teachers portrayed a working life that was very full, without the additional burdens of collaboration. Stacy from SRS claimed she was *'just trying to keep her head above water and go with the flow'.* Sarah from PRS described the pressure she was feeling as '*workload and expectations have increased, and they are throwing new things at you like new specs and I think I am in the middle like ahhhh'.*

The new Executive Principal admitted that *'time is more important than anything else'* and staff needed to be given more time to hold meetings and have conversations. Emails and text-based communications are vulnerable to being misinterpreted, and if they go unanswered elicit bad feeling. Once the leadership at Principal level changed, joint meetings decreased in number, and the head of PRS was extremely ambivalent about their value, considering them the cause of more problems than solutions.

The redundancies at PRS has left a stretched staff body struggling to cover all the classes and seriously in trouble when faced with staff absence. Providing more time for the active and productive collaboration between schools is not a straightforward task as time in this sense, will cost money.

The head at PRS suggested the solution to the political and practical distance-based problems of the 6th form was to build a new site in the centre of the town. this would relieve the tensions from his staff about the loss of A level teaching and reduce the distance travelled by staff and students. However, this is impossible, as there is no funding for it.

These two sociomaterial factors are linked by one overarching issue – **money.**

Paradoxically just as funding issues drove the schools to collaborate at 6th form level in the first place, it is money that is preventing this collaboration from flourishing and achieving its aim – fair provision for all the students in the town. This is ironic as the MAT conversion was promoted as a way of giving schools more control over their finances. The reason more teacher time has not been allocated for meetings and collaboration between the schools is again down to money. Staff shortages and redundancies mean staff are stretched with regards to their own timetables and thus have less time in real terms than they did five years ago. Ironically although austerity drove the schools to collaborate and convert to a MAT, it is also hindering its development due to lack of time and resources.

Leaky networks

The MAT presented here is a network with leaks. Literature from chapter 3 suggested it was not necessary for actor networks to achieve 'comprehensive' translation and enrolment, 'enrolment can be productively partial, and actors can be members of multiple networks' (Michael 2017:56). This is demonstrated by SRS in their burgeoning relations with the MS as an example of one network beginning to function, and their difficult relations with PRS as an example of another network leaking. Sensemaking in the relations between the MAT MS and SRS has been effectively managed and the plans for the GCSE flightpath and accelerated reading scheme have been successfully disseminated from the MS to SRS staff. It was too early in the process to see effective mobilisation of this however progress towards that looked hopeful. SRS teachers spoke of the GCSE flight path without reservations, and although they were not fully utilising it yet, these sorts of

interventions take a few school cycles to fully embed. They also provided many examples of their heads of departments visiting and working with their MS counterparts. They are enrolled in the relationship with them and the network, as far as it can at this early stage, is beginning to mobilise and move around the circuit depicted by the conceptual framework in chapter 3 (*Fig. 4*). This can be linked back to the original MAT Policy. Competition colours the relations to an extent (as SRS relies on strong floor standards set by the MS), they do not compete for students in the way they inevitably do with PRS, being situated only 2 miles apart. This fundamentally alters the basis of the collaboration.

Conversely the joint 6th form had been operating in some form since the federation was established in 2012. Yet still it was a cause of great anxiety and confusion for staff, and an admitted site of tension by the head teachers raising significant questions about the level of trust in the organisations. It was the only example of active collaboration in the MAT, as students moved from PRS to SRS to be taught and there was a joint leadership post (up to 2016). The relations between the two high schools is inherently politically different compared with the relations between the MS and SRS. SRS and their MS were never directly in rivalry with one another, one feeds into the other and it makes logical sense for them to work together to prepare students for key stage 4. PRS and SRS however, are attempting, through the joint 6th form, to overcome generations of rivalry in a policy climate that continues to push collaboration and market values. This had occurred at a particularly insecure time for the profession. Not only were teachers facing threats to their knowledge security via the curriculum reviews, they also face challenges to their job security due to budget cuts. This, when added to the sociomaterial problems such as distance, time, lack of clear leadership and so on creates a network full of uncooperative actants refusing to enrol fully and enact the policy. The experience of the joint 6th form for both staff and students becomes paradoxical, as instead of increasing opportunities and cementing the relationship between the schools, it causes greater divisions and actively reduces the quality of education provided for SRS students travelling to PRS. The focus group participants and the head of PRS are struggling to make sense of it, as day by day the situation with the 6th form becomes more confusing and relations between the schools sour. This situation is indicative of 'leaky' translations that hold together just about, and the associated ambivalent belongings where 'people things and collectives struggle to protect practices from inscription through new connections and at the same time work the connections for their own purposes' (Fenwick and Edwards 2010:113). This results in the processes struggling to move around the cycle depicted in the conceptual

framework from chapter 3 (*Fig 4*). They have become stuck in the red zone with only partial enactment of the policy.

In reality, we all operate every day within functioning actor networks. In actor-network theoretic terms this is what society is, a myriad of many actor networks intertwined, overlapping and functioning to varying degrees of effectiveness. What this research has uncovered are actor networks that function despite their numerous leaks. One suspects that much of society is built in this fashion, of 'systems' that are both enthusiastic and reluctant, stable and unstable, particularly those areas of society that are burdened by constant policy changes such as is found in education. As Benedict one of the PRS focus group participants stated:

> *'It's also [about] investment, how much do you invest in something that may not have legs at all– and we have seen a few of those over the years'*

Perhaps this is indicative of the nature of public services in the UK, that belonging to the actor networks that make up society remains perpetually ambivalent due to the constantly shifting policy framework in which they work. This makes full enrolment impossible or at least unwise as the next change is usually on the horizon.

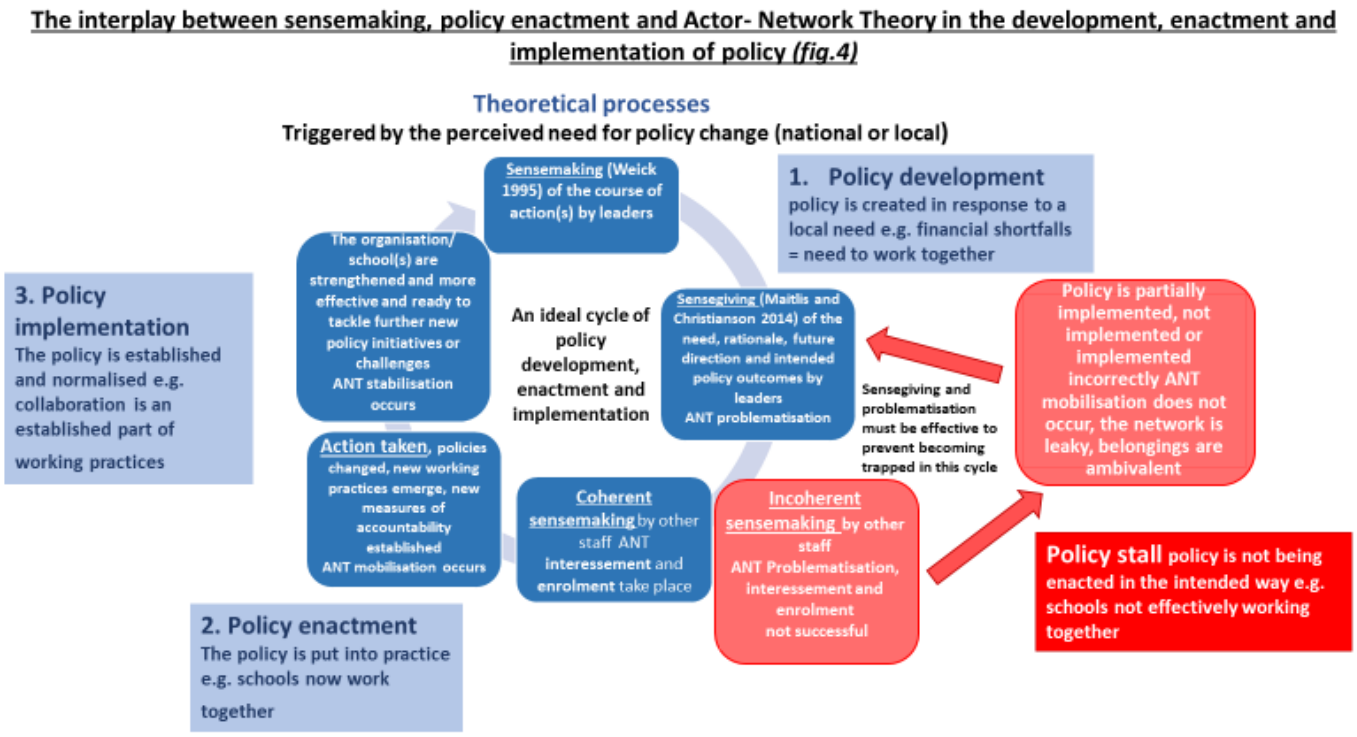
Multiple actor networks

ANT reveals many layers of actor network for example on the operational side enrolment has occurred, governance policies procedures are all in places as was necessary to ensure the DfE would allow academy conversion. Also, on a basic level the town has an operational actor network in place between all the schools that feed into one another, communicate with varying degrees of regularity and students leave school having mostly all achieved educational success. ANT would view this as indicative of the actor networks in action. However, when examined more closely there are layers of the actor networks that are not operating so effectively. As ANT views the network in terms of its effects and that its effects are all products of the relations between the actors it reveals the intricacies and difficulties that lie in the fabric of the networks from both human and non-human actors. When the ANT lens zooms in on policy areas such as the joint 6th form, huge issues are revealed, not all of which are human related. Many of the respondents, both teachers and elites were confused by the overall purpose and direction of the MAT and related collaboration and remain deeply suspicious of it. It appears the amount of teacher collaboration was higher during the federation years than following the MAT conversion. In fact, the 'federation' or 'federate' was used by many of the respondents (and myself) as

a code word for 'collaboration' as that is what that structure meant to them, that was the core purpose of it. However, historically collaboration in the federation was also fraught with leadership and conflict problems, and the lack of encouragement to continue such relations following MAT conversion could be interpreted as an attempt at damage limitation rather than an active change of policy direction. This section reveals the 'contested nature of policy implementation in which expected outcomes and experienced realities are … divergent' (Bell and Stevenson 2015:148) as the experiences of and attitudes towards the MAT and cross school collaboration differ among all the respondents, as does their willingness to invest in its enactment into practice.

To return briefly to the conceptual framework from chapter 3 once again; there are some areas of the MAT collaborative policy that are moving around the cycle towards mobilisation for example the MS and SRS relationship. However, the joint 6th form is currently trapped in the incoherent sensemaking loop, as many of the teachers and SLT struggle to make sense of it, leading to ineffectual enactment. The focus group responses reveal the MAT and related intent to work together has not been made sense of in a coherent way either, and until that is remedied the actor network will struggle to function without leaks. This had led the policy enactment to stall. This is discussed further in chapter 6.

Fig. 4 (appendix B.5)



Theme 3: The welcome MAT or policy paradox?

In the final section of this chapter I discuss both the benefits of conversion to the MAT and the ways in which the new structure and governance has made the future shape of schooling and provision in the town more secure, as articulated by the interviewees. This will be contrasted with the contradictions or paradoxical issues created by MAT conversion and the push for collaboration between these schools in a policy climate continuing to promote market values. It addresses the final research question considering how far the priorities of the MAT policy in relation to market values and accountability conflict with the development of collaboration in practice.

This section is organised into the following two categories:

- The welcome MAT – securing the future
- Fears and insecurities; is the MAT a policy paradox?

The welcome MAT- securing the future

More money?

Structural change associated with the MAT conversion did bring benefits for all the schools involved. All three MAT schools had financial concerns relating to national funding changes when they converted. This was most acutely felt by the high schools due to the fall in 6th form student numbers and funding per student. The structural intertwining of the schools created by the MAT led to the formalising of shared services and staffing such as caretaking teams and expertise across the schools facilitating focussed inhouse CPD sessions and training without the need for expensive external speakers. Economies of scale such as buying paper-based resources in bulk and service agreement with printer and photocopier companies saved the schools significant amounts of money, as they could operate bigger contracts and thus were more attractive clients. This type of collaboration had begun during the years of the federation but was formalised following the conversion. There were other small financial gains experienced that helped secure the financial stability of all three schools. As all academy schools receive funding directly from the DfE it avoids the loss of the top slice traditionally taken by the local authority, the original Executive Principal suggested this was 12%. Thus, all the schools receive more physical money although they still must finance services the LA used to provide such as payroll and grounds maintenance – more on that later. The

original Principal also identified funding sources that only academies can bid for such as the Capital Improvement Fund for buildings that could be taken advantage of.

Nevertheless, several of the elites interviewed downplayed the financial benefits of academizing. The head of PRS claimed we had come to the academies agenda 5 years too late and thus had not been able to capitalise upon to increase funding and avoid redundancies. The New Principal warned that all LA and academy schools receive funding from the same pot and there was simply less of this; *'we are not going to be rolling in money, I don't think I am going to be sailing down the Trent in a Yacht'.*

More control?

In converting to academy status, legally the land of all the schools becomes protected from local authority redevelopment, as it belongs to the Trust. This was of concern for both high schools as they both sit on large 10-acre sites prime for redevelopment. The schools were keen to avoid this and protect their sporting facilities that generate an income from lettings and attractive aesthetic environment. Academy status has the potential to safeguard the land for future school generations.

The original Executive Principal explained in 2015 that the MAT adds an additional layer of structural security to the schools, it adds a sense of sustainability to the shape of the provision as it is now. He explained this is due to *'the master funding arrangement with the DfE and the articles of association'.* This Principal firmly believed that *'permanence comes from structures not people'.* Thus, even if the entire work force currently employed by the MAT were to leave, it would still exist in its current form due to the legally binding agreement with the DfE to adopt this structure and the existence of the Trust with Companies House. As an academy the LA no longer has the power to shut the schools. The DfE still does however, so the safeguarding of the future of the school is not blanket protected.

By converting to an academy rather than remaining as a federation, the schools are also buffered to some extent by the natural fluctuations in exam data that could trigger an academy order and enforced sponsorship. Following conversion, a 3 year grace period is offered by Ofsted which could provide the schools with some breathing space to implement improvements and fully embed the collaborative culture and raise educational standards. The MS head explained how important this was, as their progress at key stage 2 was below the national floor standards at the time of our interview. By taking the decision

to convert they had secured the near future shape of the provision in the town, albeit only if they stay the right side of Ofsted.

At governance level, the governing bodies of all the MAT schools had been amalgamated and were beginning to work effectively together. The Business Manager explained changes to the governing body had taken place prior to academy conversion *'…previous committees - Learning progress, welfare, premises, HR, federation strategy, school strategy have been merged into 3 committees: education- students related, resources – HR and finances, Audit – time to look at policies needed once we convert'.* The new Executive Principal explained that the governing body had come a long way regarding acceptance of the needs and priorities of each school and were beginning to lose their previous school allegiances and work together for the good of all the students in the town.

The change in leadership was a significant turning point in the tale of this MAT as the roles of the SLT were redefined and clarified. This meant that as substantive head (with official responsibility for all 3 schools), the new Executive Principal had more leverage as an obligatory passage point and ability to problematise and seek interessement than his predecessor who admitted most of the progress made had been down to 'me being a bully'. This change in leadership removed some of the historical grievances between the team and meant collaborative relationships could start afresh with more energy. The clarification of roles added more sustainability to the team relations, although the shift of focus from PRS to SRS and its MS did lead to a degree of 'identity inclusion concern' (Van der Vegt 2001:16) for PRS teachers and head.

In addition to this, at the time the research took place the schools were in the grips of the national demographic dip that occurred in the early 2000's in birth rate. This has resulted in a decline in number of student available locally to enrol. However, current predictions by the heads suggest there will be a surge in the town population and by 2031 the two high schools should experience an increase of up to 500 students. The MS head stated as part of a MAT he felt better able to meet this challenge due to the 'freedoms academisation brings'. Later in the interview he showed me the spot on his site where he envisaged building a new first school to accommodate the expected influx of children. It was felt by him and the other leaders I spoke to that a town-based MAT, with an overview of every key stage would be best placed to make the decisions to increase schooling provision and secure it for the future.

Psychological benefits?

The feeling or sense of the new MAT and visible collaboration was helped along by immutable mobiles and intermediaries. Immutable mobiles synch meaning across sites, they are important as all the school sites are separated by a distance. The Business Manager mentions how: *'We have started to group Global emails to all staff in federation, at the same time. [this is] Right for the staff, everyone should know things at the same time'.* Staff emails were altered to no longer contain the name of their school but the name of the MAT. Not only did that ease communication issues, making it possible to globally contact everyone, or easily find individuals in the address book to contact, it also provided a collective email identity. The feeling of being part of a MAT rather than the individual schools did not happen overnight but was clearly in development.

All staff wear lanyards primarily for safeguarding and identification purposes. In 2016 SLT across the three schools adopted the same colour lanyards enabling them to be recognisable in any of the Trust schools. This added further to the collective identity of the Trust and the feeling of working together. Similarly, a joint 6th form branding and logo was created distinct from each of the high schools. This acted as an intermediary transporting meaning over the sites and to parents and students. This branding was used on letter heads instead of the respective schools branding and in turn attempted to create a separate identity for the 6th form. Staff were encouraged to refer to it in these terms rather than PRS 6th as it had been formerly known. Slowly the shift from individual school allegiances to being part of the MAT took place.

There was a suggestion by several of the SLT members that there was a psychological benefit of becoming a MAT. The new Executive Principal stated that there was *'a formality of being a MAT [that] gives security to the organisation which makes a difference to people I think'.* As mentioned earlier the head of SRS claimed that were the *'federation had been a nebulous thing; the MAT is real'*. This was not particularly supported by the teachers in the focus groups, who viewed the MAT conversion with caution (SRS) and suspicion and distrust (PRS). However, there is no doubt that legally the MAT structure is a more secure one, and politically more favourable than the federation. This in turn adds a sense of stability to the organisation.

In conclusion, both Principals and the head of SRS claim that MAT conversion created a psychological effect of security. It makes the school 'feel' more secure. This is bolstered by the legalities of the structure that lock the schools into place in a more binding way than

the federation could offer. There was an admission that there were fewer financial incentives to convert than there had been several years earlier, and it was finances the schools really needed to secure the provision for the future in its current form. However, savings were made by working together, and the schools did have more control over how the money was spent and were thus beginning to be able to tailor the provision to fit the specific needs of the town.

Recent benefits of collaboration for the students

In some areas the conversion to MAT and associated change in leadership accelerated the level of collaboration between the schools. The data collected from the Heads of the MS and SRS demonstrates considerable steps towards collaboration in terms of both the GCSE flightpath model and the reading programme. Collaboration of this type is important as the schools are undersubscribed. If working together in this way improves student outcomes this could serve as a justification for the continuing existence of the three-tier system. On size of student body alone these two schools are very vulnerable, when coupled with their below average academic performance the situation continues to be precarious.

In addition, working together in this way provides experience and CPD for both sets of staff. The MS employs both primary and secondary trained teachers and thus has a skill set there that had been underutilised. By introducing a secondary phase curriculum in the MS for year 7 and 8, both the teachers and students will benefit. These moves towards collaboration accelerated following the change of leadership and MAT conversion as the leadership roles became more clearly defined and the remit of working together was more clearly articulated.

A clear majority of the data collected about the joint 6th form was negative, focussing on the inconveniences of moving the students between sites, the difficulties in communication resulting from the decision to coordinate A level specifications and the haphazard inconsistent student experience. However, these gripes ignore the fact that many SRS students have been able to study a combination of subjects that previously would not have been available to them. The additional UCAS support they have received from PRS had helped many make successful university applications. This may be a small number of students over the past five years, but the impact upon them of the collaborative venture, however difficult it may be to practically sustain, should not be dismissed. One of the original strategic aims of the MAT was to secure equality of

education for all the students in the town, clearly, they are a way from that yet, but a difference has been made to individual students. That ultimately was the original aim of working together.

Currently the three-tier system remains established in largely unchanged form and all the schools in the group maintain good Ofsted gradings. Perhaps the MATs largest achievement is that more schools are beginning to join, by 2020 the Trust will comprise of 10 schools. This indicates stability of the structure and future opportunities for an 'all through' system including first schools and the potential to positively affect larger numbers of students (although still not those at the church middle school).

Fears and insecurities; is the MAT a policy paradox?

Despite progress made and the benefits of the MAT and associated cross town school collaboration that have been identified, questions are raised by this data set regarding the extent to which the MAT has delivered the promises that were used as part of the sensemaking and part of its strategic plan. For example, will it protect the schools from being 'taken over by an imposed sponsor? Has it cemented the collaboration between sites? Has it provided increased control over finances and thus improved standards across the town?

I have isolated the many interrelated concerns relating to the enactment of the MAT policy articulated by the interviewees and focus group participants into the following headings:

- 'We could go to jail': Increased accountability and consequences of the change to business functions.
- 'I cannot do my job': Practicalities affecting practice on a day to day basis.
- 'What are we here for?': Critical comment about what schools spend time and resources on.
- 'The political becomes personal': the personal cost of academisation and collaboration in this setting.

These subheadings relate back to my original question framed in the introduction; **what have we done?** They also highlight how the two national aims for the MAT; increased

accountability (to drive up standards) and initiation of collaboration have been found, in this case, to be working against one another.

'We could go to jail': Increased accountability and consequences of the change to business functions

From the very beginning, this was the element of the MAT conversion that concerned me the most. In the recent past, the LA would have taken a top slice of the schools' funding but would in turn have provided insurance, safeguarding guidance, payroll, site maintenance, procurements, human resources, educational welfare services including counselling and so on. They also provided a useful buffer, should the school overspend or be hit by unexpected costs: the new Executive Principal explained that *'schools could run a deficit as they were underwritten by LA stability'.* The LA was a buffer in other ways too; the LA collectively had vast amounts of experience that could (and did) prove useful should issues arise with Ofsted or any other external organisations.

With the LA influence diminished the Business Manager explained: *'[There is a] massive level of responsibility as an academy [the Principal] and I could go to jail for lots and lots of things that we would be deemed responsible for, we are directors of that company. [So] before [as a federation] you would say oh yeah I am happy with that just tweak that bit and sign it off, now I want to see everything'*

Accountability increased following conversion to a MAT and this added considerable pressure on the leadership and business team. It is clear why small schools join larger Trusts, as any autonomy they lose by doing so is offset by protection offered by the Trusts' more experienced business team. The new Executive Principal had experience converting schools to academies as had the former Principal, but the rest of the team had to quickly adjust in a system with no margin for error. Under the academies regime, each school is audited four times a year, they cannot legally or technically over spend or go into deficit (although increasingly many do (Burns 2018: online)). Tight control is maintained over the finances and access to resources.

This has fixed the schools into place but means that the consequences of mistakes, or miscalculations are very high. Student numbers and budgets fluctuate yearly: the head of PRS articulated the difficulties that the 'commercial environment we are forced to operate in' presents to local leaders. He stated, *'I am expected to run a small to medium size enterprise in an environment where I have no control over how much money is coming in,*

the only control over my expenditure is over the people I employ, and the national agenda is set not dependent on market forces but dependent on political policy'. Schools operate on longer cycles, and, in order to maintain a committed workforce it is inadvisable to just lay off the surplus staff you may not need that particular year, especially as teaching is in the grips of a recruitment crisis and they will not be easily replaceable. This is how businesses run, academies operate with similar expectations, particularly sponsored ones. This ethos did not fit these local schools, and the promise of increased control felt to many of the respondents like reduced control in practice.

The marketisation of education began in the late 1980's and has gathered pace and momentum since 2010 with the influence of the Gove era. It creates a paradoxical situation whereby schools are expected to continue offering personalised high-quality provision for their students and yet do this in the most cost-efficient way possible. For most schools their biggest expenditure is their staff and it is teaching and admin staff, the very people who develop and maintain the culture and ethos of a place, who are the first to be cut.

One of the core aims of collaboration amongst this set of schools, as articulated by all of the elites interviewed was to reduce costs through economies of scale. This included sharing material resources, but also staff. A consequence of collaboration of this nature across a set of schools in the same town, is to share staff, thus resulting in the need for fewer staff. The site teams were the first to be amalgamated, and then slowly more teachers were employed across the school sites.

Sharing teachers makes economic sense, however, practically it is laden with difficulties. The teacher will use time in the school day travelling that would otherwise be spent marking, planning lessons or meeting with colleagues. Their sense of belonging and personal wellbeing is likely to be lower as they move between teams and lead to increased 'identity inclusion concern' (Van der Vegt 2001:16) found in the focus groups. This is the darker side of collaboration that was alluded to by many of the teachers in the PRS focus groups. School collaboration is a phenomenal idea in theory, it has the potential to vastly improve systems and standards. However, there is a paradox in the human cost this has, as the schools use it as a way of rationalising their biggest cost – teachers. The schools are left with very little options, as the academies programme operates a high stakes accountability system. The situation is paradoxical, the schools receive their funding directly and thus have more control over it and yet if they overspend, misspend or make a

mistake the consequences are dire –with 'go to jail' repercussions. This makes them more cautious and frugal, at a time when resources were already stretched. This leads to the next interrelated theme.

'I cannot do my job': Practicalities affecting practice on a day to day basis

The practical and material issues faced when making the joint 6th form fully functional have already been discussed in this chapter. Problems associated with physical distance between the school sites, the timetabling of lessons, the cost and reliability of the buses are all acting as actants preventing the smooth running of the collaborative arrangement. However, further practical issues were raised by the teachers that the MAT conversion that relate to day to day practice of all the staff. Conversion to a MAT changes the way capitation is distributed and budgets are released. In the past the school would know how much money they had in the budget and could spend the funds as they saw fit throughout the financial year. The same applied to individual subject departments, they were allocated a budget for resources and one for printing costs and expected to manage this. This allowed for a level of flexibility with regards to how much could be printed at any one time for example or allowed larger resources such as iPads or expensive sports equipment to be bought all at once.

Yet, because the MAT is subject to several financial audits per year the distribution of capitation is far more closely monitored. Funds are now released monthly, and departments must effectively save up over a period if they have a large cost looming. This different way of managing finances caused inconvenience for the staff and teachers, now every penny had to be accounted for it removed much of the generosity and flexibility that had been part of the LA system before, particularly related to petty cash for trips or other small one-off resources such as prizes.

Judy one of the PRS SESTs illustrated the new bureaucracy surrounding this *'every time we need something, milk, or potatoes for science experiments …now there is a 5 way email [resulting in] 'potato gate' or 'lemon gate' because you have to go and say please can I have £2 to go and get…'* Stories such as this were widespread among the PRS group. Sarah had to send emails to 6 different people to get a set of year 9 sketch books approved as they cost more than the monthly allocated capitation. The teachers argued this had put their capitation back a year, as they were unable to finance all the resources they needed in

September for the new A Level courses, with only a few months' worth of capitation to fund them.

They also recalled how funds were blocked completely over a period of several months during the MAT conversion, a situation that dragged on due to the conversion itself taking longer than anticipated. Worryingly this applied to the allocation and distribution of pupil premium funding targeting students with the greatest need. Olivia was responsible for the coordination and allocation of additional funds for these students and explained how she was taken unaware this block would affect these children and spent a lot of time explaining to social workers and foster homes that the resources required would not be available until after the conversion. There were other stories shared, of teachers becoming so frustrated with the time lag in the system that they bought classroom resources themselves, then resigned taking the resources with them as they left. This shift in the way the finances were released to teachers changed their practice on a day to day basis. Funds had been short before conversion, but the MAT was intended to increase financial freedoms. Instead it paradoxically led to a level of control that was practically impeding the teacher's ability to do their job and provide a stimulating learning environment for the students and provide for the most vulnerable.

The concern regarding the change to financial operations was not limited to PRS, the head of the MS explained '*…what concerns me, and what we are going to have to navigate over the next 12 months or whatever is all those service level agreements that we have been used to getting from the LEA, have we covered all of them? But its perhaps surprising how much there is, it's one of those things you don't know what you have got till it's gone.'* This refers to all the services once provided by the LA, some of which were almost invisible but vital, such as emptying sanitary bins or providing window cleaning. Ensuring all of these are covered for all 3 schools and getting the best financial deal for them became a laborious task.

The strict control and monitoring of finance slow the progress of the collaboration despite MAT schools being touted as having increased financial control. It creates a contradictory situation where although the school receive all the funds directly from the DfE and thus receive more actual cash than previously each year, this cash is subject to increasingly draconian controls and restrictions that limit teacher's practice. In addition, the services provided by the LA were numerous and varied from one school to another depending on need. There was potential that certainly in the first year or so not all of

these services would be covered. Ultimately the change in the way the finances were distributed and controlled created inconvenience and distraction to the everyday practices of schooling.

'What are we here for?' Critical comment about what schools spend time and resources on

Securing academy conversion preoccupied the senior leadership team for years. Once it was secured, it continued to dominate their priorities as it resulted in a new precarious landscape of policies and procedures to navigate. This made many of the senior leaders uncomfortable as they questioned what their purpose or future role was in this new structure, and indeed if it was really what they had wanted. The original Executive Principal summed this up in 2014 stating:

'I didn't come into the profession to write a billion words of crap to get money out of people, I came to work with children'.

The new Executive Principal echoes this sentiment and expands it to a criticism regarding workload and academy design:

'*The children don't see the benefit of all the things we have inside do they, because of the system making us roll them through, we don't have time to give so much of ourselves do we? But we have to try because that's what the kids want, and they like, and it's the right thing to do but don't have time do we? And that would make a big difference'.*

Of course, the priority of all the schools be the wellbeing of the children. The conversion to academy was a policy decision made to secure the future shape of the provision in the town. The policy decision to collaborate was to ensure educational parity and improve standards. However, I am not sure anyone knew how *distracting* academy conversion would be. How time consuming and anxiety provoking it would turn out to be, not just for those doing the paperwork and dealing with the legalities, but for the wider staff body deeply unsettled by the changes afoot. Despite both Principals' experience converting other schools perhaps it was impossible to predict the extent of the paradox; that the conversion meant to stabilise the schools would in fact have the opposite effect, on a human level at least as the increased accountability measures took hold.

There is a sense from both Principals that the current education system built on business ideologies has lost something vital. It is laden with contradiction: a stretched workforce,

focuses on paperwork and satisfying external agencies rather than the children in the classroom. Although we *'have to try',* as he says, what sort of a quality job are we doing when so much time and energy is spent dodging or enacting the next (usually contradictory) policy change?

'The political becomes personal': the individual cost of academisation and collaboration in this setting

The generalised personal cost of collaboration has been discussed earlier, in relation to rationalising staff numbers, creating a multi-site caretaking team for instance, and sharing teachers. It would be easy to view the academisation and effects of collaboration affecting only the teacher staff group negatively. However, there were stories revealed in the data regarding the personal cost to the elites that may go some way to explain why this MAT demonstrates issues with enrolment, interessement and decidedly leaky networks.

There are two ghosts in this data set. The former head of SRS and head of the MS who opted to take redundancy and walk away from the schools rather than accept demotion to associate head. I approached both but was unable to secure interviews with either before they left post. The head of PRS also took redundancy and opted to stay on to pass on his knowledge to the new team. I mentioned his sense of duty to the staff and students earlier in this chapter. His interview revealed a head very much still in conflict about the direction and future of the school; he was not fully on board with the notion of collaboration and saw few gains from it. His sense of duty was keeping him in post, but I wondered how long this would endure. The cost of the MAT for these three individuals was their jobs, their status, the amount of power they had. A huge cost professionally and personally and explains why the two decided to leave. There was also the cost to the schools, the loss of these individuals experience built up over long careers, their understanding of the locality and community and their standing in it.

The original Principal also articulated a level of frustration in his second interview. At the bottom of the stairs leading to his office was a sign stating, 'No students beyond this point' reflecting the detached nature of the Executive Principal role.

He explained '*previously 'every kid knew who I was... I was all over the place... the first staff to arrive in the morning and the last to leave'*. He described the irony of finding that very *'lunchtime none of the kids knew who I was until I said my name... their parents would know*

who I was I taught half of them'. He had a great deal of personal regret associated to this, '*I loved running [the school] … I know where every light switch is, all these new buildings are down to me'* going further to reveal: '*when you own a school and give it away; it's really quite upsetting'.*

By the end of the interview I felt perhaps he would have been better able to reconcile this distance from his vocation, had his vision for the collaborative future of the group of schools been coming to fruition. However, this was not progressing as he had hoped, and the DfE were not forthcoming with approving the MAT.

The original Principal's decision to resign just as the MAT was beginning to form and collaboration was beginning tentatively to embed indicates a further element of personal cost. He described himself as 'Mr [school name]' he was a patriarchal figure for the staff, the 'heroic leader' who 'didn't do orthodoxy'. Sadly, he perceived this approach had become problematic; '*I am a barrier to now what needs to happen… there is resistance to me not the idea'.* He was resolute that his resignation would *'force the pace of change and take it in the right direction'*. He suggested there were lessons to be learned in putting together of schools, and timing was crucial, as learned from his original executive head post with the school 10 miles away, '*there is an optimum point for change'* he explained and with that school *'I should have left earlier'*. He and PRS had been the initial driving force behind the schools working together, and the MAT bid. The staff, although cautious, did ultimately trust him and his resignation destabilised the network in this sector of the town in catastrophic fashion. He may have believed he was a barrier to progress, but that grossly underestimated the strength his presence added to the network. To leave was a great personal cost to him, but potentially an even larger one to the functionality of the network at least at PRS staff level.

The decision to convert to a MAT led to many other casualties. While the head of PRS explained that the staff redundancies were not because of the academy, they were not viewed by the focus group respondents that way. Two of the three MAT schools lost their heads, PRS lost a large number of staff. This restructuring was necessary to cut costs and regenerate the leadership structure for academy conversion. Redundancies would have had to occur to some degree with or without the academy conversion due to a funding deficit, would they have occurred on such a scale? It is impossible to tell. What is clear is that the staff affected directly and indirectly mostly blamed the MAT. When they spoke of the federation they used it as a code word for collaboration, as that is the basis on which

the 'federation' made sense to them. The MAT however was a different entity, understood as the bringer of change, increased workload, uncertainty and loss, particularly for the focus group and head of PRS.

After all this time, years spent analysing this data, and reflecting on this experience, I do not know if the personal cost was worth it.

The decision to convert to a MAT eroded and corroded the emerging collaborative relationships between the two high schools that had been in operation in some form since the federation in 2012. Yet it also boosted collaborative relations between the MS and SRS. The increased threat relating to accountability measures distracted SLT and teachers to an extent beyond that which I would consider reasonable, and yet, the MAT did protect the 3 tier-system in the town certainly in the short term. It may have exacerbated job losses and led to a gap in experienced staff, but it may also have secured the future for many others by its more solid legal structure. It was contradictory on all levels resembling networks of leaks and ambivalent belongings.

I don't know if this set of circumstances I have uncovered here contain more or less paradox than would be found in other schools, in other parts of the country or even at any other point in recent history of educational policy. The introduction of business principles into education, the marketisation of England's schools back in the late 1980's and expanded upon by Gove and the Coalition created an inherent set of contradictions that has a legacy found here. What I can say is that I found a set of individuals deeply unsettled by the changes they were experiencing to their working lives. Despite the attempts of both Principals to control sensegiving and provide a direction for the federation and MAT, many members of staff remained confused and disoriented. This was reflected in the patchy, leaky network forming that connected the schools with differential forms of success.

The final chapter will conclude the findings here, offer some theoretical and methodological evaluation and ideas for future work in this area of public policy.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, theoretical and methodological evaluation

This chapter begins with an evaluation of the theoretical tools used to interpret the case study; the forming MAT and the ways in which it has made sense of and enacted the policy to work together. It considers the contribution of sensemaking, policy enactment literature and ANT and the conceptual diagram combining all three. I consider the ways in which these theories extend and complement each other. I assess the research more broadly, considering my position as an insider, and the management of that role with that of teacher. The limitations of the study are also discussed. Towards the end of the chapter I consider the implications of this research case for the understanding of school collaboration, and my own professional development. I discuss my attitudes towards academies and how this altered during, and in the time since, the completion of the field work. I end with policy suggestions drawn from my findings. These fall into two interrelated themes; the redefining national MAT policy priorities and promotion of local multi-phase MAT's with tailored aims.

Theoretical evaluation

In this thesis, I have presented a story about a group of schools trying to make sense of what the future holds for them given their context and circumstances. Weick (1995) claims sensemaking is particularly intense following a point of crisis, as people grapple to make sense of the change and their place in it. It is a necessary part of social evolution as sensemaking forces people to take stock, to make alterations, to move towards acceptance (or not and walk away). I have taken sensemaking to be the first step towards policy enactment. For a policy such as the MAT, or related school collaboration to be enacted (Ball *et al* 2012) successfully or translated (Clarke 2015) from the national to local it must first be made sense of in a coherent and (locally) meaningful way. The first test is a vision that has appeal and plausibility.

The data has illustrated how the original Executive Principal acted as a system builder and sensegiver, effectively problematising the contextual issues facing the schools and eliciting collective action. The sense he had made filtered down through one or other mode of giving, to the teachers at the schools and although I found their understandings of the need for collaboration varied, all agreed it was an essential next step. The sensemaking literature also highlighted the importance of trust (Fuglsang and Jagd 2015)

for the change to be accepted. Without a level of trust in the leadership, direction or decision making, individuals will be reluctant to take the risk required to change their practices. This was clear in my findings, trust was low across all the focus group participants, and this hindered their ability to make sense of the MAT which was viewed by staff as a threat rather than opportunity. Both PRS focus groups revealed heightened emotions and turmoil related to the job losses that overtook the MAT as it formed, and over the future direction and shape of the MAT. This was detrimental to the sensemaking process, reflected by a large number reporting to still be in stage 2 of the Kubler Ross change curve; anger.

I have interpreted sensemaking as the first step towards the enactment or policy translation from national to local. Weick suggests that 'people play a role in constructing the events they attempt to comprehend' (Weick 1995 cited Maitlis and Christianson 2014:58). This construction lays the foundations of enactment. As the participants told their stories during the focus groups and interviews sensemaking was revealed. But the leadership, sensemaking and sensegiving literature on its own would have been insufficient to explain the whole story of how the schools came to work together and to anticipate all the forms, and degrees of success that it realised. Ball states that 'policy changes the possibilities we have for thinking otherwise' (Ball 2012:15) and the decision to convert to a MAT both created and limited possibilities for this group of schools. It meant that they were legally tied together and had to operate under new accountability conventions and restrictions. However, the benefits of working together and sharing expertise also created opportunities and possibilities for the future. Ball *et al's* (2012) insights into the significance of context on policy enactment was useful to understand the inequalities that coloured the relations between the schools in terms of their differing size and facilities (material context). And the external context – national policy as it tightened - placing MATs as the preferred school structure politically. Clarke *et al* (2015) suggest policies become translated as they move from one context to another. This translation is mediated by contextual and material factors that help or hinder its eventual implementation. Bell and Stevenson (2015) develop the understanding of policy further to include insights into the way policy implementation is contested leading to different outcomes to those intended. This proved pertinent in this situation as the policy of collaboration was indeed contested and resisted by many of the teachers and the head of PRS as it didn't make sense in practical ways (particularly as we have seen, with regards to the joint 6th form).

If the policy enactment literature highlights the political nature of policy implementation and how it is rarely straightforward, it does not go quite far enough to explain the factors involved in disrupting implementation in this case, and in what ways these factors were operating. This is where Actor-Network Theory became useful to assist my sensemaking of the case.

ANT revealed socio-material factors that had become hindrances to the sensemaking process. The 'things' such as physical distance between schools and time as a resource that meant the collaboration did not make sense in a practical way blocked the translation and enactment of the policy. ANT also revealed some of the symbols that the sensemaking scholars claimed were necessary for effective sensegiving, the discourse of constructive change for the collective good used by leaders to encourage a modification of practice. These were the use of common branding, lanyards, logos etc that began to provide a feeling of the MAT as an entity for those who worked in it.

Use of ANT

It was never Law and Latour's intention that ANT be used as a toolkit and forced upon a set of data. They suggested data should speak for itself and I found that this was largely the case. Actor networks in a society overlap, they cross over, they merge, and they are messy. The network(s) under investigation here are no different and it is this 'messiness' that makes them interesting and revealing.

The schools now operate as a charitable trust suggesting in some ways this actor network is functional. However, the multiple actor networks that layer up to make sense of the relations between staff, schools, and indeed the MAT and the individual schools, demonstrate leaking assemblages and ambivalent belongings. This reveals the difficulties involved in the sensemaking, sensegiving and the enactment of the MAT policy of collaboration.

What has been discovered is a set of actor networks operating on one level and not others, yet still managing to function to an extent (as they fulfil their overall functions as 'good' schools). ANT at this juncture becomes a little uncooperative, as it refuses to acknowledge a distinction between the micro and macro and rather views everything (material and all) as part of the one sphere of extended networks. This I find problematic because it does not give credence to the power exerted from above, from the policy makers such as the DfE and Ofsted and how this influence filters down and affects practice. However, the notion of an 'extended' actor network introduced by Fenwick

(2010b:122), in a field like education where everything is connected across time and space, does make workable sense. It explains to an extent how a policy from the DfE becomes embedded in school-based practice, as the network extends to allow it to be so. It is this extension of the networks from policy to practice that has been the focus of this research and which my conceptual diagram seeks to represent (*Fig.4*).

The question of how these actor networks work on each other, often upsetting each other, is a subject for further research. It does demonstrate the live nature of the actor network and the work that must continue to ensure that the network remains functional. Policy after all is not a certainty and can act in oppressive and liberating ways. Data from the interviews regarding work completed and ongoing to form the MAT is evidence of this.

I have found ANT invaluable concerning the idea, position and effects of the socio-material. I selected ANT over other social network theories on this basis. Without recognition of material actants I would have struggled to explain the difficulties facing the policy enactment beyond that of weak leadership. Issues such as time, distance between schools, sharing or funding resources and new A level syllabuses, are material actants that have caused issues in the networks. I call them actants here rather than actors, as to be an actor, you must be fully enrolled, and it is clear from the data that these are far from that. During times of austerity the reduction in real terms of school budgets and the resulting squeeze on resources and staffing has meant that collaboration on a practical level has become more difficult to achieve. The focus groups at both schools revealed staff at all levels of experience have had to take on more responsibility, and their teaching load increased during the time of increased pressure from national curriculum changes. This means the space, distance and time between the schools becomes still more of a difficulty to overcome as staff find themselves stretched and challenged further by their day to day job. The current political culture to 'do more with less' has resulted in the collaborative venture of the schools being placed on the backburner in favour of the immediate concerns of the local sites. Unless time and direction to meaningfully collaborate are explicitly allocated it is difficult to see how this situation will ever change for teaching staff who, by the nature of their job, spend more time busy in the classroom than SLT.

ANT is utilised in this study as a methodological tool rather than a theory as such. This has allowed constant working on the data, and allowed for a sort of grounding in the findings rather than getting lost in theoretical abstraction. ANT understandings of what is important led to degree of defamiliarisation or rather a different way of thinking about

the data findings that was useful due to my position as insider. ANT pushed me to think about the research site and the policy enactment in a novel and disconcerting way, mostly because of the concept of radical symmetry and the effects of materiality. This approach was unsettling due to my prior academic background and although I found it challenging, the additional insights it offered were very interesting. The ANT approach led to actors and actants, both human and non-human, beyond my sphere of experience, and influence, being illuminated. I have supplemented ANT's focus on methodology with the work of Ball, Clarke and others on policy translation and enactment and Weick's notion of sensemaking. This has allowed me to acknowledge privilege, the lived experiences and issues of power and forms of institutional oppression to which Cultural Studies and Women's Studies attune us. ANT provides concepts that act as a sensitising lens on the data. Although the federation had been problematized relatively effectively and the need and benefits of collaboration articulated, the MAT was less easily sold to staff. Enrolment and interessement was less effective with the MAT and there was limited evidence of true mobilisation (although it was a little early in the life of the MAT to expect that). Concepts such as intermediaries and immutable mobiles demonstrated how the MAT was being enacted in practice and how the collective message of the new organisation was being transmitted and that this was patchy. Essentially ANT provided tools to aid understanding and make sense of the masses of qualitative data provided by the respondents about how the policy of MAT collaboration came to be and how it was working in practice.

ANT's principle of 'radical symmetry', the decentring of the human as the main actor in the tale was useful in many ways. This provided a language with which to describe the goings on as the schools attempted to enact a functioning MAT, and as they attempted to work together. It revealed the factors helping and hindering the process, both human and non-human. It can be applied in a non-judgemental way to illuminate the elements blocking the network formation, or those actants experiencing only ambivalent belongings. It would have been easy to blame the leaders for their lack of direction, decisiveness, poor communication and so on for why the MAT itself or the collaborative venture was not functioning as had been envisaged, and why the schools, particularly the high schools, remained suspicious and distrusting of one another. However, ANT takes a more sensitive outlook and produces insights about material conditions that ultimately may relate to other schools experiencing change than concerns levelled at the human players alone. It is descriptive not critical as Law himself explained 'Just describe the state

of affairs at hand' (Latour, 2005: 144) and thus does need additional theories to supplement it. ANT is emotionally flat, sensemaking literature added a level of emotional depth necessary to capture the reactions to policy change due to the focus on personal stories.

Evaluation of the conceptual framework *(Fig.4)*

The conceptual framework (*Fig.4*) proposed a way of fusing the theoretical elements together in order to answer the research questions and produce the case study. This is one of the theoretical contributions of this thesis. It served to illustrate the ways in which these theories extended one another. It operated in such a way as to demonstrate how the MAT was made up of layers of actor networks, not just one, and how some were moving effectively around the cycle and others were trapped by due to incoherent sensemaking and sensegiving. The red zone illustrated the form that leaky networks and ambivalent belongings took in this case, that of partially enacted policy not achieving its strategic aims to improve standards through collaboration.

Fig. 4 was conceived as an idealised cycle; I did not expect to find educational policy neatly moving all the way around it. From my own experience of working in schools, I know policy is fraught with complexities that prohibit its implementation sometimes quite unexpectedly. The diagram was designed rather to provide a tool for reflection and discussion; a way of operationalising the theories, fusing them together and providing a point of interest to question in what ways the enactment was working, or not working.

I found that in the case of the joint 6th form the policy change was struggling to move beyond policy stall. This was for many complicated reasons bound up with sociomaterial factors such as historical grievances between the schools transmitting to current staff, difficulties relating to distance between the schools and restrictions relating to lesson time. Leadership was also a limitation; the sensegiving about the need and shape of this collaboration became confused during leadership change between Principals and the loss of the joint head of 6th form. The second Principal's focus had shifted to the relationship between the MS and SRS, although this change was very subtle, and not overtly stated, it was felt by the staff. Sensegiving and problematisation needed to be stronger in this area to allow effective enrolment to occur. The push for collaboration between the 6th forms occurred during the national A level changes. This was timed purposefully to allow A Level syllabus to be matched across the schools. However, this introduced additional complications to the situation with regards to exam board choice and decisions that was

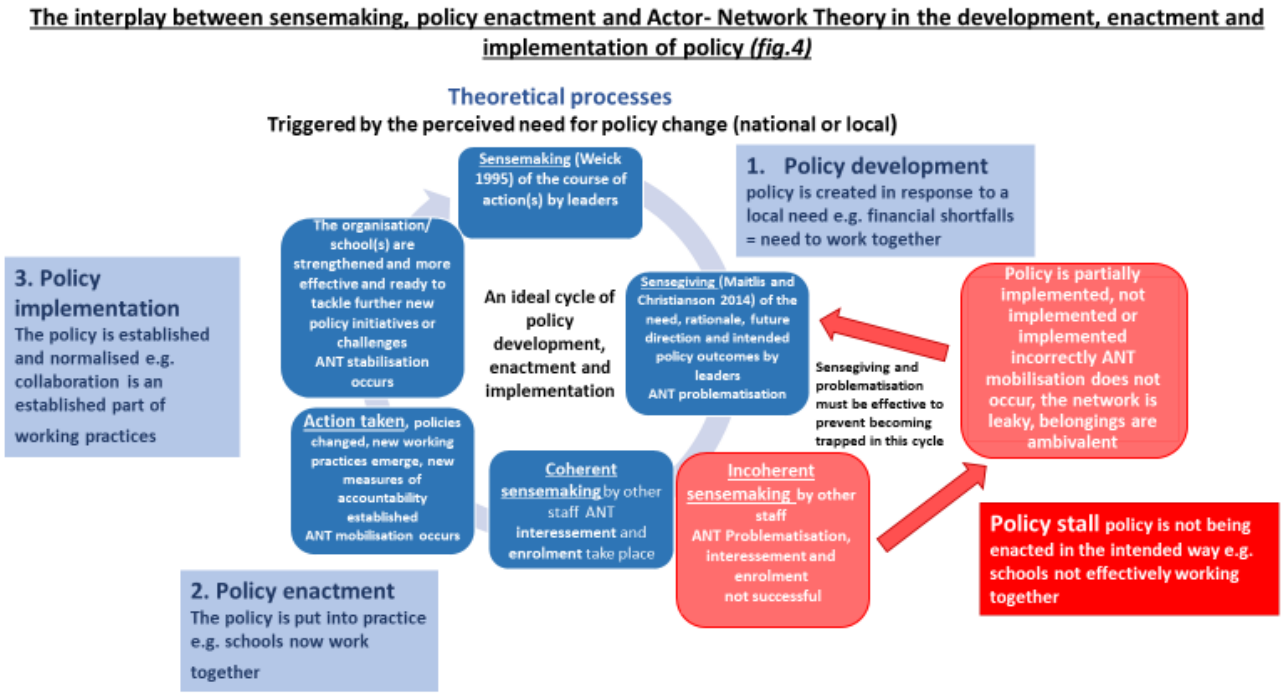
not helpful. It led to teachers experiencing a high degree of policy overload and damaged the emerging collaborative relationships.

The relationship between the MS and SRS produced a different set of relations. This moment of translation was showing early signs of moving effectively around the cycle towards stage 2 policy enactment. This set of relations demonstrated fewer signs of the problems faced in the joint 6th form. The contextual factors were more straightforward as they were feeder schools and both heads were new to post and less influenced by the historical baggage of their predecessors. In addition, the sociomaterial factors worked in their favour, their schools were geographically closer together meaning they could be seen to be present on each other's site more often. There was not the added complication of moving students between sites either. The research took place in the very first year of this emerging relationship, however the interview and focus group data suggested the signs were good. Individuals beyond the leadership teams, middle leaders and some others were beginning to experience enrolment. Collaboration and joint working between the schools was beginning to be enacted. Leadership issues were proving to be less of a problem and the political factors relating to policy contradictions and overload, at this point, did not appear to be at a damaging level. Although both schools had to ensure educational standards to secure their league table position, they did not compete with one another in the damaging way same phase schools traditionally do. However, there was a question lingering over these emerging relations concerning the number of and geographically dispersal of MS feeder schools, the MS head explained that a continuity of provision needs to be established with them if the MS is going to tackle its own educational standards. This is a clear example of competing policy initiatives. A decision will have to be made regarding the directional focus, or purpose of the investment. Will collaboration with SRS win out? Or will market values prevail as the MS protects its own position in the league tables by investing time and resources in its first schools? Can both be achieved? Time will tell. The poor relations between PRS and its feeder church MS epitomise the complexity of such cross-town school associations which should in theory be relatively straightforward but are, in this case, fraught with tensions mostly beyond PRS' control.

These differing sets of relations from within the same MAT illustrate the wider problems associated with horizontal or same phase MAT schools. The bringing together of two high schools in direct competition with one another for students and prestige was in this case, complex and messy. In contrast the vertical MAT relationships between feeder schools

were in many ways less threatening and more logical, although not necessarily easy to maintain in practice. MAT national policy encourages both types of relations, the different features of the relations, and the potential pitfalls of this management is one of the contributions of this research as they struggle to operate in a market led system.

Fig. 4 (appendix B. 5)



Contribution to theory

The conceptual framework above extends the understanding of ANT and sensemaking through their application to this case of policy enactment. Studies utilising ANT rarely look the same, it is a flexible mode of thinking, and in this case it has been used to demonstrate, or shed light upon, the difficulties faced by a set of schools as they attempt to work together through the lens of national policy enactment. Although I was attracted to ANT from my pilot study interview onwards, I always had a sense it would not be enough to reveal the full picture of what was going on here. That said, it does reveal a lot regarding issues with policy stall, offering language to explain the process of policy enactment from the very beginning; the focal actor becoming the obligatory passage point (OPP). My interviews with senior leaders demonstrated some evidence of enrolment and interessement occurring and began, in the case of the middle school and SRS to demonstrate potential for mobilisation assisted by identifiable intermediaries and

mediators. In addition, ANT insights into the effect of material actors and actants was invaluable, as it allowed me to observe goings on that moved beyond leadership issues. However, there was a gap in understanding, not just of how the focal actor became the OPP, but also how the policy could become enacted into practice. My own experience of policy implementation in schools had often been confusing and incomplete, I knew that such a significant change to practice, such cross-school collaboration, was unlikely to just 'happen'. Therefore sensemaking, and sensegiving literature and theory were important, they formed the first part of the conceptual diagram, because it was the first part of the process of policy enactment. For the policy to embed, it must first be made sense of, initially by the leaders, and this sense given to the rest of the staff. An incoherent sensemaking narrative in the initial stages will damage policy enactment and may well lead to policy stall as the interessement and enrolment are not successful. The actors remain actants and are not locked into place. Belongings to the actor network remain ambivalent, as was seen in this case study, in relation to the joint 6th form.

I aimed to produce a rounded picture of the policy enactment in this case, its successes and its failings. The combination of sensemaking and ANT have facilitated this, along with insights from Ball et al (2012) regarding the effects of context on policy enactment. The context described formed part of the material actors illuminated by ANT. Abildgaard and Nielsen (2018) investigated the how sensemaking and materiality interact in organisations undergoing change or 'work place interventions' (p5) Their findings align with my own, as they discovered that the work place interventions must be aligned with both successful sensemaking and the sociomaterial artefacts to be successful. Similar to my own conclusions regarding the incoherent sensemaking loop and policy stall in the conceptual diagram (Fig:4), Abildgaard and Nielsen note that 'sensemaking fluctuates' (2018:23) among staff and often needs to be re-established. Their research investigated the Danish Postal service undergoing a period of organisational change and found that 'being torn between two tasks…' makes the organisation defensive in their focus of their core task and as such more resistant to change of any kind. This has echoes of this research, where the policy overload facing teachers involved in the 6th form, such as the national changes to A Levels (a core task), led to the impetus for collaboration between the schools being lost. The conclusions of the Abildgaard and Nielsen study highlight the core role both context and material factors have on sensemaking and organisational change. However, although Abildgaard and Nielsen refer to the effects of the sociomaterial they do not go as far as to include ANT language or insights as I have. As far as I am aware,

ANT and sensemaking have not been used in this way before to illustrate policy enactment among a group of schools attempting to work together, and as such this is one of the main theoretical contributions of this thesis.

Rationale for selection

As with any study utilising qualitative data there are risks related to subjectivity and potential selection bias. As the analysis of qualitative data is interpretive in nature, it will, by definition, not meet the criteria applied in assessing the reliability of statistical or quantitative analysis. The use of ANT raises the inevitable question of where to 'cut the network' or 'establish boundaries around the object of enquiry' (Fenwick 2010:122). The decision regarding which bit to focus on is difficult and likely to frame the network henceforth in ways that are subjective and unnatural, creating potentially a network that exists in my eyes only. Yet the researcher must decide to cut the network somewhere to avoid it becoming 'unworkable' (Fenwick 2010:15).

There were multiple stories that could have been told here. I decided to concentrate the case study on the MAT and its enactment through collaboration to make the data more manageable and because it held the greatest interest for me due to the lack of detailed accounts on the experience of this type of policy enactment, however this has side-lined some information gathered about the federation. There was also a more human centred story about leadership and management of change, teacher vs leader's assessment and reactions to change that I found bursting from the data. I have mentioned Fullan's (2005) work on system thinking, partly as the DfE's statement of MAT aims borrows his language, and his focus on the importance of the moral imperative for effective leadership fit some of the original Principal's use of sensegiving. It has similarities with Cressman's (2009) use in ANT terms of 'System Builders' or actors who position themselves as the obligatory passage point. The work of Higham *et al* (2009) on executive leadership and federations in the context of system leadership application was also useful to build a picture of the operations of these structures and roles.

In addition, I mention distributed leadership (DL) (Spillane *et al* 2004, Thorpe *et al* 2011 and others) as a response to my observations and participants reports of the new leadership structures found in the MAT, and how that represents a change from before which may have mediated the network formation. In addition, DL theory mentions the effects of the sociocultural context which has similarities not only with Ball and the

effects of context on policy enactment, but also with ANT. Both systems thinking and DL have been subject to criticisms. Systems thinking or leadership has at its core the 'great man' theory, the central leader which is, as we have seen here, not always sustainable in the tricky policy climate of education. Harris warns of a 'dark side' of DL 'if power, influence and authority are misused or abused' (Harris 2013:551). I decided not to focus heavily on either of these theories, using them as supplementary rather than a primary focus, as there was more going on in this research site connected to the wider politics of policy change rather than leadership as such. I wished in this thesis to open the discussion up more widely and step outside more conventional leadership texts to explore enactment of policy on the ground.

In addition, there is a body of work surrounding school collaboration, the benefits of, how to make it work in practice that once again could have been included. The practicalities of school collaboration, although an important element of this case, are not the whole story. This research reveals experiences of enacting the national policy of the MAT in this local context including issues relating to increased accountability as well as collaboration. How the schools have reconciled the increased workload and pressure demands related to the business side of the academy trust whilst simultaneously attempting to mobilise the staff to work together; a story of the experiences of policy enactment. I found that the management of collaboration literature was less insightful to explain this process than sensemaking and ANT literature. I explored work such as Welch (1998) examination of the benefits and barriers of collaboration, and Tschannen- Moran (2001) finding of organisational citizenship as a mediating factor for effective collaboration. In addition, literature focussing on the importance of trust for collaborative action such as Vangen and Huxham (2003) who mention 'collaborative advantage' for organisations with healthy trust levels and similarly Blomqvist and Levy (2006) 'collaboration capability as a competitive advantage' for organisations. However, I elected not to include them as they were more practical than theoretical and did not enhance the discussion in a way, I felt warranted their inclusion.

Insider researcher concerns

As an insider researcher I considered my position both privileged and unsettling. On the one hand it may have compounded the issue of bias as I was privy to knowledge and insights that could cloud the process of interpretation during data analysis. I was emotionally attached to this research site, it was my place of work, and I invested a decade here in the students, staff and school. I have never tried to disguise this fact, and it

formed part of my rationale for adopting an ethnographic tone in the descriptions include in the write up to make evident my involvement. I designed the account to include rich description of the setting of the interviews to provide a sense of realism and immediacy. Furthermore, my position as insider researcher may have tempered the questions I asked, particularly during the elite interviews to avoid awkward professional situations or appearing to be uncollegiate.

However, my insider position also provided several advantages. It provided leverage with regards to participant access, it allowed me to secure interviews with very busy individuals. For instance, the MS head's interview had to be rescheduled four times and I suspect had the interviewer not been a member of staff he would have been less keen to repeatedly keep trying to meet. In addition, as I knew the research participants (with the exception of a few of SRS focus group members) rapport was not an issue, participant's quickly relaxed and divulged information I requested. There was a level of trust certainly in the elite interviews that as an individual invested in the schools myself, I was unlikely to 'sell them out' or approach the findings with negative or unjustly critical lens. This I believe led them all to provide more honest answers about the struggles they were facing or had faced. This could be viewed as a potential site of bias, but I would argue better that trust is established in this way allowing difficulties to be discussed, than be interviewed by a stranger and elicit no more than the professional party line.

When engaging in insider research projects one must walk a tightrope, be constantly mindful of the politics of the institution and my place in it with regards to questions asked. I also ensured I asked the bare minimum I had to of the research participants to not encroach on their time significantly. Once data collection was completed, I attempted to slip as far under the radar as possible to enable me to complete the write up with minimal interference. In the time following my data collection I rarely mentioned the doctorate to other staff, and this was useful as it minimised the risk of accidentally mentioning a finding or quoting from a confidential interview. It also avoids contamination of the data or my interpretation of it by well-meaning advice from others.

Teacher vs researcher: management and acceptance of the dual role

It is not easy being a teacher and a researcher. There have been times where I felt the roles were merging into one, and times where I felt they were at odds with one another. This status conflict is echoed in my reluctance to name the 'elites' and the ease at which I

could name the focus group teachers. This reflected my position in the research site, as one of the teachers subordinate to the elites. Although I was dealing with my workplace as a research site sometimes, I never fully broke away from my primary role as teacher. Similarly, I did not rename the schools involved but remained with my original labelling; PRS, SRS and MS. PRS stands for Primary Research site/school for two reasons. Firstly, as this was the school the original Principal came from and the one who initiated the changes, secondly the largest amount of data came from individuals closely related to this school; the Head and focus group members, the original Principal and the Business Manager. Thirdly, it was the school I worked at and thus from my perspective was primary, the name is partially in recognition of my positioning at the site. SRS stood for Secondary research Site/ School, the second MAT high school, secondary in terms of amount of data collected but also secondary to me as I did not work there. The MS or Middle School kept its name as a reminder of the three-tier system and that this research site had this important quirk. The decisions relating to the naming of respondents and schools were designed to leave subtle reminders of my position within all of this.

It is hard enough to complete a doctorate whilst continuing to work full time, but to investigate the place you work at brings additional challenges. Prior to beginning the research, I had some awareness of the potential trials ahead; however, my biggest challenge was one that I could never have seen coming and has coloured the research findings significantly. When I decided to undertake a doctorate examining PRS and its relationships with other schools, it was an outstanding school. Sadly, like many things in education, this did not last. The years that followed saw redundancies surpass what anyone would have predicted, even in times of austerity. The staff body was reduced substantially. In 2016 my department were affected by the redundancy process and although I gained a head of faculty position from it, the experience was stressful and upsetting. This coincided with my year in the field, and knowing I had to complete the research before September of that year to satisfy the ethics panel added further pressure. This was probably one of the biggest challenges of my professional career, continuing to interview elites with redundancy looming in the background, and to lead focus groups containing staff who had lost or been on the verge of losing their jobs. This situation meant that the data that was produced at this time was very sensitive to me, and so I made the decision to take a leave of absence for 9 months, tackle my new job role and get some distance from the data. I was then able to throw myself back into the write up with renewed vigour and energy. In hindsight I firmly believe the struggles I had at that time

instilled a steadfast determination to ensure the completion of the thesis to ensure it was not all for nothing.

The development or direction of an organisation or workplace can rarely be reliably predicted and sometimes steps must be taken to protect oneself from the potential damage of sensitive data. I read a substantial amount of literature concerning insider researcher ethics and approaches. This did not however adequately prepare me to deal with participants who have been, or are being damaged by restructuring, especially when you are one of them. Although painful and stressful at times my position as insider researcher has captured a difficult time in the schools in a raw and uncut way. The focus group participants knew I had been through the redundancy process and thus shared their experiences frankly and openly. The Kubler Ross change curve was a very useful tool as it focussed the discussion and was cathartic for both them and me as by its nature it suggests the situation will improve. The interview with PRS head teacher, delayed till July to allow the redundancy process to be competed, ended up being incredibly reflective and honest on his behalf and I am convinced produced richer data due to the nature and circumstances of its timing (and probably smoothed the waters of our own relationship). The nature of the changes experienced in the schools at this time has given the research findings a greater emotional pull and has highlighted the human effect the national push towards academisation can have on staff. Educational literature dealing with MATs success is measured through the quantifiable benefits to students, I have found very little containing the teacher voice or experiences.

Of course, I would never have deliberately chosen to complete my field work under these circumstances, however rather than the data suffering because of it, this led me to treat it with increased care and respect. It has added to the social action nature of the project, as it became of moral imperative to represent the voices of bruised and damaged professionals, the victims of austerity and the voices that are largely absent from literature in this area of public policy. In chapter 4 I explained this research was about 'learning and making a difference' (Smyth and Holian in Sikes and Potts 2008:35), and those are the effects it has had on me.

During my EdD process I developed 'multiple identities' (Drake and Heath 2008:140) of both researcher and teacher but as time progressed, the researcher began to dominate. I agree with Breen who suggests that the 'role of the researcher is better conceptualised as on a continuum, rather than an either/or dichotomy' and the insider/outsider dichotomy

is simplistic' (2007:165). I found myself, like Breen in her research, 'in the middle' isolated from my colleagues by my researcher status and interests but yet also cut off from the HE environment by my job as teacher. I feel a loyalty towards the schools, teachers and SLT, however I am equally loyal to my own findings, however uncomfortable they may be. This is described as 'multiple integrities' (Drake and Heath 2008:140) and is commonly found with insider researchers. This took me a while to recognise and reconcile but led, in part, to my resignation to pursue my HE interests. I felt by 2018, as Miss Hay, I had done all I could in this school setting.

The following section will reflect upon my changing attitudes towards the MAT and end with policy suggestions drawn from these research findings.

The welcome MAT?

I began this research journey with a determinedly anti-academy opinion. I trained to teach in 2007, at a time when academy schools were invariably the sponsored business type that had poor reputations for staff treatment and turnover. My formative early career years were spent at PRS, led by the original Executive Principal, who further cemented my views though his proclamations of 'over my dead body' would PRS become an academy. I was also influenced by the national press, who reported almost weekly about some academy related scandal or other, related to financial irregularities, nepotism, hiring of unqualified teachers and controversial curriculum choices due to the freedom from the national curriculum academies enjoy. By 2017 academy chains facing bankruptcy began handing back schools to the DfE. This included 12 Education Fellowship Trust schools and 21 schools from the Wakefield City Academies Trust (George 2017b: online). As a result, working in an academy school never felt like a desirable career move.

But time moves on as do policies and priorities. The introduction of the convertor academy in 2010, encouraged good and outstanding schools to convert, and many did, due to the promise of financial autonomy and freedom from a sponsor. Yet despite this change in policy direction by the time I left PRS for the final time in December 2018, my own research findings had reinforced my negative attitude towards all academy schools. I was at a loss as to why any school would willingly subject themselves to the burden and complexity of academy conversion, although I understood why avoidance of an academy order (and sponsor) was preferable. The MAT seemed the only way to retain what little control the school felt it had left, I was told this explicitly by the leaders.

My research has shown that converting to a MAT, which, in this case, involved putting several schools through the conversion process at the same time, whilst also convincing the staff it was a good idea is a phenomenally difficult job. This is so even when most staff agree that there is a moral purpose to collaborate for the good of all students in the town. The data found here suggests collaboration across schools in the same town will not simply just happen, even with the best of intent and apparently sound rationale. Even when the schools are relatively close to one another in distance, socio- material factors may still hinder relations.

In addition to this, the largest recent policy shift, The Multi-Academy Trust, collaboration and changes to accountability measures, was only one part of a myriad of policy changes found to be engulfing this group of schools. I found all levels of the organisation struggling to keep up with, and make sense of, the breadth and extent of policy change and their role within it. At times they felt miles away from the 'family of schools' envisaged by Ofsted (2019:13) even though in a cross-town setting such as this it could (and should) make perfect sense.

Through the hours and hours of dialogue and narratives, stories and experiences revealed by my respondents, I found I was not the only one looking at the academy and questioning '**what have we done?**'

Now time has passed, and I sit far away from my old wooden classroom and the wind moving through the trees.

I wonder, **what next?**

Not just for these schools, but all the MATs in England.

And I began to realise, my opinion of the MAT had changed.

The insider steps outside

I have now spent over a year away from the schools, and in that year I have thought carefully about my research questions and findings; about the policy of a 'cross town' collaboration and the difficulties associated with enacting this into practice, about why the federation did not suffice in this case and the potential of small or medium chain MAT's serving local communities.

My view of the MAT was heavily influenced by my early career experiences and latterly the feelings of uncertainty, pain and confusion experienced during the conversion. This

included the trauma of the redundancies, the leadership change, the lack of direction, the backtracking with regards to the joint 6th form and the shift of focus to year 8 and 9 transition. This was compounded by the attempts to enact MAT policies that were paradoxical and contradictory, they changed practices in a way that seemed to be a hinderance to the running of the school and made many staff question their vocational purpose. This was all captured by my research data and because of this I relived it during the years spent locked in analysis and thesis write up. In the months after I left the school, I remained immersed in the data to such an extent I remained an insider, gripped by the task of interpreting the trauma of the conversion, and questioning how it was ever going to work. It was only once I had completed a full draft of the thesis that I was at last able to gain some perspective and begin to let go of the 'multiple integrities' (Drake and Heath 2008:140) I experienced as insider researcher and teacher and adopt the perspective of a (well informed) outsider. This transition brought a different kind of insight, one less bound up in the gritty everyday difficulties of working in the schools, which at that time involved enacting multiple new policies beyond that related to the MAT. It was only once I was free from this that I was able to consider the potential of these local collaborative relationships and see the progress that was being made to embed them. Only then, was I able to consider the implications my research findings could have on national MAT policy.

Policy suggestions

The policy suggestions emerging from this research fall under two interrelated themes:

1. Redefining or refocussing the aims of MATs regarding standards improvement (from competition to local collaboration)
2. The establishing of locally centred multi-phase MATs with collaborative aims tailored to the type of relationship (i.e. same phase or feeder school)

1. Redefining the national aims of MATs

Now I am no longer in the midst of working in the school, I can see that the disruptive effects of the policy changes I captured (and experienced) were (perhaps) only temporary. They represent a brief period in the history of the schools and although progress felt slow in the following years, it was being made. More local schools began to join the MAT, the potential for the 'all through curriculum' was becoming closer to being realised. However,

a major weakness in this MAT remained; the missing church middle school and the first schools who had already joined different Trusts. Without a policy shift from the DfE it is likely these will continue to be gaps in the system. Minimising or eradicating those gaps is the next essential step to create a three-tier system fit for modern educational demands. The DfE have made it difficult for schools to leave MAT's once they have joined them. This is part of the appeal in a way, it adds permanence to the structure. However, in cases such as this, it would be logical for the first schools to be allowed to move to the locally based chain, and the church middle school to join them. As it stands there is no way of leaving a MAT once you have joined, unless performance issues force the Regional Schools Commissioner and DfE to act. Brook (2017) argues 'in the long term, the absence of an established exit route for any school in a Trust (other than those deemed failing) must surely be a major barrier to system improvement, by restricting, not unleashing, potential' (Brook 2017). Although I recognise there are other ways schools can collaborate that do not involve a MAT, in this case *'an invisible non-existent barrier'* was reported to have appeared between MAT and non-MAT schools. This suggests productive collaborative relations are mediated by the sense of belonging to specific MAT chains.

Despite the mixed findings of this study, captured at the tricky point of conversion, in a system with gaps (missing schools), I suggest the direction of future MAT policy should champion local schools working together for local concerns. Research discussed in chapter 2 suggests the effect of school to school collaboration on standards improvement is mixed (Muijs and Rumyantseva 2014). However, research conducted by Chapman et al (2011) found the positive effects of collaboration took several school cycles to embed. Similarly, Male (2017) found that a number of MATs are still 'mainly focussed on structure, growth and sustainability rather than inter-school collaboration' (cited in Greatbatch and Tate 2019:5). The conclusion that 'the system needs a degree of maturity before opportunities for collaboration … [are] feasible' (Greatbatch and Tate 2019:5) receives strong corroboration from this study. It is reflected in my research experiences, the year spent in the field which coincided with academy conversion, when collaborative relationships were just forming. The promising relations between SRS and the middle school were beginning to demonstrate the potential in a system such as this. Every town is likely to have educational areas of weakness, perhaps low literacy levels as was evidenced in this case, or high SEN needs, or the effects of poverty and deprivation. A combined policy response (across local schools) would be beneficial and go some way to filling the gap left by the LA, who would in the past had a holistic understanding of local

needs. In addition to this, Muijs suggests such collaborations can help to avoid 'myopia' where but the 'shared perceptions of reality may be closed to external influences' (Muijs 2015:294) allowing the organisations sensemaking to extend beyond their context and as such build capital.

There is recent policy precedent and research evidence of the emergence of local based MATs and local school collaborations. Ofsted (2019) found that some MATs had begun to work with one another on shared curriculum and a coordinated behaviour management training and approaches (p12) and were keen 'to be part of a 'family of schools' with similar values and ambitions to them' (p13). Similarly, the DfE are supportive of local based MATs and aware of the effect geography can have on the success of collaborative relationships. They recommend MATs try to avoid becoming too dispersed and state, 'most trusts find that a local focus, or a series of local hubs, makes it easier to communicate, share good practice, and create a common ethos within a trust' (DfE, 2016b:22). Gilbert, in her 'think piece' on the development of local area-based education partnerships suggests that 'partnerships have the potential to reduce the risk of fragmentation and dangers of isolationism in an increasingly diverse system' (Gilbert 2017:3). These partnerships are often more informal than would be found in a MAT, likened to a 'family or club membership' their 'commitment stems from pride in, and a sense of belonging to a place, as well as a strong moral purpose to do the best for all the children… in the local community' (Gilbert 2017:4). Similarly, Greany and Higham identified 'local clusters' of interschool partnerships in England, often 'fluid and voluntary' (Greany and Higham 2018:70). I suggest local MATs should be encouraged to adopt these sentiments and approaches. This will continue to support the 'self-improving school-led system' (Greany 2015:129) by allowing schools to concentrate on local needs and support one another in doing so.

Greatbatch and Tate in their 2019 review of school-to school support identified further DfE initiatives that support local schools working together. Many of these however took an interventionist tone and were directed at schools in challenging circumstances. Examples include 'Place-based school-led improvement' built around targeted 'opportunity areas' (Greatbatch and Tate 2019:18) usually found in cities, receiving a 3-year cycle of additional funding to counteract the educational effects of depravation. I would like to see such intervention targeted beyond so called 'challenging' areas. As this research has shown even 'good' schools face challenges (such as found here with regards to lack of time to invest in collaborative relationships) that could be alleviated with

additional funding. Similarly, Muijs argues that the focus on urban schools rather than rural schools needs to be addressed; as performance data indicates improvements in cities, whilst 'smaller towns and rural counties are underperforming' (Muijs 2015:297). He suggests this is in part due to the specific challenges faced by rural schools for example 'limited aspirations' and the 'perception of less of a relationship between school and work' among 'rural youth' than their 'urban peers' (2015:297). The schools that form this case study are rural, and their struggles demonstrate a need for additional support.

The research from Ofsted in 2019 cited earlier suggests there is huge variability in the way academies are run. This implies the national policy aims of MATs needs redefining or refocusing. The burden of increased accountability and financial auditing that academies are subject to is inescapable, but priorities do need to shift. This research revealed many paradoxes inherent in the MAT national policy that hindered day to day practice. These included increased financial accountability and less control, questions regarding the infiltration of business principles in school vs. the purpose of schooling, the human cost of academisation. All had their roots in the conflicting policy aims of the MAT which encouraged school to school collaboration and the promotion of market values and competition. Greany (2015b) points out 'trust needed' for effective collaboration between schools 'is hard to develop in quasi-market system, with competition so deeply embedded' (Greany 2015b:7). Competition has had inconclusive effects on standards improvement (Gilbert 2017:5) and leads to an increasingly fragmented system of separate academies. To counteract this, I suggest collaboration, specifically local collaboration, between schools serving the same area should be made a key priority. Alongside this the *'needless and ridiculous competition'* identified by the original Principal should be ended. It wastes time, resources and damages trust and as a result the emerging collaborative relations. This would involve a subtle shift in thinking about MATs, and a change in their national policy aims. The DfE have a clear role here to shape the academies programme in such a way that it supports local community schools, rather than instilling them with fear and uncertainty paradoxically creating barriers to effective collaborative working and as a result, standards improvement.

2. Multi-phase MATs with tailored aims

This research has revealed there are different tensions to manage related to the type of schools involved in the collaboration. Relationships between the feeder schools, should be more straightforward to establish as they share a common body of students, but even

these can be fraught with difficulties related to directional focus. This is more acutely felt in three-tier systems where a middle school must balance the demands of their feeders (the first schools) with the demands of the high school. Both Executive Principals and the high school Heads admitted the greatest source of tension in the MAT was the relationship between the high schools. This was supported by day to day examples from the teachers in the focus groups. It is more difficult to make sense of cross phase relationships, and to frame these in a way that makes clear the benefits of such relations, beyond that of resource sharing which can largely be done in house. In the promotion of local MAT's, it is likely many will contain both cross phase and same phase relations as is found in this case. One way to manage the different tensions found in the forming collaborative relations is to ensure the policy expectations are explicitly different. Feeder school collaborations could focus on school to school transition and readiness for the next key stage via the development of an 'all through curriculum'. This will allow a coherent curriculum to be built across schools, avoiding needless repetition of content and encouraging students to continue to progress at a steady rate as they change schools. Same phase collaboration should focus on building a sense of community and belonging, through shared staff CPD, resource sharing and, if necessary, some shared teaching. It should be written into the policy that these collaborations are built upon developmental and supportive principles, and not competitive ones. They should work to develop a common ethos and set of core values, actively breaking down rivalries through the modelling the values of inclusion from staff level down to the student body and parent community. This recommendation links to the need to redefine the contradictory aims of the national MAT policy above.

The research findings suggest schools need more support (such as additional finding to free up more teacher time) as they begin to enact the academies policy and manage the 'system unsettling potential' (Van der Vegt 2000:12) of the changes to practice this entails. This support must be carefully executed by the DfE to promote a coherent local school collaboration rather than the fragmented disjointed picture of isolated Trusts that is currently being built in many areas.

Summary of the key policy suggestions emerging from this research:

1. The conflicting current MAT policy aims encouraging collaboration between schools whilst also encouraging market values, and competition, should be rewritten. School-to-school collaboration across local areas should be a key priority to raise educational standards.
2. MAT's serving local areas (cross town, or local communities) should be recognised as a distinct type and encouraged. Part of their distinctiveness is that they include schools of all key stages to enable them to embed an 'all through curriculum'. This will alleviate some of the damage of transition and ensure no needless subject repetition. Where schools in local areas belong to different MAT's, they should be released from their chains and encouraged to join each other. This process should be made transparent and straightforward by the DfE.
3. MAT expectations regarding the outcomes of collaborative relationships between same phase schools and feeder schools should be explicitly different. Feeder school collaborations should focus on school to school transition and readiness for the next key stage. Same phase collaboration should focus on building a sense of community and belonging, through staff CPD, resource sharing and, if necessary, some shared teaching to allow for economies of scale.

MATs have become the dominant model of schooling in England, but they vary enormously regarding their 'structures and reach' (Greatbatch and Tate 219:3). This research has captured a group of schools as they chose to enact the MAT policy in a specific way, building on local school-to school collaborations to improve standards. It has also revealed the many difficulties associated with bringing local schools together. Yet, despite this I believe that the promotion of local cross -town MATs could work to raise educational standards in a collaborative and coherent way and prevent further fragmentation of provision resulting from the academies programme and reduction of the Local Authority.

Epilogue

As I reached the end of my write up phase for this thesis, I was reminded via social media of an event that had taken place exactly seven years before, just prior to the beginning of my doctoral journey. It was 2012, the first year of the newly formed federation and a joint inset day was arranged. It took place at SRS and involved both high schools, and both middle schools. An online platform was created, and teachers signed up for workshops, delivered by selected staff members from each school. I led one designed to discuss ways we could tackle low student aspirations. My audience included a mix of staff from each school, offering differing perspectives, experiences and insights into how we could collectively raise the aspirations of the students in the town. In the afternoon I led a social science cross faculty meeting, and for the first time was able to discuss with my counterparts from SRS and the church middle school continuity of subject provision across the ages and phases. The day concluded with a whole staff meeting in the sports hall. It included a video of all the activities that had taken place, peppered with smiling faces, cooperation, conversations and hope.

Similar meetings took place up to the MAT conversion in 2016 when they ceased completely. Yet none captured the mood of optimism and willingness that was evident in that first event. No other inset day allowed such direct contact between teachers of all four schools, and facilitated conversations framed by respect for our shared values and differences, and optimism for change.

I hope some of those who read this will remember that day in 2012 or will at least imagine it. The promise and the potential of collaboration that we felt before the distractions, restrictions and complications of the MAT.

This was the context in which I began my doctorate and I feel it is fitting to end with it.

As a reflection of what could have been perhaps, or of what yet may be.

Alex Hay

October 2019

Bibliography.

Academic references; books and journals

Abildgaard, J. and Nielsen, K.M. (2018) *'The interplay of sensemaking and material artefacts during interventions: A case study' Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies,* Vol 8 (3) pp. 5-26

Adonis A. (2012) *Education, Education, Education: Reforming England's Schools* London: Biteback publishing.

Allard-Poesi F. (2005) *'The Paradox of Sensemaking in Organizational Analysis' Organization* Vol. 12 (2) pp 169–196.

Ancona D. (2012) *'Sensemaking: Framing and Acting in the Unknown' in* Snook S. Nohria N. Knurana R (Eds) *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership: Knowing, Doing Being* London: Sage, *pp 3-20.*

Armstrong R. and Ainscow M. (2018) *'School-to-school support within a competitive education system: views from the inside' School Effectiveness and School Improvement* Vol.29(4), pp 614-633.

Atkinson P. and Hammersley M. (1994), *'Ethnography and Participant Observation' in* Denzin, N.K, Lincoln Y.S. (Eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp 248–261.

Baiocchi G. Graizbord D. and Rodriguez-Muniz M. (2013) *'Actor-Network Theory and the ethnographic imagination: An exercise in translation' Qualitative Sociology* Vol. 36, pp 323-341.

Ball S. J. (2008) *The Education Debate* Bristol: Polity Press

Ball S. Maguire M. and Braun A. (2012) *How Schools do Policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools* Oxon: Routledge.

Balogun J. Bartunek J and Do B. (2015) *'Senior managers' Sensemaking and Responses to Strategic Change' Organisation Science* Vol 26 (4) pp 960-979

Barbour S. (1999) *'Are Focus Groups an Appropriate Tool for Studying Organisational Change?' in* Barbour S. and Kitzinger J. (Eds) *Developing Focus Group Research* London: Sage, pp 114-126.

Barker B. (2010) *The Pendulum Swings: Transforming School Reform* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Barker C. (2000) *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* London: Sage.

Bash L. and David C. (1989) *The Education Reform Act* London: Cassell. Bauman Z. and May T. (2001) *Thinking Sociologically* 2nd ed Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Bell L. and Stevenson H. (2015) *'Towards an analysis of the policies that shape public education: Setting the context for school leadership' Management in Education* Vol.29(4), pp 146–150.

Bell M. Jopling M. Cordingley P. Firth A. King E. and Mitchell H. (2006) *What is the impact on pupils of networks that include at least three schools? What additional benefits are there for practitioners, organisations and the communities they serve?* National College for School Leadership.

Bellinger A. and Krieger D. (2016) *Organizing Networks: An Actor- Network Theory of Organisations* Transcript Verlag Bielefeld.

Benn M. (2011) *School Wars: The Battle for Britain's Education* London: Verso.

Berg B.L. and Lune H. (2006) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* London*:* Peach Pit Press.

Blomqvist K. and Levy J. (2006) *'Collaborative Capability – a focal concept in knowledge creation and collaboration in networks' International Journal of Management Concepts and Philosophy* Vol. 2(2), pp 31-48.

Bolden R. (2011) Distributed Leadership in Organisations A Review of Theory and Research International Journal of Management reviews Vol 13, pp 251-269

Borgatti S. and Halgin D. (2011) *'On Network Theory' Organisational Science* Vol 22 (4) pp 1168-1181

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006*). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'. Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol.3, pp 77–101.

Breen L (2007) *'The researcher 'in the middle': Negotiating the insider/outsider dichotomy' Australian Community Psychologist* Vol. 19(1), pp 163-174.

Brown A. and Humphreys M. (2003) *'Epic and Tragic Tales: Making Sense of Change'* The *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* Vol. 36(2), pp 210-228.

Brown A. Colville I. and Pye A. (2015) *'Making sense of Sensemaking in Organisation Studies' Organisation Studies* Vol. 36(2), pp 12-32.

Bryman A. (2012) *Social Research Methods* (4th Ed) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burke P. and Kirton A (2006) *'The Insider Perspective: teachers as researchers' Reflecting Education* Vol. 2(1), pp 1-4.

Callon M. (1986) *Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay* in Law J. *Power, Action and Belief: a new sociology of knowledge?* London: Routledge pp 196-223.

Callon M. and Law J. (1982) *'On Interests and Their Transformation: Enrolment and Counter-Enrolment' Social Studies of Science* Vol. 12(4), pp 615-625.

Cambell M. and Gregor F. (2008) *Mapping Social Relations: A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Carnall C.A. (1999) *Managing Change in Organizations (*3rd Ed) London: Prentice Hall.

Chan J. (2007) '*Making sense of police reforms' Theoretical Criminology* Vol.11(3), pp 323–345.

Chapman C, Lindsay G, Muijs D, Harris A, Arweck E, and Goodall J. (2010) '*Governance, Leadership and Management in Federations of Schools' School Effectiveness and School Improvement* Vol. 21 (1), pp 53-74.

Chapman C. and Muijs D. *(2013) 'Does school-to-school collaboration promote school improvement? A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes' School Effectiveness and School Improvement An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice* Vol. 25(3), pp 351-393.

Chapman C. Lindsay G. Muijs D. Harris A. Arweck E. and Goodall J. (2010) '*Governance, Leadership and Management in Federations of Schools' School Effectiveness and School Improvement* Vol. 21 (1), pp 53-74.

Chapman C. Muijs D. and MacAllister J. (2011) *A study of the impact of school federation on student outcomes* The National College for School Leadership

Clark S. and O'Donoghue T. (2017) '*Educational Leadership and Context: A Rendering of an Inseparable Relationship' British Journal of Educational Studies* Vol. 65(2), pp 167-182

Clarke J. Bainton D. Lendvai N. and Stubbs P. (2015) *Making Policy Move Towards a Politics of Translation and Assemblage* Bristol: Polity Press.

Coldron J. Crawford M. Jones S. and Simkins T. (2014) '*The Restructuring of Schooling in England: The Responses of well- positioned headteachers' Educational Management Administration and Leadership* Vol. 42 (3), pp 387–403.

Conti J.A. and O'Neil M. (2007) '*Studying Power: Qualitative Methods and the Global Elite' Qualitative research* Vol. 7, pp 63 -72.

Cordella A. and Shaikh M. (2006) '*From Epistemology to Ontology: Challenging the Constructed Truth of ANT*' Department of Information Systems Working Paper Series, No. 143, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Costly C. Elliott G. and Gibbs P. (2011) *Doing Work Based Research Approaches to Enquiry for Insider-Researchers* London: Sage.

Crawford M. (2012) '*Solo and Distributed leadership: Definitions and Dilemmas' Educational management Administration and Leadership* Vol.40 (5), pp 610-620.

Cressman D. (2009) *A brief overview of Actor-Network Theory: Punctualization, Heterogeneous Engineering and Translation* Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology (CPROST) Catalogue 09-01 Simon Frasier University http://summit.sfu.ca/item/13593

Cropper S. (1996) '*Collaborative Working and the Issues of Sustainability'* In C. Huxham (Ed.) *Creating Collaborative Advantage* London: Sage pp 80-100.

Cussins C. (1996) '*Ontological Choreography: Agency through Objectification in Infertility Clinics' Social Studies of Science* Vol. 26 pp 575-510

Daugherty R. (1995) *National Curriculum Assessment: A Review of Policy 1987-1994* London: The Falmer Press.

De Sousa Santos B. (2004) *The Future of the World Social Forum: A User's Manual* https://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf (accessed 21/23/2018)

Deem R. and Brehony K.J. (1994) '*Why Didn't You Use a Survey so You Could Generalise Your Findings? Methodological issues in a multiple site case study of school governing bodies after the 1988 Education Reform Act' in* Halpin D. and Troyna B. (Eds) *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues* London: The Falmer Press pp 154-169.

Degn L. (2015) '*Sensemaking, sensegiving and strategic management in Danish higher education' Higher Education* Vol 69 (6), pp 901-913.

Delyser D. (2001) '*"Do You Really Live Here?" Thoughts on Insider Research' Geographical Review* 91(1-2), pp 441–453.

Denscombe M. (2010) *Ground Rules for Social Research: Guidelines for Good Practice* Berkshire: Open University Press.

DeSantis, L. and Ugarriza, D. (2000). The concept of theme as used in qualitative nursing research. Western Journal of Nursing Research, Vol:22, pp 351–372.

Devailt M. (2006) '*Introduction: What is Institutional Ethnography?' Social problems* Vol. 53(3), pp 294–298.

Dhillon J.K. (2013) '*Senior Manager's Perspectives of leading and managing Effective, Sustainable and Successful Partnerships' Educational Management Administration & Leadership* Vol: 41(6), pp 736 – 750.

Drake P. and Health L. (2008) '*Insider Research in schools and universities: The case of the professional doctorate'* from Sikes p. and Potts A. (eds.) *Researching Education from the Inside: Investigations from within* Routledge: London pp 127-123.

Fenwick T. (2010a) '*Reading Educational Reform with Actor- Network Theory: Fluid Spaces, Otherings, and Ambivalences' Education Philosophy and Theory*, Vol.43 (s1), pp 1-14.

Fenwick T. (2010b) '*(un)Doing standards in Education with Actor-Network Theory' Journal of Educational Policy* Vol 25 (2), pp 117-133.

Fenwick T. and Edwards R. (2010) *Actor – Network Theory in Education* London: Routledge.

Fenwick T. and Edwards R. (2012) *Researching Education Through Actor-Network Theory* London: Wiley Blackwell.

Fenwick T. Edwards R. and Sawchuck P. (2011) *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the Sociomaterial* London: Routledge.

Fullan M (2004) *System thinkers in action: moving beyond the standards plateau* DfES publications in partnership with the National College for School Leadership

Fullan M. (2005) *Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action* London: Sage.

Fulsang L. and Jagd S. (2015) '*Making sense of institutional trust in organisations: Bridging institutional context and trust' Organisation* Vol. 22(1), pp 23–39.

Gerwirtz S. Whitty G. and Edwards T. (1992) '*City Technology Colleges: Schooling for the Thatcher Generation?' British Journal of Educational Studies* Vol XXXX (3), pp 0007-1005.

Ghodsee K. (2016) *From Notes to Narrative: Writing Ethnographies that Everyone Can Read* London: University of Chicago Press

Giddens A. (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory* Berkley: University of California Press.

Giddens A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilbert C. (2017) *Optimism of the will: the development of local area-based education partnerships. A think piece London:* London Centre for Leadership in Learning.

Gioia D.A. and Chittipeddi K. (1991) '*Sensemaking and Sensegiving in Strategic Change' Initiation Strategic Management Journal* Vol. 12, pp 433-448.

Glatter R. (2012) Persistent preoccupations: the rise and rise of school autonomy and accountability in England. Educational Management Administration & Leadership. Vol. 40(5), pp 559–575.

Goffman E. (1959) *The Presentation of Everyday Self in Everyday Life* London: Penguin Books.

Granovetter M. (1973) '*The strength of weak ties' Amer J. Sociol*. Vol 78 (6) pp 1360 – 1380

Greany T. (2015) '*More fragmented, and yet more networked: Analysing the response of two Local Authorities in England to the Coalition's 'self-improving school-led system' reforms' London Review of Education* Vol 13 (2), pp 125-143.

Greany T. (2015b) '*The Self-Improving School System in England: A Review of Evidence and Thinking* Leicester: ASCL and UCL

Greany T. and Higham R. (2018) *Hierarchy , Markets and Networks: Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' an agenda in England and the implications for schools* London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Grey B. Stensaker I. and Jansen K. (2012) *'Qualitative Challenges for Complexifying Organisational Change Research: Context, Voice and Time' Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* Vol 48(2) pp 121-134

Harris A. (2013) '*Distributed Leadership: Friend or Foe?' Educational Management Administration and Leadership* Vol. 41(5), pp 545-554.

Hartley J. (2004) *Case Study Research* in Cassell C. and Symon G. *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research* Sage: London

Harvey W.S. (2011) '*Strategies for Conducting Elite Interviews' Qualitative Research* Vol. 11(4), pp 431–441.

Hellawell D. (2006) '*Inside-out: analysis of the insider-outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research' Teaching in Higher Education* Vol. 11(4), pp 483-494.

Higham R. and Earley P. (2013) '*School Autonomy and Government Control: School Leaders Views on a Changing Policy Landscape in England' Education Management Administration and Leadership* Vol. 36(2), pp 271–288.

Higham R. Hopkins D. and Matthews P. (2009) *System leadership in Practice* Berkshire: Open University Press

Hill M. and Hupe P. (2003) *Implementing Public Policy: Governance in Theory and in Practice* London: Sage.

Hill R. Dunford J. Parish N. Rea S. and Sandals L. (2012) *The growth of academy chains: implications for leaders and leadership* The National College for School Leadership.

Hinds D. (2000) '*Research Instruments*' *in* Wilkinson D. (Eds) *The Researchers Toolkit: The Complete Guide to Practioner Research* London: RoutlegeFalmer pp 41-54.

Hutchings M. Greenwood C. Hollingworth S. Rose A. Minty S. and Glass K. (2012) *Evaluation of the City Challenge programme* DfE, London: Institute for Policy Studies in Education.

Jenkins R. (2002) *Foundations of Sociology* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones J. and Smith J. (2017) '*Ethnography: challenges and opportunities' Evidence based Nursing* Vol.20 (4), pp 98-100.

Jones K (2016) *Education in Britain 1944 to the present* (2nd Ed) Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jones S. (1985) *Depth Interviewing* from Walker R. (eds.) *Applied Qualitative Research* Aldershot: Glower Publishing pp 45-55.

Jørgensen M. and Phillips L. (2002) *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* London: Sage.

Kilduff M. and Brass D. (2010) *'Organisational Social Network Research: Core ideas and Key Debates' The Academy of Management Annals* Vol 4 (1) pp 317-357

Kilduff M. and Tsai W (2003) *Social networks and Organisations* London: Sage

Kraft A. Sparr J. and Peis C. (2018) *'Giving and making Sense About Change: The Back and Forth Between Leaders and Employees' Journal of Business Psychology* Vol. 33 (1), pp 71-78.

Latour B. (1996) *'Actor-Network Theory: A few clarifications' Sozial Welt* 47.Jahrg, H.4, pp 369-381.

Latour B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social – An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Law J. (1992) *'Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity' Systems Practice* Vol. 5 (4), pp 379-93.

Law J. (2009) *'Actor- Network Theory and Material Semiotics'* in *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* Turner B. (Eds) London: Blackwell Publishing, pp 141-158.

Law J. and Hassard J. (1999) *Actor -Network Theory and After* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Lawton D. (1988) *The Education Reform Act: Choice and Control* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Leo E. Galloway D. and Hearne P. (2010) A*cademies and Educational Reform* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Maanen J.V. (2011) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (2nd Ed) London: University of Chicago Press.

Maitlis S. (2012) *Narrative Analysis* in Symon G. and Cassell C (Eds) *Qualitative Organisational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges* Sage: London

Maitlis S. and Christianson M. (2014) *'Sensemaking in Organisations: Taking Stock and Moving Forward'* The *Academy of Management Annuals* Vol. 8 (1), pp 57-125.

Maitlis S. and Lawrence T. (2007) *Triggers and Enablers of Sensegiving in Organisations' The Academy of Management Journal* Vol. 50 (1), pp 57–84.

Marinetto M. (2011) *'Case studies of the health policy process: a methodological introduction' in* Exworthy *et al* (Eds) *Shaping Health Policy: Case Study Methods and Analysis* Bristol: Polity Press pp 21-40.

Matthewman S. (2013) *'Michael Foucault, Technology, and Actor-Network-Theory' Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology* Vol. 17 (2), pp 274-292.

Michael M. (2017) *Actor-Network Theory: Trials Trails and Translations* London: Sage.

Mifsud D. (2014) '*Actor-Network Theory (ANT): An Assemblage of Perceptions, Understandings, and Critiques of this 'Sensibility' and how its Relatively Under-Utilized Conceptual Framework in Education Studies can Aid Researchers' Exploration of Networks and Power Relations' International Journal of Actor-Network Theory and Technological Innovation*, Vol. 6(1), pp 1-16.

Mills D. and Morton M. (2013) *Ethnography in Education* London: Sage.

Morrison K. (1998) *Management Theories for Educational Change* London: Paul Chapman Publishers LTD.

Muijs D. (2015) .*Collaboration and Networking Among Rural Schools: Can It Work and When? Evidence From England. Peabody Journal of Education* 90: pp 294-305.

Muijs D. and Rumyantseva N. (2014) '*Coopition in education: Collaborating in a competitive environment' Journal of Educational Change* Vol. 15(1), pp 1–18.

Neuman W.L. (2003) *Social Research Methods* (5th Ed) London: Pearson.

Newton C. and Tarrant T. (1992) *Managing change in schools a practical handbook* London: Routledge.

Nichols N. and Griffith A. (2009) '*Talk, texts, and educational action: an institutional ethnography of policy in practice' Cambridge Journal of Education* Vol.29 (2), pp 241-255

Niesche R (2011) *Foucault and Educational Leadership: Disciplining the Principal* Oxon: Routledge.

Niesche R. (2013) '*Foucault, counter-conduct and school leadership as a form of political subjectivity'* Journal *of Educational Administration and History* Vol. 45(2), pp 144-158.

Nolan K. (2018) '*The Lived Experience of Market-Based School Reform: An Ethnographic Portrait of Teachers' Policy Enactments in an Urban School' Educational Policy* Vol. 32(6), pp 797–822.

Novell L.S. Norris J. White D. and Moules N. (2017) '*Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria' International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Vol. 5, pp 80–92.

O'Shaughnessy J. (2012) *Competition Meets Collaboration: Helping school chains address England's long tail of educational failure* London: Policy Exchange.

Ozga J. and Gerwirtz S. '*Sex Lies and Audio Tape: Interviewing the Education Policy Elite'* in Halpin D. and Troyna B. (Eds) *Researching Education Policy: Ethical and Methodological Issues* London: The Falmer Press pp 121-135.

Peck J. and Theodore N. (2015) *Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism* London: University of Minnesota press.

Pressman J, and Wildavsky A (1984) *Implementation* (3rd Ed) London: University of California Press.

Rankin J (2017) '*Conducting Analysis in Institutional Ethnography: Guidance and Cautions* international' *Journal of Qualitative methods* Vol: 16, pp 1–11.

Robson C. (2002) *Real World Research* (2nd Ed) Oxford: Blackwell.

Scott D. and Usher R. (2011) *Researching Education* (2nd Ed) London: Continuum.

Senge, P. (2002). *Classic work: the leader's new work –building learning organizations*. In Morey D., II,Maybury, M.T. and Thuraisingham, B.M. (eds), *Know-ledge Management: Classical and Contemporary Works.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Sikes P. and Potts A. (2008) *Researching Education form the Inside: Investigations from within* Oxon: Routledge.

Silvester J. (1998) *Attributional Coding in* Symon G and Cassell C (Eds)(1999) *Qualitative methods and Analysis in Organisational Research*: *A Practical Guide* London: Sage pp 73-93.

Simkins T. Coldron J. Crawford M. and Jones S. (2015) '*Emerging local schooling landscapes: the role of the local authority' School Leadership and Management* Vol.35 (1) pp 1-16.

Simkins T. Coldron J. Crawford M. and Maxwell B. (2019) '*Emerging schooling landscapes in England: How primary system leaders are responding to new school groupings' Educational Management Administration and Leadership* Vol. 43 (1), pp 46-50.

Spillane J. Halverson R. and Diamond J. (2004) '*Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective' Journal or Curriculum Studies* Vol. 36(1), pp 3 -34.

Stanley L. (2018) *Dorothy E. Smith Feminist Sociology and Institutional Ethnography, A Short Introduction* Edinburgh: X Press.

Stokes J (2003) *How to do Media and Cultural Studies* London: Sage.

Stone D. (2012) *Policy Paradox: the art of political decision making* (3rd Ed) London: W W Norton and Co. Inc.

Thorpe R. Gold J. and Lawler J. (2011) '*Locating Distributed Leadership' International Journal of Management Reviews* Vol. 13 (3), pp 270-285.

Tschannen-Moran M. (2001) '*Collaboration and the need for trust*' *Journal of Educational Administration* Vol.39 (4), pp 308-331.

Tummons J. (2010) '*Institutional Ethnography and Actor-Network Theory: a framework for researching the assessment of trainee teachers' Ethnography and Education* Vol. 5(3), pp 345-357.

Turner G. (2000) *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (2nd Ed) London: Routledge.

Unluer S. (2012) '*Being an Insider Researcher While Conducting Case Study Research' The Qualitative Report* Vol.17 (58), pp 1-14.

Van der Vegt R. Smyth L. and Vandenberghe R. (2001) '*Implementing educational policy at the school level Organization dynamics and teacher concerns' Journal of Educational Administration* Vol. 39(1), pp 8-23.

Van Teijlingen E. R. and Hundley V. (2001) '*The Importance of Pilot Studies Social Research update* (35).

Vangen S. and Huxham C. (2003) '*Nurturing Collaborative Relations: Building Trust in Interorganisational Collaboration' The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* Vol. 39 (1), pp5–31.

Vicsek L. Kiraly G. and Konya H. (2016) '*Networks in the social sciences: comparing Actor- Network Theory and Social Network Analysis' Corvinus journal of social policy* Vol 7: pp 77-102

Walby K. (2007) '*On the Social Relations of Research: A Critical Assessment of Institutional Ethnography' Qualitative Inquiry* Vol. 13 (7), pp 1008-1030.

Weber K. and Glynn M. (2006) '*Making sense with Institutions: Context, Though and Action in Karl Weick's Theory' Organisation Studies* Vol. 27 (11), pp 1573-1578.

Weick K (1995) *Sensemaking in Organisations* London: Sage.

Weick K. Sutcliffe K. and Obstfeld D. (2005) '*Organising and the Process of Sensemaking' Organisation Science* Vol. 16 (4), pp 409-421.

Welch M. (1998) '*Collaboration: Staying on the Bandwagon' Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 49 (1), pp 69-86.

West J. (1990) '*Educational collaboration in the restructuring of schools' Journal of educational and Psychological Consultation* Vol 1: pp 23-40

Whittle A. and Spicer A. (2008) '*Is Actor -Network Theory Critique?*' *Organization Studies* Vol: 29(4), pp 611-629.

Williams P. (2012) *Collaboration in Public Policy and Practice: Perspectives on Boundary Spanners* London: The Policy Press.

Williams R. (1089) *Resources of Hope* London: Verso.

Willis P, and Trondman M (2002) *'Manifesto for Ethnography' Cultural Studies, Cultural Methodologies* Vol.2 (3), pp 394-402.

Woods P. (1986) *Inside Schools: Ethnography in Educational Research* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Workman B. (2007) *'Casing the joint: explorations by the insider-researcher preparing for work based projects' Journal of Workplace Learning* Vol. 19(3), pp 146-160.

Yearley S. (2005) *Making Sense of Science: Understanding the Social Study of Science* London: Sage.

Yin R. (2003) *Application of Case Study Research* (2nd Ed) Sage Applied Social Research Method Series Vol. 34.

Yin R. (2018) *Case Study Research and Applications* (6th Edition) London: Sage.

Zhang Y. Widemuth B. (2005) *'Qualitative Analysis of Content' Human Brain Mapping* Vol 30 (7), pp 2197-2206

Policy documents

Department of Education and Science *(1970) Towards the Middle School* Education Pamphlet No 57 London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown copyright http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/des/middleschool-1970.html

Department of Education and Science (1965) *The organisation of secondary education* Circular 10/65 London: 1965 Crown copyright

Department for Children Schools and Families (2008) *Promoting excellence for all. School Improvement Strategy: Raising standards, supporting schools* DCSFhttp://www.learning-exchange.org.uk/files/Promoting_excellence_for_all.pdf

Evangelou M. Taggart B. Sylva K. Melhuis E, Sammons P. and Siraj-Blatchford I. (2008) *What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School?* Department for Children, Schools and Families https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8618/1/DCSF-RR019.pdf

Department for Children Schools and Families (2009) *Co-operative Schools – making a difference* Crown Copyright.

Department for Schools Children and Families (2009) *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system.* TSO Norwich.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *How hard federation can help your school* http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8969/1/00415-2009.pdf

Department for Education (2010a) *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

Department for Education (2010b) *The Case for Change* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526946/The_case_for_change_The_importance_of_teaching.pdf

Department for Education (2014) *Teaching schools and system leaders: get support for you and your school. System leaders: who they are and what they do* DfE and National College for School Leadership (updated May 2019) accessed 04/11/2019https://www.gov.uk/guidance/system-leaders-who-they-are-and-what-they-do

Sandals L. and Bryant B. (2014) *The evolving education system in England: a "temperature check"* DfE Research report https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-evolving-education-system-in-england

Armstrong P (2015) *Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence* Department for Education research report October 2015

Department for Education (2016*) Schools causing concern. Intervening in failing, underperforming and coasting schools Guidance for local authorities and RSCs* DfE March 2016 Accessed 30/10/17https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/640916/SCC_guidance.pdf

Department for Education (2016b) *Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth* December 2016 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/576240/Multi-academy_trusts_good_practice_guidance_and_expectations_for_growth.pdf

Department for Education (2017) *Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2017* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623124/SFR28_2017_Main_Text.pdf

Department for Education (2017) *Open academies and academy projects in development* DfE updated September 2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-academies-and-academy-projects-in-development

Greatbatch D, Tate S, (2019) *what works in delivering school improvement through school- to- school support* Department for Education (May 2019) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/803916/What_works_in_delivering_school_improvement_through_school_to_school_support_May2019.pdf

House of Commons Education Committee School Partnerships and Cooperation Fourth Report of Session 2013–14

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmeduc/269/269.pdf

Howarth E. (2013) *The road to federation Summary Report* The National Governors Association

http://rmeducationblog.com/academies-update-november-2012/

Ofsted (2011) *Report summary Leadership of more than one school An evaluation of the impact of federated schools* https://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/leadership_of_more_than_one_school_-_summary1.pdf

Ofsted (2015) *Key Stage 3: the wasted years?* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459830/Key_Stage_3_the_wasted_years.pdf

Ofsted (2019) *Multi-Academy Trusts: benefits, challenges and functions* No. 190032 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817085/Multi_academy_trusts_benefits_challenges_and_functions.pdf

Educational Excellence Everywhere White paper (2016) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5084/Educational_Excellence_Everywhere.pdf

Multi-Academy Trusts Commons select committee Report February 2017 http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2015/multi-academy-trusts-report-published-16-17/

http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/des/circular10-65.html (accessed 09/06/2019)

Authored websites and news articles

Andrews J. (2016) *School performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities – 2015* Education Policy Institutehttp://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/school-performance-in-multi-academy-trusts.pdf (accessed 20/12/2016)

Avery C (June 2017) *Women remain under-represented in senior leadership roles- but mentoring can help* www.tes.com/news/women-remain-under-represented-senior-leadership-roles-schools-mentoring-can-help (accessed 06/07/2018)

Baker A. (2010) *Gove's academies: 1980s idea rebranded?* http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-10824069 (accessed 27/06/2018)

Belfield C. and Sibieta L. (2016) L*ong-Run Trends in School Spending in England* Institute for Fiscal Studies London

https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R115.pdf (accessed 20/12/2016)

Brook N. (2017) *Unlike with Article 50, there's no way for schools which have joined a MAT to "take back control"* TES March 2017 https://www.tes.com/news/unlike-article-50-theres-no-way-schools-which-have-joined-mat-take-back-control (accessed 02/02/2020)

Burns J. (17th March 2018) Eight out of 10 academies in deficit, say accountants BBC news https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-43435689 (accessed 17/04/19)

Corman M. and Barron G. (2017) *Institutional Ethnography and Actor-Network Theory: In Dialogue* ResearchGate http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/S1042-319220170000015006 (accessed 14/02/18)

Cressman D. (2009) *A brief overview of Actor-Network Theory: Punctualization, Heterogeneous Engineering and Translation* http://blogs.sfu.ca/departments/cprost/wp-content/uploads/292/08/0901.pdf (accessed 7/03/2014)

Critchley A. (2016) *One small change could make a big difference to MATs* TES February 2018 https://www.tes.com/magazine/article/one-small-change-could-make-big-difference-mats (accessed 02/02/2020)

Dankert R (2011) Using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) doing research https://ritskedankert.nl/using-actor-network-theory-ant-doing-research/ (accessed 1/12/2017)

Darville R. (2002) *Policy, accountability and practice in adult literacy work: Sketching and institutional ethnography* Carleton University http://www.casae-aceea.ca/sites/casae/archives/cnf2002/2002_Papers/darville2002w.pdf (accessed 27/01/2018)

Deveau J.L (2009) *Examining the Institutional Ethnographer's Toolkit* https://socialiststudies.com/index.php/sss/article/view/23749/17633 (accessed 30/08/2018)

Dickins J. (2016) One in ten secondary schools set to be labelled as "coasting" Schools Week November 9th 2016 https://schoolsweek.co.uk/one-in-ten-secondary-schools-set-to-be-labelled-as-coasting/ (accessed 07/04/2018)

George M. (2017a) *Education Fellowship Trust becomes first academy chain to give up all of its schools* TES 10th March 2017 https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/education-fellowship-trust-becomes-first-academy-chain-give-all-its (accessed 26/10/2017)

George M. (2017b) *Troubled Wakefield City Academies Trust to give up all 21 of its schools* TES 8th September 2017 https://www.tes.com/news/school-

news/breaking-news/troubled-wakefield-city-academies-trust-give-all-21-its-schools (accessed 26/10/2017)

George M. (2017bi) *'Out of Control': how the DfE allowed troubled MATs to expand* Times Educational Supplement 27th October 2017.

George M. (2017c) *No schools turned into academies as a result of 'coasting' label* TES 6th October 2017 https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/exclusive-no-schools-turned-academies-a-result-coasting-label (accessed 7/10/2017)

Gillard D. (2018) *Education in England: a history* http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/timeline.html (accessed 09/06/2019)

Golding N. (2018) *Councils' decline is as much a part of government's legacy as Brexit* Local Government Chronical 7th February 2018 https://www.lgcplus.com/politics-and-policy/finance/councils-decline-is-as-much-a-part-of-governments-legacy-as-brexit/7023163.article (accessed 07/04/2018)

Latour B. (1997) On Actor-Network Theory: A few Clarifications) http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9801/msg00019.html (accessed 07/04/2014

Latour B. (2004) *On using ANT for studying information systems: a (somewhat) Socratic dialogue* http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/90-ANT-DIALOG-LSE-GB.pdf (accessed 7/4/2014)

Mansell W. (2011) *Co-operative schools: the antidote to academies* The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/aug/15/cooperative-schools-antidote-academies-independent (accessed 18/09/2017)

Parthasarathy B (2008) *The ethnographic case study approach* http://www.globalimpactstudy.org/2008/07/the-ethnographic-case-study-approach/ (accessed 02/07/2018)

Powell A. (2014) *The coalition's flawed academy programme: a political gift Labour refuses to accept* https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/11/coalition-s-flawed-academy-programme-political-gift-labour-refuses-accept (accessed 28/09/2017)

Ratcliffe R. (2014) *How are schools resisting academy status?* The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2014/feb/11/schools-resisting-academy-status-forced-conversion (accessed 30/09/2017)

Rice F, Frederickson N, Shelton K, McManus C, Riglin L, and Ng-Knight T (2013) *Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school* http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars/information-leaflets/STARS_report (accessed 11/04/2018)

Roberts J. (2019) *Ofsted's new MAT check would take 80 years to assess all Trusts* TES 17th May 2018 https://www.tes.com/news/exclusive-ofsteds-new-mat-check-would-take-80-years-assess-all-trusts?fbclid=IwARohOi9Q5uqmip5E1gVezwIeZLdjOW-lrrid7QNsUQpP_NzEfB4ft5-7INs (accessed 23/05/19)

Stalder F. (1997) *Actor- Network-Theory and communications networks: Towards Convergence* http://felix.openflows.com/html/Network_Theory.html (accessed 7/4/2014)

Symonds J (2009) Are UK middle schools better for early adolescents than transition into secondary school? A study of two school environments http://www.middleschools.org.uk/research.php (accessed 11/04/2018)

Thompson T. and Pinsent-Johnson C. (2011) *Institutional Ethnography and Actor-Network Theory: The possibilities and challenges of exploring the relational in adult education research* Adult Education Research Conference http://newprariepress/aerc/2011/papers/102 (accessed 27/01/2018)

Walford, G. (2011) *Researching the Powerful* British Educational Research Association on-line resource. www.bera.ac.uk (accessed on 15/08/2013)

Whittaker F (2016) *'Meet the System Leaders': The 8 largest academy chains and their Ofsted performance* https://schoolsweek.co.uk/meet-the-system-leaders-the-8-largest-academy-chains-and-their-ofsted-performance/ (accessed 24/10/2017)

Zhang Y and Widemuth B.M. *Qualitative Analysis of Content* http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/yanz-/content_analysis.pdf (accessed 10/9/2014)

Government websites and sources

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015 (accessed 11/04/2019)

http://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/ postcode look up (accessed 11/04/2019)

DfE compare schools website http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/schools/performance/school.pl?urn=124407 (accessed 06/02/2014)

http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/schoolperformance/b0014624/power-to-innovate (accessed 22/03/2014)

http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/ (accessed 10/08/2017)

http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf (accessed 10/08/2017)

http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/2010-academies-act.pdf (accessed 20/09/2017)

http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter12.html (accessed 20/09/2017)

Additional websites

What is actor -network theory?

http://carbon.ucdenver.edu/~mryder/itc/ant_dff.html (accessed 07/3/2014)

https://www.nga.org.uk/Removed-2018/About-us/Campaigning/Federation-First.aspx (accessed 17/09/2019)

http://latourbugblog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/actor-network-theory-terms-and-concepts.html (accessed 7/4/2014)

http://latourbugblog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/actor-network-theory-terms-and-concepts.htm (accessed 7/4/2014)

http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf (accessed 02/02/2014)

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/huge-gulf-in-academy-standards-revealed-w50jdvr9v (accessed 02/08/2017)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35028975 (accessed 02/08/2017)

ForresterBoyd Academy News January 2017 *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)* http://www.forrester-boyd.co.uk/2017/01/the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-multi-academy-trusts-mats/ (accessed 03/08/2017)

BBC online (22/09/2011) *Pupils more confident in federated schools, says Ofsted* http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15004918 (accessed 03/08/2017)

http://co-operativeschools.coop/about/co-operative-trust-schools/ accessed (accessed 18/09/2017)

http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2014/2252.html (accessed 30/09/2017)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Technology_College (accessed 10/10/2017)

http://www.stswiki.org/index.php?title=Actor-network_theory_(ANT) (accessed 03/11/2017)

City Technology Colleges & Academies http://www.schome.ac.uk/wiki/City_Technology_Colleges_%26_Academies (accessed 07/04/2018)

A guide to understanding Multi-Academy Trusts http://www.uhy-uk.com/wp-content/uploads/MAT-factsheet-Letchworth.pdf (accessed 07/04/2018)

Governance in multi-academy trusts National College for School Leadership https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/458632/governance-in-multi-academy-trusts_Sept2015.pdf (accessed 07/04/2018)

Struggling Northamptonshire County Council bans spending BBC online 2nd February 2018 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-42920716 (accessed 07/04/2018)

Debt to hit £626 million at Staffordshire County Council https://www.expressandstar.com/news/2016/01/30/debt-to-hit-626-million-at-staffordshire-county-council/ (accessed 07/04/2018)

One in ten secondary schools set to be labelled as "coasting" https://schoolsweek.co.uk/one-in-ten-secondary-schools-set-to-be-labelled-as-coasting/ (accessed 07/04/2018)

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars (accessed 07/04/2018)

Funding for 16-19 Education and Sixth Form Colleges National Union of Teachers www.teachers.org.uk/edufacts/funding (accessed 02/07/2018)

www.co-op.ac.uk (accessed 25/3/2013)

Appendix

A. Acronyms and definitions

B. Diagrams

1. *Fig. 1* Structure of the Federation and MAT
2. *Fig.9* Identities: researcher and teacher
3. *Fig. 5* Research timeline and key events
4. *Fig. 10* Timeline of events split into academic years
5. *Fig. 4* Conceptual diagram of sensemaking, policy enactment and Actor-Network Theory
6. *Fig. 2* A three-tier educational model
7. *Fig. 8* The Kubler Ross Change Curve with 2016 Focus group positioning

C. Ethics

1. Keele University ethical approval
2. Information sheet and consent form – sample version for Executive Principal
3. Sample version for focus groups
4. Emails to head teachers requesting focus group participants
5. Email to SRS focus group respondents
6. Email to PRS focus group respondents
7. Email to Principal requesting documents for analysis
8. Email requesting interview respondents

D. Additional data gathering

1. Professional profiles of the elites
2. Research completion dates

E. Analysis

1. Examples of ANT analysis diagrams
2. Example of problems and initial thematic analysis
3. Chapter 4 analysis plan
4. *Fig. 7* Photographs of focus group set up

A. Acronyms and definitions

Education and Policy

MAT - a Multi-Academy Trust, a group of schools bound together under one trust with a single executive principal or, depending on trust size, chief executive. The trust oversees its finances which come directly from the DfE.

A hard federation – a group of school bound together officially that share a governing body, there is some local authority involvement in the model.

GM – Grant Maintained Schools, a 1990's initiative to remove high performing schools from LA control, similar to converter MATs today (minus the collaborative element)

CTC's – City Technology Colleges, a 1990's initiative involving sponsors, similar to sponsored academies today

LA – local authority

DES – Department for Education and Science (1964-1992)

DfE - Department for Education (2010- current)

Ofsted - Office for Standards in Education, inspect and regulate children's services.

TES – The Times Educational Supplement

ERA - Education Reform Act 1988

NLE – National Leader for Education, both Executive Principals in this study hold this position. It is awarded to head teachers who demonstrate innovative or successful leadership.

Substantive head – the named individual in charge of the school, in this case the Executive Principal.

SLT – the senior leadership team comprising of the Executive Principal, Business Manager and Head Teachers.

Theory

ANT – Actor- Network Theory

DL – Distributed Leadership

Research

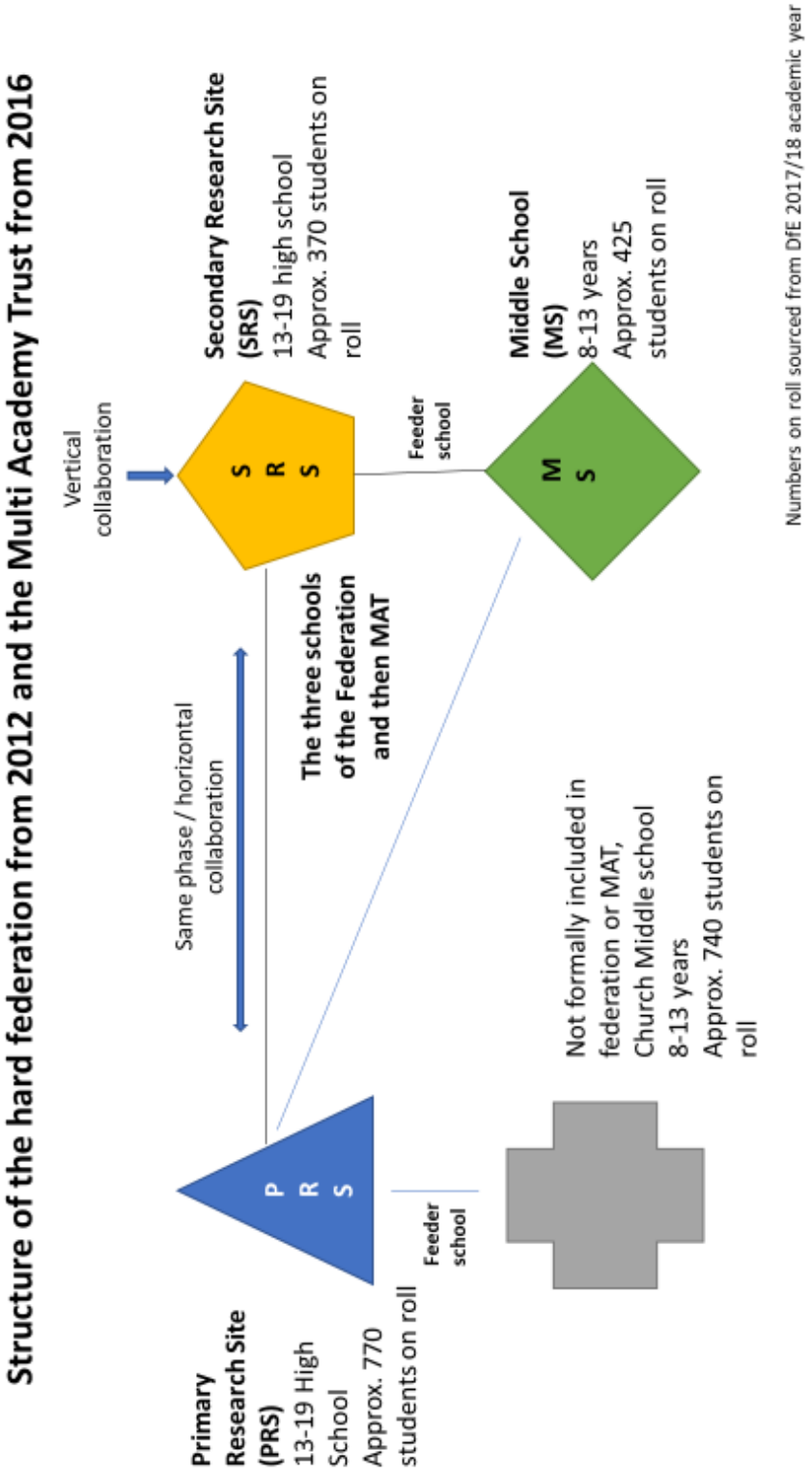
PRS – Primary Research Site, the high school in which I worked

SRS – Secondary Research Site, the high school on the other side of the town

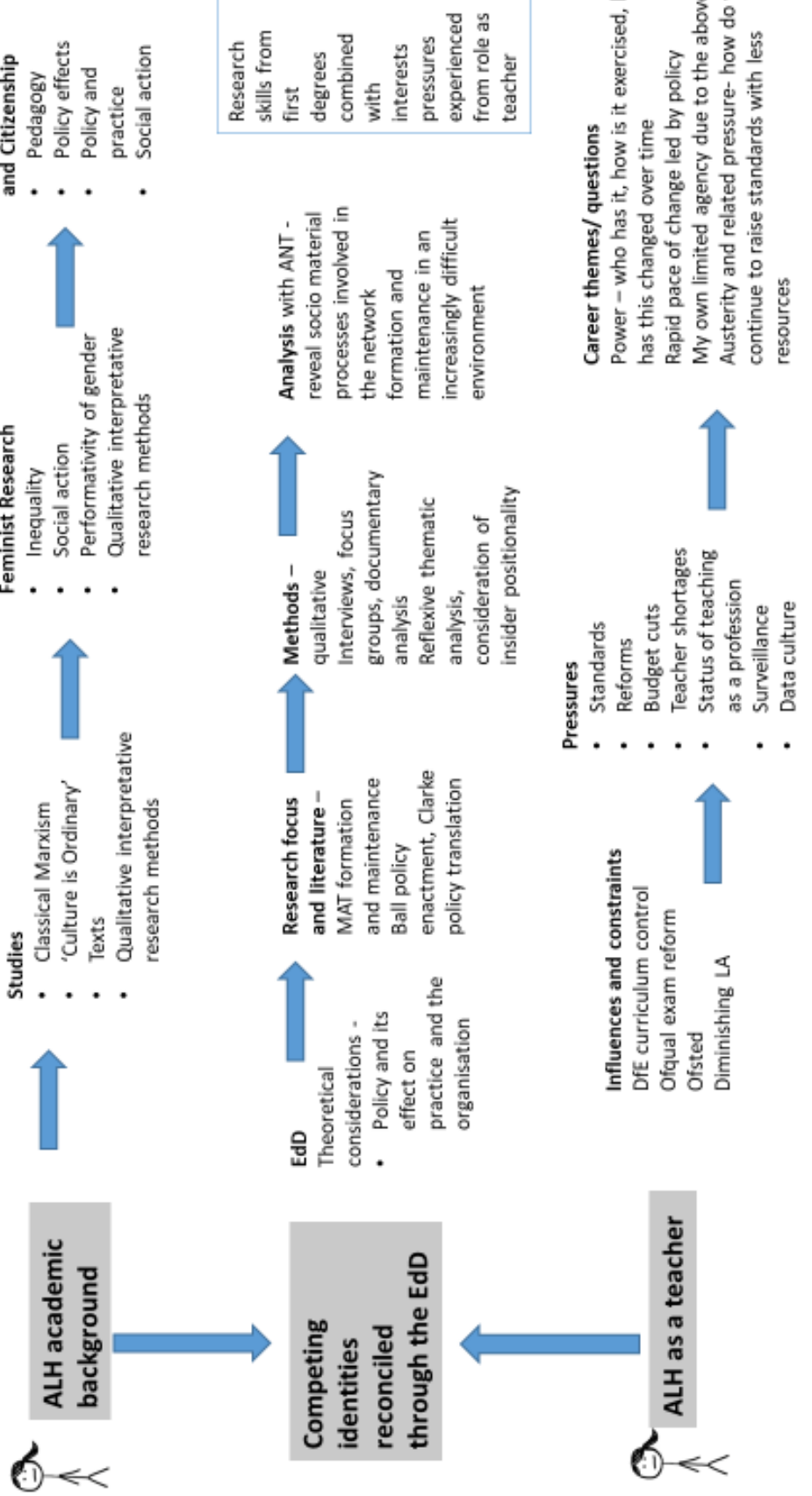
MS - Middle School, the feeder school for SRS

B. Diagrams

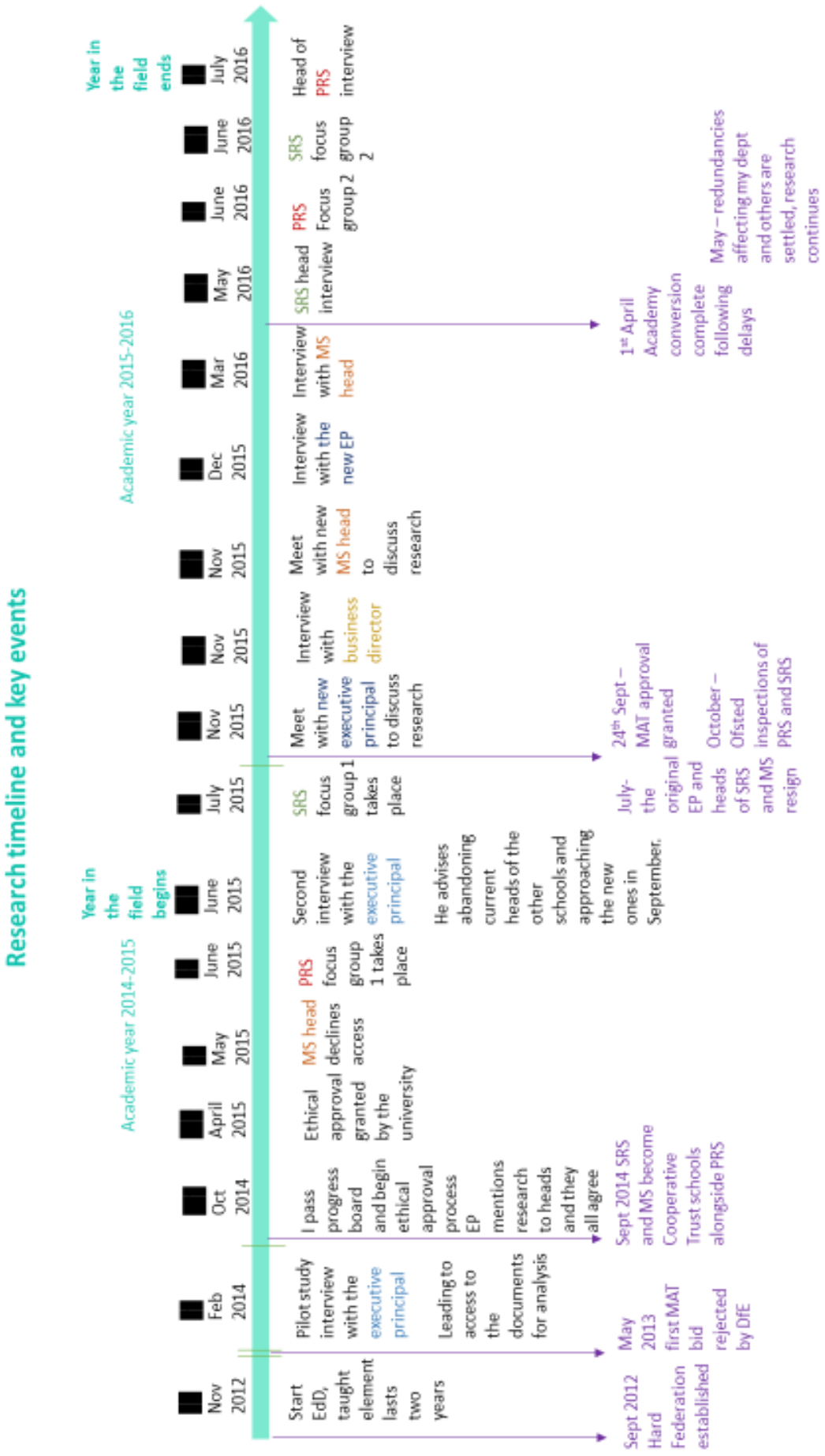
1. *Fig. 1* Structure of the hard federation and MAT



2. *Fig.9* Identities: researcher to teacher

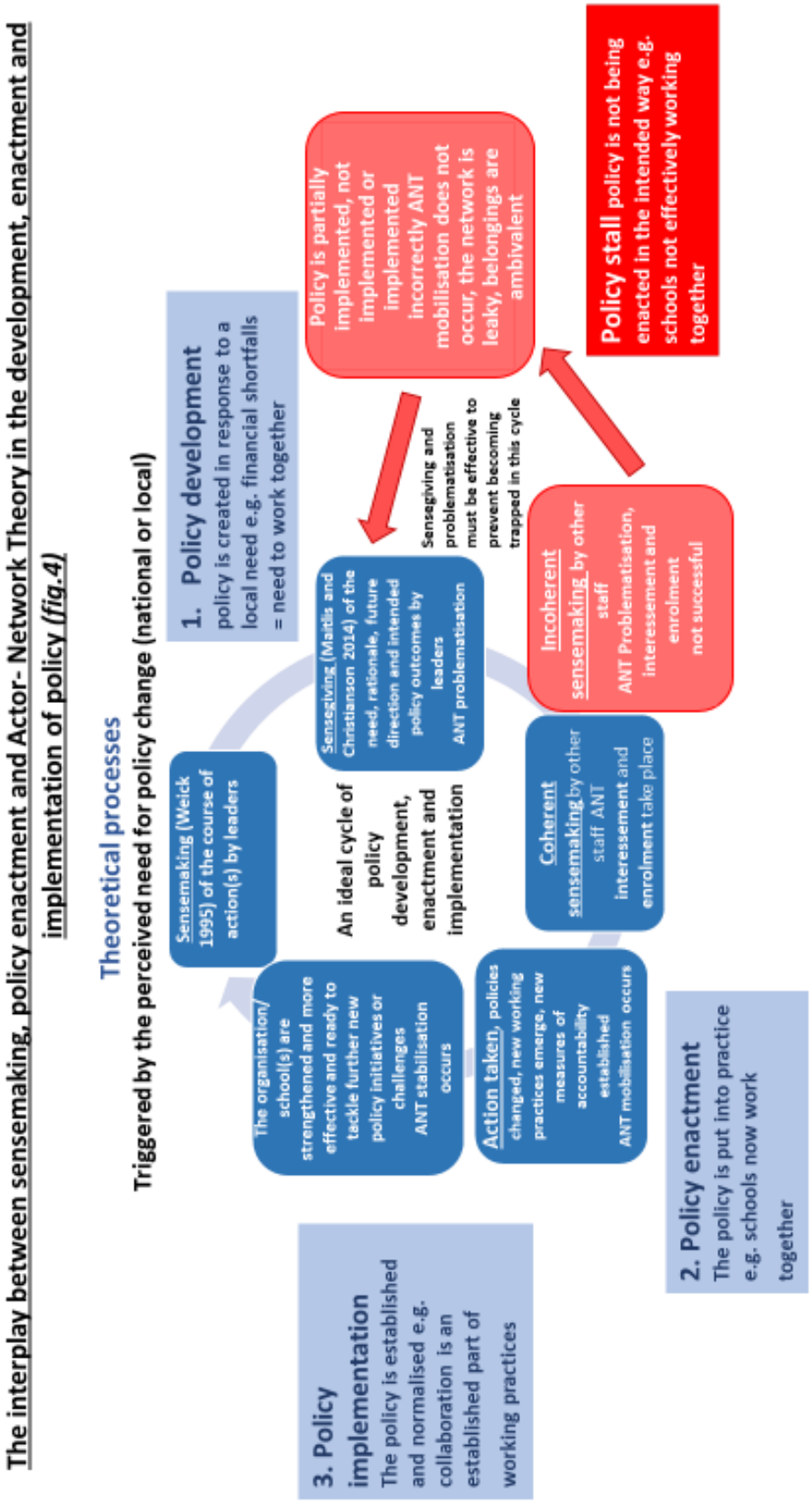


3. *Fig.5* Research timeline

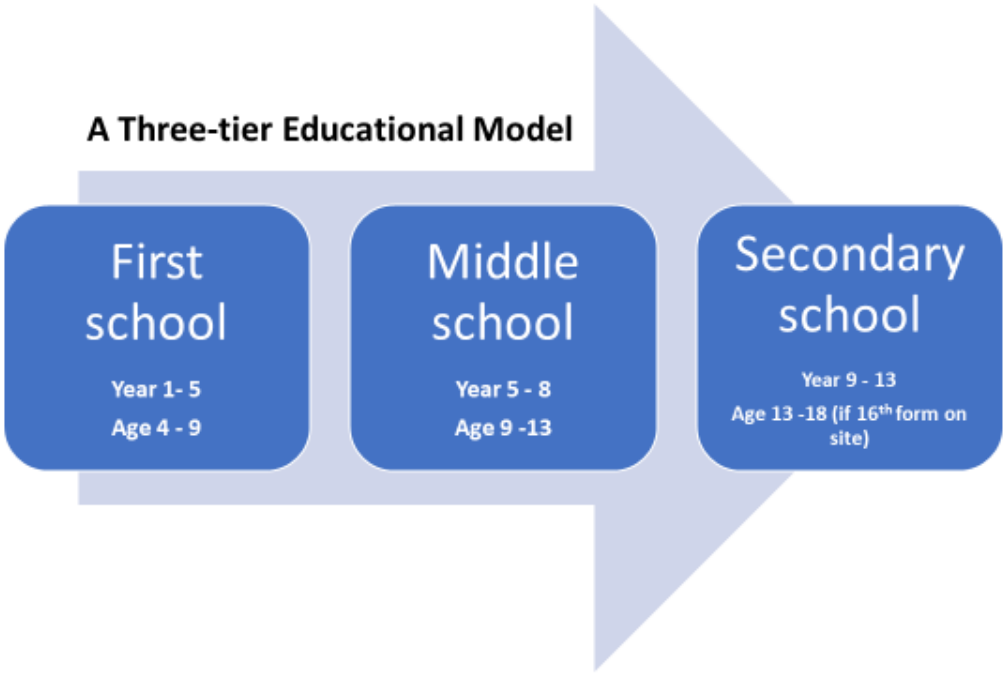


4. *Fig.10* Timeline of events split into academic years

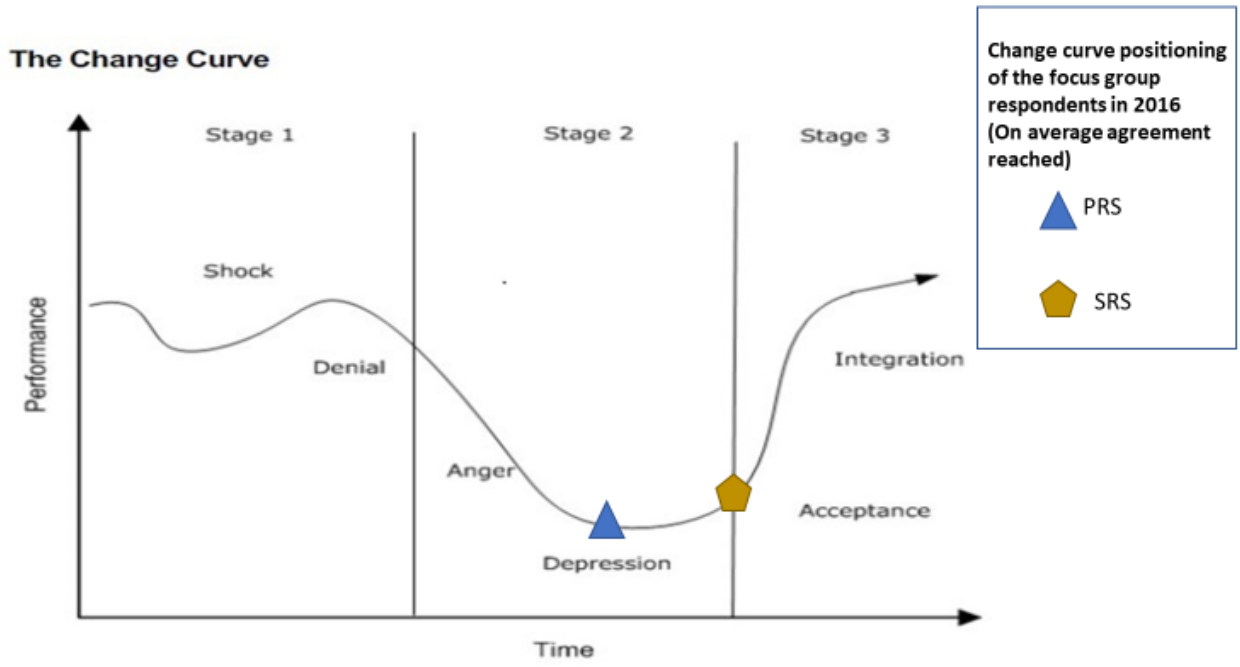
5. *Fig. 4* Conceptual diagram



6. *Fig. 2* A Three- Tier Educational Model



7. *Fig.8* the Kubler Ross Change Curve with 2016 focus group positioning identified



C. Ethical approval and forms

Keele University

RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

Ref: ERP331

24 April 2015

Alexandra Hay
[redacted]

Dear Alexandra

Re: Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change: A case study examining the interplay between structure and agency.

Thank you for submitting your revised application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Application Form	2.1	
Summary document	2	13/04/2015
Letter to Executive Principals	1	15/04/2015
E-mail to Head Teachers	2	15/04/2015
Letter of invitation to attend Focus Group interviews	2	15/04/2015
6 x Information sheets / Consent forms / Consent for use of quotes	2	15/04/2015
Focus Group Topic Guide	2	15/04/2015
Interview Topic Guide	2	15/04/2015

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application (1 September 2016), you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail. If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP3 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

pp **Dr Helena Priest**
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
Supervisor

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
Telephone: + 44 (0)1782 734466 Fax: + 44 (0)1782 733740

Information Sheet (Sample Executive Principal)

Study Title: **Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary school's response to policy change.**

Aims of the Research

This research aims to uncover processes of change and adaptation experienced by schools in the local area since 2012 and how the schools respond to local needs and opportunities and national policy drivers and initiatives. This research is being completed as part of the doctoral thesis of Alexandra Hay to broaden and contribute to academic knowledge and understanding of how schools work together.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study - **Sustainability through collaboration?** An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change. This project is being undertaken by Alexandra Hay as part of her doctorate.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Please ask if there is anything unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you are the Executive Principal and have been instrumental in guiding and shaping the schools future.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be subject to a semi-structured interview conducted by Alexandra Hay. This interview will last no longer than ninety minutes and with your consent will be recorded and transcribed by a professional and secure service for analysis purposes.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

You will be interviewed by Alexandra Hay in a federation school of your choice. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences and work at the federation of schools. The interview will take no more than ninety minutes.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

You will be allowing your perspectives and views about the organisation to contribute to a wider body of knowledge about organisational change in schools, and especially in collaborative arrangements among schools.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

It is impossible to predict what may happen in any interview however there is nothing specific about this research which leads me to anticipate that taking part will be particularly risky. The data will not be shared with senior staff or other members of federation staff and all names and locations will be changed in the final write up. However due to the small number of roles associated with the federation it is possible your identity may be not completely secure. However as all names and locations will be changed, this risk will be minimised as far as possible.

How will information about me be used?

The data you provide will be analysed by Alexandra Hay, discussed by Alexandra Hay and her supervisor, and used her doctoral thesis. Quotes directly taken from what you say may be used to support the argument emerging from the analysis, but they will not be attributed to you by name, but by pseudonym or other means of anonymising participants, school and location.

Who will have access to information about me?

The data you provide will be recorded on a digital device and transcribed using a secure professional transcription service. It will then be stored on a password protected computer for no longer than five years from the data of the interview. The data will be destroyed after five years. Your identity will be kept confidential as far as possible as your name will not be used in this research or the main doctoral thesis and the information you provide will not be discussed with any staff members of the federation. However it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity due to the small nature of the sample of schools involved in the study however this risk will be minimised as all names and locations will be altered in the final thesis.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is funded by Alexandra Hay and will form part of her EdD thesis. The EdD is overseen by the Research Institute for Social Sciences and by the School of Public Policy and Professional Practice at Keele University.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Alexandra Hay on *a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk* . Alternatively you can contact her supervisor Professor Steve Cropper on s.a.cropper@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton

Research Governance Officer

Research & Enterprise Services

Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306

Contact for further information

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Alexandra Hay, Keele University, *a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you

agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	☐
3	I agree to take part in this study.	☐
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.	☐
5	I agree to the interview being audio recorded	☐
6	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

*please delete as appropriate

CONSENT FORM

(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Alexandra Hay, Keele University, a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk

Please tick box if you

agree with the statement

1 I agree for any quotes to be used ☐

2 I do not agree for any quotes to be used ☐

3 I agree to consider the use of identified quotes by request at a future date ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

(Sample Focus group)

Information Sheet

Study Title: **Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary school's response to policy change.**

Aims of the Research

This research aims to uncover the processes of change and adaptation experienced by schools in the local area since 2012 and how the schools respond to local needs and opportunities and national policy drivers and initiatives. This research is being completed as part of the doctoral thesis of Alexandra Hay to broaden and contribute to academic knowledge and understanding of how schools work together.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study - **Sustainability through collaboration?** An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change. This project is being undertaken by Alexandra Hay as part of her doctorate.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Please ask if there is anything unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you are a member of teaching staff in a federation school and your opinions and experiences are of interest to the study.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You are being invited to take part in a group interview facilitated by Alexandra Hay. The group interview will include other members of teaching staff from your school. Alexandra Hay will be present as a facilitator, but will not actively get involved in the discussion. No senior staff will be present. The group interview will take place in your school and last no longer than sixty

minutes. With your consent it will be recorded and transcribed by a professional and secure service to allow later analysis to take place.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

The group interview will take place on Thursday [date] at [time] [in room]. You will be asked to discuss your experiences working as part of the Federation of schools. A flexible list of themes and questions has been produced to assist the discussion.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

Your perspectives and views about the organisation will contribute to a wider body of knowledge about the management of organisational change in schools, and especially in collaborative arrangements among schools.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

It is impossible to predict what may happen in any group interview however there is nothing specific about this research which leads me to anticipate that taking part will be particularly risky. The data will not be shared with senior staff or other members of federation staff and all names and locations will be changed in the final write up. However because you will be taking part in a group discussion, what you say will not remain completely private. I will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group by keeping the discussion and membership of the group confidential. Should you have concerns regarding this after the focus group has been completed, please email Alexandra Hay at a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk. Data you provide will be recorded on a secure digital device, and kept on a password protected computer for no longer than 5 years, when it will be destroyed.

How will information about me be used?

The data you provide will be analysed by Alexandra Hay, discussed by Alexandra Hay and her supervisor, and used her doctoral thesis. Quotes directly taken from what you say may be used to support the argument emerging from the analysis, but they will not be attributed to you by name, but by pseudonym or other means of anonymising participants, school and location.

Who will have access to information about me?

The data you provide will be recorded on a digital device and transcribed using a secure professional transcription service. It will then be stored on a password protected computer for no longer than five years from the data of the interview. The data will be destroyed after five years. Your identity will be kept confidential as far as possible as your name will not be used in this research or the main doctoral thesis and the information you provide will not be discussed with any staff members of the federation. However it is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity due to the small nature of the sample of schools involved in the study, the risk will be minimised as all the schools and locations will be anonymised.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This research is funded by Alexandra Hay and will form part of her EdD thesis. The EdD is overseen by the Research Institute for Social Sciences and by the School of Public Policy and Professional Practice at Keele University.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Alexandra Hay on *a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk* . Alternatively you can contact her supervisor Professor Steve Cropper on s.a.cropper@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton

Research Governance Officer

Research & Enterprise Services

Dorothy Hodgkin Building

Keele University

ST5 5BG

E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk

Tel: 01782 733306

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Alexandra Hay, Keele University, *a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you

agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	☐
3	I agree to take part in this study.	☐
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.	☐
5	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	☐
6	I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.	☐
7	I agree to keep the information discussed during the focus group confidential from other staff.	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

*please delete as appropriate

CONSENT FORM

(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: Sustainability through collaboration? An exploration of a secondary schools response to policy change.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Alexandra Hay, Keele University, *a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you

agree with the statement

1 I agree for any quotes to be used ☐

2 I do not agree for any quotes to be used ☐

3 I agree to consider the use of identified quotes by request at a future date ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

Draft of the email sent to the 3 head teachers of the federation/MAT schools requesting their assistance selecting participants for the focus groups. The Executive Principal has verbally asked if they would be willing to do this and all have agreed.

To be sent from a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk

Subject: Research Participant Request

Dear – (insert head teacher name)

I am writing to request participants to take part in two focus groups. The participants will be asked to take part in a discussion about the federation/ MAT and their experiences of it. The data produced will form part of my doctoral thesis. The focus group will be made up of teachers from your school and will take place outside of school time in the summer term this year, and next year. As I am unfamiliar with the staff at your school I will need your help selecting appropriate individuals to take part.

I require ten members of staff in total from the following groups:

- Newly/recently qualified or recently appointed teachers (appointed from 2012 onwards)
- Established teachers whom have spent 5-7 years working for your school.
- Long term teachers with careers spanning 15 + years at your school.

An equal gender mix would be desirable but is not imperative. The participants should be classroom teachers from a variety of subject departments, and/or middle leaders such as head of department. Please avoid selecting senior staff members such as assistant head teachers, heads of faculty or pastoral leaders.

Once you have identified ten appropriate staff members please send me their email addresses and I will write to them asking for their participation. I will contact eight out of the ten individuals you select.

I am hugely grateful for your help with this. Please contact me if you would like any more information.

Best wishes

Alexandra Hay

EdD (Doctorate in Education) research student

Keele University

SRS focus group invitation email

Hello

I am a doctoral student from Keele University (I am also a teacher from [school name]but please don't let that put you off!). My research area focusses on the nature and impact of collaboration between schools, and how this approach can be made sustainable for the future. The research will consist of a series of senior staff interviews, documentary analysis and staff group interviews at each of the federation schools. I plan to revisit the group interviews in 12 months' time to discuss the changes brought about by the new leadership.

I wish to invite you to take part in the group interview that will take place on **[date time and room].** You will be asked to discuss your experiences working as part of the federation with a small number of other teaching staff from your school. No SLT will be present. The group interview will take no longer than sixty minutes and the Interview findings will inform part of my doctoral thesis.

Please rest assured that my research proposal has undergone a strict review by the Keele University ethics panel and as such your identity will be protected and any insights you provide will be kept private by myself and others in the group. It is also important to note that although [executive principal] has provided consent for the group interviews to take place, he does not know which staff will be involved thus further protecting your identity.

Before you agree to take part please read the attached document for more information on the purpose of the study and the content of the group discussion.

I very much hope you will agree to be involved as the perspectives of this school form a vital part of my analysis.

Please could you reply to either [key contact] or myself before [date] to confirm attendance. You don't need to bring anything with you, I will provide refreshments.
Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Alexandra Hay

EdD student
Keele University

PRS focus group invitation email

As you are probably aware I have been working towards a doctorate in Education since 2012 and have now, at last, reached the research stage. My research will involve some senior staff interviews, documentary analysis and two sets of teacher group interviews. The first group interview will take place this term, and a follow up will take place in the summer term of 2016.

I wish to invite you to take part in the group interview that will take place on **[date time room]** You will be asked to discuss your experiences working as part of the federation with 8 other members of teaching staff. No SLT will be present. The group interview will take no longer than 90 minutes. The Interview findings will inform part of my doctoral thesis.
Please rest assured that my research proposal has undergone a strict review by the Keele University ethics panel and as such your identity will be protected and any insights you provide will be kept private by myself and others in the group. It is also important to note that although [SLT] have provided consent for the group interviews to take place, they do not know which staff will be involved.

Before you agree to take part please read the attached document for more information on the purpose of the study and the content of the group discussion.

I very much hope you will agree to be involved.
Please could you reply to this email address before [date] to let me know if you can attend.
Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Best wishes
Alexandra Hay

EdD student
Keele University

Draft of the letter sent to the Executive Principal of the federation schools requesting documents for the documentary analysis. The Executive Principal has already verbally agreed access to these documents.

Date

Dear – (insert name)

As previously discussed, part of my doctoral research requires access to a variety of official school documents for analysis. As I have now received ethical approval, I am ready to proceed. I would be grateful if you could download the documents onto the enclosed pen drive. The Password is *********.

My research is investigating schools in collaborative arrangements with one another, and the processes and policies that assist schools working together. With that in mind documents that could be relevant include:

- Federation strategic plans
- Federation staff job descriptions
- MAT applications
- Relevant educational policies
- Documents outlining the benefits of becoming a federation/ MAT/ Cooperative Trust school
- Diagrams outlining the organisational structure of the federation or learning partnership more broadly
- Any documents that you are able to release that capture the way the Federation has conducted itself – documents might include notes or minutes of federation meetings, operational or action proposals and plans; and any reviews of the federation that have been undertaken (internal or external).

I will gratefully receive anything that you think will be of interest to the study.

All the documents you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and not shared with any other staff member of the federation. The documents will be used to form part of the policy and procedure background necessary for my thesis, and complement the interviews and focus groups I will conduct. They will be stored on a password protected computer for no longer than five years. They will then be destroyed. All names and locations will be changed in the thesis to protect the identity of the schools and any individuals involved.

I am hugely grateful for your help with this. Please contact me if you would like any more information.

Best wishes

Alexandra Hay

EdD (Doctorate in Education) research student

Keele University

Email to prospective interviewees

Dear (insert name)

I am writing to invite you to taking part in a study to investigate experiences and views of school collaboration. The information you provide will form part of the doctoral thesis written by Alexandra Hay, research student at Keele University.

If you agree to take part you will be asked to attend an interview conducted by Alexandra Hay. It will take place in the summer term 2015/ autumn term 2015 (delete as appropriate). The information provided will be used to help inform the doctoral study investigating the impact of the federation/ MAT and school collaboration. The interview will take place after school hours in your school and will last no longer than ninety minutes. You have been selected as Executive Principal/ head teacher/ business manager/ chair of governors (delete as appropriate) you are instrumental in shaping the direction and future of the schools.

Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part in this research study, it is important for you to understand what it involves. Please take time to read the enclosed information sheet carefully for further information. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and do not have to provide reasons for doing so. Your anonymity will be protected as far as possible; names, locations and any other identifying information will be changed prior to the write up. No one at the schools will see your answers.

If you have any questions about the study then please do contact me on a.l.hay@keele.ac.uk. I will be happy to discuss with you any questions you may have.

Thank you very much for reading this letter,

Yours sincerely,

Alexandra Hay EdD Research student

School of Public Policy and Practice
Keele University

D. Additional data gathering

1. Professional Profiles of the 'elite's'

Elite professional profiles			
Individual	**Job role**	**Tenure of experience**	**Previous experience**
The original Executive Principal	Executive Principal of the 3 Federation (latterly MAT) schools. Not substantive head. Limited power.	Joined the school in 1980 Head teacher 2004 Executive Head teacher 2007 Resigned 2015	National Leader of Education. Substantial experience pulling local schools out of special measures. Former Executive Head of a secondary school in the neighbouring town (arrangement ended in 2014)
The New Executive Principal	Substantive Head of all 3 MAT schools. Latterly became Chief Executive as the MAT enrolled further schools.	2015 onwards	National Leader of Education and experience working on DfE projects. Previously an Executive Principal of a cross phase MAT including all phases of schools.
The Business Manager	Responsible for the business side of the academy, HR, payroll, audits, finances. Supported by finance officers located in each school. Responsible for the non- teaching staff at all 3 schools.	PRS business manager from 2004. Federation business manager from 2012.	Clerk to the Governing Body and thus privy to all decisions concerning the schools.
Head Teacher of PRS	Similar to an associate head position responsible for day to day running and decision-making concerning teaching, learning, progress, behaviour and staffing at the school.	Joined the school as Head of department in 1993. Deputy Head from 2004. Head from 2012 (initially acting for the first year). Substantive headship status reduced in 2015 via redundancy of the post.	The only head teacher to accept the reduced post following the appointment of the new Executive Principal. Had considerable knowledge of the school before and after the federation/ MAT response.

Head Teacher of SRS	Similar to an associate head position responsible for day to day running and decision making concerning teaching, learning, progress, behaviour and staffing at the school.	From 2015	Formerly deputy head at a school in the same county. Had worked with a former PRS colleague and thus knew some of the historical background to the relations between the schools.
Head Teacher of MS	Similar to an associate head position responsible for day to day running and decision making concerning teaching, learning, progress, behaviour and staffing at the school. Manages 14 feeder first schools and a 300sq KM catchment area.	Assistant Head from 2008. Head from 2015	Although new to post, as deputy he had considerable understanding of the complex relations between the schools in the town, including those between the MS and its high school SRS.

2. Research completion dates

Method	Involving	Access sought through	Location	Date
Documentary analysis	N/A	The Executive Principal for those not in the public domain	N/A	From Feb 2014 - ongoing
Pilot study interview	Executive Principal	The Executive principal	PRS	Feb 2014
Elite Interview 1	Executive Principal	Executive principal	PRS	June 2015
Elite Interview 2	The new Executive Principal	The original Executive principal	PRS	Dec 2015
Elite Interview 3	The Business Manager	Executive principal	PRS	Nov 2015
Elite Interview 4	The head teacher of the Middle School	Executive principal	The Middle School	March 2016

Elite Interview 5	The head teacher of SRS	Executive principal	SRS	May 2016
Elite Interview 6	The head teacher of PRS	Executive principal	PRS	July 2016
Staff Focus group 1 PRS	A selection of 10 teaching staff	Executive principal and head teacher	PRS	June 2015
Staff Focus Group 1.2 PRS	A selection of 7 teaching staff (same staff as first group)	Executive principal and head teacher	PRS	June 2016
Staff focus Group 2 SRS	A selection of 5 teaching staff	Executive principal and head teacher	SRS	July 2015
Staff Focus Group 2.2 SRS	A selection of 5 teaching staff (the same staff as the earlier group)	Executive principal and head teacher	SRS	June 2016

E1. Evidence of data analysis: Documentary analysis

(Adapted from Hsieh and Shannon 2005)

Step 1: read documents, build picture of the context of the collaboration

Step 2: coding using ANT concepts to build a picture of the actor network forming. Two examples of step 2 are provided below as an indication of the process in action. This process provided information and context for the interview and focus groups.

Key:

Action

In progress

Not yet

Objective sample					
Document type: Letters to parents (gathered at PRS)	**Themes**				
	Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point	**Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution**	**Locking into place / interessement**	**Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment**	**Evidence of working together / Translation**
02/2012 Federation proposal					
07/2012 Transfer to Federation					
05/2012 Ofsted Inspection					
03/2013 MAT consultation					
03/15 EP change					
01/16 MAT conversion update					
09/16 Joint 6th form post gone					

Comment: tentative steps

Subjective sample					
Document type: Press articles relating to the federation (2012)	**Themes**				
	Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point	**Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution**	**Locking into place / interessement**	**Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment**	**Evidence of working together / Translation**
01/2012 'future of education' is secured by schools link					
02/2012 'Schools joining forces to gain strength in depth'					
02/2012 'Schools join forces to safeguard future'					
05/2012 'Unanimous vote on Federation'					
07/2012 'Schools collaboration means wider access to teaching and resources: the best of both Worlds!'					
10/2012 'It can only be a good thing to work together'					
05/2013					

'It's all change at schools' (Gove visit)					
01/2014 'Link- up set to benefit pupils and schools' (Coop Trust)					
03/2015 'new principal for federation is high calibre'					
07/2015 'three heads stepping down after 100 years'	This article useful for context mainly				

Comment: Media presents a positive picture of the collaboration. OEP admits to writing the articles.

E2. Evidence of data analysis: Examples of thematic analysis

Process adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Initial preparation – inspection of documents

Stage 1 transcription of interviews and focus groups

Stage 2 close inspection of transcriptions– highlighting themes, patterns

Stage 3 diagrams/ maps and timelines –Timelines constructed of research progress and significant events identified in the interviews. Examples of these can be found in the appendix E.1 and E.2.

Stage 4 Name the themes emerging- develop categories and subcategories. Where are the successes and failures of the sensemaking and collaborative policy enactment? How can this be explained by ANT conceptual diagram (fig. 4)? Evidence of policy enactment and policy stall highlighted in the notes.

Stage 5 Actor-Network Theory analysis – ANT as a methodological tool- What can be further drawn out by ANT from the themes and subthemes. What is the role of material factors in the sensemaking and policy enactment processes?

Stage 6 The Actor network. Decision regarding where to cut the network and what parts of the data are to be used.

See below for the tables and diagrams that relate to stage 4,5 and 6.

Stage 7 Write the report thematically and ethnographically

Stage 8 – conclusions

Stage 9 – methodological and theoretical evaluation

Stage 4 (tables and diagrams) and 5 (highlighting of policy enactment and stall AN in formation)

Tables are condensed from notes originally made from interview transcriptions (only two examples from the interviews included here)

Text in bold indicate themes emerging or things of note

Green actor network forming/ policy enacted

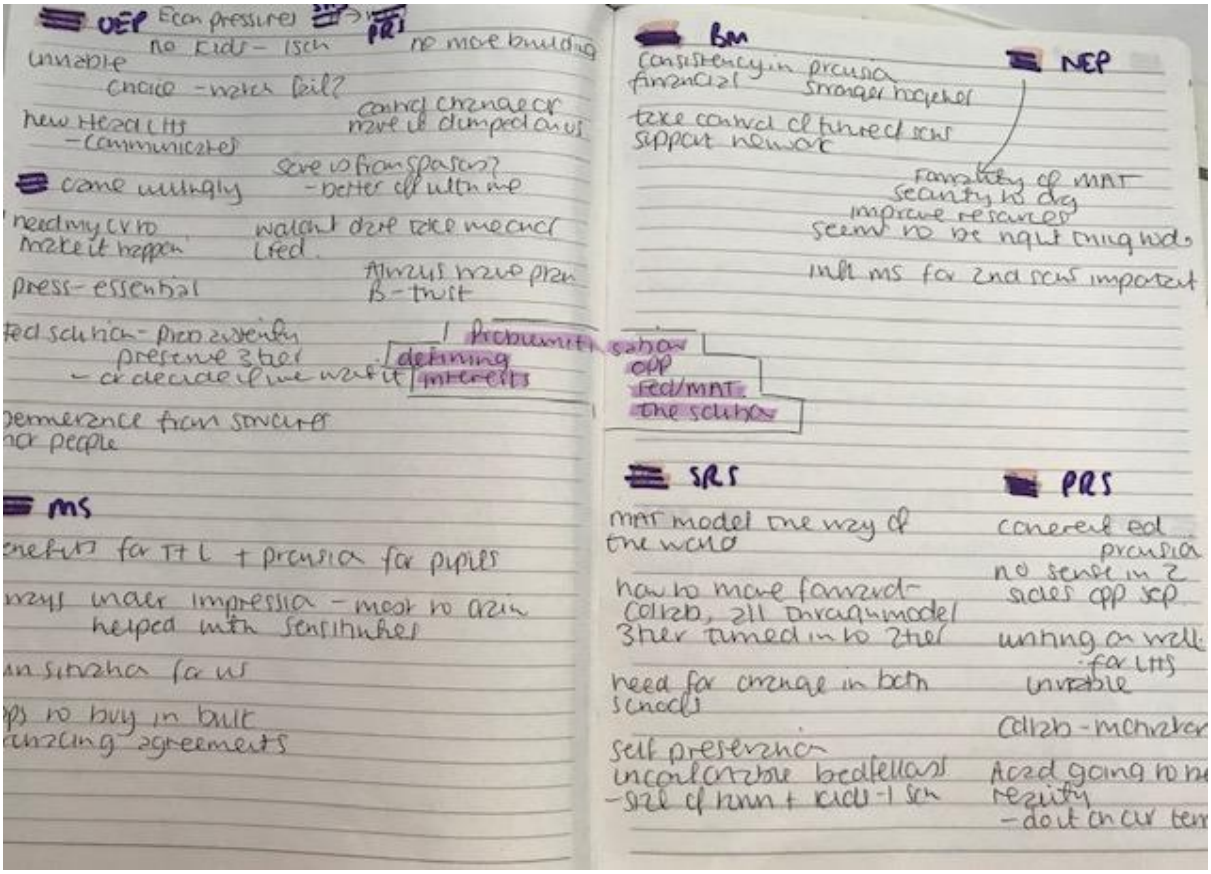
Red policy stall

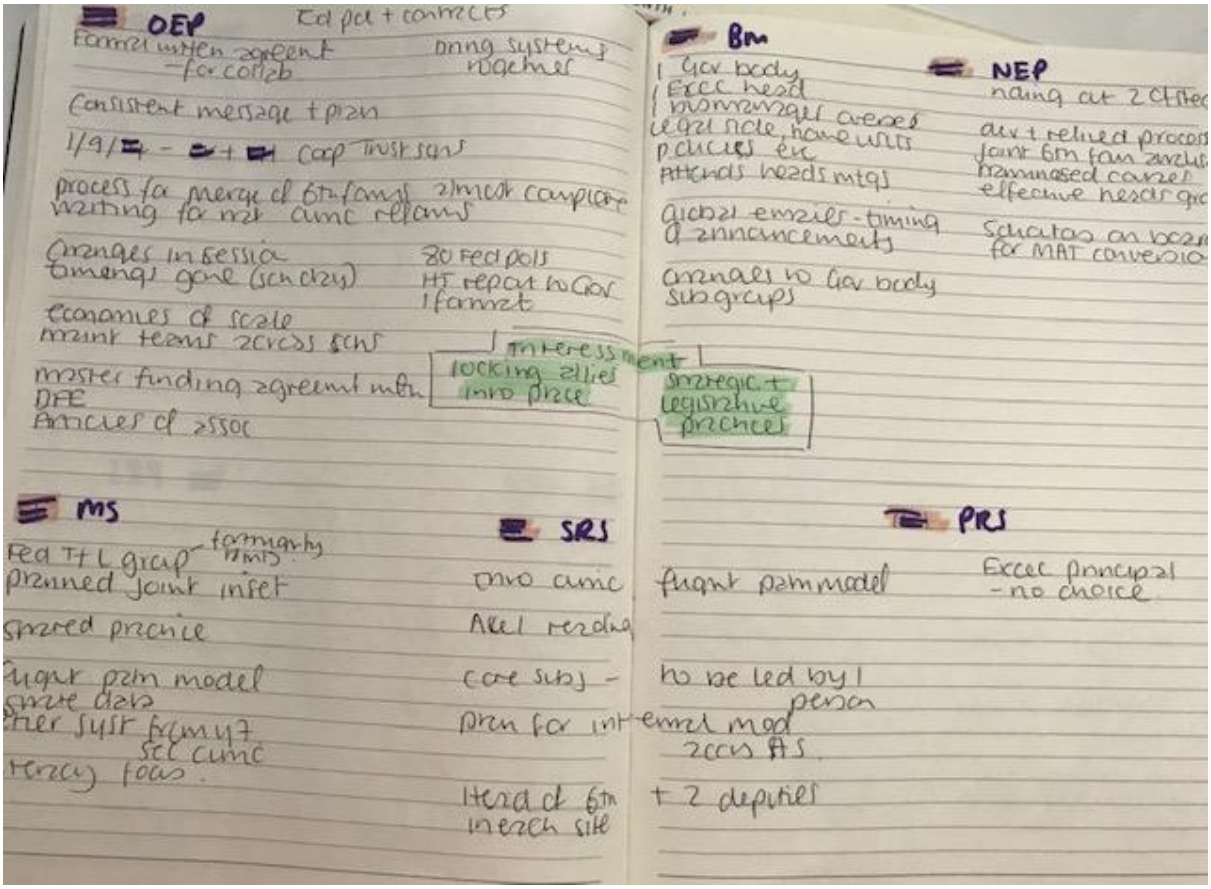
Data source	**EP interview 2**	**Date**	**Summer 2015**
Themes / ANT		**Data/ evidence**	**My comments**
1. **Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point** 2. **Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution**		1.c) **actions** serious changes at top end and 6th form 2. Fed solution, cause of probs austerity and comp from other providers, preserve 3 tier syst **Different framing** – PRS moral square deal, SRS retain control	Less of this found as the issues were already framed, the schs working as a Fed for 3 years, MAT on the way Different framing/ sensemaking for HS identified
Locking into place / interessement		'Permanence from structures not people' 6th form pace of changed governed by spec changes Timetables aligned 80 fed policies created Shared SLT lanyards Changes to GB	In the works but not sufficient, he articulates frustration regarding this Joint 6th form still dysfunctional
Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment		'increasing acceptance of change, communic across schs, most subj talk to each other, most agree change has to happen' Economies of scale, fed contracts	Should be more evidence of this by now?
Evidence of working together / Translation		Little evidence of this beyond SLT level	Still too early – pre MAT, MAT struggling to be approved

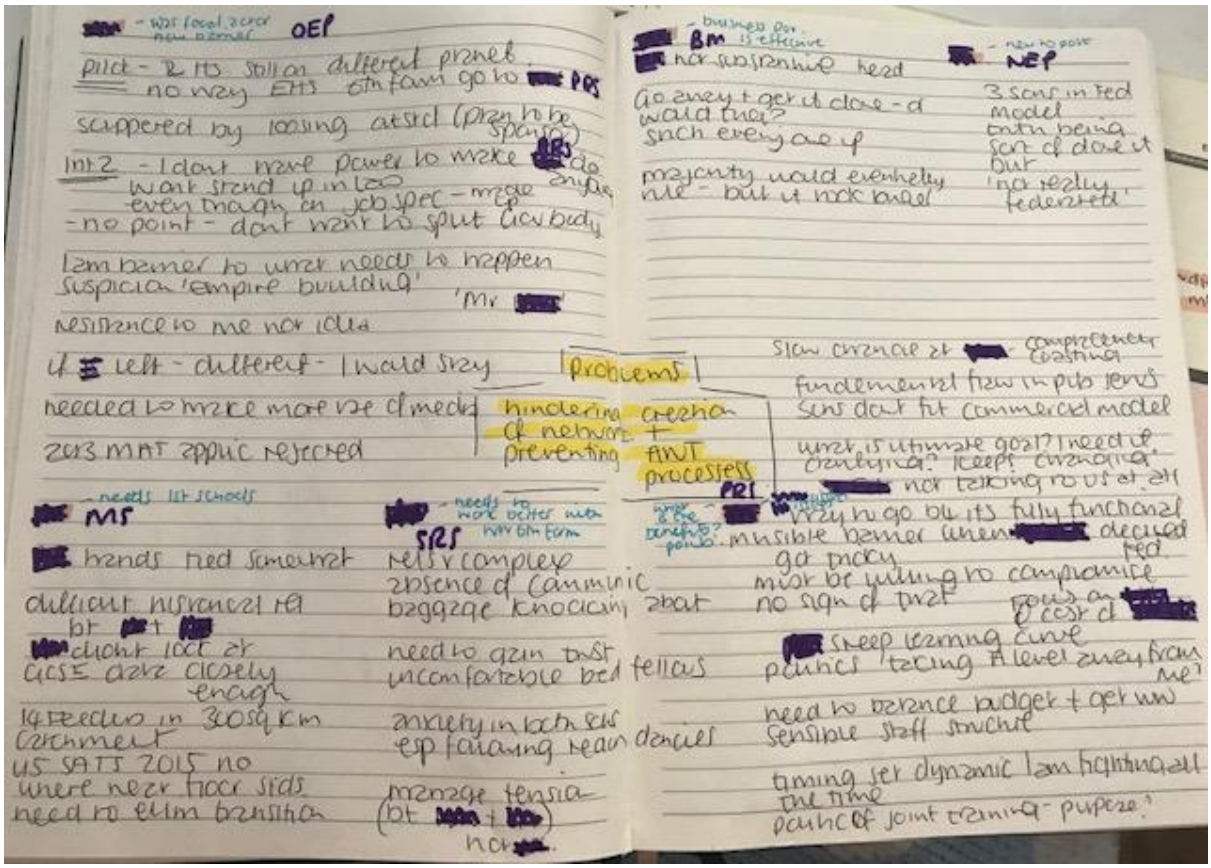
Issues	EP not substantive head – could push changes through but would split Gov body EP job spec 'purely made up I wrote it' ' I am a barrier to what now needs to happen – resistance to me not the idea' County will not bus students across the town MAT application struggling to be approved	EP resigns

Data source	**Head of MS**	**Date**	**Spring 2016**
Themes / ANT		**Data/ evidence**	**My comments**
1. **Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point** 2. **Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution**		2. 'we were immediately keen to find out what benefits there could be' we have most to gain'	**Different phase** school relations
Locking into place / interessement		Evidence of collaborative working with SRS, joint reading scheme and GCSE flight path model Change in curriculum, split secondary and primary up	
Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment		Far more evident, this school was on board from the start	New head but had been deputy
Evidence of working together / Translation		Particularly with SRS but active member of the MAT T and L group	
Issues		14 feeder schools in 300sq/km catchment MS below floor standards – KS2 SATs key perf indicator	**Directional focus**, pulled in two directions **Different phase** school relations not always straightforward
Additional themes		**Practical issues** Service level agreements – don't know what you have got till it is gone	

Comparison and cross referencing of all elite interviews – diagrams created – examples below


OEP
PRS
BM
NEP
SRS
PRS
MS


OEP
BM
NEP
MS
SRS
PRS



The visuals alone demonstrate considerable issues with the emerging collaborative relationships

<u>This was further cross-referenced using findings from the staff focus groups</u>

Data source	**Primary Research Site (PRS)**		
Themes / ANT	**Focus group 1 2015**	**Focus group 2 2016**	**My comments**
1. **Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point** 2. **Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution** **Condense into one theme – why collaborate?**	**Financial** Cost cutting, share resources Power **Control** Protect 3 tier, safety in numbers Avoid academy? **Moral** Parity of educational experience –	Little progress, confused and conflicting messages	Little progress one year to the next, if anything more confusion, relationship bt the two HS going backwards

	Ideologically good idea Yet issues – see below		
Locking into place / interessement	Very little change to everyday practice in terms of collaboration 6th form lessons in 3 hr blocks, some joint trips	Increasing anger and resentment towards SRS and the academy in general	**Ambivalent belongings**
Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment	'forced to change A level syllabus' 'political decision'	Relations have stalled between SRS and PRS Relations between church MS also decreasing	Agreement in principle but in practice not working – **material** blockers such as **time** and **money**
Evidence of working together / Translation	'it has stalled a bit' 'SRS resisting everything' 'relatively close relationship but no one wants to make the decision and give me time to do it' Variable relationship with MS, complex relationship with SRS – related to A level spec changes	'I can't really see the point in collaborating with SRS'	
Issues	No church MS involvement Historical rivalry between PRS and SRS 'Fragmented piecemeal experience hard to see benefits' 'benefits have not been articulated' 'general feeling of insecurity about what the future holds'	'feels like a battle, us vs them, our jobs and their jobs' 'dog eat dog' Policy overload – change in GCSE and A level syllabus 'powershift away from the teachers' 'its all talk' 'could be a good thing but you come back to that thing about **trust**'	Very heavy 6th form focus in both foc groups, site of significant tension and anxiety V little mention of CMS Attitude to MAT and collaboration

	'fear – am I doing myself out of a job?' 'I am defensive over jobs – no one is being truly honest' **Trust** 'No vision has been communicated' 'just a fog'		Mediated by redundancies KRC revealed level of anger and distrust was significant FG2
Additional issues		MAT conversion – practical issues, blocking finds, putting dept capitation back a year, less generosity or slack in the system, PP funds stalled **Time** **Trust** (in leaders)	

Data source	**Secondary Research Site (SRS)**		
Themes / ANT	**Focus group 1 2015**	**Focus group 2 2016**	**My comments**
1. **Work of the system leader/ obligatory passage point** 2. **Problematisation – framing the issue presenting the solution** **Condense into one theme – why collaborate?**	**Financial** – money and lack of other options, having to be resourceful **Control** – a forced hand but it is necessary **moral** – no mention of this which fits with EP sensemaking/ problematisation ideology – bring the kids of the town together leadership is in flux – new head on the way		Less moral undertones – fits problematisation model used by EP1 New head between group 1 and 2

Locking into place / interessement	A willingness here but lack of direction	'the idea of being a group is just a theory' However they are aware of the GCSE flightpath model (linking MS and SRS)	**Ambivalent belongings** – just trying to keep 'head above water' with day job
Acceptance of the vision to work together/ Enrolment	General acceptance	Increasing disillusion	KRC indicates they are reaching acceptance quicker than PRS but still have a way to go
Evidence of working together / Translation	Some evidence of cross school working and meetings, more with MS than PRS but A level discussions were taking place. Most collaboration at HOD level. Communication dependent on characters in the depts. **Distance** is a problem	HOD activity with MS continues HS relations deteriorating, damages to trust between the schools also 'I wouldn't know who to email'	Network patchy
Issues	Need for communication, lots of speculations responsibility of SLT – transparency, 'step up, form us a future' 'Biggest issue for us – in a period of transition' Haphazardly reaching a decision	Increasing anxiety Change in leadership has not delivered the certainty they were after 6th form situation (loss of joint post) is confusing	
Additional Themes		**Socio material - Distance** between school sites and	

		communication issues, **Time, trust** (in PRS staff and leaders)	

KRC – Kubler Ross Curve used in FG2 as a device to focus discussion

Condensed initial notes - FG revealed:

Different sensemaking regarding need to collaborate as given by EP1

PRS financial, Control, moral

SRS financial, control, no moral

Socio- material factors blocking the enactment of the joint 6th form (policy stall)

Distance between sites, time, money

Additionally, **trust** is a major barrier

Socio material factors assist the enactment of the relationship between SRS and MS (policy enactment)

Common body of students, distance

PRS are struggling, resisting, facing more upset and confusion than **SRS** who are confused but willing, this difference is mediated by redundancies at PRS

SLT considered the academy as bringing psychological benefits, this was not corroborated by the FG findings

Additional themes emerging

Personal cost, purpose, practical issues (beyond sociomaterial factors), accountability

These are linked by contradictions, paradoxes relating to the enactment of the MAT

Stage 6 and 7

From the interviews and FG, in consideration of the conceptual diagram (fig.4) two moments of translation emerged that demonstrated policy enactment (or rather attempts to enact policy):

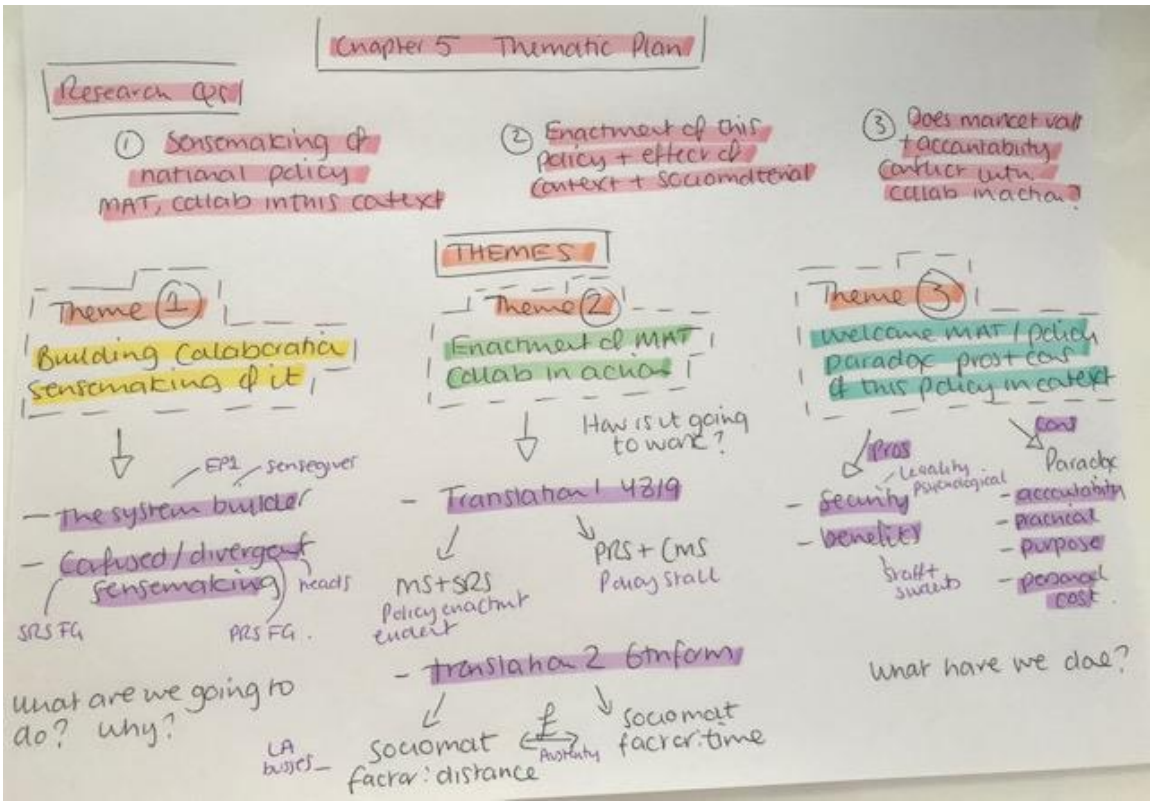
1) The joint 6th form

2) Year 8-9 transition (The relationship between SRS and the MS/ the development of an 'all through' curriculum)

These demonstrate different AN in operation

The results chapter then is planned out in consideration with the research questions – see diagram below:

3. Chapter 4 planning



4. *Fig.7* Photographs of the focus group set up

Focus group 1 in PRS

Focus group 2 in PRS