Turning Water into Wine: Scripting Multi-Academisation through Messianic Educational Leadership

Steven J. Courtney and Ruth McGinity

Abstract In this chapter, we present as scripted drama our data from a case study on the features and functions of educational leadership in the process of multi-academisation. Our objectives are to realise the potential of drama, and specifically of a Brechtian-inspired aesthetic, to foreground rich truths about the phenomenon. We do this through materialising the symbolic, symbolising the significant insights and themes, embodying the reported tensions and emotions, and puncturing the solemnity of multi-academisation. Our Brechtian approach moves us away from realism and towards a disruptive, challenging dramatic encounter with multi-academisation and its leadership, for example through our explicit characterisation of the MAT CEO as Jesus-like. This permits us to foreground charisma-based messianic educational leadership as the mechanism that we saw operationalising this project of multi-academisation. The CEO, David, inspires his followers through an extraordinary faith in his abilities and charisma to follow a mutable and relatively flimsy vision. This chapter makes contributions that are conceptual, through developing the construct of charismatic messianic educational leadership, and methodological, through widening the dramatic forms that have been used to present data and represent the social world in the field of educational leadership.

Key words

Messianic educational leadership, charisma, dramatic presentation of data, scripted drama, multi-academy trusts, multi-academisation.

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we draw on data from a case-study research project to contribute to the emergent literature on multi-academisation: this literature complements the rather larger one concerning multi-academy trusts (MATs). The process whereby a single school converts to academy status — academisation —is well understood (McGinity & Gunter 2017), even in instances where many months of negotiation do not finally end in legal conversion (Rayner et al. 2018; Rayner & Gunter 2020), yet the equivalent process for MATs is not: indeed, no homologous noun exists. Our Multi-Academisation and its Leadership Project sought to address these gaps. Our case-study MAT was created ostensibly from its CEO's desire to avoid the corporatisation inherent in the structure and to do something new, important, and different from what had been undertaken within the Local Authority.

The research took place at a time of contestation: despite having come into effect months previously, the MAT still provoked important discussions amongst its leaders about purposes, strategy and distinctiveness. Our data reveal the process and mechanisms by which, despite uncertainties and contestations, multi-academisation in this case study was achieved. We are deploying multi-academisation to mean more than the effectuation of the legal contract; we mean it as a process whereby identities, structures, cultures, practices, objectives and values are formed. We attribute its success in this case in large part to the MAT CEO, David, whose particular embodiment of unassuming charisma we noted in our interviews with him. The data show that he inspires sentiments in those of his followers whom we interviewed ranging from open admiration to devotion. They have what we can only characterise as complete faith in him. This faith appears to mitigate the effects of any the contestations or misunderstandings we highlight in this chapter, and so is functional to the process of multi-academisation. To theorise this process, we therefore embrace faith as a metaphor, explicatory mechanism and thinking tool.

Our data were generated through interviews in which leaders spoke singly to us, constructing reasonably internally coherent narratives about multi-academisation from their perspective, but including and alluding to the others who featured in the process. What we intend in this chapter is to recognise multi-academisation as a project with diverse stakeholders, a series of conversations underlain with tensions, interests and embodied positions. We do this through rendering this story as a series of scripted encounters, taking place in a 24-hour period. Through reimagining our data as drama, we reinsert the emotion, the moments of contradiction and, importantly, the charismatically leaderful relationships that were reported to us researchers. We do this in part through the creation of a character to represent the absent presence in our participants' stories— the Local Authority—and through our explicit rendering of David, the CEO, as Jesus-like. Our approach draws on narrative analysis, since we follow its principles in 'organiz[ing] the data elements into a coherent developmental account' (Polkinghorne 1995, p. 15). Further, as Polkinghorne suggests, through this method we are advancing a plot: *multi-academisation as a leadership project*. To our knowledge, only Mifsud (2016, 2017) has used drama to represent data in

educational leadership research. However, our narrative script is innovative in the way in which it draws on a Brechtian aesthetic to reveal through fantastical and dissonant dramatic elements how David does messianic educational leadership and how this is understood by his followers. Our contribution is consequently methodological, but also empirical, in capturing a moment of uncertain malleability in the creation of a structure by those deemed leaders.

3.2 MATs and Multi-Academisation

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are a privatised structure in English schooling provision, created in 2010, and are currently the multi-school grouping most privileged in education policy in England (Courtney 2015b). The trust is a single legal entity which engages in a contractual arrangement with the Secretary of State for Education to provide education across one or more sites, known as academies. None of the constituent academies in a MAT has a discrete legal identity and so cannot leave of its leaders' or staff community's own volition. Instead, any academy deemed mis-located may be re-brokered, that is, signed over to another MAT, following discussion between the Regional Schools Commissioner and trustees at MAT level. MATs were conceived to replace many functions of local authorities, for example, they employ the staff; decide on their conditions of employment and pay; devise and administer pay-related performance-management processes; provide teaching and leadership development; and are the admissions authority.

These descriptive functions reveal that MATs are the latest utterance in a long-standing policy conversation concerning a school-led system, with structural precedents in England including the requirement that so-called Specialist Schools (1993–2011) work to benefit local schools and their community (see Bell & West 2003). Indeed, high-attaining specialist schools were invited to join the Leading Edge Partnership Programme or Raising Achievement Partnership Programme, both having an explicit focus on school-to-school support (Courtney 2015a). Later iterations of the school-to-school model included federations of local-authority-maintained schools (Chapman 2015) and umbrella trusts. Unlike in a MAT, all constituent schools in an umbrella trust retain their own governing body. These example instantiations are located in England: the discourse promoting them, however, is international, with support from supra-national organisations such as the OECD (Pont et al. 2008). Homologous structures internationally include Charter Management Organisations in the USA.

The analytical functions of a MAT are multiple: first, they are a mechanism for disintermediation, or the removal of the "middle tier" (Courtney & McGinity 2020; Wilkins 2017): accountability is therefore both reduced and rendered more complex. Second, MATs constitute a mechanism for corporatisation: the most senior role is often called the CEO, and corporatised identities, purposes and practices prevail (Hughes 2020; Hughes et al. 2020). Third, in a previous article in which we draw on these data (Courtney & McGinity 2020), we argue that MATs are vital

contemporary sites in the English education landscape of provision for the system leadership that is privileged in policy and discourse. We reconceptualise this system leadership as a mechanism for, and instantiation of three forms of depoliticisation. These are, following Wood and Flinders (2014),

> [F]irst, governmental depoliticisation, where decisions, functions and activities previously undertaken by governments are instead delegated to arms-length bodies and subjected to bureaucratic and/or technical control. The second is societal depoliticisation, where social issues are moved from the public to the private sphere, and so become matters of individual choice. The third form is discursive depoliticisation, where language shifts issues to 'the "realm of necessity" in which "things just happen" and contingency is absent' (Wood and Flinders, 2014: 165). (Courtney & McGinity 2020, p. 4)

MATs are consequently a key element of a neoliberal policy agenda, variously realised in a range of nation states, to de-democratise, corporatise and privatise education, yet to do so at one remove, with school leaders' activities and standards-agenda-aligned visions filling a policy void created purposively through depoliticisation.

3.3 Theorising with Messianic Educational Leadership

In using messianic educational leadership as an analytical metaphor, we want to draw attention as much to the role of followers and followership as to that of the leader. Messiahs are recognised as such by their followers, and not by self-proclamation. Our contribution derives from our location in the critical part of the field of educational leadership: this critical disposition leads us to trouble the identification of leadership only with the actions and dispositions of the top post holder in the organisation. Following insights from, for example, the field of organisation studies (Crevani 2015; Crevani et al. 2010; Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011) and Eacott (2015) in educational leadership, we understand leadership to be the product of the relation between actors, who may be understood as leader and follower(s), if only for the duration of that interaction. Messianic educational leadership overlays upon these insights a hierarchy, a reminder that all relations are subject to power, including leaderful ones. Here, we focus not only upon David's charisma, ambition and skills, but also upon the influence of these features on the rest of his leadership team; the ways in which their response in turn recursively influences David, and the subsequent actions, claims and cultures ascribed to this interaction by case-study participants. This is a conceptualisation of educational leadership that differs from what might be called the "other" form of "shared" leadership, that is, the contemporarily dominant distributed leadership (see e.g. Harris 2013), where leadership does not happen in the space between actors, but at most is individually possessed and enacted, simply by more actors, and at the least is not leadership at all, but delegated responsibility (Gunter et al. 2013).

Messianic educational leadership is the model we are using to explain our data, but the key mechanism underpinning these messianic relations and interactions is

faith: using these terms connotes a conceptual genealogy. Messiah leadership was elucidated by Western (2008) as a discrete organisational leadership discourse and successor to what he delineates as the therapist discourse. Western describes how messiah leadership drew on American fundamentalist evangelism, anthropology, practitioner influences and Asian organisational practices and cultures to construct and privilege a heroic leader whose influence extends beyond the dyadic through creating and enforcing a strong vision. Following Western's framing, this discourse underpins the transformational-leadership model that dominated education and other fields throughout the late 1980s and onwards, until it was either subsumed within distributed forms (Gunter et al. 2013) as the reality of "hero headteachers" failed to live up to predictions, or it mutated into more authoritarian forms, even totalitarian ones (Courtney & Gunter 2015), as high-accountability regimes required public sanctions for apparent failures to deliver (Courtney 2016).

Through our own usage of messianic educational leadership, we aim both to reclaim it for the contemporary era and to enrich it conceptually. Western's elucidation foregrounds 'culture control' (2013, p. 287) as the mechanism for followership, operationalised by Messiah leaders' imposing a vision constructed as 'shared' and by follower surveillance. We dispute neither objective nor means, but want to supplement this conceptualisation to account for followers' agency in recognising, summoning and thereby empowering their Messiah. Our argument throughout this chapter is that thinking with the concept of messianic leading and leadership helps us to understand not only key features of David's practice, positioning and dispositions but also those of his followers. Their faith in him is central to explaining how multi-academisation works and why it should do so, and is an active, hard-won force, rather than passive state. They are disciples, who must maintain the faith and contribute to the aura and mystique of the messianic leadership.

Faith can simply mean trust or confidence in a person, process, institution and so on, and therefore arguably underpins most forms of educational leadership where these are conceptualised relationally rather than as organisational, hierarchical imperatives. We are extending faith into its religious domain because the object of faith in this instance is located in two arenas. First, the faith that the members of the leadership team have in David exceeds the mundane to attain the extraordinary. Second, they have faith in the doctrine of multi-academisation that he leads and operationalises. Multi-academisation is the Good News that they all have ears to hear. However, faith is neither passive nor easy; when challenges arrive, it takes effort to keep the faith. Issues of power, jealousies and contestation still arise; the point with thinking these through with faith is that it enables a rich understanding of the contortions and cognitive dissonances that followers actively overcome in order to succeed. Faith is experienced individually and knowledge claims arising from it cannot be objectively verified: for Hick (1988), that is the point:

> But the proper question is whether the religious man's [sic] awareness of being in the unseen presence of God constitutes a sufficient reason for the religious man himself to be sure of the reality of God. He does not profess to infer God as the cause of his distinctively religious experiences … The onus lies upon anyone who denies that this fulfills the conditions of a proper knowledge-claim to show reasons for disqualifying it. (Hick 1988, pp. 209–210)

Multi-academisation, like academisation before it, is an article of faith. Its existence is not in doubt, but claims are made that are largely unverifiable or objectively meaningless, as the following by former National Schools Commissioner, Sir David Carter, demonstrates:

> It is clear that there are at least three core elements that the strongest trusts exhibit. First, a board that contains a wide range of professional experiences that can deliver the dual responsibility of building strategy to deliver great outcomes for children alongside the culture of accountability that is necessary across the organisation. Second, the appointment of an executive leader, typically an executive head or chief executive officer, who is held to account for standards across the schools. Third, the creation and execution of a school improvement strategy that develops and improves the workforce, builds succession and enables the strongest teachers and leaders to influence outcomes for more children. (Carter, in DfE 2016, p. 4)

All of the above are possible in local-authority-maintained schools and federations and so do not make the case for MATs particularly. The superiority of the MAT as a host structure for these three elements is assumed rather than argued. Speaker and audience are all believers.

Additionally, any refutation of the claims made for MATs counts for little to nothing, since, as Britzman (1995) reminds us, 'receiving knowledge is a problem … when the knowledge encountered cannot be incorporated because it disrupts how the self might imagine itself and others' (p. 159). Multi-academisation shapes the field, produces identities and positions and informs the rules of the game (Bourdieu 1990). It is a suite of activities, a political objective and a process that differentiates the modern and modernising from the bog standard and obsolete.

3.4 Methodology

We undertook a single case study of a multi-academy trust that had just been created, which we will refer to in this chapter as Tonbury and Swain MAT, as we do in Courtney and McGinity (2020). The MAT comprised at that time four constituent academies (see Table 1). We observed a leadership meeting and carried out semi-structured interviews with eight members of the MAT's leadership team. These had roles comprising the MAT CEO, constituent academy principals, a 'headship team' member, academy senior leadership team member, and two trustees (see Table 2). All these roles qualify them for the label "leader", and/or legitimate their professional practice as "leadership". Calling those occupying senior positions within and across schools "leaders'' may seem axiomatic, given the primarily functionalist tendency to locate educational leadership with the person or people at the organisational apex (Gunter 2004). We follow Gunter in problematising this conflation of leadership, leader and authority in our thinking and scholarship, but methodologically we accepted those sampling parameters because they are intelligible to much of the field and to our research participants. However, treating trustees as educational leaders, as we do here again for methodological purposes, requires more justification. We, therefore,

draw attention to the endorsement of this collocation by the state, whose "Competency Framework for Governance" (Department for Education 2017) explicitly aims at MAT trustees and devotes its first area of 'Knowledge and skills' to 'Strategic leadership' (p. 8). This suite of state-sanctioned competency expectations operationalises a market, whose product is leadership and whose consumers are trustees. The private company GovernEd, for instance, 'has been contracted by the [UK] Department for Education to deliver leadership development training for Academy Trustees' (GovernEd 2021, np) and has created targeted leadership training for MAT trustees. MAT trustees are to think of themselves as educational leaders who engage in strategic leadership: this is constructed through the competency framework as doing vision work (see also Courtney & Gunter 2015), working to a set of values, collaboratively, making decisions, and managing risk (Department for Education 2017).

Institution	Description
Tonbury and Swain MAT	Multi-Academy Trust comprising four academies over two towns in a coastal county in England. Led by David.
Oak Manor	Founding academy of the MAT. Secondary phase. Academically successful. Led by David.
Skelton High	Taken over by the MAT after Ofsted failure and three Heads in 12 months. Led by a "Headship Team" of three, seconded from Oak Manor, including Sarah.
Halsby Junior	Academically successful school that academised to join the MAT. Led by Lucy.
Rushton Green Special	Small, special boys' school that academised to join the MAT. Led by Ben.

Table 3.1 The MAT and its constituent institutions. Reproduced from Courtney and McGinity (2020, p. 6)

Name	Role(s)
David	CEO of Tonbury and Swain MAT and Principal of Oak Manor.
Ben	Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Rushton Green Special School.
Lucy	Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Halsby Junior.
Sarah	Headship Team member of Skelton High. Originally from Oak Manor.
Nicola	Assistant Headteacher of Skelton High. Arrived as NQT.
Roger	Board member of Tonbury and Swain MAT.
Paul	Board member of Tonbury and Swain MAT.

Table 3.2 The MAT's leaders. Reproduced from Courtney and McGinity (2020, p. 6)

3.4.1 Rendering Multi-Academisation Data as Drama

We alluded in the introduction to important methodological issues of presentation arising from our use of interview data. Specifically, we see it as a methodological problem that these data are generated in a series of conversations with single protagonists who are reporting, narrating and constructing their role in group processes and cultures. Researchers have long grappled with how best to present these data so that they in turn best represent the social phenomena they describe (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer 1995; Eisner 1979, 1997; Mifsud 2016, 2017). Qualitative researchers have typically reconstructed from such individual accounts a social world in which notions of the social are at best invoked through thematised arrangement, or through reporting or constructing a narrative (e.g., Courtney 2017). This attempt is destined to fail on its own terms; the individually derived paradigmatic or even narrative account is not adequate to represent pluralistic social experiences, processes and encounters (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer 1995; Mifsud 2017). In fact, we make the more fundamental argument that data are usually represented in ways that reflect reified custom rather than any inherent truth or universal applicability; and that much is lost in their being rendered so (Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer 1995; Mifsud 2017), in ways that have largely lost their capacity to impinge upon the scholarly reader's consciousness. Attempting to do research otherwise raises questions concerning legitimacy and rigour, yet a thematised account reveals a truth, or an experience no more fully, precisely or meaningfully than a film, poem or dramatic work. However, education-research traditions construct such paradigmatic reports as more valid or trustworthy (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2017). Axiomatically, no data representation *is* the social world, encounter or process that it reports. All events, relations, processes and so on are reported in ways that are partial, interested, reduced and pre-interpreted by the research participant even before they encounter the researcher, who further mediates, locates, imagines, construes and infers. As Mifsud (2016) notes, 'the textual staging of the research "story" is never innocent, being influenced by views of reality and the self' (p. 864). This applies whether the product is a series of themes or a poem or play.

But what of rigour? Can a dramatic rendering of data be trusted without the verbatim quotes that are usually found in qualitative research? Let us unpack the key assumption underpinning such questions, which is that verbatim quotes are the closest the researcher can get to a window into the research participant's soul. But why is that desirable, or more rigorous? On the contrary, we suggest that it is a problem for knowledge production where research rigour is understood to be achieved when accepting more-or-less uncritically the participants' interpretation of events and phenomena. This happens when researchers use verbatim quotes primarily as a proxy for analytical rigour and trustworthiness. More extreme examples include researchers' member-checking not just their interview transcripts, but also their analysis, or through their adopting participants' ideological or discursive framings. We see three major issues with understanding rigour in this way.

The first two issues are interlinked and concern the object of analysis and the role of the researcher. Analysis in education research ought to consider the political, social and discursive contexts within which data are generated, and to use theory or thinking tools to illuminate and explain what it all means. This is integral to the tradition of policy scholarship within which we locate ourselves (Grace 1995) and implies an active role for the researcher. This approach enables the inclusion of objects of analysis such as the lies that participants tell themselves and are told in order to construct an identity and life narrative that makes sense to them and that aligns with their claimed values (Courtney & Gunter 2019). It requires a critical stance with and against the data.

The third issue is this: neither is rigour guaranteed nor reality captured through using verbatim quotes. Like all proxies, it is imperfect. Quotes may be juxtaposed or constructed, purposefully or inadvertently, in such a way as to convey a meaning differing from that intended by the research participant. One only has to recall the editing skill of online satirists such as Cassetteboy (e.g., 2020) to see an exaggerated version of this process. Of course, the researcher is more than an editor and provides vital mediating textual accompaniment that positions and locates the data (Mifsud 2016).

We suggest that the dramatic presentation of data responds to these three issues in ways that are equally rigorous, but on its own terms. In other words, we, like Mifsud (2016), 'lay claim for the validity of [our] research' (p. 877). First, it is more honest in the way in which it makes more visible the role of the researcher. As Eisner (1979) puts it,

> What the writer is able to do, as is the painter, composer, dancer, or critic, is to transform knowledge held in one mode into another ... Somehow, the artist finds or creates the structural expressive equivalent of an idea, a feeling, or an image within the material with which he or she works. The material becomes the public embodiment—a medium, in the literal sense of the word—through which life of feeling is shared. The arts are not a second-class substitute for expression. They are one of the major means people throughout history have used both to conceptualize and express what has been inexpressible in discursive terms. (Eisner 1979, p. 200)

The transformed data are instantly recognisable as an artefact or construct in a way that is concealed in the thematised report. Further, on the extra-canonical status of dramatic presentation, we agree with Eisner (1997, p. 5) that

> What is clear is that the forms we use to inform, the forms that display what we make of what we have chosen to call 'data' are as old as the hills; they may be new in the context of educational research, but they have been around forever.

This poses a challenge to the field to problematise afresh the ways in which rigour has been conceptually collocated with certain practices in education research, and also to consider new ways in which rigour might be attained when applied to alternative forms of data presentation. These challenges are useful, but demanding for researcher, participant and reader. They require work to make new connections and to scrutinise more carefully the links between old connections.

Eisner (1997) takes the field further still, noting that thinking anew about data representation brings into productive question 'what it means to do research' (p. 5). This speaks to the second issue we raised, that concerning objects of analysis and, relatedly, ways of knowing about these objects (see Gunter 2016). The focus of our enquiry in this chapter is multi-academisation; how we might know it is influenced not just by the arts, but by critical realism.

Concerning the epistemology of the arts, McLeod (1988, in Norris 2016) identifies five ways in which drama enables sense making: word, number, image, gesture and sound, with only the first two predominating typically in education research. We therefore offer this chapter as a corrective alongside Mifsud (2016, 2017) in the hope of contributing to a shift in methodological approaches to data (re)presentation in the field of educational leadership. In education more widely, Norris (2016) and Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) have provided useful overviews of the field's encounters with drama-as-data representation, which have centred on the USA and Canada. The other main sub-field in education which has used this approach is intercultural education (e.g., Frimberger 2016; Harvey 2018).

On our critical-realist approach, we take seriously its proponents' suggestions that the social world comprises more than actors' subjective and transient perceptions and experiences of it; that reified structures achieve an objective ontological status that may predate, and which certainly exceeds and endures beyond these experiences (Archer, 1998; Bhaskar, 1975). What this means for the present study is that we intend interpreting multi-academisation in this way, as an ontologically discrete structure that causes effects on actors as well as being a site and product of effects caused by these actors, and that this too requires addressing. In other words, multi-academisation conjures identities and provokes actions (although we don't believe it has agency). This liberates us to focus rather less on what our participants say about multi-academisation and to devote more attention to what their utterances signify, how they can be interplayed and what function they perform in the pursuit of multi-academisation. Our claim here is that this is most productively achieved through drama.

This is not the same as aiming at realism. We are not attempting to reconstruct from partial, individual accounts a single authentic representation of social reality. As critical researchers, we reject the epistemological grounds upon which such a theoretical enterprise would be predicated. We hold that no form or method can achieve this objective, not even arts-based methods. For instance, we note Brecht's critique that realistic drama is not at all like reality because it still follows theatrical conventions (1992, in Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer 1995, p. 405). Yet in fetishising realism, it eschews the possibilities open to it as drama.

Instead, we aim to take advantage of the medium of drama as art; it is only as art that it is able to renounce the constraints of everyday realities and capture the social world as symbolic, relational and poetic (Eisner 1979). In other words, and following Kleinau and McHughes (1980), our approach is on drama as presentational, i.e. stylised, rather than representational, i.e. realistic. This is our response to the third issue we identified, that quoting participants doesn't capture reality. Our intent, rather, is to make this instantiation of multi-academisation intelligible, to make the

symbolic explicit and material, to 'perform the magical feat of transforming the contents of our consciousness into a public form that others can understand' (Eisner 1997, p. 4). This approach consists in drawing upon the spirit of Brechtian theatre pedagogy (Brecht and Willett 1964) to render the social, organisational, symbolic and legal enstructuration of multi-academisation theatrically. Specifically, as critical scholars, we take up Brecht's challenge to problematise power structures through the medium of theatre. Brecht does this largely through the Verfremdungseffekt, or estrangement effect. Frimberger (2016) contrasts this V-effect to Aristotelian theatre

> which arranged scenes and episodes in a linear, harmonious fashion, [whereas] Brecht put them in juxtaposition and introduced interruptive devices. An actor might suddenly burst into reflective song. The audience might be directly addressed in the middle of dialogue with a social commentary on a character's underlying motivation for action. This unexpected break of classic narrative structure, now of course a well-established artistic device, startled the audience out of a mode of viewing as consumption. Instead, spectators were led to examine the unfolding events on stage with a critical eye. The V-effect enabled a critique of everyday representations through an 'aesthetic of heterogeneity' (Jameson, 1998, p. 79) on stage. This portrayed reality, and with it the self, as fragmented, constructed and ultimately changeable. (Frimberger 2016, p. 134)

We aim to unsettle the spectator/reader, as well as the narrative and underlying power relations, through a series of dramatic devices. These include first, portraying the MAT CEO, David, explicitly as Jesus-like, and including biblical language to materialise his leadership of this emergent multi-academy trust. Second, we convey the myriad meetings, events, mishaps and serendipities that led ultimately to multi-academisation as a formal ball, where the protagonists dance their role in turn. In this choice, we follow Brecht's call for a theatre that entertains (Brecht and Willett 1964).

3.4.2 Crafting the Script

To construct the scripted encounters and render the data as drama, we revisited the data in their raw, transcript form. This was important for three reasons. Firstly, although we had extensive and rich knowledge and understanding of our data as we had already analysed them to produce an article (Courtney and McGinity 2020), our focus and approach was distinctive there, and as such, revisiting the data to generate new insights became an integral part of identifying and constructing the argumentation and analytical framework for this intended contribution. Second, in order to construct a narrative that enabled us to script multi-academisation through the concept of messianic leadership, we wanted to identify trends in the data which both exemplified and legitimated this thematic and analytical approach (we had previously discussed the notion of messianic leadership in relation to the approbation and reverence paid to David by the participants in the process of our data generation but we had not previously approached the data with this specific lens in mind). Third, we were aware that the role (or lack thereof) of the Local Authority in the

decision-making process to establish a Multi-Academy Trust was ill defined in the data. There was a characterisation of the Local Authority there, ranging from absent to obstructive to histrionic, and in this regard such descriptors were important in the post-hoc rationalisation that characterised the accounts justifying both multi-academisation and the inevitability of David's leadership within this. The lack of representation of the LA as a participant presented an opportunity for us to consider and construct the ways in which we might personify this significant character and include it in the narrative. As such, re-reading the data for specific inference as to how the LA was contrived by participants was an integral first step.

Once we had identified the main themes of a) messianic leadership and b) the absence but centrality of the LA within the story, we met online to discuss and agree sub-key words or themes that would enable us to mine the data for relevant extracts that would constitute these two main, overarching themes. For the first theme we agreed that the approach would require careful inference of the data for each participant transcript to identify the way in which David was rendered messianic in these accounts. For the second theme, we agreed on several sub-key words that would enable us to identify where and how the LA was described and presented. These sub-key words included, for example, 'LA', and associated synonyms: 'Local Authority', 'County Council', 'Lintshire County Council'. The process involved taking each transcript in turn, starting with David as the protagonist driving the plot and the mood of the narrative. We then undertook simultaneous searches of the individual transcripts using the "Control plus F" (control and find) function on our computers, listing the matches in the sidebar and working our way through each synonym.

For each instance, once the sub-key words were listed, we took each in turn, initially reading the full text around the sub-key word. Sometimes there were multiple instances of the use of a sub-key word in the text and we would undertake careful reading and re-reading of these passages to infer the extent to which the meaning, description or characterisation shifted throughout the account and to clip the text that we agreed illuminated the thematic approach. Subsequently we took each of these passages and agreed on an interpretation of what was being said about either a) David's messianic leadership or b) the LA's role, copied the text to a new document and constructed a brief analytical precis for each extract. Each transcript was treated identically, and we worked our way through all of them for both main themes using the same approach as outlined above.

We now had a separate document which contained extracted data in relation to our key themes along with individual analyses of each sub-data-set that would enable us to begin constructing a coherent narrative, and eventually a crafted script, which would represent a dramatic retelling of the story of multi-academisation through the analytical lens of messianic leadership.

3.5 Scripting Multi-Academisation

In this section, we do three things. First, we present a selection of verbatim data extracts in order to enhance the trustworthiness of our script-as-analysis, which we present second, following these extracts. In this way, readers will be able to see our workings and to follow how we made the shift from the material we generated with our participants to the script we created out of it. We are not stating that the credibility of our analysis depends on readers' agreeing with our choices or with the fidelity of script to source material; rather, we are acknowledging that in this relatively new form of data presentation (for the field of educational leadership), it would be beneficial to 'walk the reader through' our methodological process. The data extracts will provide only a sense of the processes, emotions and relationships involved: we do not intend to foreshadow each element of the subsequent script with its prompt in the data. Third, we discuss holistically the themes and issues raised in the script in relation to the wider literature.

3.5.1 Indicative Data Extracts for Scene One

> We academised and have been an academy since then, but the school that I was leading was an ex-grant maintained, so it had a mindset previously. The reason it had gone grant-maintained was in order to get back into 6th form, so it went grant-maintained in 1998 because the local authority had taken its 6th form away as part of (inaudible), it was a local authority school, so it used the dying days of the Major government to get GM status so it could get back into 6th form. I only learned that once I got there. (David)

> We pushed on with academisation. It strained the relationship with the Local Authority, because the Local Authority didn't agree with the agenda of academisation. (David)

> The Local Authority ... are doing everything they can to prevent the national policy happening on their doorstep. (David)

> For me, a system leader is more about the local system and we're trying to create a systems approach that's very localised. (David)

> Everything we've talked about was about a local solution, a local option to support local schools. (Ben)

3.5.2 Scene One

CHARACTERS

DAVID — the headteacher of Oak Manor who became MAT CEO from 2017
ALAN — Director of Lintshire County Council Local Authority

EXTERIOR GARDENS OF A STATELY HOME — MORNING

Two men are walking together along a path in the gardens. The path leads from lawns, through a rose garden to a wooded area. One of the men is shorter, with an expression that alternates between affability and thoughtfulness. He has a beard and is wearing a loincloth, cloak and sandals unselfconsciously. The other, taller man is sterner, has tidy grey hair and is dressed in a suit. The shorter man speaks first.

DAVID

Thanks for coming to join us, Alan, on this spiritual retreat. I know it's not your thing, but I wanted to meet you to give you a heads-up before any rumours reach you in the Local Authority. We are seriously considering creating a multi-academy trust, with me in Oak Manor leading a small number of other local schools. We think that we can create a structure that has localism more convincingly at its heart. We think we can achieve better outcomes for local kids alongside economies of scale. I know that the Local Authority does not support academisation, let alone multi-academisation, so I wanted to be the one to let you know. Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the achievements of the Local Authority. I have come not to abolish but to complete them.

ALAN
(Pause)
Well, I can't say that I'm surprised. You've got form, after all. You've gone from Grant Maintained to academy already; I can see that you think you're on a path.

DAVID
No need to make this personal! Oak Manor went Grant Maintained before I was appointed as its headteacher, and only because the Local Authority had removed the school's sixth-form provision. GM status was the only way to get it back.

ALAN
(somewhat pompously)
The approach was strategic and intended to achieve the best outcomes for the majority, whilst providing best value for money. Having sixth forms in school means that fewer subjects are offered, but at greater cost. This is a bigger question than what any individual school wants. You talk about economies of scale - this was the perfect example of the LA working for that!

DAVID
(with feeling)
Children don't experience their education in the macro! Schools and their leaders need the opportunity to decide when economy of scale becomes a deciding factor in what they choose to offer or not. You deciding on our behalf in your interest was always the nub of the problem.

ALAN

Deciding on your behalf is how local democracy works.
(pause)
So who else is going in with you?

DAVID
Ah, now, there's the thing… that's … complicated.

ALAN
This multi-academisation is a solution to a problem that doesn't exist and is wrong for our children. We will fight you tooth and nail, David.

END OF SCENE I

3.5.3 Indicative Data Extracts for Scene Two

David's been exceptional. (Roger)

I like David. I think he's a really clever, ambitious, switched-on guy. (Paul)

I recognise the knowledge and the experience David has. (Ben)

Someone might decide that David is a bit of a maverick in the system. (Ben)

[David's] vision and his moral compass come through everything he says. (Nicola)

I think, though, having David leading it is really key. (Sarah)

To be mentored, coached, steered from somebody like David is an opportunity most people don't get. (Sarah)

Love the concept of distributed leadership because it's to me reinforcing that counter-intuitive notion that leadership is not about a leader, leadership is about distributed, shared ownership etc. But [to self] as I say, actually in reality in your distributed leadership David, all you've done is sloughed off the work to others but kept the power and authority. I get that! (David)

3.5.4 Scene Two

CHARACTERS

DAVID — the MAT CEO (from 2017) and headteacher of Oak Manor.

ALAN — Director of Lintshire County Council Local Authority.

LUCY — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Halsby Junior.

SARAH — Headship Team member of Skelton High. Originally from Oak Manor.

ROGER — Board Member of Tonbury and Swain MAT.

BEN — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Rushton Green Special School.

NICOLA — Assistant Headteacher of Skelton High. Arrived as NQT.

PAUL — Board Member of Tonbury and Swain MAT.

EXTERIOR GARDENS OF A STATELY HOME — AFTERNOON

DAVID is on a small, circular stage erected in the gardens. He is wearing his loincloth, a cloak and a top hat with a bright red flower tucked into the band. On the stage is a table with a large pitcher and several glasses on it. The other people are seated on chairs in a circle around and below him on the lawn. They are his audience. They look at him eagerly, except ALAN, who is scowling. DAVID looks around his audience. The audience, save ALAN, is mesmerised. ALAN sips his glass of water.

DAVID (to ALAN)
Please! Pass me your water!

(ALAN, as if unable to resist, slowly offers up his glass of water, whilst looking all the time at DAVID, who returns his gaze and takes the glass. DAVID takes an exaggerated sniff of the liquid and winks at ALAN.)

DAVID (to ALAN, but for the audience's benefit and amusement)
This *is* water, isn't it, Alan?

ALAN (indignantly)
Of course it is!

(DAVID holds the glass of water aloft, then turns to the table and takes the pitcher from it. He shows the audience its empty interior.)

DAVID (to the audience)
Who wants to help me?

(LUCY, SARAH and BEN, all raise their hands quickly and wave them frantically. ROGER AND PAUL raise their hands next, purposefully, and lean forwards, staring intently at DAVID. NICOLA looks around her at the others, then nervously raises her hand. ALAN folds his arms.)

DAVID (pointing at SARAH)
Come up on this stage with me!

SARAH
That's all I've ever wanted!

(SARAH climbs up onto the stage and stands next to DAVID, smiling and excited.)

DAVID (boomingly, to SARAH)
Pour some of ALAN's water into this empty pitcher!

(SARAH takes the glass of water and pitcher and obliges, smiling. DAVID takes back the half-full glass, leaving the pitcher in SARAH's hand.)

DAVID (to SARAH)
Now give it a swirl and tip it out onto the grass below.

(SARAH unhesitatingly complies, leaning slightly forward over the front edge of the stage to do so. Water streams from the pitcher to the grass. The audience looks on, ALAN grumpily, the rest expectantly.)

DAVID (taking back the pitcher)
Now watch!

DAVID now tips the rest of the water that he took from ALAN into the pitcher and gives it a dramatic swirl. The audience murmurs appreciatively, save ALAN, who scowls. DAVID holds up the pitcher and starts to tip it. Red wine pours from the pitcher in a thin trickle to the stage floor. The audience cries out and rushes to the stage, clamouring and trying to touch DAVID's cloak. DAVID stops pouring the wine onto the floor, and instead starts to pour it into the glasses from the table behind him. All the glasses are filled to the brim, despite only half of ALAN's water having been seen to enter the pitcher. Laughing joyously, NICOLA, SARAH, BEN, ROGER, LUCY and PAUL raise their glasses to DAVID.

ROGER
This, this is, you are … *exceptional*.

(DAVID smiles mysteriously and inclines his head in acknowledgement. ALAN tuts and walks away, over the garden towards the house.)

END OF SCENE 2

3.5.5 Indicative Data Extracts for Scene Three

We pushed on with academisation. It strained the relationship with the Local Authority, because the Local Authority didn't agree with the agenda of academisation. And then … when the third school was one of the forced academisations … the Head at that time who I was working with, we had a conversation where he said, at that time policy allowed our stand with its outstanding status to be sponsor and he

looked at various national academies and we had a conversation about it being sponsored by us and I said 'yes fine'. I'd have to agree to it because I'd rather all the money stayed in the town, rather than any of your money get sliced off to go and support an HQ elsewhere, let's keep the money in the town, so if you've got to academise, then yeah...so he said to me: 'you will become my boss and not somebody else' and I said 'well if you want to see it like that, but we work collaboratively and it would be a strong peer accountability, but yes technically it will be like that, but we don't need to operate in that way and I said I don't see that the money that would get sliced off we'd just keep in his school and wouldn't necessarily see it coming to ours, so I said if anything that's just a reason for doing it. Anyway, their governors chose to go with a national chain, the official reason being (it was a sound one) our school had no experience of supporting a failing school, whereas the national chain did, so they would go with them. (David)

Now, unfortunately, what happened then, it was really, really annoying, was that the Local Authority were trying to hang on to us for obviously as long as they could and put their foot down and said 'no, that's not gonna happen' and we had another Interim Head. By the time Jean came to take over for us, the staff were in complete disarray, plus, we'd been again, like I say, we'd been prodded and poked by the Local Authority, the Local Authority had not been very helpful to us at all, during the time leading up to our Ofsted and were very quick to wash their hands of us then, milked us for lots of money in the meantime, but then kind of washed their hands of us. Do I sound bitter? (Nicola)

I genuinely see it as my duty to serve my community and aware that there are changes in the educational landscape, aware that there are issues around funding, aware that there are issues nationally with the performance of local authorities. All of those factors combined made me really consider our position in the current landscape and what I could do to best safeguard Halsby Junior within that landscape and ... then being approached more directly about the formation of a local offer. (Lucy)

I think that our secondary colleagues are going to learn a lot from Halsby Junior and I think our secondary colleagues' practice is going to be enhanced as a result and I think that often people think, I use David's term as boss, I think often people think the secondaries will boss the juniors, but as we've said with the STEM it's going to be the other way round on that. (Lucy)

In some sense where I've lost that autonomy, equally I have gained because actually now it's also learning about, here I am now being given executive responsibility across a multi-academy trust which includes secondaries. (Lucy)

Could we really pull off the perception that we were an equal partner to Oak Manor, because what people saw was this really tiny organisation, so I'd go to meetings locally and as far as they were concerned, they were starting to refer to us as the Oak Manor SEN school. (Ben)

3.5.6 Scene Three

CHARACTERS
DAVID — the MAT CEO (from 2017) and headteacher of Oak Manor.
WILLIAM — Headteacher of Skelton High, Tonbury.
JOHN — Headteacher of Beech Park, Tonbury.
SCOTT — CEO of Relentless Vision Academy Chain.
LESLEY — Chair of Governors, Beech Park.
TWO OFSTED INSPECTORS
ALAN — Director of Lintshire County Council Local Authority.
MARK — Interim Headteacher at Skelton High, Tonbury.
ELIZABETH — Chair of Governors at Skelton High, Tonbury.
BEN — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Rushton Green Special School.
LUCY — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Halsby Junior.
NICOLA — Assistant Headteacher of Skelton High. Arrived as NQT.

INTERIOR BALLROOM — EVENING. The room is full of guests who have come for the retreat. They are dressed formally in a manner that, overall, recalls Les Liaisons Dangereuses. This is more in the decor than in the outfits, which are more varied. All are on their feet and about to start the dance. The music begins; it is Handel's Suite No. 4 in D Minor for harpsichord. The guests start to move to the music, which, stately rather than energetic, inspires movements consisting in sedate approchements and disengagements of groups of two or more. Each dance engagement lasts a minute or two. Our focus throughout is on David, who is wearing his loincloth, cloak and sandals and stays in or near the centre of the stage. The other guests, as usual, appear not to notice his clothing. Throughout the scene, guests representing the diverse stakeholders and potential participants in what was to become the MAT present themselves to David, singly or in groups, and perform their role in the process of multi-academisation through the medium of a courtly dance montage. The first to come together are DAVID, WILLIAM and JOHN. They bow to one another and introduce themselves.

DAVID
David Taylor, Headteacher of Oak Manor, Tonbury.

WILLIAM
William Brigston, Headteacher of Skelton High, Tonbury.

JOHN
JOHN Parr, Headteacher of Beech Park, Tonbury.
(They join their right hands together and walk clockwise with the music.)

DAVID
We each lead one of the three secondaries in the town. We have an opportunity to do something special for our local kids. The Local Authority can't or won't help us do that. What do you say to forming a multi-academy trust? It will be a shining city built on a hilltop.

WILLIAM and JOHN
(in unison, eagerly)
You've persuaded us! Of course, you'll lead! We will follow you wherever you go!

(SCOTT and LESLEY dance in from another group and join them. SCOTT is in his early 40s, slick and gym fit. He is wearing a dark, corporate suit and burgundy tie. LESLEY is mid-50s. She smiles at SCOTT. They all bow to one another.)

SCOTT
Scott Malone, CEO of Relentless Vision Academy Chain.

LESLEY
Lesley Thomas, Chair of Governors, Beech Park.
(They all start to dance together, slowly.)

SCOTT
I hear Beech Park hasn't done so well in its Ofsted.

JOHN
(defensively)
It's just a blip. They didn't recognise what we've achieved!

SCOTT
A healthy tree doesn't produce bad fruit. You're coming with us!

JOHN
David! You lead an Outstanding school: can't you sponsor us?
DAVID
Yes fine. I'd rather all the money stayed in the town, rather than any of your money get sliced off to go and support an HQ elsewhere, so if you've got to academise, then yeah.

JOHN
You will become my boss and not somebody else.

DAVID
Well if you want to see it like that, but we would work collaboratively and it would be a strong peer accountability, but yes technically it will be like that, but we don't need to operate in that way.

LESLEY
(to DAVID)
What do you know about supporting a failing school?
(to SCOTT)
Scott, I choose YOU.

(SCOTT and LESLEY seize JOHN's hand and dance-march him off stage. Two OFSTED INSPECTORS join DAVID and WILLIAM. They are identical; both are around seven feet tall, gangly, dressed in black tuxedos, and instead of two eyes and a nose, they have a single, large, piercing and unblinking eye in the centre of their face. They all bow to one another.)

OFSTED INSPECTORS
(in unison)
Time for inspection! We've seen your data: don't bother trying to change our minds. But feel free to go through the motions.

DAVID
Oak Manor is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.

OFSTED INSPECTORS
(in unison)
Outstanding!

WILLIAM
Erm, our drama grades have been particularly strong …

OFSTED INSPECTORS
(in unison)
Requires Improvement!

(ALAN dances up to the group and bows.)

ALAN
Right, we'll take over Skelton from here. Any last requests, William?

(WILLIAM gulps and blanches. Two bouncers approach and drag him off stage. The OFSTED INSPECTORS and ALAN follow, still dancing. Simultaneously, MARK and ELIZABETH enter, dancing, and join DAVID. They all bow and continue the dance together.)

MARK
Mark Fellows, Interim Headteacher at Skelton High, Tonbury.

ELIZABETH
Elizabeth McQueen, Chair of Governors at Skelton High, Tonbury. This is a moment of great opportunity. I invite you both to present your vision for Skelton and we governors will choose between you.

(The music fades. The other dancers in the ballroom continue, oblivious, but DAVID stops in the middle of the stage and turns to face the audience. The lights lower and a spotlight picks him out. DAVID trembles as he speaks. His eyes look upward, and he slowly raises his arms, palms facing the heavens. He is having a vision.)

DAVID
(dreamily)
Anyone who has ears should listen! I see … something new… exciting… local! We'll be collaborating, Oak Manor and Skelton, in a way that is different and innovative! Technically, I'll be at the apex organisationally, but the whole thing will really be co-constructed. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear.

ELIZABETH
Clear, you say. Are you talking about a MAT? With you as CEO? How will it work?

DAVID
It's going to be an ongoing collaboration. With me technically in charge from my office in Oak Manor.

SKELTON HIGH GOVERNORS Off Stage
Rubbish!

MARK
Er, well, if you pick me, I'll basically carry on what I've been doing.

ELIZABETH
(listening to her governors, turns to DAVID)

56

We love your vision, we love your idea, but we just don't think we're ready yet and we're going to appoint our own Head. (To MARK) Yes, that's you! I'm sure Skelton High will rise from the ashes with you in charge!

(ELIZABETH and MARK exit. The music resumes. BEN and LUCY enter. DAVID and they bow to one another and recommence dancing.)

BEN
(excitedly)
Ben Richards, Headteacher of Rushton Green Special School, Swain. Listen David, I've got to get out of this SEN bubble in Lintshire. You know, the one where all the headteachers get together and talk about SEN issues, but actually, how is that good if you're just sat in that phase trying to solve problems that go beyond SEN?

LUCY
Lucy Catskill, Headteacher of Halsby Junior, Tonbury. Listen David, people might say it's a cliché, but I genuinely see it as my duty to serve my community and I'm aware that there are changes in the educational landscape, aware that there are issues around funding, aware that there are issues nationally with the performance of local authorities. All of those factors combined make me really consider my position in the current landscape and what I could do to best safeguard Halsby Junior within that landscape. So if you've got a formal offer, I'd like to hear it.

DAVID
(To Ben, thoughtfully)
Well, you've been buying our services for a while: why don't we do something more formal?
(To Lucy)
We've been supporting your IT at Halsby. You already know Ben through the Rushton student you took on as an apprentice. Let's start talking about multi-academisation. Our MAT will be a shining city on a hill!

(ALAN passes close by, dancing with ELIZABETH. As he does so, he calls out to BEN.)

ALAN
Nice to see you, Ben! By the way, we're cutting your pupil numbers from 50 to 42 next year!

(BEN is livid. He incorporates an angry hopping motion into the sedate court dance that he is performing with LUCY and DAVID.)

BEN and LUCY

(in unison)

Right, David, you're on!

DAVID
I'll be executive headteacher, obviously.

LUCY
What, just because you're the secondary? I think that our secondary colleagues are going to learn a lot from Halsby Junior and their practice is going to be enhanced as a result and I think that often people think the secondaries will boss the juniors, but as I've said, it's going to be the other way round!

BEN
People need to see that we are equal in this relationship, David.

(ALAN and ELIZABETH do another pass en dansant and overhear the conversation.)

ALAN
(To Ben)
Ha! Oak Manor SEN school!

BEN
(angrily)
Piss off, Alan!

DAVID
Mmm, everyone who asks receives. OK, you can both be executive headteachers, on the MAT's executive board. I'll be… chief executive.

LUCY
Yes! That makes sense because I'll have an executive function across the MAT.

BEN
Yes! That makes sense because I am your equal, David.

DAVID
Now, let's start to think about opening up a free school…

ALAN (off)
Over my dead body!

(ELIZABETH re-enters with NICOLA and joins DAVID, LUCY and BEN. They start a new dance movement together.)

DAVID
So Mark didn't work out?

ELIZABETH
We've been through another two heads since Mark.

NICOLA
This is it. We're done for. Save us, David!

DAVID
If you insist. Indeed, it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick.

(The music comes to an end as ALAN re-enters. DAVID, BEN, LUCY, NICOLA and ELIZABETH bow once more to each other. Joining hands, they exit together. ALAN pursues them, repeatedly pinching NICOLA's arms and making her yelp.)

END OF SCENE 3

3.5.7 Indicative data extracts for Scene Four

But when you are also dealing with the emotions of the local authority. (David)

We were there with the Local Authority saying 'look, we're really struggling here, support us!' But they weren't feeling it in the same way. (Ben)

What we went and spoke to the Local Authority about on a number of occasions with their hierarchy is that actually where we find ourselves at the moment, you [the LA] don't have the resources to do what you want to do, we don't have the resources that we want to do, so what we need to do if we can get the economies of scale right at our end and you get the economies of scale right at your end, where we meet in the middle surely is the optimum for the young people that we're all trying to benefit and they couldn't argue with that point, but the reality ended up being very different and they just fought us tooth and nail. (Ben)

We were considered a low priority school for Lintshire County Council, they used to come and visit me once a year and that was it, so actually recognising that not only can I safeguard our school, but actually we can contribute to something bigger and we felt that actually our offer would be useful to share, appealing to others and so on. (Lucy)

Not only are Halsby Junior the first school in Tonbury to become an academy, I think we are Lintshire's first infant/junior same-site school, one of them, to have academised, but not with the infant school. (Lucy)

We chose to do that [multi-academise] because we felt it was the best thing for our school. The landscape enabled us to be part of something really rather fabulous, to perhaps extend our offer elsewhere in our town. (Lucy)

As a consultant, I've done over 150 projects with different companies all over the world, so I've seen what schools are and are not producing, so it [becoming a Board Member] was just an opportunity to perhaps add some value. (Roger)

3.5.8 Scene Four

CHARACTERS

DAVID — the MAT CEO (from 2017) and headteacher of Oak Manor.
ALAN — Chief Executive of Lintshire County Council Local Authority.
ROGER — Board member of Tonbury and Swain MAT.
LUCY — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Halsby Junior.
BEN — Executive Principal *in* Tonbury and Swain MAT and *of* Rushton Green Special School.

ON THE TERRACE LEADING OUT TO THE KITCHEN GARDENS.
It is twilight, and as dusk falls, drinks are being served on the terrace. People are dressed up in evening wear and are milling around, making small talk whilst the waiting staff serve Pimms in tall glasses.
Alan becomes the focal point for the audience, he enters the terrace through the large, open double doors and makes his way to the corner of the terrace. Alan is somewhat reeling from the earlier news and has had a couple of pre-evening cocktails. He takes a glass of Pimms from a passing waitress and as he turns, he is confronted by ROGER and LUCY who had spotted him on arrival and made a beeline.

ALAN
(Under his breath but loud enough to be heard by the approaching characters)
Oh for God's sake, here come the bloody apostles.

LUCY
Everything alright? You know, after that little bombshell earlier? Bit of a shock for you, was it?

ROGER
Ha! Understatement of the year!

ALAN
You might be somewhat over-egging that particular pudding, Lucy. It is not as if David and Oak Manor don't have form on moving in directions which preclude the Local Authority specifically, and local accountability more generally. I take it you have all your ducks in a row in anticipation for a seat at the table with the 'messiah'?

LUCY
What can I say? David approached me. You know it makes sense, Alan. You know the way things are with the general state of LAs at the moment, goodness knows you

haven't visited us in over a year! Talk about low priority. It is my duty to serve my community and safeguard the school. And David recognises what we are!

ALAN
Which is what?

LUCY
(Incredulously)
A high-performing school! Which has no intention to sink with LA or be pushed into a national chain that neither knows nor cares about our local community! Come on Alan, where have you been for the last two years?! The writing has been on the wall. Schools like Oak Manor and Halsby Junior will plough our own furrows rather than leave anything up to chance or fate where the LA is concerned! At some point you have to acknowledge that ambitious leaders need more than just firefighting, Alan.

ALAN
It's interesting to me that that's how you would describe the work that Lintshire does in maintaining and supporting over 500 schools, Lucy.

LUCY
We are opting out Alan, as is our prerogative. To pastures new!

ALAN
(Becoming quite loud)
I understand, but I am not obliged to remain silent in the face of such decisions - especially when they have been made behind closed doors with pre-conceived agendas!

ROGER
Don't be ridiculous, Alan, you know that they are under no obligation to consult with you about decisions affecting the future of the school. They have surveyed the market, put their finger in the air, sensed which way the wind is blowing, and made a bloody sensible decision if you ask me.

ALAN
The bloody market! Listen to yourself. This isn't one of your business ventures, Roger! These aren't consumers!

ROGER
As a consultant, I've done over 150 projects with different companies all over the world, so I've seen what schools are and are not producing, Alan.

ALAN
I don't know if you have noticed Roger, but schools are not units to be shifted.

ROGER
When are you going to wake up, Alan? This is about innovating, leading the field, making a difference!

LUCY
I agree, why would this not be a good thing, Alan?

ALAN
Well for a start because you are about to strip the LA of an asset that has belonged to the local community for a lot longer than any of us have been around! And to do so behind closed doors! All you need is a man in a loincloth who knows how to talk the talk and you are all chomping at the bit to throw local democracy under the bus in pursuit of some imagined utopia! Get real. Lucy, you are about to sign over your queendom to the King of Kings! You are deluded if you think you will have the same control as you have now.

LUCY
I'll have more, Alan; I will be anointed as an Executive Member, no less! And added to that to be part of, not just be a part of but to LEAD on something, something that really is rather fabulous!

ALAN
(under breath)
One of the chosen ones.

LUCY
(in full flow)
We all have a role to play in this exciting venture, although of course it's all part of David's vision, I am sure! To bring in the strongest to develop something remarkable to help the weakest. Thou shalt love thy neighbour and all that!

ALAN
HA! That's rich coming from you; does Halsby Infants School ring any bells, Lucy? And you preach of loving thy neighbour! You are the only infant/junior school split site where one has academised without the other!

LUCY
(Curtly)
I don't see why that is relevant, Alan.

ALAN
(raising voice, causing some heads to turn towards the trio)

There's very little that isn't relevant, Lucy. You are all very good at talking up the narrative! How you are saviours rescuing the poor little children of Tonbury and Swain and it's only through stripping these communities of their shared and historical assets can you possibly provide anything resembling a decent education! Baloney! Fundamentally this is a story of abandoning the collective principle! A complete rejection of education for the public good!

LUCY
For goodness' sake, Alan, don't be so hysterical.

ROGER
I really think it would make this less painful for everyone Alan if you could just see this in more transactional terms!

ENTER BEN

ALAN
Funnily enough, I don't see this in transactional terms, Roger. I see it as a community resource that is being somewhat hijacked!

BEN
If we are going to talk about hijacking agendas, Alan, it might be worth remembering the way in which the LA behaved towards Rushton Green. Trying to hold us over a barrel over numbers.

ALAN
Christ.

ENTER DAVID
All turn to David as he glides across the terrace, drink in hand.

DAVID
Hello!

(BEN, LUCY and ROGER all smile and cry greetings in return. ALAN remains surly.)

LUCY
We were JUST talking about how excited we all are by our new future.

ALAN
Were we? Must have missed that.

DAVID
In truth I tell you, in no one in Lintshire have I found faith as great as this. Oh ALAN, it might be time to accept the inevitable. The deals are done! Everyone has a seat

at this table and we will make a great local offer for the local kids of Tonbury and Swain! Maybe a model for others to follow! Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock.

(BEN and LUCY murmur agreeably)

ALAN

I am not even sure what I am doing here anymore.

BEN

Yes, I don't think we have much more need for the LA! Maybe you will learn a thing or two from our MAT? About strategy. About being a maverick!

ALAN

I don't think setting up a school structure that reflects the desired government policy and direction is a great example of how to be a maverick, Ben.

BEN

Well, it's the first homegrown MAT in the county!

ALAN

Listen to yourself! What does that even mean? I need to get out of here. It's suffocating being around all these deities of destiny. I don't know what you thought the fate of these poor children of Tonbury and Swain would be without your 'homegrown' non-democratically elected or accountable MAT would be! I need another bloody drink.

(ALAN storms off. DAVID looks serenely on and the others smile happily.)

END OF SCENE 4

3.6 What does Scripting Multi-Academisation Illuminate?

Rendering our data as scripted drama following a Brechtian aesthetic has enabled us to make explicit what was implicit; to materialise the symbolic; to reinstate the relational; to point out the areas of contestation and to reveal the role of faith in bringing about the messy project of multi-academisation. In this section, we describe the ways in which we have achieved this.

We have been inspired by Brecht's approach to dramatisation, including most obviously its assumption of responsibility for illuminating social and political issues, which it achieves through encouraging 'complex seeing' (Brecht and Willet 1964, p. 79) in the audience through rejecting realism and creating dissonance and interruptions — the Verfremdungseffekt (estrangement effect); see Frimberger (2016).

We operationalised this Brechtian spirit through creating fantastical scenes in which magic happens; through presenting David's charismatic, messianic leadership by depicting him explicitly as Jesus-like; through compressing time, space and the process of multi-academisation and rendering them through a ballroom dance scene; and through including particular characters—Ofsted inspectors—as de-humanised and comically sinister.

Our primary reason for undertaking this approach is that it aligns with and operationalises our epistemological location and approach as critical scholars, whose focus is on revealing and explaining the power structures and relations in play through education arrangements. Explanatory work in the critical field has tended to draw on theory and theorising (e.g., Courtney, McGinity & Gunter 2018; Heffernan 2018; Niesche 2014). We see a Brechtian-inspired aesthetic as potentially speaking to the same problems of meaning and power, yet to do so in a way that fulfils theatre's remit to entertain. This is new in the field of educational leadership.

The data revealed high emotions, occasional missteps, and tensions within an overarching narrative arc of successful multi-academisation. The act of dramatising enabled us to put these reports back into the story as the moments of drama that they undoubtedly were to the protagonists at the time. We created the character Alan to represent the Director of the Local Authority, who is invoked by nearly all the research participants at one time or another. Interviews create absent presences, whom in this instance we were able to make substantively present, thanks to our presentational approach. This decision enables much of the drama, particularly since, importantly, if Alan were susceptible to David's charismatic, messianic leadership, it is not evident in the processual outcomes, and so his role is vital in manifesting the reported challenges and tensions.

We included two fantastical scenes, two and three, to unsettle the audience and encourage a different response to the scripted drama, following Brecht's V-effect. Scene two interrupts the unfolding narrative through a miraculous interlude that is dressed down as common-or-garden magic. This sets up David as a miracle worker, but unassumingly so. It also establishes the relationship he has with his followers, who are delighted by him. Such delight would otherwise be difficult to depict, since the events and interactions constituting multi-academisation were so understandably messy.

Scene three is set in a ballroom, where multi-academisation is rendered as a dance. Dramatically, this provided an opportunity to depict the sometimes-fleeting appearances (in the interview data) of key moments and actors. Stylistically, we judged that it would not be possible to convey the myriad emotions in such a compressed scene that would have accompanied the events presented, ranging from Ofsted inspections to humiliations by peers, and so we took inspiration once again from Brecht (Brecht and Willet 1964), who gives permission for power to be problematised through upending solemnity. The tone is therefore satirical; this is reinforced through including comically monstrous Ofsted inspectors.

Our decision to depict David explicitly as Jesus-like requires particular justification. Our intentions were to reinvigorate and provide enhanced empirical depth to the concept of messianic leadership. Reinvigoration is required because although

messianic leadership is implicit in much of the literature on transformational leadership, with its focus on idealised influence and inspirational motivation, it is rarely explicit beyond one or two early analogies, e.g., 'transforming leaders convert followers to disciples' (Bass 1995, p. 467). This absence is particularly clear in the field of education; Scott (1980), for instance, is typical in invoking, but not seeking to add conceptual heft to the concept of messianic leadership. We turn therefore to the field of organisation studies, where we agree with Western (2013) in his broad delineation of the features of, and context for messiah leadership:

> Strong cultures were required in which employees could feel they were part of a progressive vision, part of a community, and because they shared the values and vision of the leader they would work long hours and bring their whole selves to work. Motivation and control came from within individuals and from peers who shared norms set by the culture of the company [sic]. To establish these strong and seductive cultures, charismatic leaders were required who could set out visions and values persuasively, gaining loyalty and commitment from employees. (Western 2013, p. 218)

Western locates his construction of messianic leadership in the Bible to draw attention not only to the fundamental role of vision, but of followers in messianic leadership:

> Where there is no vision, the people perish:
> but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
> (Proverbs 29: 18)

As Western notes, this latter element is vital: followers must actively and thinkingly engage in order to be happy and for the organisation to succeed. This is undoubtedly the case with David's followers, who, as our data extracts reveal, are devout in their belief, which is in him rather than in the vision he expounds, which, centred rather vaguely on localism, does not bear much scrutiny in its claims to be distinguishable from, or better than the Local Authority's offer. There are schools more local to Bay Manor than Rushton Green, for example, that are not in the MAT, and so a strict geographical application of the concept is meaningless. The unworkability of the vision is made explicit by one of the Board Members:

> I challenge the concept of local, because local ... does not mean local to everybody ... Is it community or is it location? And I think the trustees are favourable in understanding that it is community but are thwarted by faculty who think it's location. So, a learning is having not established that very clearly from the very beginning, not having a goal and strategy that complements the goal, it's setting us back, it's delaying things. (Roger)

Two propositions arise from this that are central to our argument and approach. First, the fact that this lack of clarity does not prevent multi-academisation indicates that the followers' faith is in the charismatic, magic-working David himself. The vision is at best secondary. Second, the mechanics of followership are best explained by the sort of active, intellectually engaged faith that underpins messianic leadership, because despite the harmonious organisational outcome, i.e., happy multi-academisation, followers have to do cognitive work to get to that state. Roger signs up cheerily, despite his misgivings. Lucy and Ben accept David as a new hierarchical superior,

where before they were at the organisational apex. This speaks to Weberian charismatic authority, which is legitimated by followers' duty 'to recognize its quality and to act accordingly. Psychologically this "recognition" is a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality' (Weber 1947/2012, p. 359).

Our data support Western's argument that the key feature of messianic leadership is control.

> Steve: Who came up with that structure?
>
> David: I did. It's emerged. I know that sounded big-headed, controlling. It's emerged in trying to make sense of how this board structure is forced upon us… And I think that's the best way of trying to get that collective responsibility, that shared ownership, etc.
>
> Steve: So if it's about shared ownership, why didn't you delegate power to the local governing committees?
>
> David: Because this, it's not big enough to need to do that. It's just a matter of scale.

This can be seen in the homogeneity of view amongst the senior leadership team, some of whom co-lead one of the MAT's constituent academies, Skelton High, in a Headship Team.

> Ruth: Having David not there full-time but some of the time, is that better than what's happened before?
>
> Nicola: Well, because, it's kind of irrelevant to a certain degree because we've got the Headship Team and it's been really...when David's met with the staff and put forward his vision, he's said categorically, you talk to one of these guys and it's the same as talking to me … from my perspective, when I'm at Skelton High, I know I can always go to the Headship Office, so it might not be technically a Head Teacher body person, but there will be a member of the Headship Team and it doesn't matter who it is.

As disciples, it is their role not just to take forward the message, or Word, but to stand for him in his absence in a way that exceeds deputisation. Thinking and writing with messianic leadership in this way enables us to explore and articulate the mixture of follower faith, with all its tensions, alongside leader humility and confidence that was evident in the interview accounts. We undertook to do this through using biblical quotations as well as through the characterisation: it is a welcome indicator that our approach is appropriate that these extracts fitted easily into the dialogue, corresponding to things that David was saying in any case.

3.7 Concluding Remarks: on the Ethics of Dramatic Presentation

In this chapter, we have brought to the field of educational leadership an innovative contribution to an emergent approach to presenting data, that is, through scripted drama. This has been undertaken by Mifsud (2016, 2017) and has a genealogy in the wider education field (e.g., Eisner 1979; Frimberger 2016; Harvey 2018). We have

drawn on a Brechtian-inspired aesthetic to tell a story of multi-academisation and the role of messianic leadership in operationalising it, and simultaneously to draw the audience's attention to the power relations in play. We have been explicit throughout about the benefits of this approach, but we want here to acknowledge and, where possible, counter two of the main challenges involved.

First, we have produced an account of multi-academisation that owes more to our interpretation than to our participants'; indeed, we have had them, as characters, say things that they did not in the interviews. On what grounds do we therefore claim that this presentation is ethical? Our response to this is grounded in our understanding of the social world as largely a co-construction of its actors (but see below); in research, that includes the researchers. We reject the pseudo-objectivity that underplays or renders invisible the role of the researcher in much educational-leadership research, particularly that which is functionalist (e.g., Leithwood and Jantzi 2005). Our research participants have no greater claim over the reality that we are trying to present than we do. Nonetheless, we never have participants say something that was oppositional to their views or values or contraindicated by something that they had said.

Second, we have chosen a satirical tone to much of the play: how do we therefore avoid the question posed by Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995, p. 404): 'how do we capture human experience without distorting and trivializing it?' We see this as an extension of the first question, and so our response is that we are not attempting primarily to capture human experience, but the process of multi-academisation that, following our critical-realist approach, we see as structuring. However, we acknowledge that we have named our characters using the pseudonyms we have attached to them throughout the project; they are not composite, or specifically created to articulate a point generally made across the data. In that sense, they are recognisable (but only to the participants themselves). We have consequently sought to minimise this impression through our Brechtian approach, through depicting the fantastical and impossible within a context of the conceivable, at character level.

We cannot claim to have solved these ethical dilemmas, only responded to them, yet we see many possibilities for this approach for the field of educational leadership. We call for more, and for more varied use of it as a method, not just for data presentation but also for generation. In this way, the field will be obliged to re-think its relationship with leadership, which is, after all, a reified abstraction. As such, leadership is no better suited to articulation as numbers or themes than as drama or art. Unshackled from canonical norms concerning data presentation, what innovations and new conceptualisations the field might produce!

References

Archer, M. S. (1998). *Critical Realism: Essential readings*. London: Routledge.

Bass, B. M. (1995). Transformational Leadership Redux. *Leadership Quarterly, 6*(4), 463–478.

Bell, K., & West, A. (2003). Specialist Schools: An exploration of competition and co-operation. *Educational Studies*, *29*(2–3), 273–289.

Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A realist theory of science*. Leeds: Leeds Books.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brecht, B., & Willett, J. (Ed./Trans.). (1964). *Brecht on theatre*. London: Methuen.

Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, *45*(2), 151–165.

Cassetteboy (2020). *Cassetteboy vs Trump 2020*. YouTube. Available at: https://youtu.be/2gr0B16rFzI (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Chapman, C. (2015). From one school to many: Reflections on the impact and nature of school federations and chains in England. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *43*(1), 46–60.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.

Courtney, S. J. (2015a). *Investigating school leadership at a time of system diversity, competition and flux*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Manchester: University of Manchester.

Courtney, S. J. (2015b). Mapping school types in England. *Oxford Review of Education*, *41*(6), 799–818.

Courtney, S. J. (2016). Post-panopticism and school inspection in England. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *37*(4), 623–642.

Courtney, S. J. (2017). Corporatising school leadership through hysteresis. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *38*(7), 1054–1067.

Courtney, S. J., & Gunter, H. M. (2015). Get off my bus! School leaders, vision work and the elimination of teachers. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, *18*(4), 395–417.

Courtney, S. J., & Gunter, H. M. (2019). Corporatised fabrications: The methodological challenges of professional biographies at a time of neoliberalisation. In: J. Lynch, J. Rowlands, T. Gale, and S. Parker (Eds.), *Practice Methodologies in Education Research* (pp. 27–47). London: Routledge.

Courtney, S. J., & McGinity, R. (2020). System leadership as depoliticisation: Reconceptualising educational leadership in a new multi-academy trust. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*. Advance online publication. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220962101 (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Courtney, S. J., McGinity, R., & Gunter, H. M. (2018). *Educational leadership: Theorising professional practice in neoliberal times*. London: Routledge.

Crevani, L. (2015). Relational leadership. In B. Carroll, J. Ford, & S. Taylor (Eds.), *Leadership: Contemporary critical perspectives* (pp. 188–211). London: Sage.

Crevani, L., Lindgren, M., & Packendorff, J. (2010). Leadership, not leaders: On the study of leadership as practices and interactions. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *26*(1), 77–86.

Cunliffe, A. L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). Relational leadership. *Human Relations*, *64*(11), 1425–1449.

Department for Education. (2016). *Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth*. Department for Education. Available at: 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 (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Department for Education. (2017). *A Competency Framework for Governance*. Department for Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/583733/Competency_framework_for_governance_.pdf (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Donmoyer, R., & Yennie-Donmoyer, J. (1995). Data as Drama: Reflections on the Use of Readers Theater as a Mode of Qualitative Data Display. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(4), 402–428.

Eacott, S. (2015). Educational Administration Relationally. *Educational Leadership Relationally*, 1–14. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-911-1_1 (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Eisner, E. W. (1979). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York: Macmillan.

Eisner, E. W. (1997). The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation. *Educational Researcher*, *26*(6), 4–10.

Frimberger, K. (2016). A Brechtian Theatre Pedagogy for Intercultural Education Research. *Language and Intercultural Communication 16*(2), 130–147.

GovernEd. (2021). *Training and Leadership Development for Academy Trustees*. London: GovernEd. Available at: https://govern-ed.co.uk/academy-trustees (Accessed 9 June 2021).

Grace, G. (1995). *School leadership: Beyond education management: An essay in policy scholarship*. London: Routledge.

Gunter, H. M. (2004). Labels and Labelling in the Field of Educational Leadership. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *25*(1), 21–41.

Gunter, H. M. (2016). An intellectual history of school leadership practice and research. London: Bloomsbury.

Gunter, H. M., Hall, D., & Bragg, J. (2013). Distributed Leadership: A Study in Knowledge Production. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *41*(5), 555–580.

Harris, A. (2013). Distributed Leadership: Friend or Foe? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *41*(5), 545–554.

Harvey, L. (2018). Adapting intercultural research for performance: Enacting hospitality in interdisciplinary collaboration and public engagement. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 17(4), 371–387.

Heffernan, A., (2018). *The Principal and School Improvement: Theorising discourse, policy and practice*. Cham: Springer.

Hick J. (1988). Faith as Knowledge. In: *Faith and Knowledge*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hughes, B. C. (2020). Investigating the CEO of a MAT: Examining practices and positions on "the street." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *48*(3), 478–495.

Hughes, B. C., Courtney, S. J., & Gunter, H. M. (2020). Researching professional biographies of educational professionals in new dark times. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *68*(3), 275–293.

Kleinau, M., & McHughes, J. (1980). *Theaters for literature: A practical aesthetics for group interpretation*. Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred Publishing Company.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). A review of transformational school leadership research 1996–2005. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 4*(3), 177–199.

Mifsud, D. (2016). Data representation with a dramatic difference: negotiating the methodological tensions and contradictions in qualitative enquiry. Confessions of a budding playwright ... *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 29*(7), 863–881.

Mifsud, D. (2017). *Foucault and School Leadership Research: Bridging Theory and Method*. London: Bloomsbury.

Niesche, R. (2014). *Deconstructing educational leadership: Derrida and Lyotard*. London and New York: Routledge.

McGinity, R., & Gunter, H. M. (2017). New practices and old hierarchies: Academy conversion in a successful English secondary school. In P. Thomson (Ed.), *Educational leadership and Pierre Bourdieu* (pp. 98–111). London: Routledge.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *8*(1), 5–23.

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Improving school leadership. Volume 2: Case studies on system leadership (Vol. 2). Paris: OECD.

Rayner, S. M., Courtney, S. J., & Gunter, H. M. (2018). Theorising systemic change: learning from the academisation project in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, *33*(1), 143–162.

Rayner, S. M., & Gunter, H. M. (2020). Resistance, professional agency and the reform of education in England. *London Review of Education*, *18*(2), 265–280.

Scott, H. J. (1980). *The Black School Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat?* Washington: Howard University Press.

Weber, M. (1947/2012). The Theory of Social and Economic Organization. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing.

Western, S. (2013). *Leadership: a critical text* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE.

Wilkins, A. (2017). Rescaling the local: multi-academy trusts, private monopoly and statecraft in England. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *49*(2), 171–185.

Wood, M., & Flinders, M. (2014). Rethinking depoliticisation: beyond the governmental. *Policy & Politics*, *42*(2), 151–170.