It's a Matter of Trust

A Case Study of Collaboration within a Newly Formed Group of Primary Academies

Anthony John Dimmer

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to find out the extent to which the formation of an academy trust supported school to school collaboration and improvement during the first year of its existence. The thesis reports on a longitudinal case study which tracked the development of an "academy trust" of five schools as they started to develop a self-improving system of collaboration during the first two years of its existence. The study explores the process by considering the views of teachers about levels of Joint Practice Development, Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose, Evaluation and Challenge and Alliance Architecture. These are key elements identified by David Hargreaves (2012) as the essentials of a self-improving school system. Together they are the building blocks of his concept of "collaborative capital". It also takes account of the interactions between headteachers and deputy headteachers, senior and middle leaders in creating a culture of collaboration and the extent to which communities of practice begin to grow. The case study takes the form of an initial survey of teaching staff in all five schools followed by interviews with a sample of leaders and teachers to amplify the findings from the surveys carried out in January and June 2014. A follow up survey took place in January 2015 with interviews held in June 2015. The impact on school improvement has been evaluated by comparing an initial audit carried out in January 2014 with one conducted in January 2015. The findings show considerable developments in terms of Social Capital and Capacity Building in laying the foundations for Joint Practice Development but it ends with a question about whether this can be sustained to bring about significant school improvement.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Appendices

Anthony Dimmer   EdD   Reflective Statement   June 2016

In progressing through the taught modules of the EdD, I completed the four assignments by trying to develop a theme based upon my original reading for the Foundations of Professionalism module. Prior to registering for the EdD, I had attended the specialist module on Leadership of Learning because this is the main area in which I work as a School Improvement Adviser in a Local Authority (LA). Until I began my studies, although I have been very familiar with the literature on school leadership and have worked for National College for School Leadership (NCSL) as a Key Facilitator of Leadership Learning, I had not given deep consideration to the issue of myself as a member of a distinct profession, beyond being a teacher and a headteacher. The taught modules gave me the chance to reflect on this and also to begin to develop my understanding of the researching professional.

This theme of professionalism underpinned my four assignments. Initially, I wrote about the Educational Improvement Professional and his role in supporting and challenging teaching professionals to become more effective in meeting the needs of pupils in primary schools. The feedback I received identified my conclusion as "forward looking" and this encouraged me to try and retain a focus on "professionalism" within the present political climate and the current tensions between results and the quality of learning which teachers experience in working with primary aged children. The ethical considerations introduced as part of this module proved illuminating and were a useful reference point throughout my work. It did lead to my original encounter with the concept of "performativity" which has been significant in the three modules that followed. Although I have some sympathy with criticisms of the concept of the imposition of managerialism in education, I am a pragmatist and see my own role in mitigating the impact of some of its more negative implications on the culture of learning which is not always measurable in a quantitative way.

As the Methods of Enquiry Module 1 (MoE1) required me to design a research project and engage with methodology and research processes, I took the performance versus learning debate and drew upon ideas, which are being rehearsed in classrooms. In retrospect I feel that at this stage of my studies I became too engaged with designing a project rather than with the theoretical framework within which I should work and this has remained a weakness as I have continued to MoE2.

I continued the theme of professionalism into my assignment on Leadership of Learning in Educational Institutions. My intention with this work was to focus and improve my knowledge of the best ways in which school leaders can improve the professional effectiveness of

teachers. I visited a wide range of literature and also became more familiar with the ways in which researchers in this area derived the evidence for their findings. In this I was greatly supported by the nationally and internationally eminent speakers who presented their ideas to the group. My background as a teacher of history means that I tend to be more at home sifting through bodies of knowledge than necessarily exploring the research methodology in use. I attempted to make this a special focus of this assignment, for example in developing a greater understanding of "effect size" as an indicator of validity. The writing gave me the opportunity to make direct links with my work as an adviser and there are three examples directly quoted from observations made in school during the period of the module. Given that one of the conclusions from my first assignment was that the role of a school improvement professional is to enable school leaders to "handle multiple discourses, deploy them and create new discourses". This has helped align my studies and my working life.

My fourth assignment followed directly from the design developed during Methods of Enquiry 1 and involved research into the views of teachers in five schools about how they saw the learning versus performance debate and how well their beliefs fitted their view of the predominant political culture of the time. The initial data collection took place in December 2010, a few months after the election of the present coalition government. This is significant as much of my previous writing took as its context the previous administration's actions and culture, which have been systematically changed over the period of my studies. The opportunity to gather professional insights from teachers built directly on the three previous modules as I involved headteachers and senior leaders in the study.

At this point changes in my home situation made study in depth more difficult although this probably affected the writing of the assignment more than the planning of the research. After submitting the initial draft, I was forced to interrupt my studies for six months from April 2011 until September 2011. I then followed the MoE2 programme again, resubmitting revised versions of the assignment while attempting to read more deeply, particularly in the area of mixed methods research. As part of my assignment I used SPSS to analyse the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire that formed the main part of the gap analysis.

Over the course of the first three years my engagement with the EdD taught courses broadened and deepened my own view of myself as a professional and the way I view my role in relation to the teaching profession. Although I gained a much deeper knowledge of the research methodologies available, I felt that I still had some way to go before I was fluent in their application as a researcher. My natural standpoint is an interpretivist one and I believe in a constructivist view of research. This did lead to some misgivings about the

applicability of my initial research to problems faced in the classrooms I serve where there tends to be a perceived need for certainty and short term solutions rather than the "activist" professional culture of which I wrote at the beginning of my studies. In the present political climate, this implied that I needed to focus on a problem that schools saw as directly impinging on their work. Although I originally planned to pursue my MoE2 research into the Institutional Focused Study (IFS), the period of interruption and wider reading led me to identify a more immediate focus. It was also a contentious one that can cause friction between schools. I resolved to study Transition when children move from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in primary schools. This retained the focus on learning and performance as a common theme from the taught courses as it was concerned both with confidence in test results and continuity of children's learning skills as they move through the system. It also compared views of learning from the viewpoints of teachers and pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2, which could highlight different professional perspectives. One of my concerns with my previous writing had been that it had focused exclusively on adults and I was keen to look more closely at the impact of their actions on children's learning. This enabled me to collect quantitative data on performance and data of a more qualitative nature from interviews and observations. I was able to build upon my previous learning and to fill some of the gaps identified within feedback by engaging more closely with research methods literature.

Although my IFS study provided a clear body of evidence about the key factors that made transition between schools at the age of seven more problematic than the transition within a single primary school, there was criticism in the feedback about the way in which it was conceptualised initially. I attempted to address this in my thesis proposal as a mixed method study and was assisted by the panel feedback and advice to pursue it as a case study. Although, I did not follow the theme of transition into my thesis, some of the issues that I had identified do provide continuity, particularly those pertaining to teacher identities at different stages of learning in different schools and how they can impede clear communication and trust between professionals. The issue of schools learning from each other has grown in significance since 2010, culminating in the white paper of 2016 "Education Excellence Everywhere" which sets out the agenda for a self-improving school system. Although I have worked as a school improvement professional for over 20 years in both an LA and private company context, my experience as a headteacher before and after the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) has given me strong belief that the expertise of school improvement is developed first within schools and that a "Joint Practice Development (JPD)" model is both more effective and sustainable than one relying on external expertise. I would qualify this by saying that the JPD model must be informed by research about effective practice and must lead to improved outcomes for learners. I was keen to learn more about

the process by which collaboration can be developed within the pressures of the national political context of high accountability and competition. I conceptualised my research to try and take account of the various forces at work by using key aspects David Hargreaves (2012, p. 11)) Maturity Model as an initial lens to provide an aerial view framework of the collaboration landscape facing the schools. The ideas propounded by Etienne Wenger (1998) about how Communities of Practice can support and sometimes inhibit cross school working provided a second lens, partly because they can be seen as supportive of horizontal collaboration between teachers with similar interests, but also because they can inhibit wider systemic working where identities are threatened. My third lens is that provided by Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1986) to look at how, both at macro and micro levels, the interaction between hierarchy, communities of teachers and individual schools and members of staff impacted on both the development of collaborative practice and the rigour needed to ensure that it results in school improvement.

In order to see how this development grew, I have tracked it over two academic years and accumulated a body of survey and interview data that has not been easy to integrate into a coherent narrative. I have grappled with this because of my personal interest and because the findings have a particular relevance to my future professional role. I see this very much as supporting schools in developing strong collaborative links that lead to continuing improvement and I believe that the understanding of the relationships between trust and rigorous challenge are key to this process.

The deeper understanding of the literature and methodology that I have gained over my seven years following the EdD has made a considerable contribution to my own learning as a professional and to the schools that I serve. It has sharpened my understanding and critical skills in using research in my work and given me the opportunity to highlight the importance of evidence based practice in schools. Although the latter is a truth, "universally acknowledged", the pressures within the English education system often lead for a yearning for "quick fixes" rather than the reflective approaches that research inculcates and from which I have benefited during my EdD studies.

It's a Matter of Trust

Chapter 1

Introduction

I began my teaching career in primary schools in 1974 at a time when national government took no formal role in setting expectations for the curriculum or standards in schools. Visits from the Local Authority (LA) were rare and those from Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) even rarer. Improvements in the curriculum came about voluntarily, often led by academic initiatives such as Nuffield Science or by enthusiastic local advisers who were funded to develop such new learning by teachers and pupils. Headteachers met regularly and teachers occasionally came together to discuss new developments. I first encountered this as a result of the publication of the Bullock Report, "A Language for Life" (Bullock, 1975). I met with teachers from the local area who held responsibility for English in their schools to discuss our practice and how this might be improved to comply with the recommendations from the report. This was my first experience of being part of a community of practice. My headteacher was an enthusiast for school improvement and later became an HMI. She supported me in developing our practice. It led to my first postgraduate education study for an Advanced Diploma in Teaching Reading. Three years later, when I subsequently became Deputy Headteacher in one of the local schools with which I had worked, I found no evidence that our sharing of practice had had any impact at all. Collaboration was a "nice thing" to do after school; we felt better for sharing our ideas and concerns but there was little evidence that it had changed existing practice in our locality.

Since then I have continued to work in primary education, holding two headships and, eventually in 1994, becoming an adviser to primary schools in a large local authority in the south east. I have been fortunate in riding the crest of the educational wave over the past 20 years, serving as Principal Primary Adviser and, briefly, as Chief Adviser for Schools. As such, I have worked with many very talented teachers, advisers and academics and have benefited considerably from their ideas and experience. And yet David Hargreaves still found in 2012 that "sharing good practice" was a very ineffective means of improving teaching (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 8). Since then there has been a growing movement of schools collaborating together on a more formal footing, although it remains to be seen whether we are on the brink of a new era in school improvement. This case study seeks to shed some light on how far this has been achieved in one group of schools.

The Research Problem

In my 20 years as a school improvement professional I have promoted school to school working, often brokering connections between schools to share good practice. In my role as a senior Local Authority (LA) officer, I was instrumental in establishing a system of confederations of schools across the LA. These confederations were aimed at encouraging schools to share practice and work collaboratively to share services such as Educational Psychology and Educational Welfare for the good of all pupils.

Since the advent of Local Management of Schools (LMS) in the late 1980s, most schools have enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and have lived in a competitive environment where the size of their budget has depended on the number of pupils admitted. While most schools are happy to collaborate by sharing good practice, few are happy to cede any autonomy in doing so and many are sensitive about publicly admitting any shortcomings. For these reasons, I have often found collaboration to be limited to sharing Continuing Professional Development and, as I discuss below, to be at a fairly superficial level.

After the General Election in 2010, the government sought to increase the levels of school autonomy by creating a growing number of "academies" where the LA no longer has a formal influence on the leadership and management of schools that are deemed successful. There has also been a financial crisis resulting in reduced funding to LAs and their capacity to sustain an effective school improvement service. Successful schools are increasingly expected to support those that are less successful and this was enshrined in the Ofsted Framework for School Inspection (Ofsted, 2013) as a requirement for schools wishing to be judged as "Outstanding". With the introduction of Teaching Schools and Teaching School Alliances the scene was set for the creation of a "self-improving school system". The success of this initiative will depend on the capacity of schools to collaborate effectively in giving, receiving and developing knowledge about strategies which improve leadership, pupils' learning and tested outcomes. I believe that this is a great opportunity for the whole teaching profession and have based my research on developing greater knowledge about how school to school collaboration can become an engine for school improvement.

Rationale

In considering where to find a suitable area of study for my thesis, my initial starting point was my Institution Focused Study (IFS) that explored the key aids and barriers to continuity of learning when children move from the infant years (Key Stage 1) to the junior years (Key

Stage 2) in primary education. I explored this from the perspective of both learners and teachers and discovered distinct differences between the conditions in a single primary school and those between separate infant and junior schools. Where two schools were involved I found:

> There is evidence that despite efforts to liaise effectively and share information, there are differences in philosophy between the junior and infant schools that result in varying interpretations of words such as "independence" in the two settings. There are also examples of the same observation of writing being interpreted differently by teachers from the schools involved (Dimmer, 2012, pp. 47, 48).

This led me to consider what underlying factors bedevil efforts to smooth transition and, eventually, to issues revolving around collaboration between schools. From my professional work in school improvement, I am aware of a body of literature on the topic, dating back to David Hargreaves' pamphlet, "Working Laterally" (Hargreaves, 2003) . This line of thinking has been continued through a series of papers from the National College for School Leadership on the theme of "Creating a self-improving school system" (Hargreaves, 2010) culminating in "A self-improving school system: towards maturity" (Hargreaves, 2012) in which he states:

> A self-improving school system is one in which school improvement and professional development are conjoined in the life and work of the school and its chosen partners (p. 6).

This belief that the future of school improvement lies in school to school collaboration is at odds with the experience of schools contributing to my IFS and with the success of the more general notion of "sharing good practice". Indeed, Hargreaves quotes the results of his ad hoc survey of conference participants who have participated in this model whereby teachers speak or write about effective practice thus:

> Without exception, teachers tell me that the success rate of such attempted transfer is, in their view, low or very low. This is a puzzle. If this is what most teachers think, why is so much time and energy spent on what has become an almost sacred feature of teachers' professional development – offering or receiving examples of "sharing good practice? (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 8)

Hargreaves goes on to analyse why "sharing good practice" on its own is unlikely to be successful and to offer a constructive solution. However, if collaboration between schools and between teachers appears to be difficult and unproductive, it does seem to be simplistic to expect that, on its own, the school system can become truly self-improving and, yet, that idea underpins much of government policy today.

In the LA, in which I work as a School Improvement Adviser, there is a mixed economy of academies and community schools. Most of the established academies are in the secondary sector and they are now a majority. Many of the primary schools that have become academies have done so because they have been identified as "inadequate" by Ofsted and have been forced to partner with an "outstanding" primary school or become part of an academy chain led by a secondary school (although the LA does have one primary Teaching School). The borough in which I work contains 25 primary schools, of which ten had become academies by January 2014. This is a high proportion compared to the authority as a whole.

There is one Multi Academy Trust (MAT) that originated as a "good" school partnered with an "inadequate" one, but which has now resulted in both becoming "good". I was closely involved in the formation of the Federation that preceded the MAT. There are three single "converter" academies, one of which is an "outstanding" school that is paired with an inadequate one, one of which is an "outstanding" school paired with a secondary Teaching School linked to the local Church of England diocese and one of which is a good school linked to an academy chain, led by a secondary school.

Five schools have now formed the first all primary "academy trust"[1] in the LA. I am working on a consultancy basis with these five schools, which are dedicated to mutual improvement. Each school has its own individual academy trust although there is also an overarching trust that "to a greater or lesser extent influences or controls the individual trusts" (Hill et al 2012 p. 15). Ofsted judges two of the member schools as "outstanding" infant schools, two are "good" primary schools and one is a "satisfactory" junior school. In the remainder of this case study they are referred to as "the Trust". From discussions with the headteachers at these schools it is clear that one of their key reasons for becoming academies is to draw strength from collaborating together for the mutual improvement of teaching and learning. This echoes the example quoted by Hill et al, where:

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[1] In order to preserve confidentiality, the precise type of academy trust has not been identified.

The unifying factors are seen as a shared vision and values; partnership working in key areas such as leadership, professional development and sharing best practice; improved succession and career planning; and a relentless focus on an exceptional quality of teaching and learning (2012, p. 17).

The context of the schools and their initial priorities are discussed in Chapter 4 where the sample is further outlined.

Research Perspectives

It is this group that forms the focus for my research, aimed at providing additional knowledge about the impact of school to school collaboration on improving outcomes for pupils. The intention is to address the research questions from three perspectives as the trust develops over its first year and a half. The first lens is that provided by Hargreaves (2012) where he conceptualises the process of partnership as having three dimensions; professional development, partnership competence and collaborative capital. He sees the first two as the "soil" in which collaborative capital grows, leading to "a very different school system, one in which self-improving schools thrive" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 6).

Understanding what exactly makes a partnership deep and why deep partnerships are beneficial and yet much harder to establish and maintain than shallow ones………. Indeed, we have reached the point where we can specify the criteria by which we can judge a partnership to have developed depth (Op. cit. p. 5).

I have tested how those criteria can be applied in the development of an "academy trust" through the medium of a case study.

The second lens is that provided by Etienne Wenger in the concept of communities of practice. (See Chapter 3) He defines a community of practice as a group that shares a particular passion for a topic and want to deepen their expertise by sharing knowledge on an ongoing basis.

The third lens is that of Cultural Theory as expounded by Mary Douglas (1986). This has been adopted by the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts, Matthew Taylor, whose analysis has taken the three forms of power from Cultural Theory, the individualistic, solidaristic and hierarchical perspectives as having much to offer in terms of successful collaboration. To be successful, collaboration has to offer some advantages to the

individuals involved from a solidaristic (social) perspective and it will need to be underpinned by trust. From a hierarchical perspective leaders will need to enable, support and incentivise collaboration. This latter will enable an insight into the kinds of leadership that are successful in promoting successful collaboration.

These foci will allow me to analyse the different sources of power within the development of the Trust and how the interaction between them supports or hinders development.

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

As I state in more detail in Chapter 4, my professional life is very focused on the relationships between professionals, and this leads my approach to this research to be first and foremost constructivist in nature. The constructivist view is that we know about the world through reflecting on our experiences and that our understanding is constructed by the way our minds perceive or interpret them, i.e. there will be multiple constructed realities. This focus on the role of experience has led me to look at the subject through the three lenses outlined above and explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

Through the medium of a case study, I set out to collect and use both quantitative and qualitative data in order to "establish a more comprehensive account of the thing being researched" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 150). He earlier states:

> Case Studies focus on one instance of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance (p. 52).

Moreover, the use of multiple methods is necessary to capture the complex reality under scrutiny, the development of the group of schools known as the Academy Trust.

Study Design

I conducted this case study between September 2013 and November 2015. The data collection took place between February 2014 and June 2015. In order to gauge the extent of change over the period, I used surveys based on Hargreaves' (2012, p. 5) criteria, "by which we can judge a partnership to have been developed in depth". These surveys were completed in both Spring 2014 and Spring 2015 and were sent to all members of teaching staff, numbering 63 in total, and, initially, to Chairs of Governors. (Subsequently, governors

were removed from the sample because of a low response.) Responses were analysed using a simple Excel spreadsheet to give a quantitative view of the ways in which levels and types of collaboration have changed during the initial year. The analysis focused on the key themes of professional development, partnership competence and collaborative capital, which Hargreaves defines as existing when:

> The partnership's overall knowledge, skills and experience are augmented and evaluation and challenge operate at the levels of staff and student, not just senior leaders, the quality of Joint Practice Development (JPD) rises to new levels, and becomes the powerful but disciplined innovation which drives the better practices which are essential to a self-improving school system (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 23).

Semi-structured participant interviews took place in June 2014 and again in 2015 to explore how the intentions of the leadership have played out in practice. The headteacher, deputy headteacher or a senior leader, a middle leader and a teacher from each school were interviewed, giving twenty interviewees in all. The themes for these interviews were drawn from the responses to the initial surveys. Transcripts from these interviews were analysed from the collaborative perspective to look at how the themes of partnership, professional development and collaborative capital have developed. (See Chapter 5)
Given the scepticism exhibited above about the impact of groups of teachers sharing good practice, these interviews were analysed through the lens of the Joint Practice Development model from Hargreaves.

The quantitative and qualitative data derived from these surveys and interviews were analysed during the summer of 2015 with a view to determining the extent to which the trust has developed "collaborative capital" and the findings summarised in Chapter 6.

> Collaborative capital is the term I use to describe a position where the partnership arrangements among a group of schools, some of which are deep whilst others are shallow but perfectly fit for purpose, are firmly established as the normal state of affairs in the system as a whole (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 22).

The Value of the Study
From my point of view as a researcher, this study presents a unique opportunity to look at how a group of schools, that has made a collective decision to collaborate formally in becoming a trust, can develop practices and new knowledge that will lead to improvement of the member schools. Its uniqueness as a case study stems from the fact that the Department

for Education is now more disposed towards the Multi Academy Trust model where schools cede some of their individual autonomy to become a member of one trust. Schools may be less inclined to move to gain academy status on this basis unless they have a leading role or are forced down this route by an adverse Ofsted judgement. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained through the study will inform my work as a consultant and also that of schools in the local authority who are already members of collaborative confederations that seek to sharpen the impact of their work. I will also give the findings wider currency through conferences, papers and a blog.

Chapter 2

Collaboration as a Means of School Improvement

Introduction

This chapter sets out the recent historical and political background to the concept of a "self-improving school system" through collaboration between schools which is the focus of this case study. It begins by examining the initiatives and events which provide the context, before moving on to discuss some of the implications if collaborative arrangements are to become a major plank in school improvement. One key area explored is that of system leadership, whereby effective school leaders are enabled to play a role beyond their school in building greater capacity within the system. This has been viewed as key to the success of networks of schools in raising pupils' achievements. The traction that these ideas have engendered has triggered wider political interest. This has been brought together by a recent Select Committee Report that is my next consideration. Finally, the role of academies as a vehicle for the development of cross-school working is considered and some of the limited evidence that exists for the impact of collaboration on student outcomes is presented.

Network schools as an engine of professional development and school improvement is not a new phenomenon and has a history that goes well beyond the education system in England. Chapman and Hadfield (2009, pp. 14 - 15) quote a number of examples from the USA and Canada. They quote Lieberman and Grolnick (1996 p. 9) in "Networks and reform in American education":

> They tried to achieve goals of participant learning and professional competence by modelling different modes of enquiry, supporting the formation of teams to support and write school based plans for change, finding mechanisms to encourage cross role groups to work together, focussing deeply on particular topics, and inviting the participants to help shape the agenda in their own terms.

These are sentiments that would chime well with the zeitgeist at the time of this research. Although there are other examples, notably from Australia and New Zealand, the emphasis on networked learning communities in North America means that it has a rich experience in this arena. Bryk et al (2015) describe a modern variant of these as Networked Improvement Communities which espouse a systematic view of learning at Levels A, B and C by facilitating links between learners. Level C learning is newly developed as a result of collaboration.

In England there have been a number of initiatives, including Networked Learning Communities which are described below. The majority have been in secondary education, primarily aimed at improving outcomes in challenging areas. An early example was Education Action Zones in the late 1990s. This was devised by New Labour to enable groups of schools to break free from LA control and focus more closely on the needs of their locality. However, they were bedevilled by a "blizzard of bureaucracy" and were "squeezed by political demands for fast improvement in end of key stage scores," (Chapman, 2009 p.105) sometimes within months. They rarely fulfilled their potential (ibid). Another attempt to promote equity through bringing together successful and unsuccessful schools to collaborate was the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG). This involved a grant of £125,000 per secondary school being made available from the DfE to schools with more than 35% of students eligible for free school meals. The aim was to raise standards and strengthen leadership through collaboration. The groupings were constructed by LIG consultants external to the LA aiming to provide a mix of capacity and need. This tended to lead to a rational, bureaucratic approach that, "ignored geography and already existing relationships between schools" (C. Chapman & Gunter, 2009, p. 124). There appears to have been little impact in terms of improved scores and there is evidence from research that LIG "had a negative effect" (ibid p. 63).

A form of collaboration that did not depend on a government funded initiative was the grandly named, "Improving the Quality of Education for All" school improvement programme. It was university based in that a number of universities have acted as hubs for groups of schools. To begin with it was delivered to groups of schools by university staff but its long term sustainability was based on bringing in school staff who had developed enquiry focused approaches to whole school reform. There was a focus on developing connectedness to facilitate the flow of learning. One finding that is relevant to this study is where there was symmetry between the schools in the structure. This helped schools to operate as both leaders and followers enabling all members to benefit rather than seeing collaboration in terms of the cost (Hadfield, 2009 p.39-40).

One of the most successful of the earlier initiatives to promote school improvement through collaboration was the London Challenge, which began in 2003. This was geographically focused and brought schools in London together in families based on three years' attainment and free school meals data. The result was grouping of schools which faced similar problems. It has been described as:

Arguably the most significant of this approach…which focused on raising the attainment of disadvantaged learners, whilst at the same time improving the overall performance of London schools. (Ainscow, 2015, p. 11)

This experience led to initiatives in similar urban areas such as the Black Country Challenge in the Midlands and the Greater Manchester Challenge in the North West which started in 2008. Summarising the impact of the Greater Manchester Challenge when the first phase ended in 2011, Ainscow comments:

After three years the impact of the challenge was significant in respect to the overall improvements in test and examination results and, indeed, the way the education system carries out its business. So, for example, by 2011, Greater Manchester primary schools outperformed national averages on the tests taken by all children in primary schools in England. (2015, p. 42)

I shall return to this when discussing the implications for policy makers in Chapter 6.

The Recent Historical Background

The idea that school to school collaboration can play a more significant role in supporting school improvement is not a new one but it has attained much higher importance among policy makers since the Coalition Government came into power in 2010. In the White Paper, "The Importance of Teaching" published in November 2010, it was stated that: "The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools" and that, "Our aim has to be to create a school system which is self-improving." (DfE, 2010, p. 73) This statement chimes well with my personal position and history as an educational professional. I was a headteacher in 1988 when Local Management of Schools (LMS) gave individual institutions the responsibility for their own budgets and started a shift of power from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to schools. This was accompanied by greater accountability when the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was set up in 1992, again reducing the power of LEAs as the responsibility for defining what was "good" was transferred to an external organisation and all schools began to be inspected and reported on regularly as individual providers of education.

To some extent, this trend appeared to be interrupted by the New Labour government of 1997 that established the National Strategies. These set out a relatively prescriptive view of school improvement which has been described as, "a centralised model of top down

improvement" (Greany, 2014). At the time, I was serving as a School Improvement Adviser and played a role in disseminating the National Literacy Strategy (1998) and the National Numeracy Strategy (1999). Both strategies recruited specialist school improvement consultants who had a prime responsibility to introduce and monitor the implementation of 'the Strategies'. The architect of the national strategy movement was Michael Barber and there was no doubt that he galvanised the government's efforts to improve schools.

> In the following summer (1998) every primary school headteacher and one or two other teachers from each school attended one of more than 300 two day conferences at which the National Literacy Strategy and the excellent materials, included precise instructions on how to teach a literacy hour – including the phonics – were explained (Barber, 2007, p. 34).

The education system, which had begun to live in a world of increased autonomy and heightened accountability, was exposed to sudden change of culture. "Teachers might not have liked being told how to teach by the government, but they loved the fact that their children learned more and faster" (Barber, 2007, p. 34). While there were good reasons for adopting some of the suggested strategies, this shift in responsibility for the quality and mode of teaching from schools to central government undermined the embryonic sense of school autonomy and the responsibility of teachers to engage with research in developing new approaches to effective pedagogy. This culture is encapsulated in the title of Barber's retrospective book "Instruction to Deliver" (2007) in which teachers and schools were relegated to the role of package handlers, delivering externally devised material through prescriptive pedagogy.

The reasoning behind Barber's approach to school improvement when New Labour came to power in 1997, lies is his analysis of how poor the outcomes for pupils, and by, extrapolation, the quality of teaching was at that time. Only 62% of eleven year olds were achieving the expected levels in reading and writing and, according to the thesis outlined in the "How the world's best education systems keep getting better" (Mourshed et al., 2010), which he co-authored, this would justify a prescriptive approach (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Exhibit 8:
A unique "intervention cluster" exists for each improvement
journey, with six interventions common across all journeys

Improvement journey	Poor to fair	Fair to good	Good to great	Great to excellent
Theme	*Achieving the basics of literacy and numeracy*	*Getting the foundations in place*	*Shaping the professional*	*Improving through peers and innovation*

Intervention cluster[1]	• Providing motivation and scaffolding for low skill teachers
	  − Scripted teaching materials
	  − Coaching on curriculum
	  − Instructional time on task
	  − School visits by center
	  − Incentives for high performance
	• Getting all schools to a minimum quality level
	  − Outcome targets
	  − Additional support for low performing schools
	  − School infrastructure improvement
	  − Provision of textbooks
	• Getting students in seats
	  − Expand school seats
	  − Fulfil students' basic needs to raise attendance
		• Data and accountability foundation
		  − Transparency to schools and/or public on school performance
		  − School inspections and inspections institutions
		• Financial and organisational foundation
		  − Optimization of school and teacher volumes
		  − Decentralizing financial and administrative rights
		  − Increasing funding
		  − Funding allocation model
		  − Organizational redesign
		• Pedagogical foundation
		  − School model/streaming
		  − Language of instruction
		  − Language of instruction
			• Raising calibre of entering teachers and principals
			  − Recruiting programs
			  − Pre-service training
			  − Certification requirements
			• Raising calibre of existing teachers and principals
			  − In-service training programs
			  − Coaching on practice
			  − Career tracks
			  − Teacher and community forums
			• School-based decision-making
			  − Self-evaluation
			  − Independent and specialized schools
				• Cultivating peer-led learning for teachers and principals
				  − Collaborative practice
				  − Decentralizing pedagogical rights to schools & teachers
				  − Rotation and secondment programs
				• Creating additional support mechanisms for professionals
				  − Release professionals from admin burden by providing additional administrative staff
				• System-sponsored experimentation/innovation across schools
				  − Providing additional funding for innovation
				  − Sharing innovation from front-line to all schools

Common across all journeys	Six interventions: [1] Revising curriculum and standards; [2] Reviewing reward and remunerations structure; [3] Building technical skills of teachers and principals, often through group or cascaded training; [4] Assessing student learning; [5] Utilizing student data to guide delivery, and [6] Establishing policy documents and education laws			

1 Total number of interventions in each phase: poor to fair, n=103, fair to good, n=226, good to great, n=150, great to excellent, n=94

Source: McKinsey & Company interventions database

Indeed, Barber justified his approach by citing an improvement to 75% of pupils meeting literacy expectations by 2000 after three years of the National Literacy Strategy. As the testing regime for eleven year olds began in 1995 and Ofsted began inspecting primary schools in 1994, there were other factors such as embedding the testing regime and high stakes accountability at play. This could account for the plateauing of results in the early years of the new millennium. In the same report, the English school system is identified as being on a journey from 'Good to Great' from 1995 onwards (Mourshed et al, 2010 p. 47). This apparent contradiction may be due to the complexity of trying to improve a very

established system rather than build a new one, as there are elements of the Literacy Strategy in both columns of Figure 2.1.

Ben Goldacre, who was commissioned by the Coalition to raise the profile of research within the teaching profession, encapsulates the contrast between the New Labour approach and the present government's in the quotation below from his report.

> Before we get that far, though, there is a caveat: I'm a doctor. I know that outsiders often try to tell teachers what they should do, and I'm aware this often ends badly. Because of that, there are two things we should be clear on. Firstly, evidence based practice isn't about telling teachers what to do: in fact, quite the opposite. This is about empowering teachers, and setting a profession free from governments, ministers and civil servants who are often overly keen on sending out edicts, insisting that their new idea is the best in town. Nobody in government would tell a doctor what to prescribe, but we all expect doctors to be able to make informed decisions about which treatment is best, using the best currently available evidence. I think teachers could one day be in the same position (Goldacre, 2013, p. 7).

Despite the reservations above, the twin ideas that underpin the self-improving school system that the expertise lies within the profession itself and that of sharing this expertise systemically, were recognised by New Labour.

> Local and national government policy in England under New Labour has emphasised the value of collaborative networking across many fields including in relation to the provision of the more equitable and effective provision of education services (Howes, 2007, p. 117).

As was described above, the twin strategies of LMS and inspection fundamentally eroded the central position of the LA (Howes, 2007, p. 119). They emphasised the individual accountability of schools in a competitive environment such that the flow of knowledge might become stifled. As the limitations of top down school improvement became apparent:

> Improvements that may have been due to governmental intervention based on target setting and other centrally organized processes are increasingly seen to have been exhausted (Tymms, 2007 in Howes, 2007, p.119).

Tymms' proposition was supported by some of the actions taken by the New Labour government. Between 2002 and 2006 Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) were set up by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). This initiative involved 1500 schools working in groups of five to seven with the express aim of creating and sharing new knowledge across the education system. As was acknowledged at the time, there was and is a tension between schools competing for pupils and developing and sharing innovative ideas more widely. For this reason, NLCs were tightly circumscribed by "the deliberate construction of something more organisational" which might overcome "the underlying tensions created by the individual 'institutional' focus of schools in a competitive market" (Howes, 2007, p. 122).

Nevertheless, in 2006 the National Primary Strategy rolled out a programme entitled Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) so that:

> Every teacher in every primary school, presently in a network or not, has the opportunity to work within a group of schools with the aim of strengthening pupil learning and implementing effective continuing professional development programmes (PSLN, 2006).

Schools were asked to bid for a grant of £19,000 by coming together and agreeing to work on an initiative that would raise standards of achievement by pupils. They had to meet specified criteria about measurable short term improvements. Unfortunately, the initiative was short-lived and funding was curtailed after one year, although the LA in which I worked found the money for a second year to try and keep to the original promise of a network for every teacher. I shall return to this initiative when I describe the sample for my research as the Trust under scrutiny can trace its roots back to it.

From the above, it is clear that there is a conflict in approaches to improving the English education system. These appear to be between the top down approach epitomised by the National Strategies and the bottom up approach suggested by attempts to find solutions through knowledge transfer by networking schools to create a self-improving system.

Collaboration and School Improvement

The levels of high stakes, individual school accountability and the market created by schools' need to attract pupils are often quoted as barriers to the kind of collaboration which involves the sharing of knowledge between schools which would enable them to improve outcomes for all pupils. Where schools are at the extremes of effectiveness and competition is not an

issue, LAs have often partnered strong schools with inadequate ones to provide additional leadership capacity and support the development of new practice. This kind of collaboration may well result in new learning for both schools, for as Chapman et al note: "Even the most successful leaders recognised that higher performing schools have much to learn from the less effective schools they are partnering" (2013, p. 204).

However, the model is intentionally one way. Hargreaves would question whether this is indeed collaboration which could be scaled up to become a self-improving school system if:

> The design was flawed especially as it failed to avoid the "done to" approach that caused morale in the partner school to plummet further and gave every impression of a rescue mission, not a partnership (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 11).

The possibility of creating a self-improving school system owes much to the development of the quality of leadership in schools over the past decade as the National College for School Leadership has shown an increasing impact at all levels. The notion of "system leaders" lies at the heart of the matter. Originating from Michael Fullan (2005) but taken up enthusiastically by NCSL they have the following in common:

- A conviction that they should strive for the success of schools beyond their own,
- A commitment to actively work with other schools to help them become successful,
- A willingness to accept a role as a "servant" leader within a wider system.

Those headteachers of "outstanding" schools who have been designated National Leaders of Education (NLEs) by NCSL have clearly signed up to this kind of role but, if the system is to become self-improving, these beliefs and attitudes will need to become much more widespread. David Hargeaves (2010) sets out his vision for a sustainable self- improving system based around groups of schools working together which he terms "family clusters". They can vary in constitution from groups of the same phase (homogenous clusters) and groups where a secondary school joins with feeder primary schools possibly including special schools (heterogeneous clusters). His feeling is that they should be geographically local so that face to face contact and mobility of staff support the aim of close collaboration. This will go beyond the present capacity of the NLE network, which is mainly focused on supporting the weakest schools.

One question which Hargreaves raises, but does not resolve, is how this system can be brokered because, "Some headteachers and even more governing bodies, are wary or even sceptical about families of schools" (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 13). Sometimes this has to do with immediate priorities and sometimes because there is mistrust born of a competitive culture. He tentatively suggests that LAs could perform this brokerage task and some, such as Bournemouth and Wigan, have already done so with a measure of success as their schools have engaged positively. He suggests that local authorities could work with NCSL to broker clusters on a wider scale but other developments within the educational system, such as the advent of academies and free schools, have weakened their ability to influence all schools in their geographical area. This is particularly true when the LA is larger and the schools more diverse. In projecting his thinking forward to 2015 he states:

> The emergent range of patterns is considerable and, at first sight, looks chaotic when compared with the isolated schools of the old local authorities with their strict boundaries (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 21).

There does seem to be a contradiction inherent in his view that some form of clustering might be more chaotic than "isolated schools".

The issue of engagement is key to engendering a self-improving school system. The importance of this is echoed by Ben Levin quoted by Toby Greany in "Are we nearly there yet?"

> If we have learned anything over recent decades about large scale improvement in education, it is that reforms 'done to the system' do not have the desired effects. The evidence, not just from education, but also more generally is that reform strategies must be explained and implemented in ways that engage the idealism and professional commitments of educators (Levin, 2012).

Greany, speaking in March 2014, was critical of the contradictions in the Coalition Government's approach to creating a self-improving system. It is far from nearing Hargreaves' vision for 2015:

> As in chaos and complexity theory, however, below the surface is a new kind of order in which schools working together in networks have aligned their continuing professional development and their leadership development, and woven these into

their school improvement plans, both for each school and other schools in the cluster (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 21).

He points to an incoherent picture which is far less optimistic than that portrayed above.

> The coalition has at least four parallel reform narratives and is attempting to follow them all at the same time: the world class/no excuses approach, the freedom to teach approach, the market based approach and the system leadership approach (Greany, 2014, p. 28).

His point about the confusion in the Coalition Government's approach to school improvement is further reinforced if we return to the matrix in Figure 2.1 and look again at the findings of what research has shown to be the key features of a school system on the way from Great to Excellent (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 51). Figure 2.2 below amplifies the features of systems on this journey and lists those jurisdictions that are judged to be at this level. England is seen as being at the Good to Great level (Mourshed et al., 2010, p. 47). Given that many of the features shown on the Great to Excellent matrix are implicit in the self-improving school system presaged by Michael Gove as Education Secretary in 2010, this might account for the title of Greany's lecture, "Are We Nearly There Yet?" His conclusion is that, "All this is symptomatic of a government that is confused about what it is really trying to achieve" (Greany, 2014, p. 28). He goes on to summarise Mourshed et al thus:

> 'Unleashing greatness' requires more than cutting back on government, raising the accountability bar and waiting for improvement to flourish: for example, McKinsey and Co found that while systems focusing on moving from Awful to Good tended to focus half and half on interventions that increased school accountability versus interventions that build capacity, in systems moving from Good to Great, the split was 78% on capacity building versus 22% on accountability (Greany, 2014, p. 31).

To reach the position outlined in Figure 2.2 for the system as a whole, there appears to be a greater need for capacity building than envisaged at present. As Michael Fullan puts it;

> Collective capacity is when groups get better – school cultures, district cultures and government cultures. The big collective capacity and the one that ultimately counts is when they get better conjointly – collective, collaborative capacity, if you like. Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching...

The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish
extraordinary things – for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice
becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason
is more powerful still – working together generates commitment. Moral purpose,
when it stares you in the face through students and your peers working together to
make lives and society better, is palpable, indeed virtually irresistible. The collective
motivational well seems bottomless. The speed of effective change increases
exponentially (M. Fullan, 2010, p. 67).

Figure 2.2

Exhibit 17:
Great to excellent journeys emphasize
learning through peers and innovation

Theme	Description	Example interventions
Raising calibre of entering teachers and principals	• **Learning communities:** The system facilities school-based learning communities to create peer-led support and accountability to each other • **Flexibility:** The system provides effective educators with greater pedagogical autonomy • **Rotations:** The system rotates educators throughout the system in order to spread learning and varied styles of mentorship	• Collaborative practice amongst educators • Decentralizing pedagogical rights to schools and teachers • Creating rotation and secondment programs across schools, and between the center and schools
Creating additional support mechanisms for professionals	• **Leverage:** The system provides administrative staff in schools so that teachers and principals can focus on pedagogy and leadership rather than administrative tasks	• Providing additional administrative staff
System-sponsored innovation across schools	• **Stakeholder innovation:** The system sponsors and identifies examples of innovative practices in schools (teaching and learning practice, parent/community involvement practices, etc.) and then develops mechanisms to shares these innovations across all schools	• Sharing innovation from the front-line • Funding for innovation

Systems included[1]	Hong Kong (2000+)	Saxony (2006+)
	South Korea (1999+)	Singapore (1999+)
	Ontario (2003+)	

1 All these systems are on the journey from Great to Excellent and, while they demonstrate rising gains, none
  have yet attained the Excellent threshold on the universal scale (560+)
Source: McKinsey & Company interventions database and system interviews

System Leadership and Networking

Writing in 2007, David Hopkins spelled out a set of principles for system reform that included
three elements at the heart of which is System Leadership; indeed the sub-title of his book is
"Realising the potential of system leadership". In his view, there are three key strategic areas

that interlock: Teaching and Learning, School Improvement and System Wide Reform. At the intersection lies System Leadership, which has been described above. Inherent within the notion is a sense of moral purpose and equity, which is needed if the competitive forces identified by Greany are not to predominate. Hopkins extends his thinking to describe how "the system" can work in practice and includes a discourse on the place of collaborative networking within his argument. His thinking now appears optimistic and perhaps he was exaggerating for effect when he stated:

> The competitive ethic between schools engendered in many countries by policies with a strong accountability which promoted differential funding and freedoms, is gradually being replaced by a range of funded and unfunded networks (Hopkins, 2007, p. 115).

However, his thinking about the power of collaboration may yet prove to be visionary:

> Networks support improvement and innovation by enabling schools to collaborate on building curriculum diversity, extended services and professional support as well as to develop a vision of education that is shared and owned well beyond the school gates. In networking lies the basis for system transformation (Hopkins, 2007, p. 115).

And further:

> In education, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and de-centralised structures and assist in the process of re-culturing educational organisations and systems (Hopkins, 2007, p. 131).

Although Hopkins clearly stakes a lot on the capacity of schools to network and transform the system, he does recognise that there will be a continuum from the most basic level of sharing good practice to the holy grail of system transformation and renewal (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3

Towards a typology of networks
1. At its most basic level, a network could be regarded as simply groups of teachers joining together for a common curriculum purpose and for the sharing of good practice.
2. Networks could involve groups of teachers and schools joining together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of not just sharing practice but of enhancing teaching, learning and student achievement throughout a school or group of schools.
3. Networks could also not just serve the purpose of knowledge transfer and school improvement but also involve groups of stakeholders joining together for the implementation of specific policies locally and possibly nationally.
4. A further extension of this way of working is found when groups of networks link together for system improvement in terms of social justice and inclusion.
5. Finally, there is potential for groups of networks to work together, not just on a social justice agenda but also to act as agents for system renewal and transformation.

Given what was said above about the reluctance of some schools to engage, there is also development work to do in the area of partnership competence. Most schools have a local network and some already work in partnership for specific purposes, for example to moderate assessments to ensure accuracy. Hill (2008) lists some key lessons for those embarking on collaborative work. These are intended to support the higher levels of systematic collaboration envisaged by Hopkins and Hargreaves, so that the transfer of professional knowledge and skills between schools is carried out effectively:

- Ensuring that collaboration fits with the objectives of all partners so that everyone involved wants to make the partnership work,
- Spending time understanding the culture and working methods of partners and using differences as a spur to learning rather than conflict,
- Having open communication between partners, covering performance data and, as they arise, differences and changing circumstances,
- Developing strong links at all levels so that partnership is supported by a dense web of interpersonal connections,
- Spending as much time on building up commitment to collaborative activity within an organisation as on building relationships with partners,
- Using interim or input measures to assess a partnership's early progress before the full value of the partnership comes through,
- Agreeing a clear status and remit and decision processes for the collaboration.

I shall return to these points when evaluating the success of the cluster of schools in this case study.

Recent Political Developments

In November 2013 the House of Commons Education Committee published a report entitled, "School Partnerships and Collaboration". It acknowledged that partnership working between schools has been in existence for a long time, regardless of government policy, but that it has become far more important in recent years with the advent of the "school-led" or "self-improving school system". The Committee collected evidence from March 2013 in a number of areas:

- The differing forms of school partnership and cooperation, and whether they have particular advantages and disadvantages,
- How highly performing schools could better be encouraged to cooperate with others,
- Whether schools have sufficient incentives to form meaningful and lasting relationships with other schools,
- If and how the potential tension between school partnership and cooperation, and school choice and competition can be resolved,
- Whether converter academies' requirements to support other schools, included in their funding agreements, are sufficient and are effectively policed,
- Whether academies sponsored by another school receive sufficient support from their sponsor,
- Whether school partnerships drive effective school improvement,
- Whether there are any additional upsides or downsides for highly performing schools supporting others through partnerships (Select Committee, 2013, p. 6).

The Committee received fifty written submissions from a range of stakeholders including schools, academy chains, clusters of schools, local government representatives, professional associations, academic researchers, Ofsted and the DfE. They identified different forms of collaboration operating in England today as Federations, Trust Schools and Academy Chains, all of which involve a formal relationship and a change of school status. They also identified looser forms of collaboration that involve school to school support such as National Teaching School Alliances, System Leadership and other collaborative organisations such as Challenge Partners, Whole Education Network and the PiXL Club.

Federations of schools date back to the 2002 Education Act. Originally, they were designated as "hard" or "soft" depending upon the formality of their constitution. Here the Committee refers to those where schools are combined under a single governing body, although each retaining their own identity and budget. I have been closely involved in the establishment of one federation where a much improved school became federated with an adjacent one with a similar history of under-performance. The expertise of the new head teacher was brought to bear in both schools. Leadership structures were aligned, teaching was significantly improved and the schools are both now designated as 'good'. In order to retain their structure and avoid LA attempts to enlarge one of the schools, they both achieved academy status in 2012 as a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). A MAT involves a group of schools working under a single Trust and Board of Directors. The other main type of academy is the Umbrella Trust where each school in the group has its own Trust while subscribing to the Umbrella Trust for mutual benefit. I will return to the issue of Academies in the following section.

The less formal collaborative groups explored by the Select Committee involve two of the DfE key initiatives in terms of system reform: Teaching Schools and System Leaders. Teaching Schools are intended to provide a focus for school to school support in what is termed an Alliance. Teaching Schools have all been designated by Ofsted as "Outstanding" but their role is more to act as a hub for the development of teaching, including Initial Teacher Training, than directly to support individual schools in a one to one relationship. The Committee noted that there are 360 Teaching Schools across the country but that this is fewer than the projected 500 and that they are not equitably distributed, leaving some rural areas bereft of this kind of support.

The System Leader initiative, which involves the designation of some heads of "Outstanding" schools as National Leaders of Education (NLE) and their schools as National Support Schools (NSS), is more focused on providing individual support to failing schools. Although they are intended as separate initiatives, there are examples where a single institution plays both roles. This kind of support is, of necessity, one sided and seems unlikely to have long term impact unless the receiving school has support for capacity building in the longer term, perhaps as part of a collaborative led by a Teaching School or NSS.

The other types of organisation examined by the Select Committee have grown up in the light of experiences gained by schools, particularly through initiatives like London Challenge and City Challenge, which fostered school to school collaboration as a means of school self-improvement. Challenge Schools operate in small groups across the country where they

agree to provide supported self-review and challenge to each other in a local setting.

The Committee came to the conclusion that there was widespread support for the concept of schools collaborating and that, in many cases; it enabled schools to have access to provision which they could not do alone. Much of this was in the area of Continuing Professional Development where teachers can share expertise and ideas but it also made it possible, in some areas, to widen curriculum access.

That there are examples of radical school turnaround is recognised but the report does warn against viewing collaboration, in itself, as a panacea because it will depend on the vision and leadership with which it is pursued, whether it results in school improvement for all members. While much of the perceived benefit of collaboration is seen as stemming from the engagement of high-performing schools, there were concerns expressed that this might lead to a dilution of energy and that they might lose some of their leading edge capacity. The Committee also heard the counter claim that high performing schools can benefit from supporting others and this is supported by research cited above e.g. Chapman (2011)

There is some debate between co-operative models and those needed to support failing schools. Despite this, City Challenge was cited as an example of more intensive partnerships bringing about rapid improvements in weaker schools, providing the over-arching structure is strong and support and challenge well managed. Local and geographic proximity was also considered and the conclusion reached that it was an important enabling feature. Present DfE assumptions about manageable distance are challenged by the evidence provided. There is also some criticism of high performing schools that have taken advantage of academy status to gain greater autonomy but which have not engaged in supporting weaker schools e.g. "Unleashing Greatness" (Gilbert, 2013). This is, perhaps, one of the tensions between working in a highly competitive environment and an expectation that the system can improve itself through collaboration. The Committee recognised this tension but reaches the overall conclusion that, properly managed it can be a creative one that avoids complacency or collaboration becoming "cosy".

Its overall conclusion that:

> Properly handled, school collaboration offers benefits to all schools involved. The Government should continue to promote this message so as to reassure reluctant governing bodies and promote equality of esteem among all participants (Select Committee, 2013, p. 39).

Moreover:

> Although evidence on the impact of school partnerships seems positive, it would still benefit from robust evaluation, particularly aimed at identifying what works and why. Given the importance of a school-led improvement system to its vision, we recommend that the Government embed evaluation into further initiatives relating to school partnership and collect systematic evidence on 'what works' (Select Committee, 2013, p. 39).

Among its other recommendations, the Committee noted that collaborations appeared to have more impact where there were clear lines of accountability and some sense of obligation to work together. This leads to the next section where the role of academies in providing both facets of school led improvement is discussed. But before doing so, it is appropriate to discuss the role played by LAs in support of a self-improving school system. The Committee refers to them as part of the "middle tier" which also includes Academy Chains. Those who gave evidence provided little support for the traditional school improvement role of LAs:

> Witnesses did not advocate a return to the old model of LEA-led improvement. Peter Maunder identified some of the limitations of the previous system, in particular that, while "the expertise resided in schools", it was delivered by "top-down" systems through advisers (Select Committee, 2013, p. 29).

However, the Committee did hear that some LAs have been adapting to take into account changes in the school improvement landscape. It quotes research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (Aston et al., 2013) to the effect that:

> LAs were repositioning themselves to put schools in the lead, while securing delivery of their statutory duties through education partnerships. They were adopting a more adaptive style of leadership, and were prepared to move radically to enable school to school support (Select Committee, 2013, p. 30).

The NFER team, which reported to the Committee, carried out case study research into the role played by the middle tier internationally and found that:

> The case-study findings chimed with those from our rapid review. This found that in high-performing countries, the middle tier nurtures and facilitates school to school support through:

- Practical work (maintaining a knowledge of the education system, and using data to support work on the ground),
- Engaging with schools' improvement work and enabling them to maximise the capacity of that work to benefit the system as a whole,
- Brokering school-to-school collaboration, facilitating initial discussions and working with schools to help them as they respond to challenges or develop new approaches,
- Nurturing a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility for the system as a whole through effective system leadership,
- Helping to embed and sustain the work in individual schools and across networks,
- Disseminating effective practice,
- Being open to innovation and new ways of working (Aston et al., 2013, p. 3).

This is indeed a broad brief for "the middle tier" and one that the Committee touches upon but does not sufficiently investigate. It acknowledges the diverse variety of middle tier arrangements that exist at the moment but does not look sufficiently critically at which model might best be able to fulfil the criteria outlined above in high-performing countries. Building upon this research the authors go on to suggest that middle tier organisations, including LAs and Academy Chains:

- Develop a long-term vision and strategy for Teaching and Learning that moves beyond compliance and to which all partners sign up,
- Develop a framework for school-to-school support,
- Embed evaluation and challenge.

The first point takes us well beyond the position stated by Michael Barber earlier as Fair to Good to a position where schools are empowered to innovate within an informed framework i.e. that identified as Great to Excellent. The final element in the NFER's findings is perhaps the most important in enabling school improvement to be truly school-led. They amplify their findings to provide a useful working definition of what lies at the heart of the self-improving school system:

- Encourage – and support capacity building in – individual schools to embed evaluation and challenge through a common approach to developing teaching and learning, including peer-to-peer support and challenge, use of data and

CPD. Leadership teams are critical in modelling the right behaviours, which can then extend across schools.

- If necessary, have a mechanism for undertaking the challenge role if the schools feel they cannot (Aston et al., 2013, p. 7).

The Select Committee heard submissions from LAs, in addition to that from researchers, and this provided evidence that some are already working towards enabling a school-led improvement system.

> We heard from Kirston Nelson of Wigan Council that this is a model they have already adopted: providing an enabling infrastructure, which is about being able to identify, through performance data, the schools that may require support through the partnership. It is a commissioning and brokerage role, but we also have a role in terms of quality assurance. Our school partnership and the model that we have put in place reflects that, but it reflects a collective accountability with head teachers, all on the same driver in terms of moral purpose for system improvement for all children in Wigan (Select Committee, 2013, p. 30).

This brief statement addresses many of the issues raised by the committee report in terms of collaboration within a framework with a shared moral purpose, an issue which is under-emphasised by their report but to which I will return when further considering models for evaluating collaboration.

Academies

Although school to school collaboration is not a new thing, its place at the centre of a self-improving system as a nationwide strategy for school improvement is. At the heart of this strategy is the belief that the expertise to make a step change in how well schools perform lies within the schools themselves and that, to release this potential, schools should have greater autonomy than that enjoyed under LAs and Local Management of Schools. The arguments for greater autonomy leading to improved pupil outcomes are rehearsed extensively by O'Shaughnessy. He quotes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "the creation of more autonomous schools will lead to innovations in curriculum, instruction and governance, which in turn will improve outcomes," and Hanushek's statement that, " Autonomy reforms improve student achievement in developed countries" (O'Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 19). This leads him to state, "The move back to school autonomy has found its ultimate expression in the academy movement" (ibid, p.21).

Although "academies" were created in 2002, when the first three were opened, and a further fourteen were opened during 2003 and 2004, it was only in the latter year that a decision was taking to scale up the initiative to create 200 more. However, these original academies were created specifically to address a single issue of long term poor performance in urban secondary schools by re-creating them as centres of excellence with additional funding, new models of governance and very high expectations. The description of Mossbourne Academy by Andrew Adonis who served as Minister for Schools between 1998 and 2008 encapsulates the ambition for these schools:

> During a recce before the official opening, I was stunned not so much by the buildings as by the students and the teachers. The spacious, multi-coloured £28 million Richard Rogers construction and state of the art facilities were breathtakingly impressive, more like a university than a school, including lecture theatre, sports hall, bright open-plan study and social areas, glass-fronted classrooms and abundant PCs. But more striking was the behaviour of the children, all of them from the surrounding area, proud of their grey uniforms with red trimming and ties, lined up quietly in the playground before filing in for assembly and clearly enjoying their classes. As for the teachers, the professionalism was palpable (Adonis, 2012, p. 4).

While Adonis is clearly impressed by the outward features of this academy, it was not until 2010 that the academy movement began to become a widespread, if not systematic, way of bringing about improvement across the whole education system in England. In May 2010, when the Coalition Government came into being there were 203 of these original 'sponsored' academies; academies where the expertise of the highest performing schools could be harnessed to help improve the weakest. By September 2012, this had grown to 501. The movement was augmented by the creation of 1809 "converter" academies, a new category whereby all schools became eligible to benefit from the institutional autonomy enjoyed by sponsored academies.

Technically, academies occupy a separate legal status to maintained schools and are established as companies whose object is a charitable purpose for advancing education under the Academies Act of 2010. The academy trust enters into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State, appoints governors (directors) and is regulated by the Education Funding Agency. The trust takes responsibility for running its own affairs including commissioning school improvement services. The advent of sponsored academies between 2002 and 2006 had ushered in the formation of chains of schools under a sponsor, two of

the most notable being the Harris Federation and ARK, but there were originally nine others. Distinct approaches to school improvement have become the house style in some of these chains allied to collaboration between schools to bring about transformation. Although O'Shaughnessy draws on DfE analyses to claim that sponsored academies have improved at a faster rate than other state funded schools (O'Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 22), others are more cautious, "Some think tanks have argued that these reforms naturally lend themselves to the development of a system underpinned by federations and chains of schools. However, the evidence to support this claim remains limited" (Chapman & Muijs, 2013, p. 201).

In discussing the potential of academies to transform education in England by developing a school led system, Hill and colleagues present the following diagram (see Figure 2.4) that shows the range of collaborative arrangements that they analysed in detail, (Hill et al 2012). They clearly point to the advantages of the academy model in what they term, "hard edged" accountability.

Figure 2.4
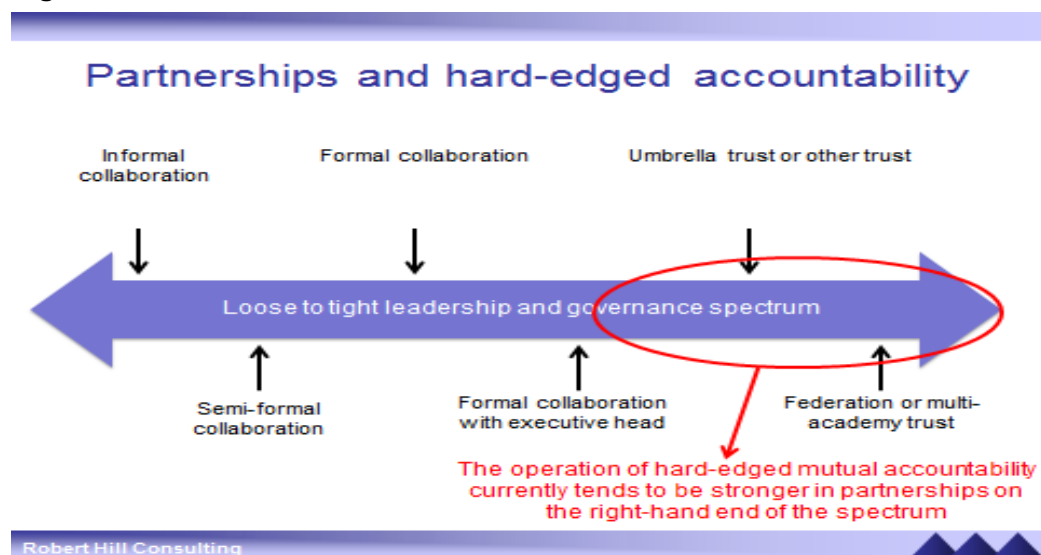
Although, Hill (2014) adheres to the view that schools with "harder, integrated governance have a stronger platform for holding each other to account", he also points out that for this to become a universal norm will take time and will require not just the creation of academies. It will also require a "deep maturity between local schools and/or local authorities" (Slide 11) to move further towards a self-improving system . Although the creation of academies does include a considerable commitment on the part of groups of schools to engage in mutual development as outlined above, the adoption of this purely bottom up approach to improvement may have its limitations, as Greany points out, when looking outwards at Asian education systems:

A growing number of research reports... indicate that many high performing jurisdictions in Asia "unleash greatness through a complex combination of top-down and bottom up reform....central and local government work tirelessly in these systems to galvanise energy, build the capacity of their schools, foster innovation and ensure evidence is driving change (Greany, 2014, p. 13).

The Impact of Collaboration

Enthusiasts for collaboration as a means of school improvement are prone to make claims for its effectiveness, sometimes based on spurious evidence, as in the case alluded to above, where claims for the success of the early sponsored academies are used to bolster the case for developing chains of academies. One difficulty in providing valid evidence of impact is the variety of school type and models of collaboration that can inhibit comparative measurement. Despite the claim that, "Schools working together leads to better results," (DfE, 2010), Chapman and Muijs point out that:

Current educational reform is taking place at an unusually rapid pace. Therefore it is unsurprising that the evidence about whether the policies are ill or well-conceived or even what works and why in developing a self-improving school system lags behind policy development or emerging practice (2013, p. 202).

Hargreaves paints a vision of a system in which more control and responsibility is given to school leaders who are committed to working together to achieve better outcomes for pupils. However, much of the discussion about this is anecdotal rather than based on research. Chapman and colleagues (2009, p. 204) point out that among the six possible variations of collaborative arrangement which they collectively call federations, one form is academy federations. Their quantitative analysis mainly focuses on secondary schools and points out that establishing the trust and confidence to enable groups of schools to have an impact on pupil outcomes takes time.

The follow up study (2013) combines both quantitative analysis of outcomes with qualitative data gained from interviews of school leaders. Their quantitative findings "indicate school federations are a potentially useful mechanism to support raising the performance of weaker schools" (2013, p. 214). They qualify this by finding that 'performance federations', where a strong school is supporting a weaker one, are more likely to be effective where an executive headteacher is in post across the federation i.e. that the schools share one headteacher and governing body. In addition to "performance federations", in which students begin to out-

perform their peers from the second year of the federation, they also identify academy federations as having a similar effect from the third year of federation. This reinforces the gradual nature of school improvement through collaboration.

One key way in which such schools promote improvement is by sharing best practice across the federation in terms of teaching and learning, leadership, school policy, finance and administration as a means of raising expectations. They highlight the development of a joint "moral purpose linked to the well-being of the wider community rather than just an individual school" (p. 216), quoting one executive headteacher of a high performing school as saying, "the key to working with other schools is what you learn when you go there – it sharpens your practice". This is important as an illustration that the cross school learning identified is mutual rather than one way.

From the evidence presented in these studies, it seems unlikely that the research being undertaken in this thesis will be over a sufficiently long period to allow for an evaluation of the impact on pupil outcomes but that the conditions that enable this to take place could provide fertile ground for further investigation (See Gilbert 2013 p.11).

Conclusion

Although the role of collaboration between schools as a means of improvement has a relatively long history and there is now a political consensus that it is a good thing, there does appear to be a lack of consistency in the strategic thinking behind actions to promote it by central governments in the UK. The work of Greany (2014) points out the inherent contradictions within the armoury used to promote school improvement in England; for example where the accountability framework inhibits the innovative benefits of autonomy. There is a body of research that indicates the benefits of collaborative working on teaching and learning through ideas such as joint practice development and developing a collective moral purpose for improving the learning in an area beyond one school. The barriers to this often lie in the competitive nature of the school system, where high stakes testing and published inspection reports often take precedence over longer term and, perhaps, more sustainable arrangements for groups of schools taking responsibility for their own improvement. Earley (2013, p. 91) voices an element of doubt and introduces the term 'co-opetition':

> However, it is not always clear how the potential tension between partnership and cooperation, and school choice and competition can be resolved. With the anticipated

decline of many LA functions, government policy argues that schools will gain support from a mixed economy and operate within a climate of 'co-opetition', a neologism coined to describe co-operative competition. Only time will tell how successful this will be.

There are examples where collaboration works successfully but they are sometimes limited to a few schools. Those examples where it is successful may be at the leading edge of new thinking, perhaps reflecting the view presented in Figure 2.2 that a system which emphasises "learning through peers and innovation" is on a journey from "great to excellent". In national terms, Toby Greany's question, "Are we nearly there yet?" could quite easily have been, "Do we know where we are going?"

The following chapter sets out to explore in more detail literature that might help to clarify the background processes that a group of autonomous schools will go through in establishing meaningful collaboration on a voluntary basis as a means of self-improvement and as a background to the study's research questions.

Chapter 3

Three Lenses for Looking at Collaboration

The previous chapter explored the literature in order to set out the background to the present focus on collaboration as a means of school improvement. In some areas this has already taken root as an area strategy, for example in Suffolk where a recent report by the RSA was entitled, "No School an Island". It said:

> At the heart of this report is our belief in the power of collaboration. Our approach is to combine devolution of responsibility and resources to schools with a stronger expectation that they commit to strong partnerships with:
> * Other schools and early years settings in their pyramid where objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the attainment and progression of every child,
> * Other neighbouring schools, organisations working with young people and the wider community where the objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the well-being of every child,
> * Schools with a similar profile to themselves in 'families', where the objectives and accountabilities are focussed on the quality of teaching and learning and school improvement (Bamfield, Hallgarten, & Taylor, 2013, p. 5).

The purpose of this chapter is to look at three specific ideas from the literature about collaboration that can form lenses through which to evaluate aspects taking place in the case study schools. The major focus, or primary lens, is the work of David Hargreaves who has developed his thinking about lateral systems culminating in "A self-improving school system: towards maturity" (Hargreaves, 2012). He expounds a model for school led improvement and includes evaluative tools to support its development.

I shall also draw upon the ideas initially developed by Etienne Wenger about Communities of Practice that essentially focus on how best to develop organisational knowledge for the benefit of a wider organisation. This work has been developed as Professional Learning Communities by Stoll et al (2003) but was largely confined to their use in individual institutions as opposed to cross-school collaboration. The development of opportunities for school networking has taken the idea one step further with the result that, "Networks appear to be able to do this because they simultaneously improve the quality of professional development and support the transfer of knowledge and practice" (Hadfield, 2009, p. 16).

I follow this with a discussion of what Grid Group Theory can offer in the context of school to school collaboration because it raises some interesting issues about the leadership and sustainability of a collaborative approach to school and system improvement. This idea was originally expounded by Mary Douglas (1982), and subsequently applied to public service provision by Hood (1998) and to organisational solutions by Thompson (2008).

By taking these three differing perspectives, the intention is to create a conceptual framework that will enable a deeper understanding of the ways in which collaboration develops and can support school improvements that might be possible from viewing the data from a single viewpoint. Hargreaves' model provides an overview of the underpinnings of collaboration in social capital, ways of improving teaching through joint practice development and methods for evaluation and challenge. In a sense it provides a map of the territory and offers some thoughts about the direction of travel. It assumes a readiness and capacity for collaboration as a good in itself but is less explicit about outcomes other than in terms of improved collaboration. The inclusion of communities of practice within the research is to look more closely at the various groups that develop as the engine for improvements in teaching and to gain the views of the teachers, whose voices might otherwise be missed. As we move away from a system where the LA is the prime mover in terms of school improvement, often fostering collaboration as one of the levers, the inclusion of Cultural Theory is intended to broaden out the focus and look at the possible impact of having a less recognisable locus for rigour and accountability to ensure that collaboration leads to improvement.

Towards a mature self-improving school system

Before I discuss the two subsidiary lenses through which I analyse the case study data, I will now explore the work of David Hargreaves in more depth. It incorporates a number of the concepts raised by the other two but is different in the sense that it actively sets out to provide a strategy whereby school to school collaboration can be harnessed as the foundation for a modern school-led improvement system.

Much of David Hargreaves' thinking focuses on the concept of "capital". It can be defined as, "relating to or being assets that add to long term worth" (Merriam Webster Dictionary cited in "Professional Capital" by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012, p. 1)). Although the concept of financial capital is the most common use of the word, it has currency in many aspects of life. Underlying much of the discussion about school improvement is the notion of Human Capital applied to the teaching force. Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan begin by

highlighting two possible contexts in which the Human Capital of teachers can be deployed. There is the business model that assumes an initial investment but demands a quick return. This approach is characterised by short term initiatives by governments, often measured by test results within a year or two. An example in England could be viewed in the National Strategies described above. They contrast this idea with that of Professional Capital which underpins much of David Hargreaves' thinking. Developing Professional Capital requires a longer term investment that is system wide and develops through a culture of open collaboration.

Within Professional Capital, there are three forms of capital interacting with each other in a way which is resonant of the David Hargreaves' model. They include Human, Social and Decisional capitals and are applied to system development rather than purely at individual teachers or schools. The idea that successful education systems rely purely on the performance of highly talented individuals as favoured by the Business Capital model is refuted by reference to the highest performing systems in the world where Hargreaves and Fullan contend that Professional Capital is at work as a long term investment (2012, p. 3). While they maintain that high levels of Human Capital are vital, they state that it is only possible to sustain the best teaching by ensuring that Social Capital exists to enable the best ideas to be shared and next practice developed (2012, p. 51). This concept is similar to David Hargreaves' idea of Joint Practice Development discussed below.
The third element of Professional Capital described above is Decisional Capital whereby experienced professionals deploy their judgements intuitively to ensure that learning is maximised. The contention is that this level of professionalism is best developed in a highly collaborative system where expertise and skills are shared. The most explicit echoes of this idea can be seen in the notions of Analytical Investigation and Disciplined Innovation which fall under the umbrella of Collaborative Capital, the culmination of David Hargreaves' model.

David Hargreaves has been an advocate of school to school collaboration for a number of years, starting with "Working Laterally" in 2003. As mentioned in Chapter 2, school to school collaboration was then at an early stage of development, with initiatives such as Networked Learning Communities touching relatively few schools. By 2012 the landscape had changed significantly, partly because of political initiatives, although, as Greany (2014) has pointed out, this has not happened in a coherent way. Hargreaves' contribution, through a series of four think pieces for the NCSL, has been to offer insights into the processes needed if school to school working is to yield real improvements in teaching and learning. His contention is that for this to take place, partnerships need to be deep but that this depth requires both commitment and time to develop. His statement that, "We have reached the point where we

can specify the criteria by which we can judge a partnership to have developed depth", (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 5) may well be true but his analysis also makes clear the complexity of the task which, without mediation, many schools will find difficult. He sets out a series of dimensions and strands in a narrative format with the express purpose of providing a "persuasive story" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 5). They are Professional Development, Partnership Competence and Collaborative Capital. He defines a self-improving school system as "one in which school improvement and professional development are conjoined in the life and work of the school in relation to its chosen partners" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 6). Each dimension is sub-divided into four strands that are shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 (Hargreaves 2012 p.7)

Box 1: The maturity model and its 12 strands

The **professional development** dimension and its strands:
– joint practice development
– mentoring and coaching
– talent identification
– distributed staff information

The **partnership competence** dimension and its strands:
– fit governance
– high social capital
– collective moral purpose, or distributed system leadership
– evaluation and challenge

The **collaborative capital dimension** and its strands:
– analytical investigation
– disciplined innovation
– creative entrepreneurship
– alliance architecture

In Hargreaves' view the dimensions are sequential, for example,

> The first dimension, professional development, necessarily takes precedence over the second dimension, partnership competence, for an obvious reason: partnership competence is not an end in itself, but a means to enhancing the professional development from which better teaching and learning arise (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 8).

Given the evidence relating to possible conflicts between collaboration and school autonomy outlined in Chapter 2, it could be argued that if attempts are made to share professional development without first addressing the partnership competences, the interactions between schools may remain superficial. Indeed, as Hargreaves (2012, p. 8) himself says, efforts to share best practice are not new but do not have a strong record of success. "Without

exception, teachers tell me that the success rate of such attempted transfer is, in their view, low or very low."

The model of professional development suggested by Hargreaves, which he calls Joint Practice Development, is a sophisticated one. It is designed to ensure that new learning by teachers is developed through practice that involves coaching and mentoring, resonant of the model discussed by Rowan below. While there is much to commend this form of collaboration, the more sophisticated the process, the more its success will depend on pre-existing high Partnership Competence. While some individual schools may have the capacity for Joint Practice Development built through strategies such as Lesson Study (DCSF, 2009), relatively few will have collaborated closely in the ways envisaged by Hargreaves.

> Joint practice development differs from "sharing good practice" because:
> - It is a joint activity in which two or more people interact and influence one another,
> - It focuses on teachers' professional practice, not just knowledge,
> - It is a development of the practice, not simply a transfer from one person to another (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 9).

Hargreaves suggests that the number of schools entering into a deep partnership should be limited. He has worked with headteachers who envisage partnerships between one and three to be their optimum size but, while this may be true for secondary schools, for primary schools it might be larger groups of five or six. The sharing of coaching and mentoring, in addition to supporting the improvement of teaching, also offers opportunities for the development of leadership across a group of schools but for this to be successful, a sense of shared moral purpose, distributed system leadership and high social capital must all be present. This argues for a more iterative relationship than Hargreaves suggests between Professional Development and Partnership Competence, particularly in a climate of high stakes accountability where confidence building might need to precede sharing of expertise. This confidence is likely to arise from one of the key aspects of Partnership Competence, that of Reciprocity. To Hargreaves, Reciprocity is a key element of High Social Capital because it implies the give and take attitudes needed for trust to develop, based on the belief that new knowledge will benefit all members. This is alluded to by Taylor below when he talks about collaboration being in the interests of all engaged. Hargreaves points to the importance of leaders in modelling trust both within school and with partner schools to generate a climate of trustful relationships. This resonates with the hierarchical strand within Hood and Eddy Spicer's writing below. He quotes McEvily and Zaheer (2004) in seeing

school leaders as the "architects of trust." They must also demonstrate the shared moral purpose which is a key element of working collaboratively, particularly where schools are engaged in a partnership on an equal footing and where the advantages might be less obvious than when a strong school is supporting a weaker one. The role of leaders is even more vital in convincing the wider community of parents that sharing expertise will bring benefits to their children as well as those in partner schools.

Hargreaves includes the Evaluation and Challenge strand within the Partnership Competence dimension. This might well be seen to grow from sharing a moral purpose but the ability to move beyond the affiliative will depend on the levels of trust achieved. As Hargreaves says, "Without proper evaluation and challenge conversations between headteachers and teachers decline into undemanding chats in which big issues of school quality and school improvement remain unconfronted" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 19). He maintains that this rigour needs to be practised at all levels, bringing it into the "culture" quadrant identified in Figure 3.3 below. Interestingly, Hargreaves proceeds to bring together in one diagram what he calls the "four key strands of a deep partnership", to make the link between Joint Practice Development and those elements of Partnership Competence discussed above and upon which it will depend for success (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Interactions between the four key strands of deep partnership (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 21)
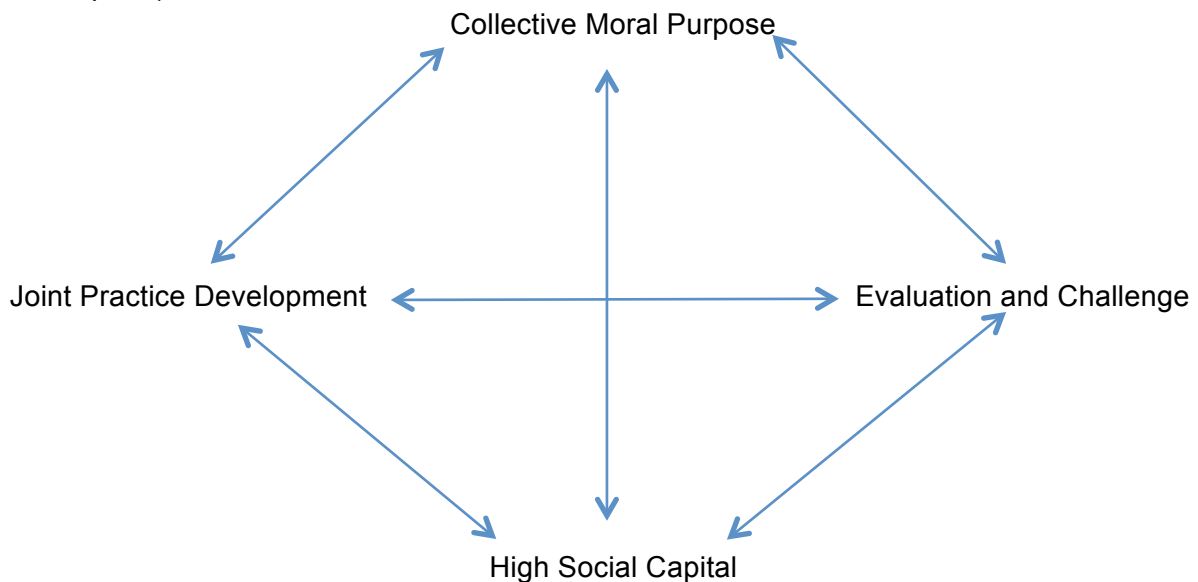
This interactivity may be hard won, as on the previous page Hargreaves lists the same strands in order of difficulty: 1) Joint Practice Development; 2) High Social Capital; 3) Collective Moral Purpose; 4) Evaluation and Challenge. While none of these will be easily

accomplished, changing the established practice of teachers is difficult to achieve without accurate evaluation and challenge, high social capital, including reciprocity, and real collective moral purpose because some of the more trenchant issues will not be tackled effectively.

> Relocating teachers' time and energy from relatively ineffective models of sharing good practice to more effective models based on mentoring and coaching is not easily achieved because it means reforming what we mean by professional development (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 8).

Hargreaves' third dimension, Collaborative Capital, is used to describe the situation that exists when the partnership arrangements within a group of schools are firmly and effectively established. It brings together the combined social capital between partners with the collective intellectual capital and the organisational collective capacity for self-improvement developed by the schools. The four strands identified operate at a high level so that analytical investigation, involving sophisticated diagnostic skills, leads to innovative solutions. Innovation is clearly focused (disciplined), accompanied by evaluation and effectively disseminated. This dissemination will depend on the evolution of what Hargreaves calls Creative Entrepreneurs who will ensure that knowledge is shared effectively without ignoring the cost of development. If a group of schools has successfully developed the first eleven strands of Hargreaves' model, he would say that they have attained the status of Alliance Architects with deep partnership and Collaborative Capital at the heart.

One of the key strengths offered by Hargreaves' model is that he has used it to construct evaluative tools that might help the education community answer Greany's question, "Where are we now?" in terms of the levels of collaboration that already exist within the system. These tools are used to collect some of the data that underpins the analysis carried out in later chapters of this case study.

Building a Knowledge System is a Complex Undertaking

My second lens for looking at the way collaboration can work comes from exploring the concept of Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) as originally set forth by Wenger (1998). I became interested in this area as a result of a previous study that focused on Transition between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 for pupils in primary education. One aspect that emerged from that IFS (Dimmer, 2012) was that practitioners could use

similar language but attribute different meanings, for example, to the concept of "independence in learning".

This resulted in pedagogic differences that reduced the continuity of learning for the pupils involved.

> An illustration of this is the view of independent learning expressed by the two teachers. The Year 2 teacher viewed her pupils as able to take full responsibility for planning and researching a piece of work without adult direction, whereas when the pupils reached Year 3, the teacher felt that they were unable to manage basic classroom routines, without asking for adult help. (Dimmer, 2012, p. 41)

This difference points to a lack of a sense of shared identity between the teachers and an absence of belonging to a "Community of Practice". Wenger et al define Communities of Practice as:

> Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4).

Although the teachers at the two schools involved showed a willingness to collaborate, they had not yet developed a sense of having the same concern and set of problems about the pupils' learning at school, which would help them to come to a common understanding. Therefore, their collaboration tended to be superficial and could be said to lack a shared moral purpose.

This kind of superficiality is not uncommon in school to school collaboration, "particularly for front line teachers facing many other calls on their time and energy" (Taylor, 2013a). Matthew Taylor was referring to an enquiry commissioned by the RSA on behalf of Suffolk County Council, entitled "Raising the Bar" (Suffolk, 2012), which recommended that school to school collaboration could play a vital role in improving school performance. And yet, Taylor relates in his blog how he spoke to staff in a collaboration pyramid of secondary and primary teachers who claimed that partnership was very useful but, "under examination it turned out that they didn't even have a structured conversation about the progress individual pupils made across transition" (Taylor, 2013a). This work led to the writing of the report, "No School an Island" which sets out school to school collaboration as a key strategy for school improvement in Suffolk (Bamfield et al., 2013).

However, if the system is to fulfil Taylor's widely shared optimism about the power of collaboration (see Chapter 2), it would appear that the development of Communities of Practice might be one of the essential structures that will need to be put in place. Transition between phases of education might not be the ideal starting place but it does illustrate the need. One possible problem is in creating a mutual sense of value in these interactions, what Hargreaves (2012) refers to as collective moral purpose. There are other scenarios such as improving teaching, subject leadership and developing new curriculum and assessment approaches where Wenger and colleagues' definition could be more aptly applied:

> These people don't necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together they typically share information, insight and advice. They help each other solve problems…They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals and other documents – or they may simply develop a tacit understanding that they share (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 5).

What seems to be missing in the examples of failure cited above is a rudimentary understanding of the key elements that underpin the notions behind Wenger's work; the basic structure which requires the three elements of a shared domain of knowledge, a community of people and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective within their domain. In my example above, there was a group of people but a lack of a shared domain, sense of community or shared practice.

> The most successful communities of practice thrive where the goals and needs of the organisation intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 32).

Defining the domain is seen as key to the levels of engagement as well as to the achievement of the key aims of the organisation. It needs to inspire commitment but also to be wide enough to appeal to members who can bring in new ideas. Wenger et al do not underestimate the complexity of building communities of practice. They talk about "cultivating" them because they see them as living entities. "Because communities of practice are organic, designing them is more a matter of shepherding their evolution than creating them from scratch" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 51). They set out seven principles based on their experience and research in different businesses that they list as:

1. Design for evolution.

2. Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives.
3. Invite different levels of participation.
4. Develop both public and private community spaces.
5. Focus on value.
6. Combine familiarity and excitement.
7. Create a rhythm for the community.

Because Communities of Practice are organic, designing them must allow for them to evolve. A well-designed community relies not only on a deep understanding of the domain by members but also the input of external perspectives to prevent it becoming too introspective. Members may be able to offer different levels of participation at different times and about different issues. The issue of public and private community spaces recognises that, although events within the community are important in terms of disseminating ideas, much of the development work and networking will come from more private interactions. The value generated is not always immediately apparent and communities need to take care to evaluate the impact of their work which may come from many small changes as well as larger breakthroughs in practice. The final two principles underpin the sense of life in the community that come from a strong sense of direction and achievement.

In the field of primary education, where most schools are relatively small, the opportunities for cultivating Communities of Practice are relatively straightforward to find. For example, they could consist of teachers working with a specific year group or phase of education such as the Foundation Phase, teachers with a specific leadership responsibility such as a subject or aspect, English or Assessment or at a particular point in their career, Newly Qualified Teachers or aspiring deputy headteachers. There is also the chance to develop new communities to overcome barriers such as that alluded to above where transition between phases can be problematic.

The creation of such communities across schools does offer the opportunity, indeed the necessity, to give experiences of leadership that might not exist within a single organisation.

> Communities thrive on internal leadership. Similarly a knowledge organisation depends on a distributed cadre of formal and informal leaders – both inside and outside communities – who have the vision to help them meet their potential (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 192).

On the face of it, Communities of Practice appear to present a panacea for the development of new knowledge within a school led improvement system. However, the transition examples quoted above illustrate one of the possible dangers inherent in this approach. The inability to collaborate meaningfully was not simply because the teachers involved did not belong to a community but that they belonged to different communities with different cultures and objectives. Individual communities will take ownership of their domain that can be positive but might also become exclusive. If one domain is seen as very important, it is quite possible that members of the community might assume self-importance, develop internal practices and not take into account the wider needs of the group. This could lead to balkanisation, where groups vie with each other for time and resources. For example, Year 6 teachers may well see their interests as paramount because of the high stakes attached to test results at the end of Key Stage 2, whereas Early Years Practitioners may hold strongly to the view that the needs of the youngest pupils should predominate. Some communities, for example, those dealing with the arts, may feel that they are taken less seriously than the core subjects. Changes over time in the membership of communities could lead to a loss of enthusiasm and vibrancy or even a sense of complacency where there is insufficient leadership. Although some of these possible issues are explored by Wenger et al, it will be important that leaders within collaboratives of primary schools monitor communities carefully and ensure that the domain and the practice are refreshed regularly to support the wider aims of whole school improvement.

Notwithstanding these possible pitfalls, Chapman and Hadfield sum up the results of their studies in terms of benefits for teachers thus:

> Our own research within school networks has shown how staff often form semi-autonomous groups that meet over time and that encourage sustained professional dialogues and so assist members in implementing what they have recently learned (Hadfield, 2009, p. 17).

Cultural Theory and Collaboration

In this section I draw on work based around Grid Group Theory, originally expounded by Mary Douglas in the field of anthropology (Douglas, 1986) but increasingly applied to the analysis of institutions.

Douglas first expounded her grid group theory in her book entitled "Natural Symbols" which was published in 1970. At that stage it was simply focused on the two dimensions, "group"

meaning a general boundary around a community, which was shown on the horizontal scale and "grid" referring to regulation, which is shown on the vertical scale.

A simple illustration of the original idea in action is given by Hood (Hood, 1998, p. 8) in the naming of children. Parents who feel they have a free choice to name their children after film stars or other celebrities may be said to be "low" as far as the Grid dimension is concerned, whereas those who are constrained by rules of culture to choose family names might be said to be "high" on the same continuum. The Group dimension refers to constraints that relate to how belonging to a community limits the extent of individual choice. For example, as a member of a closed community there might be an imperative to fit in with common expectations of behaviour, as is often the case in individual schools. Hood applies these ideas to the arena of public management with the high Grid position suggesting that managers should work within a tight framework of rules and the low Grid position holding that once appointed managers should be free to get on with the job and be judged by outcomes. There are resonances here of the debate between school autonomy and impositions such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies referred to in Chapter 2. The Group dimension refers to who should be carrying out the task. A high Group position would suggest that public services such as education should be carried out by a dedicated group of professional teachers or, in a low position; they could be done by a range of individuals with specialist expertise. Into this comes the issue of private for profit businesses versus a public service ethos which might claim the higher moral ground.

From this discussion Hood (1998, p. 9) derives the four styles of public management which have been abbreviated by Taylor. These can be shown as Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1

"Grid" a "Group" b		
	Low	High
High	*The Fatalist Way* Low co-operation, rule bound approaches to organisation. Example: atomised societies sunk in rigid routines. (Banfield 1958)	*The Hierarchist Way* Socially cohesive, rule bound approaches to organisation. Example: Stereotype military structures (Dixon 1976)
Low	*The Individualist Way* Atomised approaches to organisation stressing negotiation and bargaining. Example: Chicago-school doctrines of "government by the market" and their antecedents. (Self 1993)	*The Egalitarian way* High-participation structures in which every decision is "up for grabs". Example: "Dark green" doctrines of alternatives to conventional bureaucracy. (Goodin 1992)

a Extent to which public management is conducted according to well-understood general rules.
b Extent to which public management involves coherent collectivities, institutionally differentiated from other spheres of society.

The Fatalist way is characterised by low levels of trust, lack of co-operation and apathy such as is often evident in failing schools where leadership is very weak or absent. The Hierarchist Way can be seen in organisations that are socially coherent and operate within well-understood rules and procedures such as can be found in very successful schools which have sustained high performance over a number of years. Egalitarian forms of organisation are socially distinct from the world outside but the rules may be open to constant debate as new issues arise. An enlightened form of this may be seen in schools with high levels of distributed leadership. An individualist approach to public management involves an antipathy to collectivism and a preference for handling each transaction through negotiation. This is often the situation in schools with strong beliefs about professional autonomy but sometimes with high internal variations in quality.

Douglas' original ideas were based on her ethnographic work in Africa but in the early 1980s she collaborated with Aaron Wildavsky to apply the theory to social developments in the USA. Wildavsky went on to collaborate with Michael Thompson to expand the model with the result that Mary Douglas described as, "The most important theoretical development by a long shot was based on each culture being self-defined by opposition to the others" (Douglas, 2007, p. 8). Any community can contain several cultures and each culture and those who espouse one might maintain cohesion by charging others with moral failure. Douglas says that, "It was the point at which the title "grid and group" was superseded by Cultural Theory (CT Henceforth)" (Ibid).

Michael Thompson illustrates this notion by referring to the development of Arsenal Football Club ground in north London. He refers to the participants as Arsenal, the individualist or market actor, Islington Council as the hierarchical actor and the local community including residents who would be affected by the developments were the egalitarian or solidaristic actor. The club needed an enlarged stadium to meet safety and commercial expectations, the council wished to keep the club within the borough and the residents wanted to prevent wholesale redevelopment of the old stadium with a loss of local housing. This seeming impasse resulted in pressure to find an alternative solution that might meet the needs of all interests. This is what Thompson calls a "clumsy" solution (Thompson, 2008, p. 4).

The most recent application of this concept to school to school collaboration has come from Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA (Taylor, 2013b). He argues firstly that:

Change can be pursued using hierarchical, individualistic or solidaristic means; second that often the most effective solutions find some way of combining these sources of power (if they are not combined they will often undermine good intentions); and third that this is always difficult; such solutions are contextually contingent and "clumsy" because the three forms of power are inherently in tension with each other (indeed their power partly derives from their critique of each other (Taylor, 2013b).

Perhaps the power of Cultural Theory, as illustrated above, lies not in the adoption of one style but in their interaction, which is where Thompson finds his "clumsy" solution. Although exponents of the Hierarchist way, such as LAs, may well point to the inefficiencies of a wholly egalitarian approach, they might also favour the empowerment of individuals through professional development. Indeed within the English school system they would be held accountable for doing so. Although leaders may prefer a hierarchical approach within their own institution, they may feel very strongly that an individualistic approach in the system enshrines school autonomy, which is highly prized in a competitive environment. Where schools are working closely together in a collaborative way, it may bring together different styles of Grid and Group combinations. The framework offered by Douglas and illustrated by Hood may give some insights into the tensions and successes of collaboration as a means of school improvement. Where the LA has formal responsibility for ensuring that all schools are judged as at least good, there is a clear hierarchical imperative to ensure that any school to school support results in clear improvement in outcomes. For example, the extent to which the egalitarian way is espoused by different schools may define the extent to which individuals in "communities of practice" are empowered to act without constant reference to superiors, but this may not focus on the key priorities for an individual school. Where a school has left the LA, this tension may not be felt and the pressure to find a solution, however "clumsy" may not exist.

David Eddy Spicer (Eddy Spicer, 2012) looks at how the same concept can be applied within a single school in discussing how the "institution of schooling" interacts with the "instructional core" and has an impact on the structure and organisation of the school. He alludes to the importance of this in relation to:

> The recent policy emphasis on school to school relationships that aim to shift two crucial dimensions of the school, the organisation of the instructional core and the management of that organisation (Eddy Spicer, 2012, p. 115).

He refers to the three modalities of authority within the school as dimensions. He characterises these as hierarchic or managerial, horizontal operative authority through collective ascription and epistemic authority in terms of "acknowledged expertise that draws on what is to be taken to be the knowledge base of the education profession" (Eddy Spicer, 2012, p. 116). The three are not seen as contrasting systems but are interwoven and Eddy Spicer seeks to provide a framework for understanding the inter-relationship. He quotes Lortie's assertion that to be successful, school managers must have credibility based on a deep understanding of teaching and learning, "epistemic authority" (Lortie, 1969). Lortie refers to this as "mastery of the consensus", a term which Eddy Spicer correctly identifies as oxymoronic.

Rowan (1990) is also quoted as developing this thinking by comparing two contrasting systems deriving from hierarchical and collective perspectives. The hierarchical model included a clear management structure and a prescriptive curriculum. He found that this approach to managing teachers did lead to increased alignment, efficacy and feelings of cohesiveness, rather than alienation. However, the levels of constraint placed on individual professionalism led to one teacher, whom he quotes, to say that freedom was limited to the use of a different worksheet or the creation of a new one, "as long as it meets the objective". This kind of approach was a feature of the Literacy Hour discussed in Chapter 2. The contrasting collective approach comprised a de-centralised management that depended heavily on shared educational values and the development of "professional learning communities" similar to those outlined above. The strength of such an approach was its coherence and the commitment to the organisation that it inculcated. This might arguably be more sustainable and less dependent on individual charismatic leadership. In further research (Rowan & al, 2009) he identified a modality that combined elements of the first two which he characterised as one using "professional controls". It relied much more on the development of a broad professional consensus about what constituted effective teaching. It also involved new leadership positions as coaches, working with leaders and with teachers. Coaching and facilitation were key strategies in arriving at a professional consensus. In this study of five schools, Rowan's contrasting of the different approaches may well provide insights into how collaboration between them might be helped or hindered by differing or similar sources of authority.

Eddy Spicer (2012) encapsulates the tensions and complexities involved by bringing together these concepts in Figure 3.3 which attempts to relate pedagogic discourse to organisational form i.e. teaching and learning with leadership structure. He contextualises the diagram as being seen from the point of view of a supported school towards the

supporting school. He goes on to talk about wider relationships between schools deemed outstanding and those deemed in need of improvement. Although this is not the context in which this case study is set, the set of relationships outlined might well support the analysis of how relationships develop between the five schools. He places the professional role (position) and the epistemic autonomy of the individual (person) at either end of a continuum on the vertical axis and the field of discourse from that prescribed by the system to those that are open to negotiation and individual elaboration on the horizontal axis. Eddy-Spicer describes the four quadrants as Bureaucratic (hierarchic depending on managerial authority), Cultural (where there is an agreed set of values that all individuals feel bound to), Collective (this is where authenticity and deep learning are emphasised and may be linked to the development of communities of practice), and Professional (where ideational meaning can be negotiated within ascribed positions i.e. where the "mastery of the consensus" is developed.)

Figure 3.3 Modalities of authority based on orientations to interpersonal and ideational meanings (Eddy Spicer, 2012, p. 130)

Positional

Bureaucratic   Professional

Interpersonal   Closed ——————————————————— Open

Cultural   Collective

Personal
Ideational
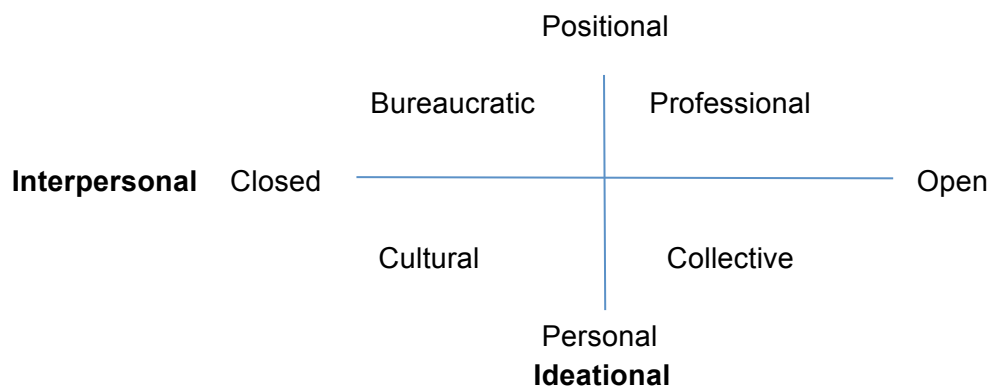
To summarise I return to Taylor's blog, "Falling in love with the 'c' word", in which he espouses collaboration between schools as a powerful means of improvement but also offers his analysis of how "cultural theory" can contribute to the process. He uses slightly different language from Hood or Eddy Spicer but does encapsulate some of the possibilities and hazards involved. From a positive standpoint he sees collaboration as a way of achieving the "clumsy" mix of forms of power that Rowan highlighted in his third modality of "professional controls" where:

- From an individualistic perspective, collaboration must be seen to be in the interests of all engaged,
- From a solidaristic (collectivist) perspective collaboration needs to be underpinned by trust based on shared norms and values,

- From a hierarchical perspective, system and organisational leaders – recognising how hard it is to establish and maintain – have to enable, incentivise and support collaboration (Taylor, 2013b).

The hazards he highlights reflect aspects of the discussion above. I paraphrase:

- If collaboration is too controlled and managed by hierarchy it can become bureaucratic and lifeless, as reflected in Rowan's example of freedom to change the worksheet,
- If collaboration relies too much on solidaristic (collectivist) values, it will often lack clarity and strength (rigour) and end up being more of a friendship (too affiliative),
- If collaboration is too individualistic it can become merely transactional (or token), less inclusive and a possible field for internecine conflict and lack of reciprocity.

The implication of the above is that if the hierarchical culture is insufficiently strong, there is a distinct danger that collaboration may not lead to improvement because there will not be a tension that might force a solution to be found, however clumsy. Much of the literature, particularly that referring to chains of academies, takes as the premise for collaboration that it will consist of good or outstanding schools supporting those that are inadequate or requiring improvement. This may be effective in the shorter term but, without a deeper analysis of the mechanisms at play, it does not necessarily lead to systemic innovation and, as Greany points out, (see p. 19) there is a need to build a system where the overall capacity is much greater than that which exists at present.

By focusing on the models presented in this chapter, this case study seeks to explore some of the underlying themes that might underpin this increase in capacity and even to support the achievement of Hopkins' aspiration, "Every School a Great School" (Hopkins, 2007). Further explanation about how the work of Hargreaves underpins the research undertaken, and how the perspectives provided by Communities of Practice and Grid Group Cultural Theory can add richness to the analysis, is explored in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I will set out my theoretical perspectives that have led me to decide on Case Study as my research design. I shall then outline the specific type of case study involved which will lead on to a discussion about the design of the research undertaken and the ethical issues which it has raised.

Theoretical Perspectives

From an ontological perspective, I am very much wedded to an interpretivist view of the world rather than a positivist one. As Crotty (1998, p. 67) puts it, "The interpretivist approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world."

My professional life has been governed by the culture and interpretations that persist in state education in England and is very focused on the relationships, perceptions and interactions between human beings as professionals. Therefore, my approach to this research is first and foremost constructivist in nature. The following is intended to give an insight into the development of my thinking in this area as I planned this research. The constructivist view is that we know about the world through reflecting on our experiences and that our understanding is constructed by the way our minds perceive or interpret them, i.e. there will be multiple constructed realities. There are dangers in this approach which have been characterised as "anything goes" because it suggests that any one person's way of making sense of the world is as valid as any other, which could undermine the ability to work critically. It is important to take note that "constructivism" is used here to refer to my epistemological standpoint about how knowledge in my field is constructed, i.e. what Crotty refers to as 'the meaning making of the individual mind' (1998, p. 68). To guard against this, I have attempted to engage with a range of sources that question the underlying culture that has been the background to my experience, a state education system, locally administered moving to become one in which there is greater autonomy and diversity. In developing this mind-set, I have consciously adopted the stance of "bricoleur" in being eclectic and drawing upon my experience and the literature as Levi-Strauss puts it:

> Turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider and reconsider what it contains and, finally, and above all to engage in a sort of dialogue

with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem (1966, p. 18).

This line of thinking has brought me to consider the issue of the relationship between the school system and school improvement in a holistic way by looking at the patterns of interactions drawing on ideas from Gestalt psychology. I have chosen this rather than a more reductionist approach where individual issues are tackled by individual solutions. This focus on the whole is what led me to conduct this research as a case study. Taking this approach has meant that it will be difficult to extrapolate and generalise from the findings. However, it will enable me to focus in depth on the patterns that emerge from the study and, perhaps, make informed judgements about cause and effect, drawing on my own experience alongside the data.

This focus has led me to look closely at phenomenology as a research strategy because of its emphasis on individual experiences. The phenomenon in question here is collaboration and phenomenology is an "attempt to recover a fresh perception of existence, one unprejudiced by acculturation." (Sadler, p. 377) in Crotty.

Crotty states that:
> Phenomenology suggests that if we lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena, and revisit our experience of them, possibilities for new meanings emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning (1998, p. 78).

Although this might suggest a wholly qualitative approach to my study, I do not fully subscribe to the paradigm split between positivism, which is often identified with a quantitative stance, and that more usually associated with interpretivists and constructivists. This can lead to false polarities that can maintain that one view is exclusive of the other. The rejection of dualisms and forced choices which arise from the paradigm arguments between qualitative and quantitative methods has led me to adopt pragmatism as a philosophical basis for mixed methods research. These perspectives lead me to favour this approach to my study, which is essentially pragmatic and depends on the nature of the research questions. I intend to use both quantitative and qualitative data in order to "establish a more comprehensive account of the thing being researched" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 150). Although this approach is essentially "pragmatic" I am seeking to maintain rigour by collecting data from the point of view of a sample of participants over a period of time, so that an element of triangulation will be possible during analysis.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggest a refinement of pragmatism as it applies to mixed methods research as "dialectical pragmatism" which takes qualitative and quantitative methods seriously but then "develops a synthesis for each research study" (2009, p. 73). They note: "The major reason that pragmatism is the philosophical partner for mixed methods is that it rejects the either-or choices from the constructivism-positivism debate" (op. cit. p.73).

The Case Study

As I have outlined in the review of literature, the concept of a self-improving school system has had a growing currency since its incorporation in the White Paper of 2010. (DfE, 2010) Underlying the idea is the view that schools collaborating together can be mutually improving. The opportunity to study this phenomenon in greater detail arose when a group of schools in the area in which I work decided to form a Trust, a form of organisation that brings them together on a formal, legal basis as a group. As such they became of focus for my case study.

The object of this case study is school to school collaboration and its subject is the group of primary schools that, between 2013 and 2015, formed a Trust as academies to work together for their mutual benefit. This aligns well with what Thomas suggests as the two key elements:

1. A "practical historical unity" which I shall call the *subject* of the *case study*, and
2. An analytical or theoretical frame, which I shall call the *object* of the study (G. Thomas, 2011b, p. 513).

As such, the decision about the subject arose from my *local knowledge* about the case and the opportunity it offered for an in depth analysis of how it developed. Given its topicality and my background, both as a headteacher and a school improvement professional, it had an inherent interest for me. At the time of writing, this case was not a "representative or typical one" (Yin, 2009, p. 48) as this group of schools was pioneering both in becoming academies and agreeing to form a binding collaborative. However, it did offer the chance to explore how collaboration developed over the course of two years.

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution program or system in a "real life" context (Simons, 2009, p. 21).

In terms of the typology of case studies outlined by Thomas (2011b, p. 515) quoting George and Bennett (2005, pp. 75-76) this could be described as a *theory testing* case study, "assessing the validity and scope conditions of a single or competing theories." The theory in question is Hargreaves' "Maturity Model", which could enable schools to develop their capacity for self-improvement.

In terms of methods used to pursue my inquiry, the choice of case study does not dictate a specific way of collecting data:

Case Study is not a methodological choice but a choice about what is to be studied...by whatever methods we choose to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures of hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods… but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case (Stake, 2005, p. 443).

However, in order to test Hargreaves' model, the tools that he provides have been used. This is described in the section below.

The Research Questions

The main research question is:
To what extent does the formation of an academy trust support school to school collaboration and improvement during the first year of its existence?

The subsidiary research questions are:
How well does Hargreaves' (2012) model of collaboration work in practice?

What are the patterns of Hargreaves' dimensions and strands in operation across the five schools?

To what extent does the development of the collaborative partnership follow the sequence laid down by Hargreaves?

What variations are there in the perceptions of the developing partnership between governors, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers within and across schools with reference to Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1986)?

What evidence is there within the schools' joint evaluation that school improvement has resulted from collaboration?

The decision to adopt a format of a main question and subsidiary questions was taken in order to guide the collection and analysis of data. These are sometimes known as contributory questions in that, by combining the answers to the subsidiary questions, I will be able to answer the main question satisfactorily (White, 2009, p. 63).

Research Design

Through the medium of a case study I collected and used both quantitative and qualitative data in order to "establish a more comprehensive account of the thing being researched" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 150). He earlier states:

> Case Studies focus on one instance of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance (p. 52).

Essentially, the approach could be described as a "sequential mixed design" where the quantitative strand and qualitative strands occur in chronological order whereby:

> Questions of one strand emerge from or are dependent on the previous strand. The research questions for the QUAL and QUAN phases are related to one another and may evolve as the study unfolds (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009, p. 27).

Furthermore:

> This combination allows the strengths of each strategy to be combined in a complementary manner with the strengths of the other (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009 p. 240).

To illustrate the need for a combined approach, I include the following examples. To gain a broad perspective of the views of a larger number of individuals within the sample schools, I brought a quantitative perspective to bear on the evidence provided through surveys. These took place in January 2014 when the Trust was in the process of being established and again in January 2015 when it had been formally launched. To gain a deeper qualitative perspective about the "hierarchical, solidaristic and individualistic" views (Taylor, 2013b), I recorded interviews with headteachers, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers and analysed them using the lenses outlined above in Chapter 3. As Denzin (1978) states in his attempts to define the concept of "triangulation", this process can be described as

"methodological triangulation" or "the use of multiple methods to study a single problem" (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p. 237).

Validity and Reliability

Although triangulation could be viewed as one strategy to underpin the validity of this research, i.e. whether the study is finding out what is intended, it is not, of itself, sufficient. There is a range of views about the extent to which validity is an appropriate concept when applied to a case study. Thomas (2011a, p. 63), for example, expresses concerns about its appropriateness because "we have no idea at all what we expect to find out from the research, the idea of validity is less meaningful". However, in this case the detailed research questions and the use of an explicit frame based on Hargreaves do provide clear parameters within which the outcomes will occur. Although Thomas dismisses Whittemore's (2001) criteria for assessing the validity of interpretive research because he can cite examples where valid research (e.g. Einstein) does not meet them and invalid research (e.g. Burt) which does, the criteria outlined there do have a bearing on this case study. The fact that it seeks to build on the work of a body of previous findings ("canons of evidence") goes some way to meeting the criteria of "plausibility" and "credibility". The literature clearly demonstrates that the content of the study has clear "relevance" to the present education system in England. While as a case study it cannot claim complete "comprehensiveness" or "generalisability", I have included sufficient detail about the research process for there to be an audit trail to meet the criterion of "confirmability".

Robson (2002, p. 170) states that, "it is possible to recognise situations and circumstances which make validity more likely" and he goes on to cite features of good flexible design. These include starting from a problem, detailed methods with a rigorous approach to data collection, data analysis and report writing (2002, p. 166). He also describes threats to validity as inaccuracy born of inadequate data collection. As can be seen below, all data in this study have been collated and recorded rigorously either through the means of spreadsheet analysis for surveys or through tape recording and transcription of interviews. The use of a mixed methods approach using quantitative data avoids some of the implications of "imposing a framework or meaning on what is happening rather than this occurring or emerging from what you learn during your involvement with the setting" (2002, p. 167). The relatively prolonged involvement of the researcher over a period of two years is also seen as reducing threats to validity.

Although the concept of reliability with respect to flexible research models may also be questioned, in this study the survey used could be easily replicated either with a similar

sample in another group of schools or repeated with the same sample. The interview questions are explicit within the study and there are a tape-recording and transcription available to support the replication of the research. Although as Thomas points out (2011a, p. 63) "there can be no assumption from the outset that, if the enquiry were to be repeated by different people at a different time, similar findings would result," every effort has been made to ensure that the process is transparent and that reliability can be tested.

Drawing on my study of the literature, I based the surveys on Hargreaves' model which he includes in, "A self-Improving school system: towards maturity" (2012, pp. 42-45). I have included examples of the survey material as Appendix 2. Hargreaves highlights four key strands of deep partnership as Joint Practice Development, High Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose and Evaluation and Challenge. He does place them in ascending order of difficulty (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 20) and this is one feature of the theory that I was interested to test because it tends to suggest a linear process rather than one that is more iterative. In designing the survey format I took these four strands which Hargreaves describes as interactive (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 21). This might appear slightly at odds with his statement about the hierarchy. In addition, I added a fifth element to the survey that of Alliance Architecture, which is drawn from the concept of Collaborative Capital that Hargreaves describes as:

> Where the partnership arrangements among a group of schools, some of which are deep whilst others are shallow but perfectly fit for purpose, are firmly established as the normal state of affairs in the system as a whole (2012, p. 22).

The survey tool for Alliance Architecture offers a summary of the process of developing Collaborative Capital that Hargreaves describes. He says that:

> If a cluster of schools in partnership can reach the leading stage in each of the above 11 strands of the maturity model, then they have built a highly successful alliance with the capacity to help other schools to a similar achievement (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 32).

As, at the time of writing, there is a considerable momentum for schools to group together in a similar way and undertake peer reviews, I was interested to gain a view as to how confident this Trust had become in its processes and outcomes.

To gain an insight into whether any changes took place during the period of the study, I analysed the records from the schools' initial self-evaluation meeting which took place in November 2013 and compared this with the results of a similar meeting from autumn 2014. This will be in the form of a written record collated by the schools, which I analysed using it to identify changes within the key themes of "achievement, teaching, behaviour and safeguarding and leadership" which are drawn from the Ofsted Self Evaluation Schedule. The schools were required to carry out the initial self-evaluation by the Department for Education as part of the process of becoming an "academy trust".

The Sample

The sample for this case study was drawn from a group of schools with which I had worked for three years prior to embarking on this study. I have used the word "sample" here with some caution as, at this stage in the development of collaboration, it is unclear whether the group of five schools that form the object of the case are indeed representative of primary school groups more generally. As explained earlier, they have come together for a variety of historical reasons rather than through an external design or plan. They are pioneers in committing to this form of fixed collaboration. I have visited four of the schools twice yearly as a routine monitoring exercise on behalf of the LA. I had a detailed knowledge of their performance data and a view of the quality of teaching offered through observation and audit of the school's records. I had also taken part in Headteacher Appraisal, advising governors about performance and objectives. The schools are all in the same large town but, with one exception, they are geographically spread and do not compete for pupils. The exception is where one infant school is a direct feeder for an adjacent junior school.

I was not party to the discussions which led the schools to decide to form a Trust but the roots lay in a previous collaboration to which two of the schools, one primary and one infant, had belonged. This had been set up under the auspices of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks mentioned in Chapter 2. This group was spread across the county and the difficulty of sustaining closer working as a cluster of self-improving schools meant that its future was limited. One of those schools had a close working relationship with another infant school, so it was a natural extension to move in that direction. The second infant school wished to develop closer links with its adjacent junior school. The fifth school is a primary school that had been undergoing rapid change and improvement with a relatively new headteacher who saw the opportunity to work within the group as a very positive development.

The decision to form the Trust came about in the summer of 2013 although, in that September, only the two infant schools, both badged as "outstanding" by Ofsted, had become academies. The two primary schools received permission to convert in January 2014 and the junior school in February. As part of the process of forming the Trust the Department for Education required the schools to carry out a mutual self-evaluation exercise and submit their findings in November 2013. As this included sharing sensitive performance information, the indication is that there was already a high degree of openness among the headteachers and deputy headteachers who attended that meeting. I attended the afternoon session, partly to validate their findings and offer support. Below, in Table 4.1, the performance outcomes for each school, which were discussed at that meeting, can be seen. Each school has been allocated a letter to preserve confidentiality but it is evident that schools A and B are primary schools, school C is the junior school and schools D and E are the infant schools.

School	Year	A	B	C	D	E
Free School Meals	2013	18.3%	22.0%	16.9%	5.6%	10.0%
Phonic Screening Year 1	2013	69.5%	71.7%		80%	87.8%
Key Stage 1 Reading L2+	2013	78.4%	79.7%		95.4%	92%
Key Stage 1 Writing L2+	2013	71.9%	81.4%		95.4%	88.5%
Key Stage 1 Mathematics L2+	2013	80.7%	91.4%		95.4%	95.4%
Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Mathematics Combined L4+	2013	43%	82%	78%		

Table 4.1 Outcomes for each school at the outset

It is clearly evident from the table that the two infant schools are high performing and that School A performs significantly less well. The most significant figure is that for Key Stage 2 because there is a national Floor Standard of 65% below which no school is expected to fall. School C has an on-site unit for Special Educational Needs (SEND) that reduces the

published outcome figures if they are included. When they are disaggregated, outcomes are 88%. In the autumn of 2013 School A was subject to additional support from the LA but later withdrew as academy status permitted it to do. The weaknesses in performance were acknowledged at the self-evaluation meeting and the school drew up an action plan to address them. This did not include specific actions by members of the Trust to offer support or additional scrutiny as the headteacher felt the school had capacity to improve outcomes. I have taken the percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals as a proxy for the levels of disadvantage in each school to provide additional context to the performance figures. These are the figures quoted in 2013 although they have not changed radically over subsequent years. The national average was 26.7%.

During the first year of the Trust's existence, collaboration was confined mainly to meetings of headteachers and deputy headteachers and mainly concerned with planning. There was specific work on sharing practice in Early Years where the infant schools have acknowledged strengths and on moderating assessments of work by Year 6 pupils to agree standards which is a requirement within the LA and nationally. Information from interviews suggests that School B was the major beneficiary from the work with Early Years practice. From the discussions about planning emerged a decision to establish groups of subject leaders with regular time tabled meetings and review groups. The latter consisted of senor leaders and teachers who visited each school to review an aspect of the curriculum chosen by the school as a focus for external evaluation. Both of these developments are alluded to by interviewees in Chapter 5. The headteacher of School A left in January 2015, leaving the deputy headteacher to act as interim head for the spring term. In April she was appointed as headteacher.

It was at the time of the academy trust formation that I was in the process of formulating a proposal for this thesis so for the reasons outlined above; I began to study how the collaborative developed between September 2013 and August 2015.

I collected data at four points over that period to gauge how developments proceeded and how effectively the capacity to collaborate grew. I conducted a paper survey in January 2014 to gain an initial view of where the participants saw themselves in terms of the strands outlined by Hargreaves. Following the quantitative analysis of the surveys, I identified key questions to guide semi-structured interviews that took place in June 2014. The second round of surveys took place in January 2015 to enable a comparison to be made with the initial findings. The second round of interviews took place in June 2015 to explore the views

of staff members about the contribution made by the development of the Trust to their professional lives.

Data Collection and Analysis

This case study could be classified as "diachronic" in that it set out to show change over time as the collaborative group of schools developed. To chart this journey I chose to use two forms of data collection; a survey based on Hargreaves' taxonomy (see p.41 above) and a set of interviews based on questions arising from the analysis of the surveys (see Chapter 5, p 86 and p 111 below). The first round of surveys took place in January 2014 using the survey format as shown in Appendix 3. Survey forms were delivered to each school in early January and were collected on the final working day of the month. Headteachers agreed that the forms should be returned to a named member of the administration staff so that there was no undue pressure on teachers to comply. Participants were asked to highlight in yellow statements from the survey forms with which they agreed as applying to their school at the time.

Following collection of the survey forms, they were analysed by collating responses for each school on an Excel spreadsheet which also aggregated the results and enabled the graphs shown in Chapter 5 to be generated. Careful analysis of the graphs and the statements each represented made the collation and interpretation of the data possible and for a set of questions to be formed as described above. These questions were the basis for semi-structured interviews that took place in June 2014. They were conducted in the respective schools using rooms allocated by the headteachers which gave privacy and a quiet space for recording. Each interview was allocated a slot of 20 minutes with flexibility of five minutes. A sample of four members of staff was interviewed; the headteacher, deputy headteacher, a senior teacher and a more junior teacher in order to give a cross section of views. The senior and junior teachers were volunteers selected by the headteachers and, as such, would be expected to have a point of view on the collaborative process so far. Each semi-structured interview was recorded and fully transcribed. They were analysed both for the type of content included as it related to Hargreaves' taxonomy and for the views expressed. The results of both analyses are included in Chapter 5 as a graph and written analysis respectively (see pp. 86 -94).

A second survey took place in January 2015 using the same format and method of distribution and collection. The data were collated in a similar way but using a spreadsheet that enabled the 2014 data to be compared to that of 2015. This is described at length with

illustrations in Chapter 5. The analysis that arose from the comparisons gave rise to a further set of issues that formed the basis for further semi-structured interviews with the same group of participants as in June 2014. The intention was to interview the same individuals but changes in staffing meant that for two junior teachers this was not possible, although care was taken that those interviewed had been employed throughout the research period between the beginning of January 2014 and the end of June 2015. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. They were annotated to highlight the aspects of Hargreaves' taxonomy emphasised and this was represented both graphically and through detailed description as it had been in 2015 (see pp. 110-123).

This process was designed to allow any changes that had taken place over the two academic years to be identified and analysed both in terms of their contributions to Collaborative Capital (see Chapter 3, p. 44) and school improvement more generally in terms of leadership capacity and outcomes (see Chapter 2, p.24).

The process is encapsulated within the matrix shown in Appendix 5.

The Survey

In order to study the development of collaboration I conducted surveys which were aimed at obtaining data that could be analysed both as a cross-section of the staff in the schools and also as a longitudinal study to see how views and levels of participation might change over time. For example, at the outset one would expect senior staff to be closely involved with planning developments whereas teaching staff might become more involved at a slightly later stage.

To some extent, the decision to use a survey was a pragmatic one. I wished to investigate the views of up to 63 individuals at the outset of the formation of the Trust. It would not have been practicable to interview such a large population in person, either because of limits on my time or being able to access them during the working day. The limitations of using a survey were recognised, particularly those relating to ensuring that views gathered were those of the individuals in the sample. As Robson (2002, p. 233) points out:

> Respondents won't necessarily report their beliefs, attitudes etc. accurately (e.g. there is likely to be a social desirability response bias – people responding in a way that shows them in a good light).

Given that in the process of becoming an academy, all staff would have been consulted and that this was a serious development that could affect pay and conditions, it was fair to expect that the participants would be aware of the reason for the group becoming a trust. It would also raise questions of loyalty that could mean that responses would contain a positive bias in favour of showing the school in a good light. In order to mitigate this, the column headings used by Hargreaves (Beginning, Developing, Embedding and Leading) were omitted from the survey in order to limit this tendency. Letter headings were substituted to aid coding. Each statement was numbered for the same reason so that statement A1 under Joint Practice Development would read as, "The school encourages staff in principle to share good practice as well as in practice on professional training days and sometimes after attendance on external courses."

Although the wording of the survey does contain some jargon which is specific to education, given that the audience was intended to be either professional or Chairs of Governors, this was not considered as an insuperable obstacle. To try and ensure that there was a common understanding of the wording, I included a rubric at the top of each section to explain its context and try and ensure a common understanding. For example under Joint Practice Development, I highlighted the fact that it was a development of practice, not simply a transfer from one person to another by stating:

> It naturally becomes a development because when two or more people are involved in a relationship of mentoring or coaching, the originator goes beyond the process of simply transferring it to a receiving colleague…….. See Appendix 2

Each copy of the survey begins with a page of explanation and instructions. These outlined the contents of my research and the steps I was taking to ensure confidentiality. The instructions refer to the labelling and coding and asked participants:

> To highlight those sentences in each bank of statements that you believe to be true, leaving those which you either do not see as true or which are unclear as blank. (See Appendix 2).

This last point was made in order to try and ensure that only positive responses were highlighted so that, "ambiguities in, and misunderstandings of the survey questions" (Robson, 2002, p. 233) did not cloud the data i.e. only those that were understood and viewed positively were included.

Prior to distribution, the survey format was piloted with a group of six colleagues who work as school improvement advisers i.e. have extensive experience of working with school leaders and teachers. This did lead to some minor changes in the wording of the instructions so that they were clarified.

Surveys were sent to each school and distributed and collected by the school office to meet a deadline specified in advance. In practice they were delivered during the first week of the spring term i.e. early January and collected during the final week of the month, with a reminder one week before the deadline.

The Interviews

The interview stage of this design was intended to enable me to delve more deeply into the views of the individual participants and how far they were representative of a defined group of Governors, Heads and Deputies, Senior Leaders, Middle Leaders or Teachers not having additional responsibility. The table quoted by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 239) from Johnson and Turner (2003 p. 306) identifies interviews as:

1) Good for measuring attitudes and most other content of interest,
2) Allows probing by the interviewer,
3) Can provide in-depth information.

Furthermore, King (1994, pp. 16 -17) cites them as particularly useful when, "individual perceptions of process within a social unit – such as a work group, departments or whole organisation," are to be studied. The interview question format was *semi-structured* to give the interviewer flexibility to modify the order or change wording to meet the needs of the interviewee. (Robson, 2002, p. 270) This could be an important factor when these ranged from experienced heads to newly qualified teachers.

The interviews were intended to last for twenty minutes with each participant headteacher, deputy head teacher, a middle leader and teacher from each school. This was arranged in discussion with the headteachers and was manageable in terms of staff release and my availability. They were recorded, with the permission of participants, on the understanding that the contents of the recorded files would only be available to me as researcher and that any transcripts or excerpts would only be quoted anonymously.

Analysing the Data

I have drawn on Miles and Huberman who stated:

> We aim to account for events rather than simply to document their sequence. We look for an individual or social process, a mechanism, a structure at the core of events that can be captured to provide a *causal description* of the forces at work (Miles et al, 1994, p. 4).

I have followed their recommended process of *data reduction*, *data display* and *conclusion drawing and verification*. The issue of data reduction was uppermost in the decision to use a survey method that allowed for a larger group of participants, but ensured that the data produced would be manageable and would lead to further investigation. The decision to restrict interview subjects to four from each school and 20 overall was designed to maintain breadth of data whilst making the quantity manageable in terms of transcription and coding which could be mapped on a single grid. This leads to the second stage of their process, *data display.* It was important for the purposes of being able to maintain the study over a two year period, with each phase dependent on the previous one that the data could be readily displayed and reported upon during the intervening months. This aided the development of the next phase but also enabled interim analyses to be shared with the participating schools and with the research community through poster conferences and talks.

The final stage of *conclusion drawing and verification* might be thought of as the substance of the next chapter of this thesis but it is also an integral part of the process of deciding the direction at each of the phases. As Robson comments, "These three flows of activity, together with the activity of collecting the data itself, form a continuous iterative process" (2002, p. 476). It has also allowed for some verification to be integral by seeking confirmatory evidence as the study has proceeded. The production of graphical representations has also enabled comparisons to be made between the various phases so that the case can be constantly under scrutiny, rather than the process of drawing conclusions being delayed until the final stage.

The data derived from both the surveys and the interviews in 2014 and 2015 was analysed in stages using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The initial stage in 2014 was to count the responses to the survey and to display them as graphs using a spreadsheet in an Excel workbook. I did consider using SPSS for this purpose but decided that the quantity and the simplicity of the data did not merit such a complex tool.

However, for simple statistical texts, you may not require such specialist software; spreadsheet software such as Excel can perform a range of statistical tasks (Robson, 2002, p. 392).

The overall picture was broken down to show how the specified groups: governors, heads and deputies, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers might differ in their responses. This information was then placed in the context of the developing Trust in discussing why certain patterns might exist, leading to the posing of questions for the ensuing interview stage. Using the secondary lenses of Communities of Practice and Grid Group Theory, these data were also subjected to scrutiny to arrive at tentative hypotheses about what the data might be suggesting. This approach was intended to enable me to look at what had been gathered from three distinct perspectives: the overall view of how participants responded to Hargreaves' typology, a top down hierarchical section to examine how the direction of travel for the Trust was initiated (hierarchical), gained support (became solidaristic) and enabled individuals to develop over the period of study, and a lateral section to investigate how Communities of Practice had developed and reinforced this sense of direction or initiated new ones.
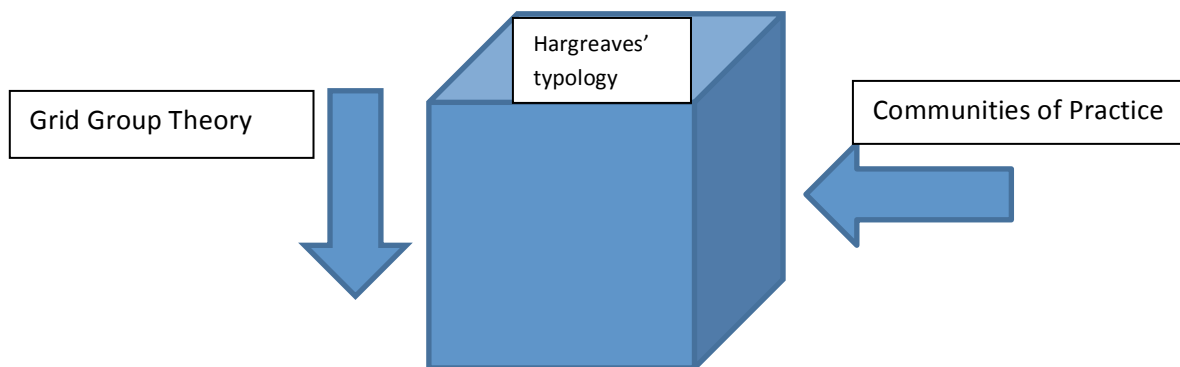
From the analysis of the survey, a series of questions was derived to deepen my understanding of the dynamics at work within the schools. These were used at interviews with individual representatives of each group at each school, making 20 interviews in all. Each interview was transcribed and an initial analysis conducted to identify how they related to Hargreaves' (2012) typology. This was achieved by coding statements from responses by identifying key words or phrases that related to specific areas such as social capital or professional development. Following this an analysis of specific responses to the issues raised was made and the lenses of Communities of Practice (Wenger et al., 2002) and Grid Group theory (Douglas, 1986) brought to bear on the findings so that a more detailed explanation of the forces at work would emerge.

> The fact that a case study does not, in itself, call for a particular approach to the
> analysis of the qualitative data which it produces…with the major concern being to
> gain an understanding of the culture of whatever constitutes the case (Robson, 2002,
> p. 473).

The second phase of data analysis differed in some respects from the first. The tools used were similar but there was now an opportunity to see how aspects might have changed during the ensuing period of a year; for example, did more participants feel able to respond to the survey and how did the composition of the respondents change, if at all?

The second round of interview topics were developed in order to explore what had changed and whether there was greater engagement by a wider group of participants. What were the key areas in which the Trust had developed and what were seen as the next phases in its development?

I have ended both previous paragraphs with a question that I hope the following chapter will begin to provide some answers.

Ethical Considerations

As the content of this thesis is both topical and based in a specific locality, it has been important to ensure that due attention is given to ethical considerations. The five schools that form the subjects of the research are situated in a large town where there is a community of 25 schools who meet together and whose headteachers will know each other professionally. As the schools involved belong to one group of academies and that it is the only trust of its kind within the LA, the identities of the schools could not be kept anonymous to any reader from this LA. I have worked within the LA for nearly 21 years and with this group of schools for the past six. My interest in research is well known and the topic of the present study is also common knowledge.

For these reasons it was important from the outset to obtain the permission of the schools to undertake the study and for them to understand that it would become known locally that the focus was on school to school collaboration. In order to do so, I initially sent a letter to headteachers in 2013 to obtain their agreement to participate (See Appendix 3). Although it would not be possible to guarantee anonymity to the schools, I did undertake to ensure that individuals would not be identified in any consequent reports and that participation was on a voluntary basis. I was at pains not to approach individual members of staff as my role as a school improvement advisor is one in which there could appear to be a power relationship

and I did not want to apply any unintentional pressure. This is because I regularly carry out Health Checks on schools for the LA that involves observing teachers.

For the purposes of the survey, it was necessary that I knew the position in the school of the participant and at which school they worked so that the findings could be coded appropriately. In order to do so, I allocated a letter to each school and a number to each type of participant so that, for example the headteacher or deputy headteacher from the first school alphabetically would be classified as A2 whereas a teacher from the fifth school alphabetically would be E5. As the responses are grouped together when reporting it would not be possible to identify individuals.

The interviews posed a greater difficulty in terms of participation and anonymity. I arranged to interview the individual participants by contacting the headteacher of the school, making it clear that individuals could opt out if they felt uncomfortable. I also reiterated at the interview that they could decline to answer any specific questions and that any quotations in interim or final reports would not be attributable. In the event, although this was true in terms of the wider world, because of the content, it was possible for a headteacher's comments to be identified to a particular school. Before releasing the quotation in question I did check with the participant in order to ensure that the consent already obtained was fully informed. As I am employed by a private company under contract to the LA, it was important that participants understood that none of the data would be made available to either organisation at any stage and that any final report or papers produced would only be made available with specific consent. Prior to the commencement of the study an Ethics Approval Form was submitted to the Institute of Education at University College London in January 2014 and approval was subsequently granted to proceed.

The Role of the Insider Researcher

In the context of this case study, the issue of insider research is relevant. The researcher works with the 'sample' schools on a regular basis and there could be an implied power relationship. As the five schools are academies rather than LA schools, the advisory role is one of consultancy rather than as a representative of an external accountability agent. That said, my role does imply some authority as far as teaching staff is concerned and there was a need to ensure that safeguards were included. The Institute of Applied Social Research (IASR) at Bedford University guidance on Insider Research raises some interesting issues in this regard. Although headteachers were initially approached, it was important that individual members of staff felt able to withhold consent without any concern that this might affect

future relationships. For the survey part of the study, participation was purely voluntary and did not involve headteachers in handling responses. As far as the interviews were concerned, the headteachers were asked to find a volunteer from each group or category and the researcher would, therefore, be unaware of those who declined.

Although the above refers to some of the possible disadvantages of being an insider, Shah (2005 p. 556) does highlight advantages for the researcher in terms of familiarity, access and rapport with primary schools to set against the possibility of intrusiveness. This helps the research process by ensuring ready access, a shared frame of thinking and familiarity with the day to day working lives of the professionals involved. Against that one has to set the possibility of myopia and lack of objectivity. Mercer explains this thus:

> On the one hand, greater familiarity can make insiders more likely to take things for granted, develop myopia, and assume their own perspective is more widespread than it actually is… the obvious question might not be asked; the sensitive topic might not be raised, assumptions might not be challenged; seemingly shared norms might not be articulated and data might become thinner as a result (2007, p. 11).

To mitigate these possibilities, great care was take to contextualise my role as a researcher rather than my more familiar role as a consultant. Myopia and the possibility of taking things for granted were guarded against through the use of the Hargreaves (2012) taxonomy as the basis for the formulation of the survey material. My distribution and collection of surveys was de-personalised as described above. Interviews were conducted on a day when I was not working as a school improvement adviser but as a distinct visit for a single purpose. Participants were not contacted personally before either interview and were not individuals who had recently been observed or taken part in discussions. The interviews related to the survey findings and were semi-structured to ensure that I was not overtly leading participants along paths where they were uncomfortable or that sensitive topics were avoided. Unlike insider research where a workplace colleague is undertaking a study, my role as a consultant and inspector required me to maintain an objective position while maintaining relationships of trust. Within the context of this study, the insider element was designed so that I have:

> the advantage when dealing with the complexity of work situations because you have in-depth knowledge of many complex issues. This is vital when exploring a problem or issue in a detailed and thorough way. (Costley, 2010, p. 4)

It avoided the possible disadvantages cited above through:

careful attention to feedback from participants, initial evaluation of the data, triangulation in the methods of gathering data and an awareness of the issues presented in the project. (Costley, 2010, p. 6)

Chapter 5

Presenting the Findings

Introduction

The analysis of data from the surveys and interviews with schools is based upon David Hargreaves' (2012) Maturity Model (Figure 5.1) and raised a series of questions that were used as the basis for interviews with teaching staff that took place during June 2014 and 2015.

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The maturity model and its 12 strands

The **professional development** dimension and its strands:
– joint practice development
– mentoring and coaching
– talent identification
– distributed staff information

The **partnership competence** dimension and its strands:
– fit governance
– high social capital
– collective moral purpose, or distributed system leadership
– evaluation and challenge

The **collaborative capital dimension** and its strands:
– analytical investigation
– disciplined innovation
– creative entrepreneurship
– alliance architecture

</div>

Figure 5.1 The Maturity Model and its 12 Strands

For the purpose of this analysis four interview responses from each school were analysed in detail. Responses from headteachers, senior leadership team members, middle leaders and teachers or teaching assistants were transcribed and analysed using the three key dimensions and 12 strands within the Maturity Model (see Figure 5.1).

For the overall analysis of data, I underpinned Hargreaves' model with two other conceptualisations of the ways in which collaboration can work. The first of these is Communities of Practice (Wenger et al., 2002) and the second is Grid Group Theory (Douglas, 1986). These were explained more fully in the Literature Review but the key idea from Wenger's writing is about workers with similar roles in different parts of an organisation or different organisations and their propensity to collaborate. This enables a horizontal view to be taken across the Trust from the points of view of some key groups, such as heads and deputies, Year 6 teachers, English Leaders or Early Years Practitioners.

From Grid Group Theory, the three key ideas of hierarchy, solidarity and individualism and the tensions between them, enables the data to be scrutinised vertically within each school at the micro level to see how the various members, head teacher, senior leader, middle leader and teacher interact in developing the collaborative aspects of the Trust. At the macro level, it also enables an analysis of how the Trust operates within the "self-improving school system". As Taylor says:

> My shaft of light was to see that 'collaboration' when done properly has enormous potential to achieve this clumsy mix of forms of power:
> - From an individualistic perspective, collaboration must be seen to be in the interests of those engaged,
> - From a solidaristic perspective, collaboration needs to be underpinned by trust based on sufficiently shared norms and values,
> - From a hierarchical perspective, system and organisation leaders – recognising how hard it is to establish and maintain – have to enable, incentivise and support collaboration

However, each of these ways of valuing and pursuing collaboration could unbalance the whole endeavour:
> - If collaboration is too individualistic it becomes merely transactional, less creative and more prone to abuse and conflict,
> - If collaboration relies too much on solidaristic values it will often lack clarity and strength and end up being more of a friendship (how often are you really challenging to your friends?),
> - If collaboration is too controlled and managed by hierarchy it can become bureaucratic and lifeless (Taylor, 2013b).

The Context

As I discussed in Chapter 4, this case study follows a chronological sequence in its data collection and analysis. The timeframe for the overall collection of data covered two academic years, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. During the autumn term of 2013 three of the five schools involved were focused on the processes of becoming an academy that were mainly administrative in nature, although they did develop suitable governance structures. Collaborative working at that stage was mainly confined to headteachers and their deputies but, despite the heavy administrative load, they did hold a formal meeting to peer-review each school's self-evaluation, a process that involved some rigour and honesty, showing that trust was already becoming well-established at this level. I was present at this meeting in a supportive capacity to explain and verify any judgements that were questioned. As noted in Chapter 2 the schools had been part of an earlier collaborative group, which gave a strong basis for their development.

The foresight to involve both headteacher and deputy headteacher at this stage later proved beneficial as over the course of the two academic years, one headteacher and one deputy moved on to another school and two deputies took maternity breaks. The leaving headteacher was replaced by her deputy and the deputy by an internal appointment. The headteachers and deputies headteachers continued to meet monthly to plan for the future and initiated the first collaborative project around the development of more joint practice within the Early Years, where the two infant schools had acknowledged strengths and the primary schools were actively seeking support.

The data collection points took place in the January and June of 2014 and 2015 and consisted of a survey, followed up by interviews with a cross section of staff. Although, at the outset, it was intended to include governors, the response level was low (2 responses), so the interviews were confined to headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers. The latter two were combined as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) had assumed middle leader responsibilities, subject leads, by the time of the interviews towards the end of the school year.

Year 6 teachers and English Leaders supplemented the initial engagement of headteachers and deputy headteachers and those with responsibility for Early Years, because of joint moderation activity, particularly in respect of Key Stage 2 writing. This kind of activity is a requirement of the national assessment at the end of the key stage and it did give some of

the teachers working with older children the chance to collaborate. This is reflected in the 2014 interviews.

At the end of the academic year 2014, the schools held a social gathering for all staff that took place during the week of the interviews. This meant that at the initial interview more staff felt that they were beginning to be involved in the collaborative process. It was followed by an in depth induction day at the start of the autumn term which ushered in a structured range of collaborative activities, termly subject leader meetings, joint peer reviews and the establishment of training packages for NQTs and Teaching Assistants. These took place over the academic year 2014-2015.

Ordering the Findings

The data are presented in chronological order of collection to provide a narrative view of the development. The outcomes for each round of surveys provided themes for the questions that were used to guide interviews.

Section 1

Initial Survey Data Analysis and Questions for Further Investigation

The data used for this analysis are taken from the responses by staff members at each of the five schools comprising the Academy Trust. For the purpose of analysis I grouped the respondents into three types: Governors, Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers (HD), Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Middle Leaders and Teachers combined as Teachers (T). The Governors, Heads and Deputies group was subsequently designated HD because of the low governor response. The rationale for this is that governors, heads and deputies had all been closely involved with the decision to form an academy trust and the self-evaluation at its outset. The reason for grouping middle leaders and teachers is based on the fact that, of those who responded, only Newly Qualified Teachers did not have middle leadership role in terms of subject responsibility.

The survey tool was based on Hargreaves' (2012) 'Maturity model (mark 2)' which he introduces as "This revised model has been adjusted to apply to any schools in partnership" (p.41). One bank of statements each from the Professional Development and Collaborative Capital dimensions, Joint Practice Development and Alliance Architecture and three from the Partnership Competence dimension, High Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose and

Evaluation and Challenge, were used to create the survey and to provide breadth without making the tool unwieldy. These sections, alongside Joint Practice Development, are included within Alliance Architecture and described as the "four key strands of deep partnership" (see Figure 3.2). Each statement within the model was numbered within each of the five sections, Joint Practice Development (JPD), High Social Capital (HSC), Collective Moral Purpose (CMP), Evaluation and Challenge (E&C) and Alliance Architecture (AA). As the trust was in the early stages of existence, this survey was intended to provide a baseline to measure future development and to raise questions that could be explored through individual interviews. This early stage of development was also the reason for the focus on partnership competence. Respondents were asked to highlight statements that they considered to be true at the time. These have been analysed as a whole and by the groups described above. The purpose of the latter was to explore whether there were differences between groups at this stage and whether different perspectives develop over time.

The Overall Picture

Thirty-one responses (a response rate of 46%) were received from a possible total of 68 individuals including headteachers, deputy headteachers, and members of senior leadership teams, middle leaders and teachers. For the purpose of analysis they have been grouped into the three types, Heads and Deputies (HD) (10 responses, 32%); Senior Leadership Team (SLT) (9 responses, 29%); and Middle Leaders and Teachers combined as Teachers (T) (12 responses, 39%). In the graphs below, percentages rather than numbers are used to aid comparison of the proportions from each group. Because of the low numbers involved, no claim is made for the statistical reliability of the following and the graphs are intended for illustrative purposes.

> In a case study, where there is one case, expectations about reliability drop away. They drop away because, with just one case, there can be no assumption from the outset that, if the inquiry were to be repeated by different people at a different time, similar findings would result (Thomas 2011a, p. 63).

The statements in each element of Hargreaves' (2013) model are divided into four sections, Beginning, Developing, Embedding and Leading, which form a hierarchical list for each of "Professional Development", "Partnership Competence" and "Collaborative Capital". These hierarchical descriptors were omitted from the survey tool in an attempt to avoid suggesting the most likely outcome and replaced with letters A-D. Each statement was also numbered; for example, "*JPD 2. Staff development is not seen as a high priority in the school.*"

Joint Practice Development

As stated in Chapter 3, Joint Practice Development differs from "sharing good practice" because of the focus on the development of professional practice rather than simply transferring knowledge from one person to another. In the Joint Practice Development section the pattern of responses to the 13 statements declines from left to right which illustrates the downward trend from Beginning, through Developing and Embedding and on to Leading. The vertical axis on the graphs denotes the percentage response and the horizontal axis the number of the statement on the survey.
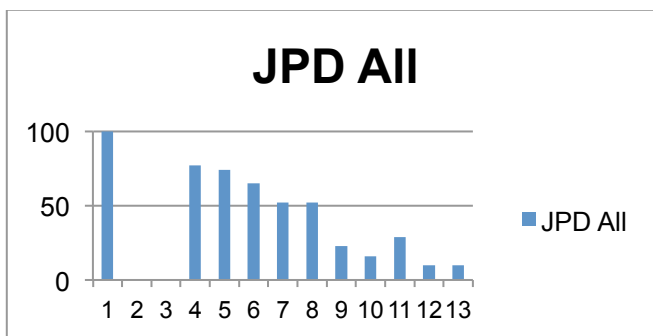
Figure 5.2 Joint Practice Development Overall (31 responses)

The two empty columns on the graph reflect negative statements (Items 2 and 3):

JPD 2 Staff development is not seen as a high priority in the school.

JPD 3 Most staff do not see professional training days as important to their professional development, which is seen as the responsibility of individuals.

These responses align with the positive response to Item 1,

JPD 1 The school encourages staff in principle to share good practice, as well as in practice on professional training days and sometimes after attendance on external courses.

All (31) respondents agreed with this statement.

The next section, headed "Developing" elicited a positive response with three quarters of survey respondents (24) highlighting Items 4 and 5, two thirds (20) highlighting Item 6 and more than half (16) highlighting Item 7.

JPD 4 The school has instituted peer observation sessions.

JPD 5 It encourages coaching and engages in learning walks for staff.

JPD 6 It is moving steadily towards a model of CPD that focuses more on the improvement of classroom practice.

JPD 7 Pairs and triads of staff engage in JPD projects within the school.

All of the above statements refer to practice within an individual school. Only at the "Embedding" stage does it become clear that JPD involves working with partner schools. Item 8 scores over 50% (n=17):

> JPD 8 The school has evolved its CPD close to the practice model, with regular mutual observation of lessons, followed by coaching sessions as routine, as well as on professional training days with partners.

Following that, responses tail off. This suggests that, as a whole, respondents see themselves as being in the "Developing" phase of the model i.e. more focused on in-school than between-school JPD at this stage.

Analysis of Joint Practice Development by Group

For the purpose of analysis, the three distinct groups were identified among those who responded to the survey. Bar charts for each group have been constructed (see Figure 5.2). At this stage, the numbers in each group are small but the group sizes are broadly equivalent at 10 for Heads and Deputies, 9 for members of the Senior Leadership Team, and 12 for the Teacher group. This small number limits the reliability of any conclusions drawn but as the graphs show (see Figure 5.3) there are clear differences between the responses of the various groups.
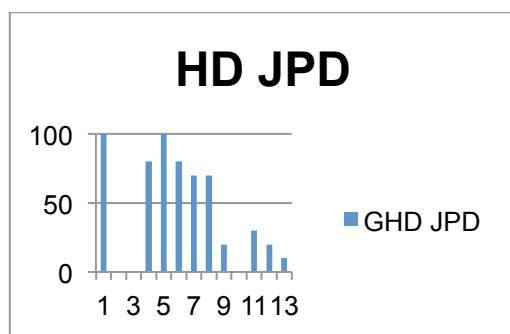
(10 responses)
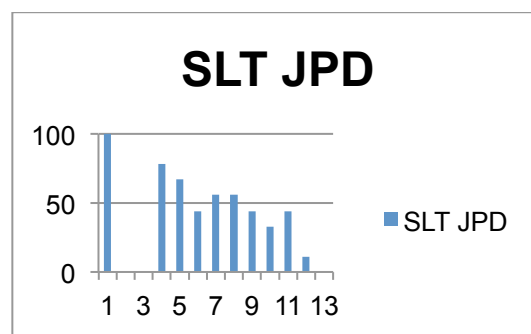
(9 responses)
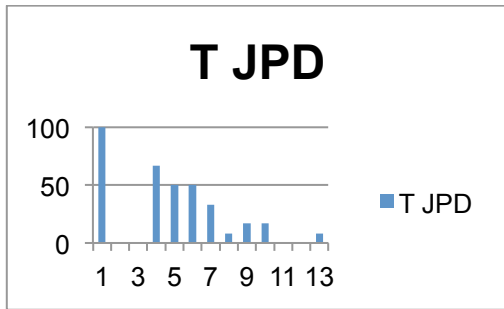
(12 responses)

Figure 5.3 Joint Practice Development by group

Items JPD 4-7, which refer to the state of in-school rather than between-school professional development, show a consistent pattern although the HD and SLT groups scored it more highly than the teacher group; perhaps suggesting that they are more closely involved in coaching and learning walks. Peer observations scored over 50% in all groups. SLT members scored more highly at the "Embedding" stage than do HD members. This may reflect a greater degree of previous cross-school networking by, for example, core subject leaders, than the HD group is aware of. This might arise through membership of groups established by the LA or by the local Schools' Learning Partnership.

High Social Capital (HSC)

At the heart of Partnership Competence is social capital, which consists of two elements, trust and reciprocity. Trust includes goodwill, open and honest relationships, reliability (consistency and dependability) so that mutual respect develops. Reciprocity includes a sense of mutual obligation to exchange ideas and practice. The second element in the survey asked respondents to highlight those areas of trust and reciprocity that were already developing .
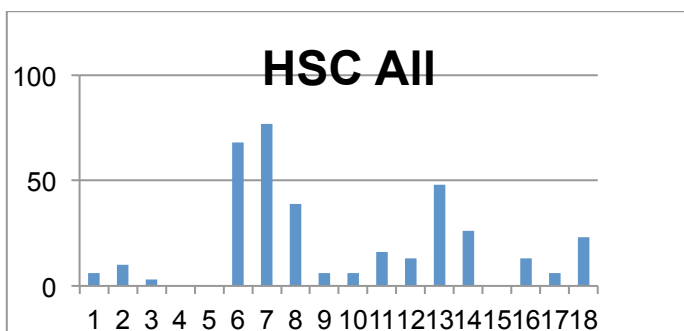
Figure 5.4 High Social Capital Overall (31 responses)

Scores are low for the "Beginning" section of the HSC survey indicating that respondents feel that they have overcome the problems of distrust and anxiety implied by statements such as:

> HSC 1 There is limited experience of building trust across schools
> at headteacher and senior leader levels in a few areas.

And

> HSC 4 There is anxiety among staff of the other partner(s) that they are treated in deficit terms, or 'we're being done to'.

The most positive cluster of responses is for Items 6, 7 and 8. The first two emphasise the positive engagement of the SLT with collaboration as a means of self-improvement:

> JPD 6 Trust, with openness and honesty, has been established at SLT level and are now being established among all other staff across schools.
> And
> JPD 7 There is agreement at SLT level that all sides have something of value to offer to other partners.

The third statement goes a step further and implies that this is purposeful:

> JPD 8 Action is taken to identify what each partner and each member of staff can offer to the other(s) and what might be sought from the other(s).

As the section from Hargreaves (2012) on "Talent Identification and development through distributed leadership" was omitted from the initial survey, this is an area that can be fruitfully explored through interviews. The other high scoring item at 48% agreement (14) is JPD 13: Partners do things *with* each other, not *to* each other.

This reinforces the collaborative values that might underpin the formation of the academy trust and were explored further through interviews.

**Analysis of High Social Capital (HSC) by Group**

For the purpose of analysis, three distinct groups were identified among those who responded to the survey as stated above. Bar charts for each group have been constructed. Again, there are serious limitations to any wider conclusions that might be drawn because of the low numbers that the percentages represent.

HD HSC

(10 responses)

SLT HSC

(9 responses)

T HSC
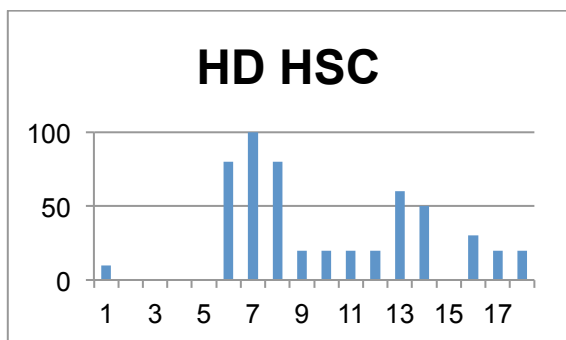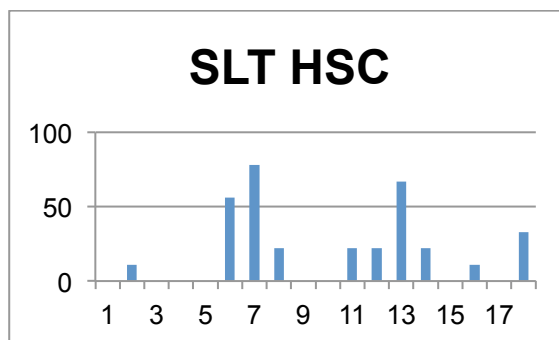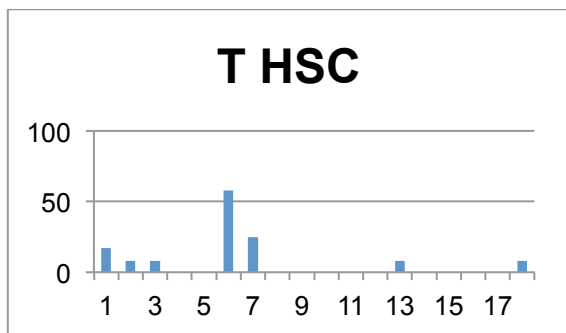
(12 responses)

Figure 5.5 High Social Capital by group

Comparison between the various groups for the High Social Capital element shows a similar high level of agreement for Item 6, (80% or 8 responses; 55% - 5 - and 66% or 8 responses respectively) which states:

> HSC 6 Trust, with openness and honesty, has been established at SLT level and are now being established among all other staff across schools.

This does suggest that the climate at the outset of the Trust development is optimistic and positive. However, for Item 7 which specifically refers to the SLT,

> HSC 7 There is agreement at SLT level that all sides have something of value to offer to other partners,

there does appear to be a marked difference among the groups, perhaps indicating that the Teacher group is less aware at this stage. The generally positive response to Item 13 referred to above again seems pronounced among the HD and SLT groups but far less so at the Teacher level.

There was zero response to Item 15,

> HSC 15 When a new partnership activity is mooted, the question 'How will it boost our collective social capital?' is always asked.

This may reflect limited experience to date but could also be an indication of limited

awareness of planning for the development of the Trust at this stage when the priority may have been initial establishment.

Collective Moral Purpose

Collective moral purpose exists when the moral purpose of each individual school in the partnership to its own pupils becomes extended to all learners in the partnership.
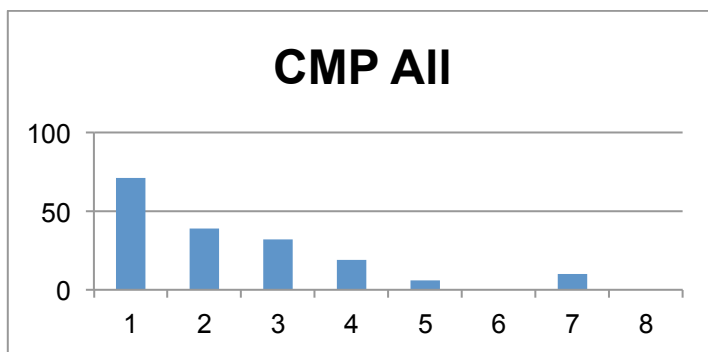
Figure 5.6 Collective Moral Purpose Overall (31 responses)

Responses to the items on Collective Moral Purpose taper sharply from left to right on the graph indicating that respondents feel that this area is at the "Beginning" stage of development with the only item scoring over 50% (n=22):

CMP 1Teachers direct their moral purpose at the pupils in their immediate care. Followed by:

CMP 2 As the school enters into partnerships; there is a growing commitment to care about the success of partners and the linked achievement of their students.

The third item refers only to headteachers, which might indicate that senior leaders are at the "Developing" stage as far as Collective Moral Purpose is concerned. Analysis by group may reveal more on this issue.

CMP 3 The headteachers and senior staff have accepted the philosophy and practice of system leadership and are now taking action to distribute the ideas of system leadership to other levels in the school, leading to a growing sense of collective moral purpose.

Analysis of Collective Moral Purpose (CMP) by Group

(10 responses)

(9 responses)

(9 responses)
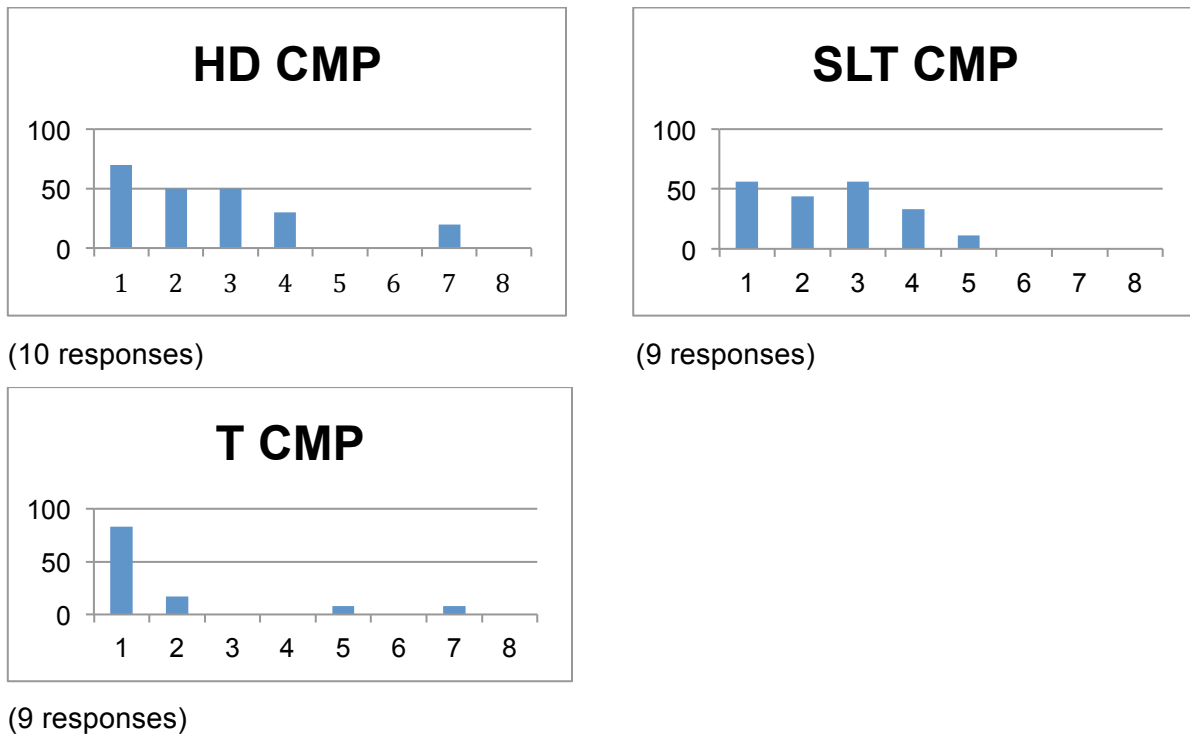
Figure 5.7 Collective Moral Purpose by group

Initially the most striking item from group analysis of CMP is the level of agreement about Item 1:

CMP 1 Teachers direct their moral purpose at the pupils in their immediate care. That this scores more highly among teachers than the other groups reflects their focus on individual classes within their schools.

The agreement within the HD and SLT groups about Items 2 and 3 suggests that, at this stage, those leading the trust see it as "Developing" in a positive sense.

CMP 2 As the school enters into partnerships, there is a growing commitment to care about the success of partners and the linked achievement of their students.

CMP 3 The headteachers and senior staff have accepted the philosophy and practice of system leadership and are now taking action to distribute the ideas of system leadership to other levels in the school, leading to a growing sense of collective moral purpose.

Evaluation and Challenge

Evaluation and challenge includes the capacity of each school to evaluate the quality of education offered by partner schools and to make challenges to help their practice to improve.
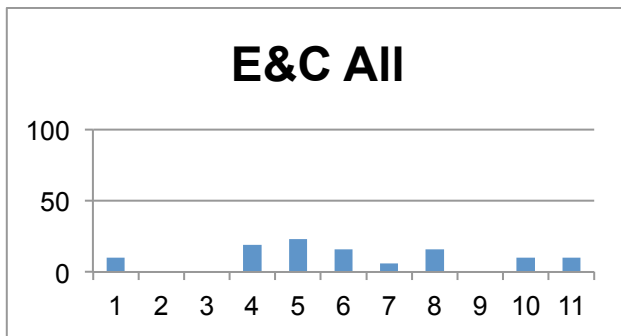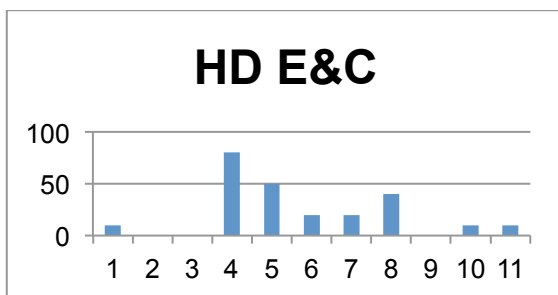

Figure 5.8 Evaluation and Challenge Overall (31 responses)

Responses to items under Evaluation and Challenge items were much lower, perhaps indicating that the High Social Capital needed to undertake this kind of mutual activity is still at the "Developing" stage as far as most respondents are concerned. Item 5 elicits the most positive response, which reflects the nature of the wording:

> E&C 5 As the social capital (trust and reciprocity) between partner head teachers grows, they begin, somewhat tentatively, to challenge each another and enjoy the benefits.

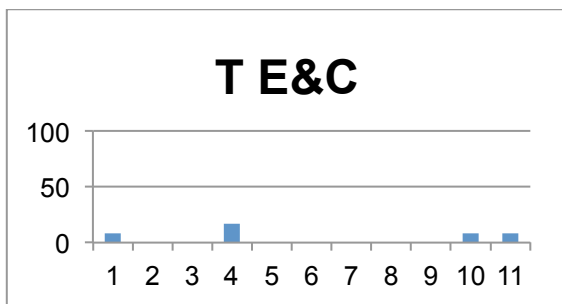**Analysis of Evaluation and Challenge (E&C) by Group**

Although numbers are low, the bar charts show that there is a clear difference between the HD group and the others.

(10 responses)

(9 responses)

90
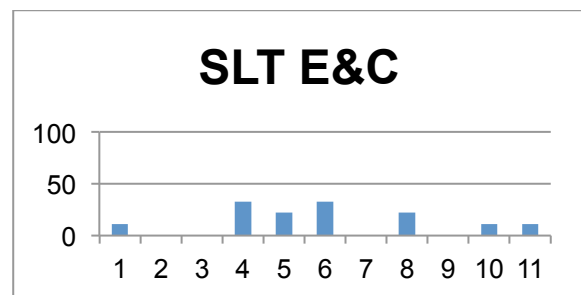
(12 responses)

Figure 5.9 Evaluation and Challenge by Group

The low scoring for Items 1-3 reflects the realism of the HD group in establishing the Trust as a means of self-improvement as they see E&C as implicit in the process.

> E&C 1 As the extent of the partnership is limited and under the close control of the headteacher and senior staff, the need for processes of monitoring and evaluation is limited.
>
> E&C 2 The idea of evaluation and challenge between headteachers provokes anxiety and defensiveness.
>
> E&C 3 The partners do not see challenge as inherent in deep partnerships and so do not challenge one another at any level.

There is some agreement about Item 4,

> E&C 4 The ability to judge the benefits of partnership activities and calculate transaction costs is being developed among senior staff as appropriate processes of monitoring and evaluation are devised.

This represents the developing nature of the trust and should form a key element of interviews at the next stage of the research.
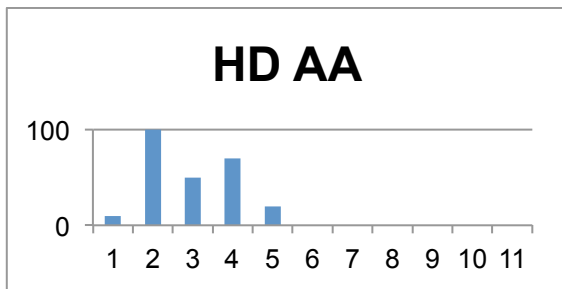
Alliance Architecture
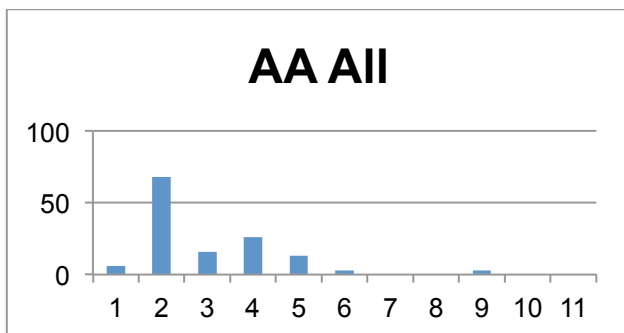
**Figure 5.10 Alliance Architecture Overall (31 responses)**

The bunching of responses towards the left of the graph indicates that items under Alliance Architecture are seen as "Beginning" although the relatively high response rate for Item 2 suggests that it had a more general resonance that reflects an optimistic outlook.
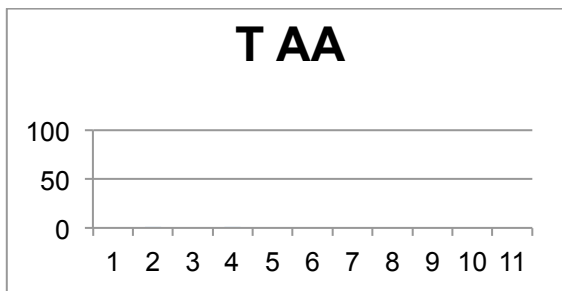
AA 2 The partnership is gaining strength.

Analysis of Alliance Architecture (AA) by Group

(10 responses)
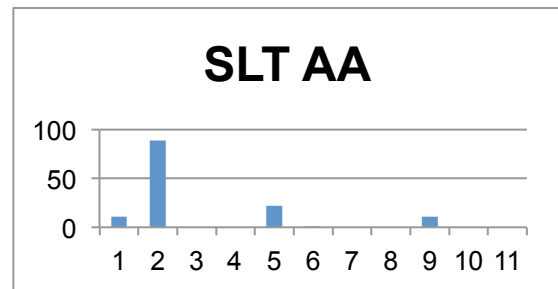
(9 responses)

(12 responses)

Figure 5.11 Alliance Architecture by group

The apparent unanimity about Item 2, "The partnership is gaining strength." is not evident among teachers based on this group analysis. This may represent the early stage of development when discussion and feedback may have been at SLT level, but it was a factor explored at interview.

The relatively high scores for Items 3 and 4 indicate that the HD group has already grappled with the issues of establishing collaborative leadership and this was explored further at interview.

> AA 3 After some early difficulties and tensions, clarification of the terms of the partnership and allocation of roles and responsibilities restore confidence in the partnership.
>
> AA 4 Means of future conflict resolution have been agreed among school leaders.

Summary

The overall outcome of the initial survey suggests that the five schools in the Academy Trust were at the "Developing" stage for Joint Practice Development, which is more focused on in-school JPD than between schools. Analysis by group suggests that High Social Capital is less well established among the Teacher group, who may feel more at the "Beginning" stage, than among the HD and SLT groups because their involvement in the initial setting up was limited. This pattern is repeated for Collective Moral Purpose and Evaluation and Challenge, which suggests that the initial discussions about the direction of the trust are not yet as fully realised by teachers as, by more senior colleagues. Even amongst senior leaders, the development of Collective Moral Purpose is at an early stage and the conditions that will allow robust Evaluation and Challenge are at the development stage. The Alliance Architecture section, although it shows an optimistic view of the future, demonstrates that the group is at an early stage in developing the whole picture, notwithstanding the High Social Capital that exists.

The following issues were identified for exploration through semi-structured interviews.

1. The extent to which there is an overall development vision for how the trust will look in a year's time and how this is reflected in an overall plan.
2. What key values the trust has established and how these are working in practice for staff at all levels.
3. What the key success measures that the various groups within the trust are using to evaluate its development over the first year of its existence.
4. How the process of identifying "talent" and "development through distributed leadership" is being taken forward across the trust.
5. The opportunities that have already been taken to develop JPD across the schools and any impact on the quality of teaching and other areas identified in individual school action plans.
6. In what tangible ways individuals perceive that "the partnership is gaining strength".
7. What early difficulties and tensions have there been and how have they been overcome.
8. What means of resolving conflicts have been devised.

Analysis of 2014 Interview Transcriptions

The Overall Picture

All 20 interviewees were enthusiastic about belonging to the Academy Trust, even if their individual knowledge or opportunity to benefit directly was limited. As previously described, three of the schools had belonged to a collaborative group that was spread widely across the LA. The experiences gained there have helped create a positive attitude to joint working,

"You've been nurtured in that way, you know that when someone comes in they are not coming to point the finger, they are coming to help you" (Early Years Teacher School D).

At the time of the interviews, the schools had not yet had the chance to organise an event for all to attend, although a social event was planned for the end of July and a joint training event planned for September. Some interviewees had had the chance to participate in Joint Moderation of writing across the trust either as Year 6 teachers or English/Literacy Leaders. Others had worked together to develop Early Years practice. As well as taking part in the above, headteachers and deputy headteachers had met half termly to evaluate and plan. This had developed a sense of momentum and even those who had not yet taken part in collaborative work expressed a clear desire to get involved.

> One of the issues we have had this year is our assessments at Year 2 so one of the things that would be very useful would be cross school moderation and to do it more regularly rather than at the end of the year. (Year 2 Teacher School E)
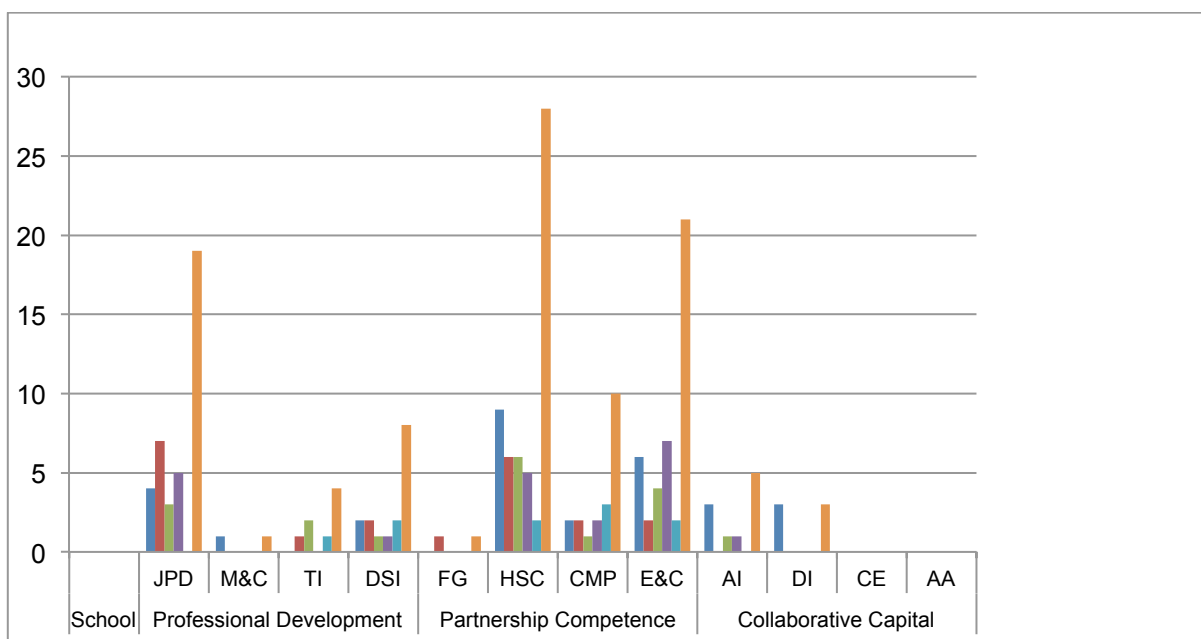
Figure 5.12 Analysis of Interview Responses 2015 (Each school's response is shown by a different colour and the total within each strand is represented by an amber bar.)

The initial consideration of the data labelled each response according to the area within Hargreaves' model that most closely matched what the interviewee had said, either through the use of key words such as "trust" or "challenge" or through the overall meaning of the statement (see below). To achieve this, each statement in the interview transcript was analysed and, where it was possible to identify an alignment with a dimension, it was colour coded thus, Professional Development, Partnership Competence or Collaborative Capital. Each colour-coded statement was then allocated a letter code to denote which strand within the dimension it most closely fitted. For example (colour coded in yellow):

> I think that this organisation of the schools makes it easier to make those connections and to go in and physically see what they are doing. How the children do it, it depends on the HTs being close or that you are close to the person doing maths in the other school. I think that way it should enable us to grow in those areas that it is taking longer to make progress in. **HSC** (Partnership Competence) Senior Leader School B

In this example, the interviewee is talking about the underlying conditions that will support evaluation and challenge and lead to Joint Professional Development but the point she is making is the need to have High Social Capital in place as a pre-requisite.

It was not always possible to identify a single strand in what the interviewee said so on some occasions two strands have been allocated. In all cases they fall within the same dimension; For example:

> I joined because I knew those heads quite well and I knew the values they had in their school and it is similar to what we have here. I felt that as heads the group would be a good group to work with. Similar ethos and similar values for the children that go to our schools. That's why I felt it would be a good group to join. **HSC/CMP** Headteacher School B (Coded in yellow - Partnership Competence)

In this case, the statement clearly refers to High Social Capital but there is also a strong element of Collective Moral Purpose. This occurs in a small minority of cases but where it does the statement has been counted twice in the results.

The colour-coded statements from each school were then totalled under each strand and the results are shown as Figure 5.12.

The patterns of responses across all five schools show some variation, giving the overall picture shown above. This clearly shows that High Social Capital (HSC), which includes trust and reciprocity, is the area most often discussed by interviewees. They recognised this as the most crucial area if the Academy Trust is to make a successful start in improving practice through learning from each other. This is interesting in the light of Hargreaves' comment that, "the first dimension, professional development, necessarily takes precedence over the second, partnership competence" (2012, p. 8). This may change as more members of staff gain greater involvement and because initial Professional Development through the Trust has been limited to the specific groups referred to below. It could also relate to the fact that Hargreaves' original work was developed in the context of Teaching Schools (Hargreaves, 2010) where alliances of schools form a cluster around a hub in an organic way, mainly through the medium of Joint Practice Development. The Trust was formed expressly to promote joint school improvement and each school became an academy within a year as an expression of their commitment to this end.

The interview data show that there is a realisation that Evaluation and Challenge are part of the process of self-improvement. As one headteacher said:

> Quite robust challenge so we are really unpicking, "Why do you think that?" and so as honest partners we can say this is what the data shows and this is what we think

The requirement by the Department for Education to establish a strong mutual evaluation process, by grading each school as red, amber or green against Ofsted criteria before the trust could be inaugurated, has helped enable the schools to move quickly to the position where the partnership competence is high. Joint Practice Development is well represented in the responses because of the joint moderation and Early Years work in which many of the senior leaders and all of the heads took part. Collective Moral Purpose and shared values appear strongly represented despite the trust being at such an early stage of development.

Issues Raised

> **Issue 1.The extent to which there is an overall development vision for how the trust will look in a year's time and how this is reflected in an overall plan**
>
> **Issue 3. The key success measures that the various groups within the trust are using to evaluate its development over the first year of its existence**

Responses to the above two issues were consistent and are best reflected in the words of one respondent who stated, "When we were at the RAG Meeting last November I think it was clear that we all wanted to provide excellence for our children" (Headteacher School D). Another said, "I think we saw very clearly from the beginning what we wanted it to be and to keep the nub of it centred around children and that value and progress element" (Headteacher School A).

More specifically the interviewees were very clear about what they wanted in a year's time as a third headteacher states, "We do plan to involve all teachers next year and we have dates to involve all subject leaders" (Headteacher School E).

Although the schools had decided against having one joint action plan, they had agreed a common core of principles.

> We did talk about having one key action plan but decided against it because the schools are so diverse but we did agree in September about having five key points, for example, raising achievement and raising the standard of governance, in line with the Ofsted criteria (Headteacher School E).

However, there is a realisation that the Trust does need to sustain consistent approaches if it is to move forward as a joint enterprise. "If we all write our SEFs and SDPs in line with those bullet points it will make it much easier to bring together" (Headteacher School D). This reflects an organic approach to growth rather than a rigid adherence to a plan, perhaps because of the interplay between developing partnership competence and the need to build confidence through school improvement by successfully giving opportunities for Joint Practice Development.

Success is seen as, "We are able to see impact from our individual and shared action plans and our SDPs and that we are able to say this happened because of all the hard work and input from the Trust " (Headteacher School A).

One possible weakness in this approach is the failure to differentiate sufficiently between the highly successful schools in the group and any in need of rapid improvement.

Issue 2. What key values the trust has established and how these are working in practice for staff at all levels

Establishing the values that underpin the collaboration from the outset does not appear to have presented a great challenge. "When you look at all schools' values, they all want the best for their children so they are aligned when you really unpick it" (Headteacher School C). The fact that the espoused values seem to be implicit may owe a lot to the "community of practice" already developed among headteachers before establishing the trust. "I joined because I knew those head teachers quite well and I knew the values they had in their schools and they are similar to what we have here" (Headteacher School B). "The schools that I've been to as part of the Trust do have the same values, principles and we have certainly had schools come here to see how we run values" (Senior Leader School A) and "Yeah, I think that's why X and the other heads got together. All the heads have the same kind of ethos about how they want their schools to be run" (Senior Leader School C). This is not to say that the potential for problems is ignored.

> Of course, each school is in a different area and will have different intakes but I think there are a lot of similarities… It's difficult to strike that balance between being a unique school and to follow on the lead of other people nearby (Senior Leader School A).

This sense of shared values appears to have permeated down the schools' hierarchies. As one teacher who is newly qualified put it, "Tensions? No, but everyone has their own view, it's part of our values, it is about sharing but also about being honest and open" (Teacher School C). The dangers of not establishing this sense of agreed values and the organic way they are being developed is recognised, "When we meet more frequently, that's when relationships will develop and the honesty and there's got to be otherwise we are just meeting up and may be talking behind peoples' backs" (Teacher School D).

Issue 4. How the process of identifying "talent" and "development through distributed leadership" is being taken forward across the trust

Given the time the trust has been in place and the sensitivities in developing partnership, it may not be surprising that one headteacher commented, "We've done a bit of that but we could do it in more depth and a bit more widespread because we have only looked at head, deputy and core leaders." (Headteacher School E) The experience of the schools may suggest that it was wise to spend more time becoming familiar with each other before carrying out an exercise in surveying expertise. "Although you have the RAG rating day, it's not until you start going in to other schools and see what they do… that you can really judge" Teacher School E). This highlights the benchmarking opportunities involved in deep collaboration.

From a distributed leadership point of view, most of those interviewed had either experienced the chance to take responsibility within an aspect of collaboration such as moderation (English and maths) or joint practice development (Early Years). Those who had not were anticipating that their time would come. One Physical Education (PE) leader put it this way,

> I'm not sure it will be done as this is the expert, this is the guru in this subject… a maths guru in this school. What I hope is that all schools share their practice and someone can lead those meetings and make sure all the ideas are down on paper and catalogued and we could maybe work from that document. (Middle Leader School A)

As one headteacher said, "Talent spotting will come as we disseminate the Trust to other levels of stakeholders". (Headteacher School D)

Issue 5. The opportunities that have already been taken to develop JPD across the schools and any impact on the quality of teaching and other areas identified in individual school action plans.

Issue 6. In what tangible ways do individuals perceive that "the partnership is gaining strength".

Although, at the time of interviewing, there had been no formal launch of the Trust for all staff, joint practice development had started for key sections of staff. Headteachers had involved their deputy headteachers, some of whom have been able to develop leadership skills on a wider stage, for example by playing a key role in the Early Years developments. Other teachers have had the chance to lead on behalf of their school and report back. "They are the experts because they've been there... We expect them to take it forward as they will have the passion for it. I suppose it's just good distributed leadership." (Headteacher School B)

In terms of impact on the quality of teaching, Early Years is cited most often,

> For example the impact that it has been having on our Early Years has been phenomenal. Working with X has completely changed our practice, upped our game...
> Governors is another huge impact... (we have an) awayday next Monday where governors are coming together to talk about what they have learned this year and create strategic targets for next year (Headteacher School A).

As previously mentioned, cross school moderation has given both Year 6 teachers and English leaders the chance to learn from each other with the caveat that preserving good professional relationships remains a high priority.

> With writing moderation things came up which I think I can work on but as we are at the early stages, I don't feel I could say I think your marking might need to... say look what we've done, you know! (Senior Leader School C)

Nevertheless, one headteacher summed up the progress to date:

> I'm not saying we've got it all right but the shared level of trust and collegiality among the group of headteachers has been part of what has enabled us to move to the next level involving other staff. (Headteacher School B)

Issue 7. What early difficulties and tensions have there been and how have they been overcome.

Issue 8. What means of resolving conflicts have been devised.

From the standpoint of headteachers, any early tensions seem to have been overcome through regular meetings and talking things through.

> Because we've been generous of spirit we've passed the boundary of being critical because we can do it openly without anybody taking offence or getting huffy because relationships are strong (Headteacher School D).

This view seems to be supported at deputy headteacher level from another school:

> There are two aspects to this. I have to go to (joint) governors' meetings. I feel that I have been able to put forward my point of view, support X in putting forward her point of view so I haven't felt there's any tensions. And with EYFS meetings, there's been really healthy debate about pieces of work for instance, but no tension, just positive professional dialogue (Deputy Headteacher School D).

As a newly qualified teacher said,

> Not really, there are things that not everyone agrees with but we are there to challenge and question each other (NQT School E).

Although there are examples where challenge has been accepted as part of the improvement process, this may not always have been the case at this stage.

> Oh Lord no! I mean some of the moderations we've seen have been horrendous and we've come back and said that was a funny way of doing things, but not in a tense way (Senior Leader School A).

Where tensions have been identified, they appear to relate more to an individual governor than a more general issue. The headteachers have worked together to ensure that this does not have a negative impact on day to day development.

Summary

Close analysis of the content of the first round of interviews in relation to the issues raised does tend to support the thematic analysis shown in the graph at Figure 5.31. Although there is a strong hierarchical lead from headteachers in driving the collaboration forward, there is a significant amount of evidence that other leaders and teachers are engaged with the building of High Social Capital and Joint Practice Development. Those who have not yet become directly involved have picked up on what is being developed and seem to welcome this form of learning within a tight knit group of schools. Possibly because of this and the frequency with which some groups, particularly headteachers and deputy headteachers and Early Years Practitioners, have met, there has already been some mutual challenge injected into the process and an acceptance that this is part of developing new learning. The need for openness is widely acknowledged within the responses as a key to reciprocity and there is a growing realisation that all schools in the Trust have things to offer.

> It's not until you start going into the other schools and seen what they do that you can really judge yourselves… and that's why I've realised that we've got a lot to celebrate and be proud of (Headteacher School C).

However, although all of the participants are positive in theory about challenge, there is little evidence of impact on improvement except in School B where Early Years and Governance are cited as benefiting from the collaboration. The changes in Governance followed a talk by the headteacher of School A who is an Ofsted inspector.

Section 2

Follow-Up Survey in 2015

To aid the reader in identifying the various parts of the hierarchy, Beginning, Developing, Embedding and Leading, the letters A,B,C,D have been included in this analysis. This is because the data have become more complex as numbers of responses have grown. For the follow up survey 49 responses were received out of a possible total of 68 (72%). This compares favourably with the original survey. From the HD group there were 10 (20%), from the SLT group, 13 (27%) and from the teacher group there were 26 (53%). This most likely represents the growth in engagement with the collaboration within the Trust during the ensuing period. The numbers in the HD group have remained constant whereas there is a small rise from 9 to 13 for the SLT group and a larger rise from 12 to 26 for the Teacher

group. This survey took place following the formal launch of the Trust to all members of the schools' communities. As previously stated, the group numbers remain low and the differences highlighted between groups are not considered to be statistically reliable and are included as illustrative rather than definitive.

Joint Practice Development (JPD)

Overall

The overall picture of responses for JPD in 2015 shows a decline as a percentage in agreement with the statements in comparison to 2014. To some extent this misrepresents the changes because there are actually more individuals who have highlighted the statement in 2015 than in 2014 although as a percentage of the higher number, it has fallen. This is not equally true for the HD group as for others who have become more involved in the Trust developments since the original survey. Percentages have been retained as they give a clearer sense of the proportions of respondents who have highlighted specific statements.

Only two statements show an increase in the overall responses in percentage terms.

JPD C2 - Pairs and triads work across schools in the partnership.
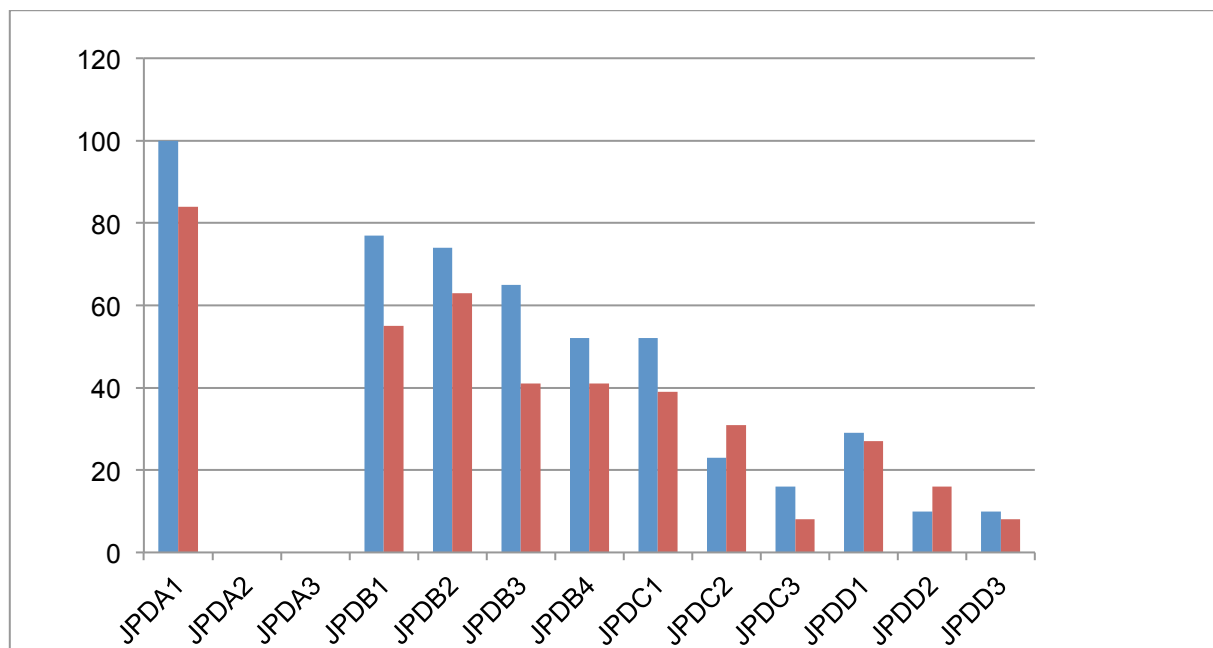JPD D2- JPD is embedded in all professional development and applies across partnerships. (See Figure 5.13)

Figure 5.13   2014/2015 Joint Practice Development Overall (31- 49 responses)

Heads and Deputies (HD)

For the HD group this is particularly marked with a rise from 20% to 50% for item C2. It also shows a marked increase in response to item C3:

JPD C3 Pupils are becoming involved in JPD as co-constructors of better teaching and learning. (See Fig. 5.14)
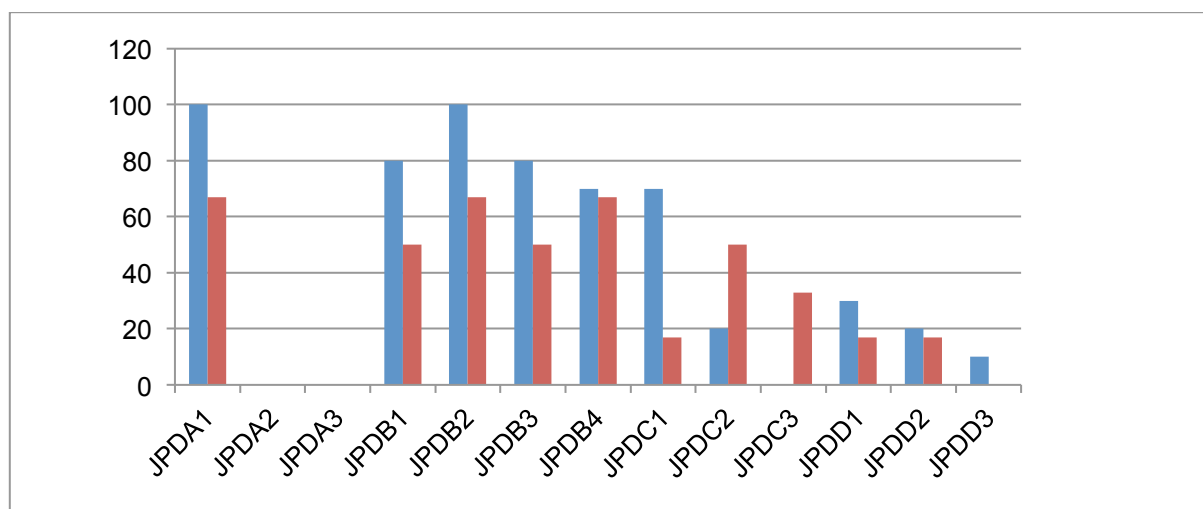

Figure 5.14   2014/2015 JPD HD (10 responses)

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The SLT group also shows an increased agreement with item D2 above of over 10%.

Teachers (T)

The Teacher group shows the greatest range of higher agreement with the statements, perhaps because of their greater involvement this year. They show increases in the following areas:

JPD B2 It encourages coaching and engages in learning walks for staff.

JPD B4 Pairs and triads of staff engage in JPD projects within the school.

JPD C1 The school has evolved its CPD close to the practice model, with regular mutual observation of lessons, followed by coaching sessions as routine, as well as on professional training days with partners.

JPD C2 JPD pairs and triads work across schools in the partnership.

JPD D1 The school has a highly sophisticated model of professional development that integrates initial teacher training (ITT) and CPD into a coherent

whole, in which leadership development begins in ITT and progresses to senior leadership roles and succession planning.

JPD D2 JPD is embedded in all professional development and applies across partnerships.

JPD D4 Staff are skilled in the design and management of innovation and the school serves as an innovation hub. (See Fig. 5.13)
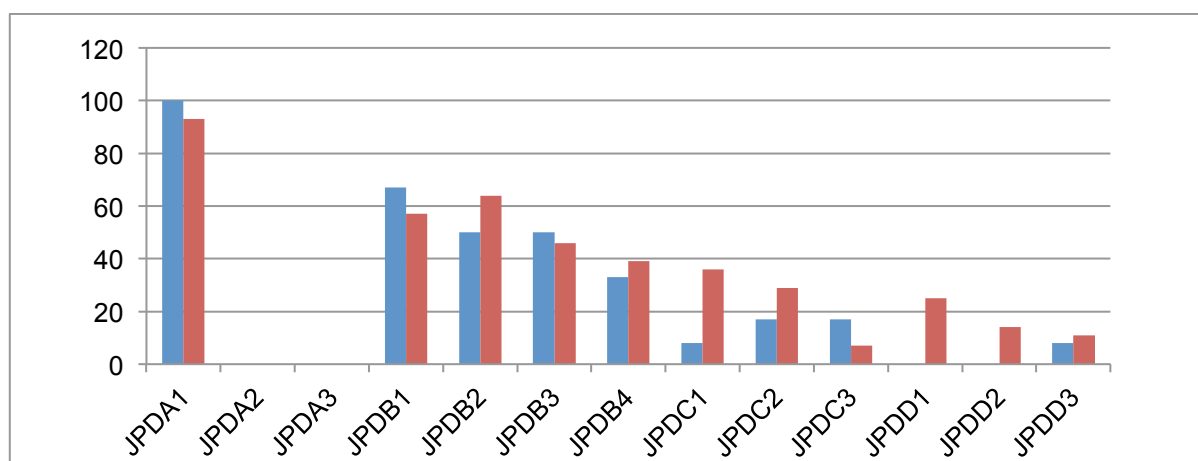

**Figure 5.15**   **2014/2015 JPD Teachers (26 responses)**

To some extent, the declines in response for some areas could relate to the rejection of the more negative statements such as: "Staff development is not seen as a high priority at this school". Those areas which show an increase mostly fall into the Developing and Embedding sections (B and C) of the survey statements with the teaching group increasingly highlighting items from the section D, Leading. This reflected the growing strength of interest in the schools as a whole in collaborative working; work in which this group has been pioneering. Examples of this growth were sought during the interviews.

High Social Capital (HSC)

In the strand of High Social Capital, responses show an overall rise in many areas since 2014 (see Figure. 5.14). However, for items B1 and B2 there is a significant overall decline between 2014 and 2015. The declines appear to stem from a fall in HD responses across sections B and C, which are counter-acted in most cases by increases in SLT and Teacher agreement with the statements. This difference between groups was further explored at interviews and was perceived by headteachers and deputy headteachers as relating to the staffing changes at that level. (See Figures. 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19.)
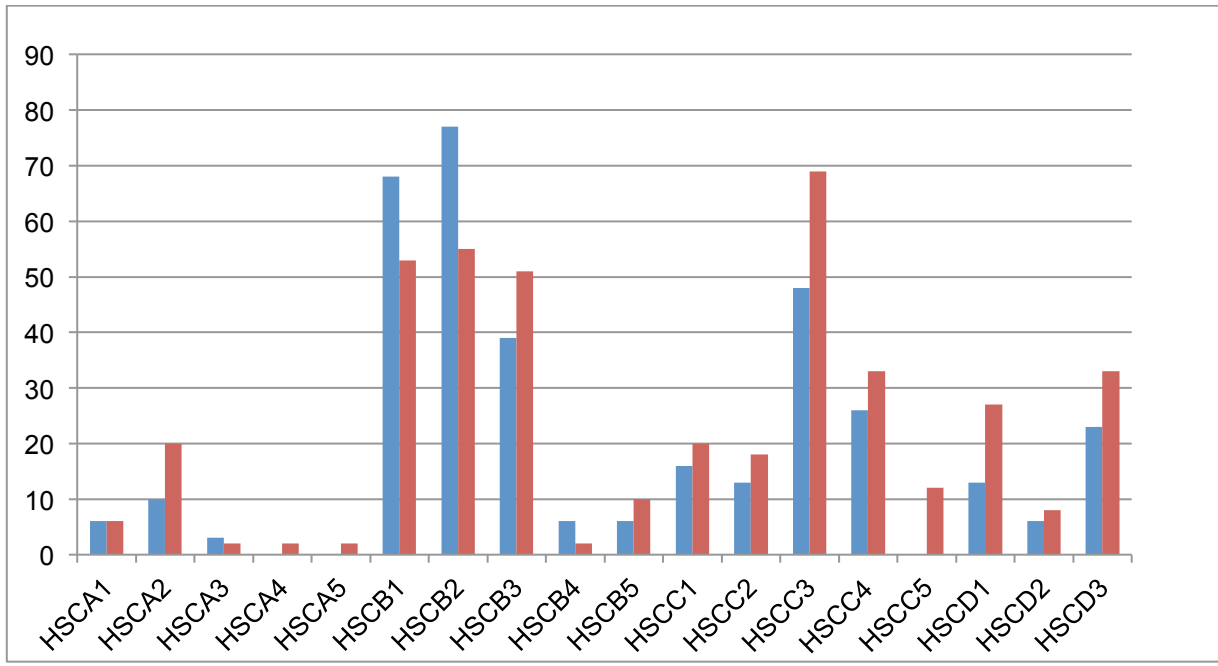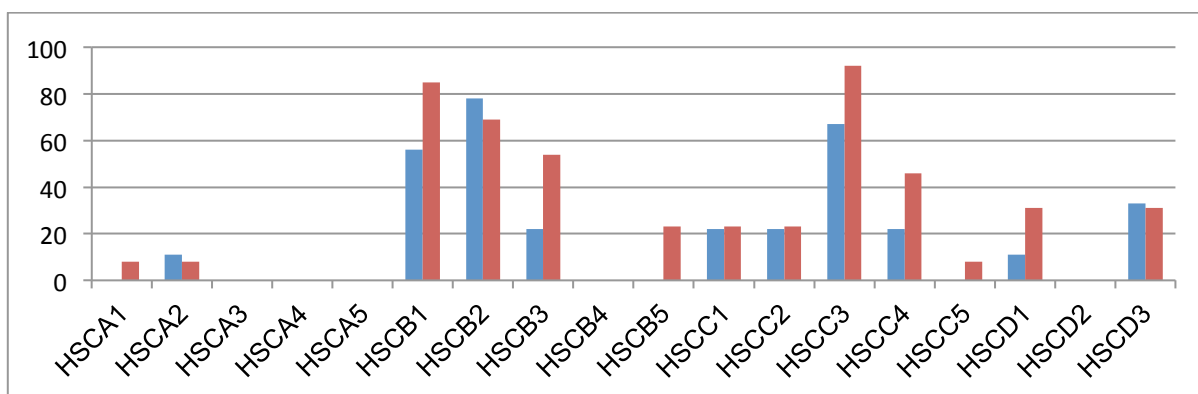
Figure 5.16   **2014/2015 High Social Capital Overall (49 responses)**
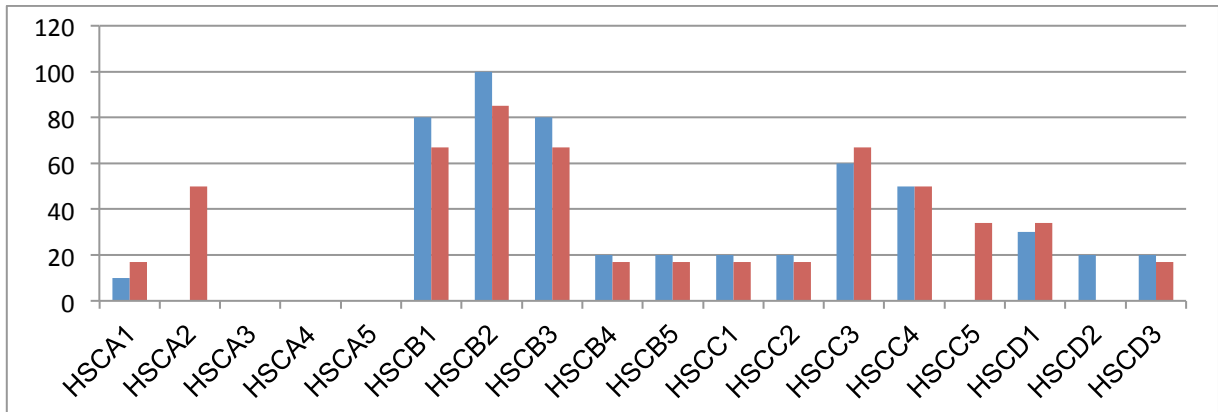
Figure 5.17   **2014/2015 High Social Capital HD (10 responses)**

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

These falls in HD group responses are in marked contrast to the SLT and Teacher groups, which show sharp increases.

Figure 5.18 2014/2015 High Social Capital SLT (13 responses)

The SLT group shows greater agreement with:

> HSC B1 Trust with openness and honesty has been established at SLT level and are now being established among other staff across schools.
>
> HSC B3 Action is taken to identify what each partner and each member of staff can offer to the other(s) and what might be sought from the other(s).
>
> HSC B5 Some cross-partnership governors have been created.
>
> HSC C3 Partners do things *with* each other, not *to* each other.
>
> HSC C4 Most governors now support the partnership and recognise the benefits.
>
> HSC D1 High levels of trust are now well established and at each level there is sufficient confidence and experience to advise and support other partnerships in the art of establishing and sustaining trust.

The significant exception to this overall pattern of increase for SLT members is the fall in positive responses to item HSC B2, which contradicts the view held by teachers:

> There is agreement at SLT level that all sides have something of value to offer other partners.

This was explored through interviews but there was no consistent explanation among this group, which had remained stable between the survey periods.

Teachers (T)

The Teacher group shows the greatest overall increase since 2014 particularly in agreeing with the following statements:

> HSC B2 There is agreement at SLT level that all sides have something of value to offer to other partners.
>
> HSC B3 Action is taken to identify what each partner and each member of staff can offer to the other(s) and what might be sought from the other(s).

HSC C1 Trust is well established among staff and increases among governors and key stakeholders. Trust audits take place from time to time.

HSC C2 Reciprocity in action exists at all levels, with high levels of satisfaction at mutual gains.

HSC C3 Partners do things *with* each other, not *to* each other.

HSC C4 Most governors now support the partnership and recognise the benefits.

HSC C5 When a new partnership activity is mooted, the question 'How will it boost our collective social capital?' is always asked.

HSC D1 High levels of trust are now well established and at each level there is sufficient confidence and experience to advise and support other partnerships in the art of establishing and sustaining trust.

HSC D2 Success in effective reciprocity is validated and quality assured externally.

HSC D3 Staff have experience of supporting other schools in how to establish the principle of reciprocity and operate it in practice to improve teaching and learning.
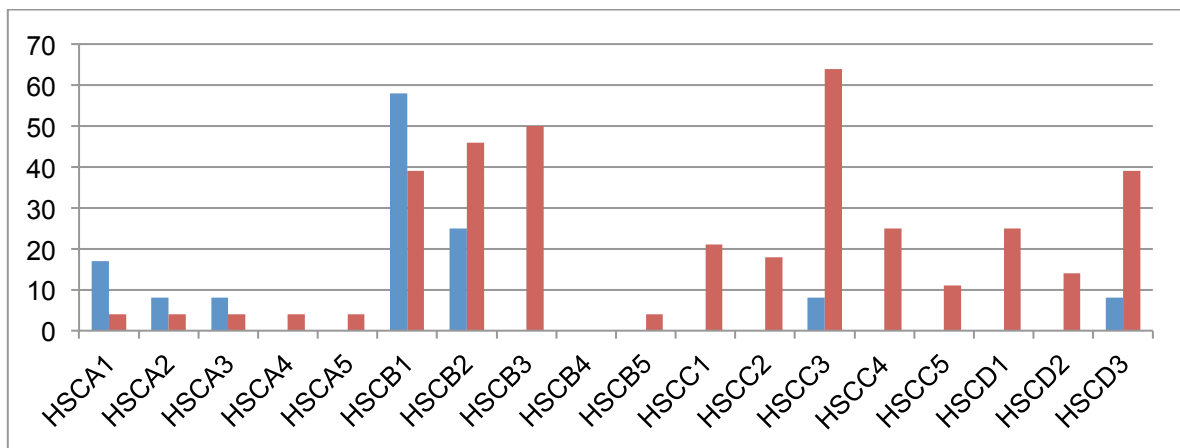
Figure 5.19   **2014/2015 High Social Capital Teachers (26 responses)**

In contrast to the above is the apparent fall in positive responses to item B1, which may be a rogue result but was explored at interviews.

These responses from all three groups demonstrate a belief that the schools have now moved into a position where they are leading the way as far as Trust and Reciprocity are concerned. This appears to be the area where there are the highest levels of positive response. The impact of this was explored through interviews but no respondent felt that there had been a decline but rather a marked increase in trust.

Collective Moral Purpose
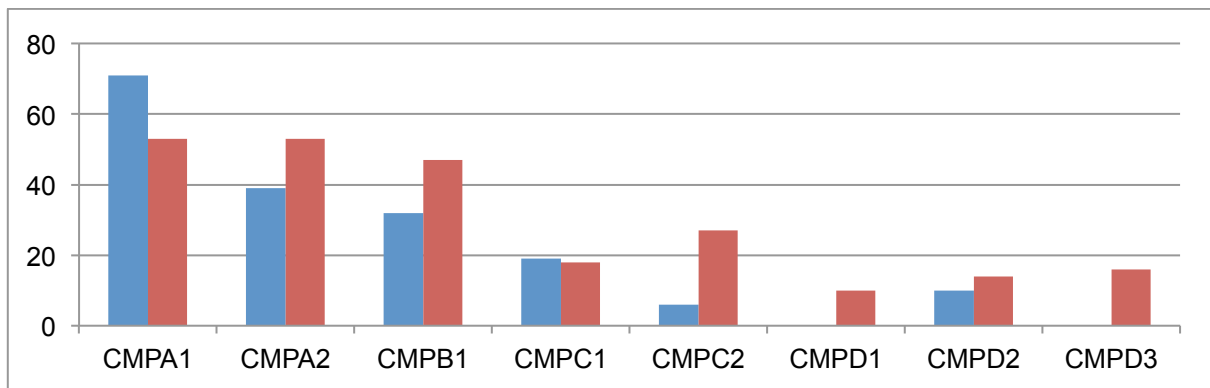
Figure 5.20   **2014/2015 Collective Moral Purpose Overall (49 responses)**

There is an overall decline in agreement with the statement:

      CMP A1 Teachers direct their moral purpose at the pupils in their immediate care.

However, there is an overall increase in agreement that:

      CMP A2 As the school enters into partnerships, there is a growing commitment

      to care about the success of partners and the linked achievement of their

      students.

This appears to demonstrate a growing sense of Collective Moral Purpose.
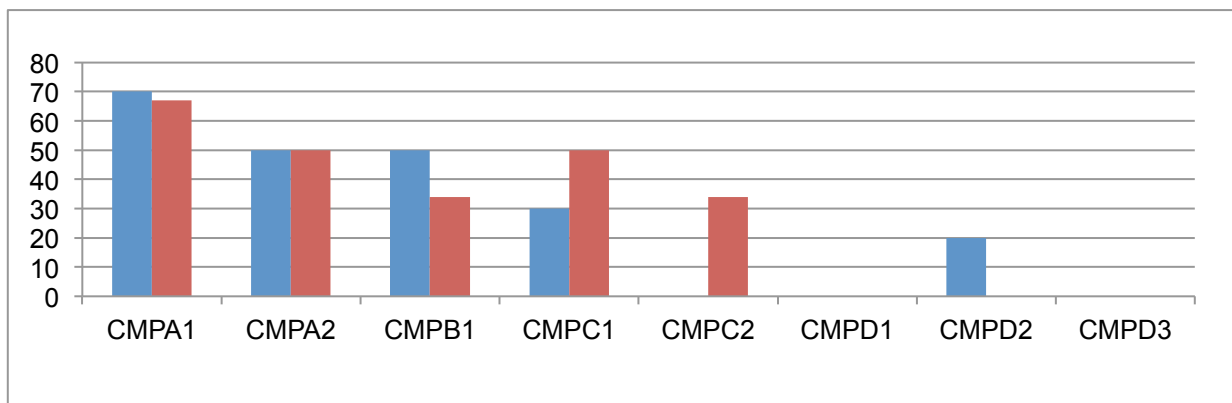
Figure 5.21   **2014/2015 Collective Moral Purpose HD (10 responses)**

Heads and Deputies

The HD group shows a marked improvement in agreeing with the following statements:

      CMP C1 The principles and practice of system leadership are now well developed

      among the whole staff and action is being taken to extend it to governors and

      students.

      CMP C2 Progress is being made in transferring the philosophy of collective moral

purpose to partner schools and to parents.

However, they appear to disagree with the 2014 outcome, which showed that 20 per cent thought:

CMP D2 - Collective moral purpose boosts collective capacity for school improvement.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

(13 responses)

Figure 5.22   **2014/2015 Collective Moral Purpose SLT**

The SLT group particularly shows greater agreement that:

CMP B1 The headteachers and senior staff have accepted the philosophy and practice of system leadership and are now taking action to distribute the ideas of system leadership to other levels in the school, leading to a growing sense of collective moral purpose.

CMP C2 Progress is being made in transferring the philosophy of collective moral purpose to partner schools and to parents.

CMP D2 Collective moral purpose boosts collective capacity for school improvement.

CMP D3 Staff are now able to induct other partnerships in the art of achieving collective moral purpose.

Teachers (T)

Figure 5.23   2014/2015 Collective Moral Purpose Teachers (26 responses)

The Teacher group shows improvement in levels of agreement in all areas, with particular strengths in:

> CMP A2 As the school enters into partnerships, there is a growing commitment to care about the success of partners and the linked achievement of their students.

> CMP B1 The headteachers and senior staff have accepted the philosophy and practice of system leadership and are now taking action to distribute the ideas of system leadership to other levels in the school, leading to a growing sense of collective moral purpose.
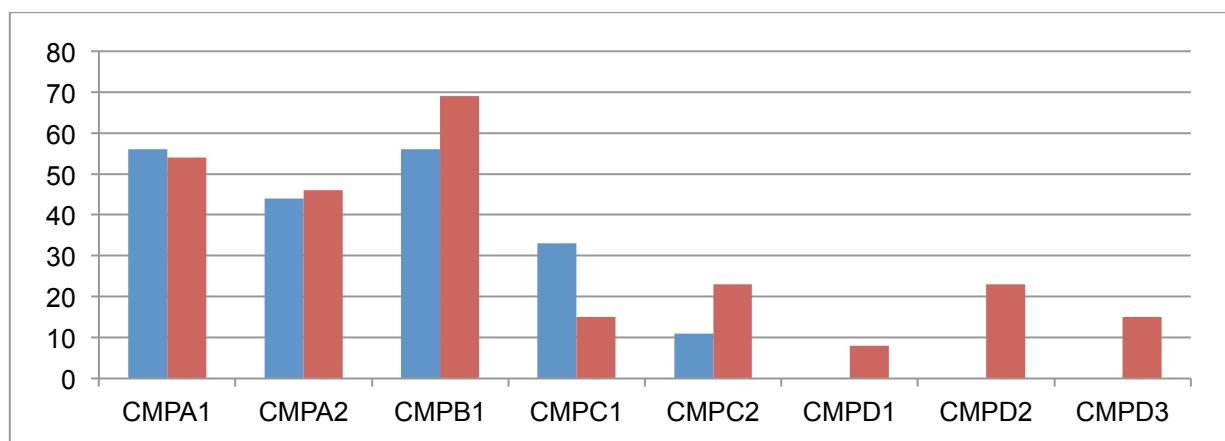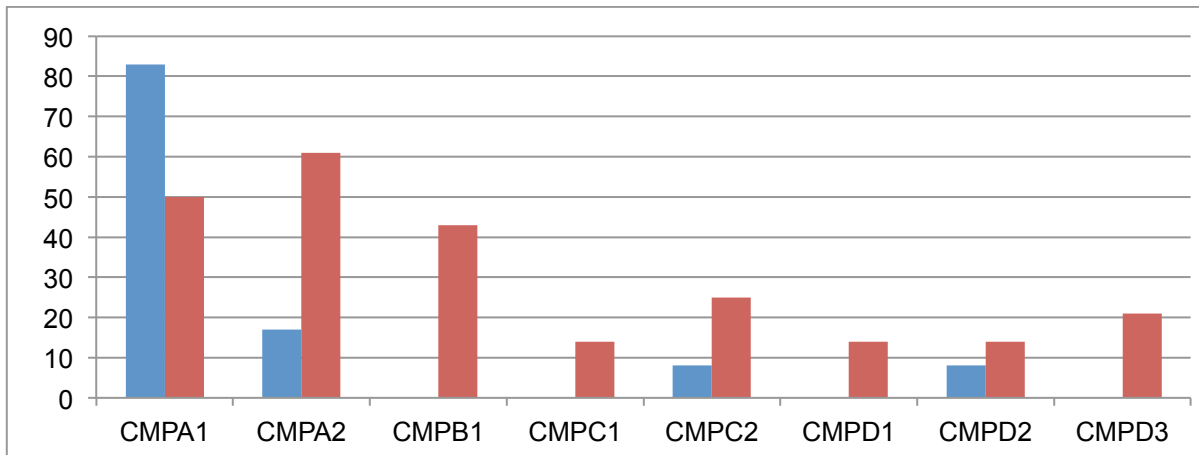
> CMP C2 Progress is being made in transferring the philosophy of collective moral purpose to partner schools and to parents.

> CMP D3 Staff are now able to induct other partnerships in the art of achieving collective moral purpose.

This response shows a clear move into the developing and leading areas of Collective Moral Purpose. How this is having an impact on provision for pupils across the Trust was explored through interview.

Evaluation and Challenge

Overall

This area also shows high levels of gain overall in agreeing with statements in the survey. More people agreed that:

E&C A1 As the extent of the partnership is limited and under the close control of the headteacher and senior staff, the need for processes of monitoring and evaluation is limited.

At first glance this might seem surprising, as the involvement in the partnership has widened between surveys. This was explored at interviews but responses seem to contradict the survey result. Groups are expected to keep minutes of all meetings and report back. In fact several respondents mentioned a need to manage expectations so that there did not become a position where there were either too many initiatives at once or that individuals become overloaded.
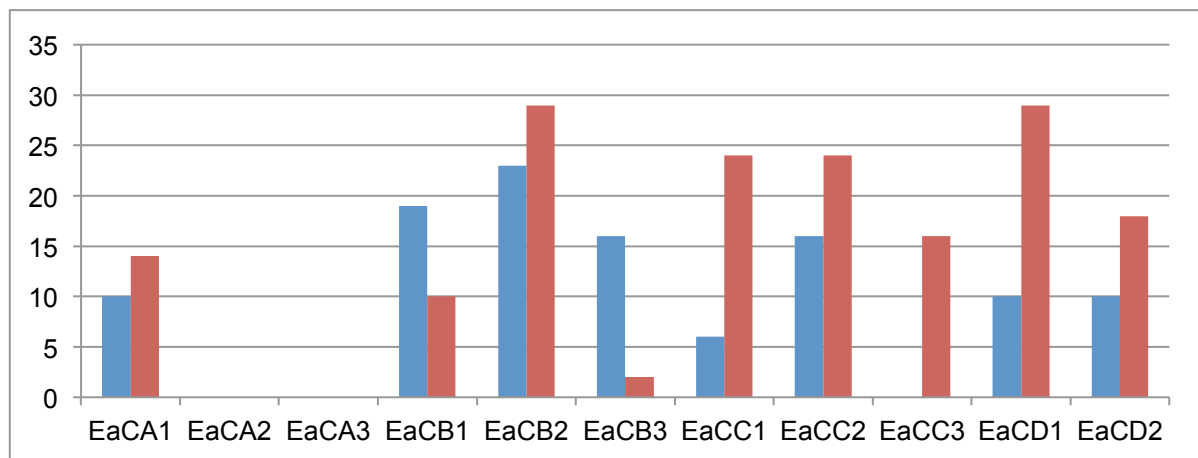
Figure 5.24   2014/2015 Evaluation and Challenge Overall (49 responses)

There is also greater agreement that:

E&C B2 As the social capital (trust and reciprocity) between partner headteachers grows, they begin, somewhat tentatively, to challenge each another and enjoy the benefits.

E&C C1 The skills of monitoring and evaluation of partnership activities are well distributed among staff, as is the skill of maximising benefits whilst minimising transaction costs.

E&C C2 Reciprocal challenge is firmly established among senior leaders.

E&C C3 To improve the quality of JPD activities, Evaluation & Challenge are being developed at all levels of staff, as social capital steadily increases.

E&C D1 The partnership has built the skills of monitoring, evaluating and quality assuring partnership activities into all its leadership development activities and is using this experience to support other schools and partners.

E&C D2 Reciprocal challenge is treated as a key feature of a self-improving partnership and is built into all leadership and professional development.

Heads and Deputies (HD)
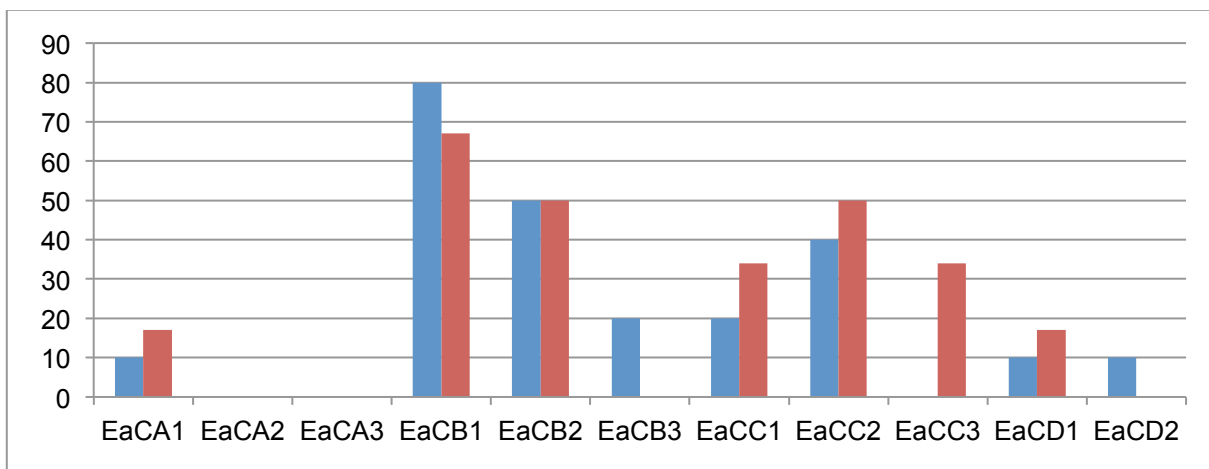
Figure 5.25   2014/2015 Evaluation & Challenge HD (10 responses)

The increases for the HD group are most evident in responses to items C1 – C3 that focus on the distribution of responsibility for partnership activities.

Senior Leaders Team (SLT) and Teachers (T)

This overall picture is consistently reflected across all groups but most markedly among the SLT and Teacher groups, although, as the scale denotes, the proportions making positive responses are lower.
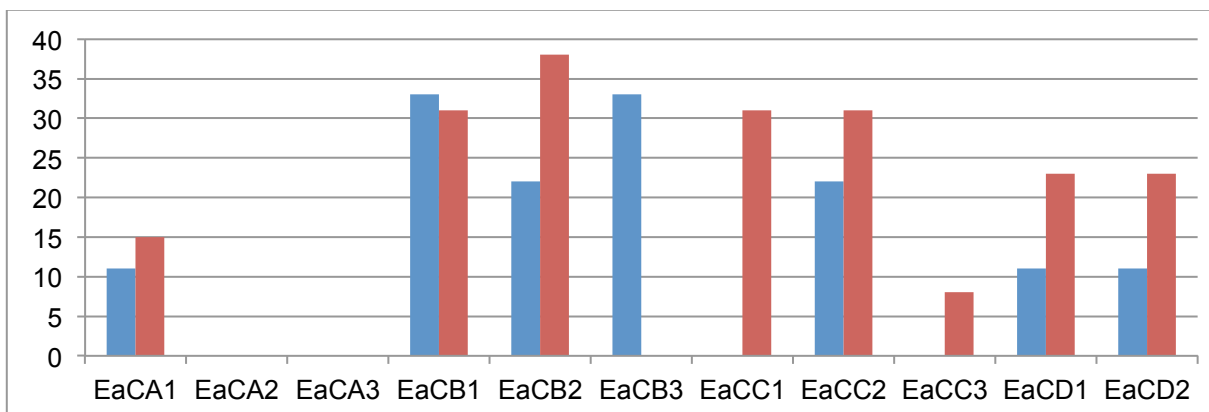
Fig. 5.26   2014/2015 Evaluation & Challenge SLT (13 responses)
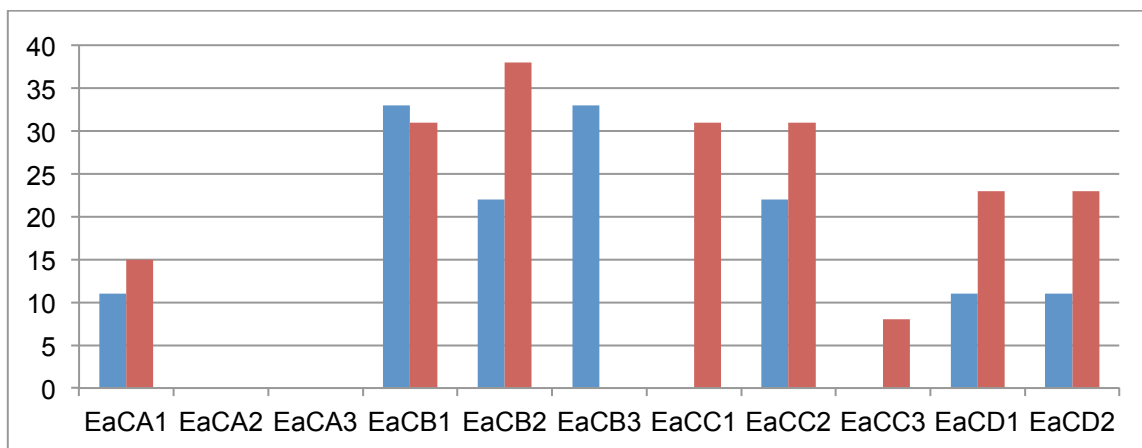
Fig. 5.27   2014/2015 Evaluation & Challenge Teachers (26 responses)

These statements show that a rising proportion of respondents clearly see themselves being in a position to evaluate the improvements being shown across the Trust and the reciprocal challenge is firmly established. Again the schools see themselves as being in a position to support other partnerships.

Alliance Architecture
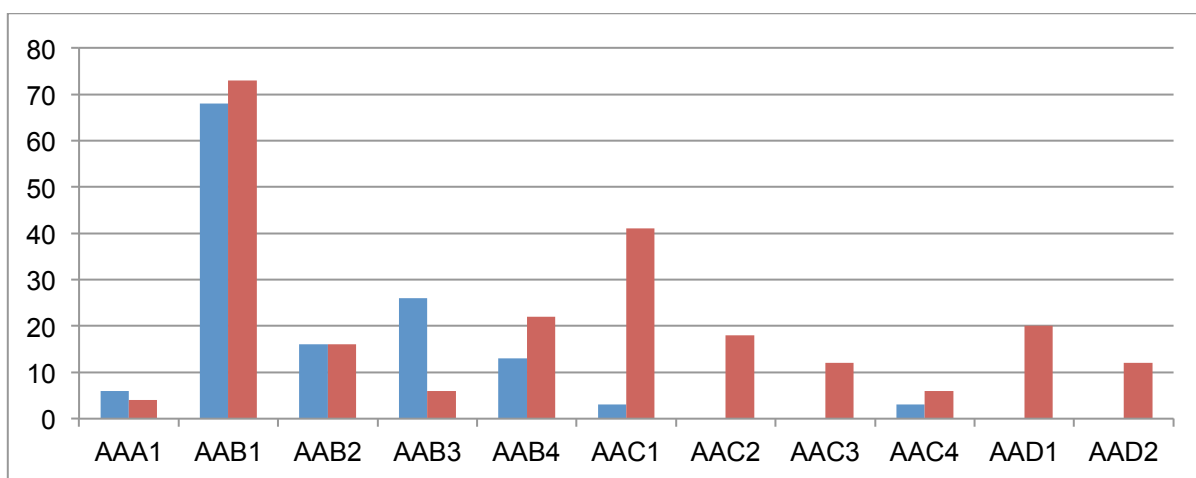
Fig. 5.28   2014/2015 Alliance Architecture Overall (49 responses)

This area also shows a sustained improvement in levels of agreement with the survey statements overall.

The statement that:

AA A1 Most schools in the partnership have limited experience of partnership-building and existing partnerships are shallow.

does show an increase among a small percentage of the HD and T groups, perhaps reflecting

changes to staffing since the first survey, because numbers are low.

The particular areas of growing agreement are:

> AA B4 Attention is being paid to the interactions of the four key strands: JPD, social capital, collective moral purpose and evaluation and challenge.

> AA C1 The partnership has now extended well beyond senior leaders and has become part of the partner schools' normal and natural ways of working at all levels, including governors as well as staff.

> AA C2 Conflicts and problems are now relatively rare and are quickly identified and resolved.

> AA C3 Collective moral purpose means the partner schools have taken ownership of all students in all the schools.

> AA D1 The school knows how to build and sustain effective partnerships, including how to bring a partnership to an agreed end where and when this is appropriate.

> AA D2 The school offers a service (advice and active support) to schools that either embark on new partnerships or find themselves in difficulties with an existing partnership.

Heads and Deputies (HD)
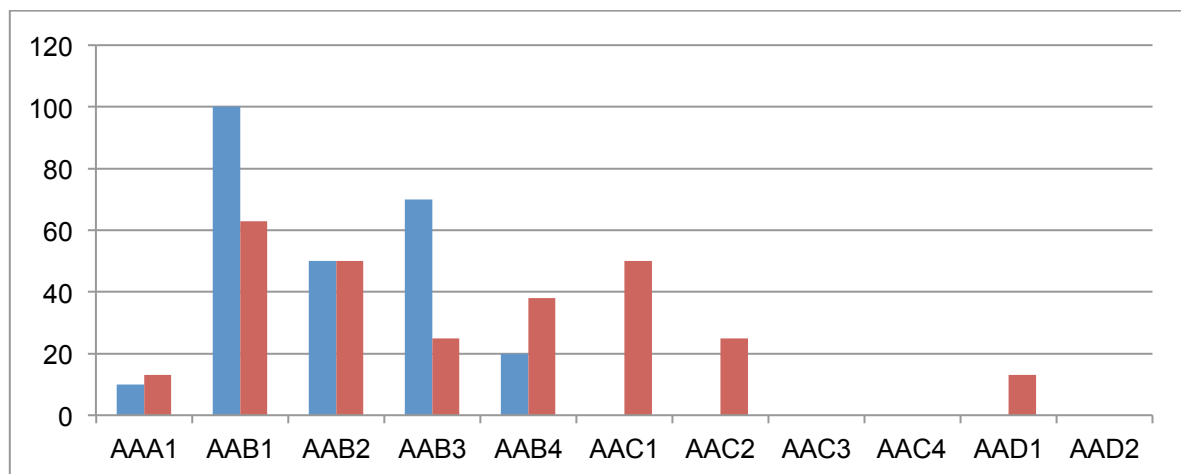
Figure 5.27   **2014/2015 Alliance Architecture HD (10 responses)**

For the HD group, the levels of response show a decline in some items from section B (Developing), perhaps indicating a "job done" feeling, particularly for item B1,

> The partnership is gaining strength.

The improvement for item B4:

> Attention is being paid to the interactions of the four key strands: JPD, social
> capital, collective moral purpose and evaluation and challenge,

might indicate a greater understanding of the requirements of partnership working developed through the process of collaboration.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Teachers (T)
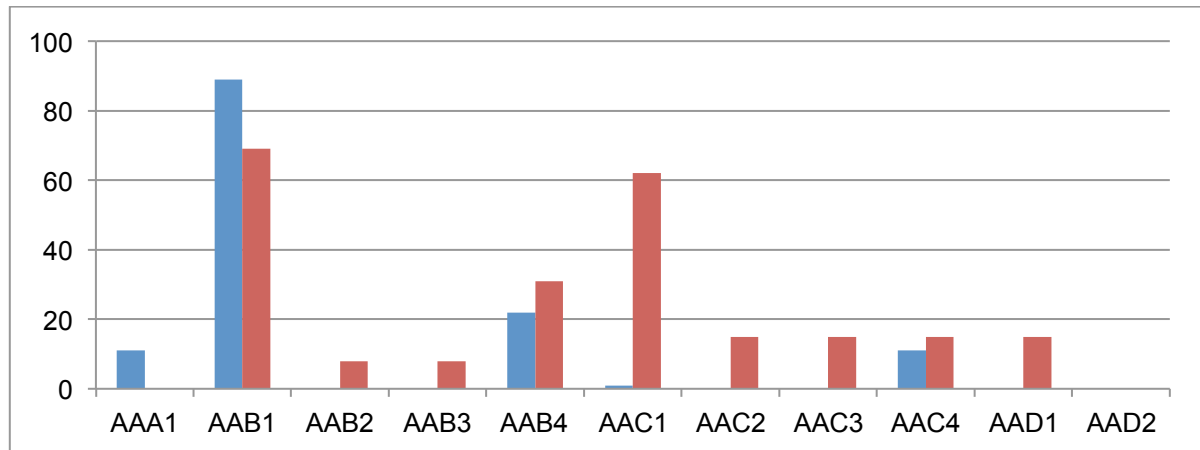
Figure 5.30   2014/2015 Alliance Architecture SLT (13 responses)
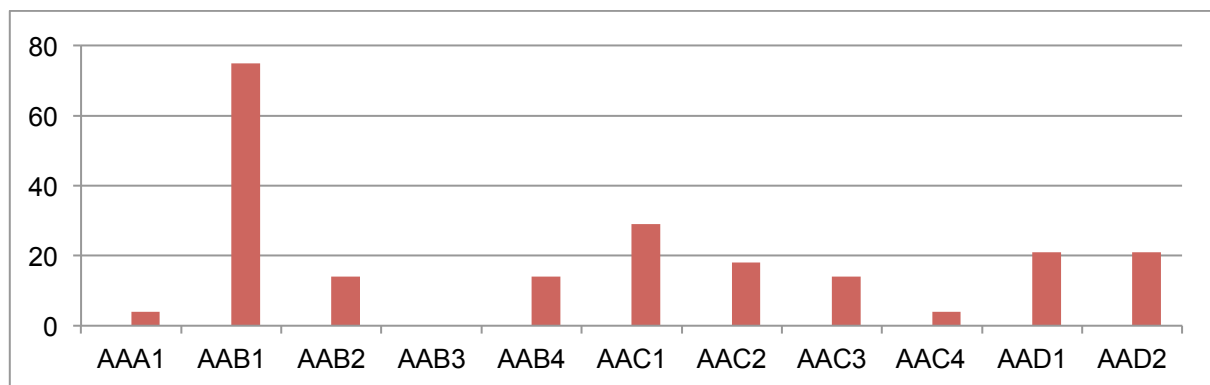
Figure 5.31   2014/2015 Alliance Architecture Teachers (26 responses)

The pattern of response in this area is similar across all groups. It is noteworthy that for items in sections C and D, Embedding and Leading, the improvements are from a previous nil response. From this data a key action was to gather examples of how collaborative capital has developed through the last year, although it is clear that confidence within the partnership had grown. This growth was most clearly shown in the responses of teachers who did not appear able to relate to these statements in 2014.

Questions for Interviews arising from the survey data:

1. How has the Trust changed over the past year? What effect has this had on you as a professional?
2. What examples can you give that involve mutual observation of lessons and coaching, pairs and triads working across schools or of pupils becoming more involved in discussing their learning?
3. The survey shows that you believe that high levels of trust are now established and that mutual benefits are being felt. What examples can you give of how greater openness is leading to improving practice in your school?
4. What examples can you give of how the partnership work that you have done has had a positive impact on pupils' learning in other schools?
5. Is there an example you can give of how being part of the Trust has meant that you have been challenged to improve your practice? Have you been in a position to challenge anyone else?
6. How would you describe the ways in which the ability to work collaboratively has grown in the past year? Can you give examples of what has helped this development and what have been the barriers?

Analysis of 2015 Interview Findings

The questions that formed the basis for semi-structured interviews in 2015 were devised following the analysis of the survey data in order to provide a deeper understanding of some of the information received from the 49 responses.

The responses to each question were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed in the same way as those in 2014. From the initial coding Figure 5.32 gives a numerical picture of the areas that respondents discussed. Although some questions refer to specific strands within Hargreaves' model, where possible, they are presented in a way so as not to lead to specific areas. For example, Question 5 that refers to challenge was often answered in terms of JPD received through meeting and comparing practice rather than as a result of a specific observation and feedback. The links between Evaluation and Challenge and Joint Practice Development for individuals working in a reflective way when sharing practice can be seen in comments from a Year 1 teacher at School D such as:

But we all got on so well and it was that honesty and it was like, OK what did you see, what did you think about this group? We talked a lot about questioning and us as people going into people's classrooms and asking the right questions. For my degree I did a lot of research-based projects towards the end of both of my foundation degree and my BA. I sort of said [unintelligible 00:09:36] you know, we need to really sharpen up on our questions because we're not getting enough information back from the children, from the staff.   So then we re-evaluated our questions. So I think we could be honest, we could be really constructive and we did really enjoy working with each other so it was like mutual respect. But also a bit of fun at the same time.
JPD/E&C (Professional Development)
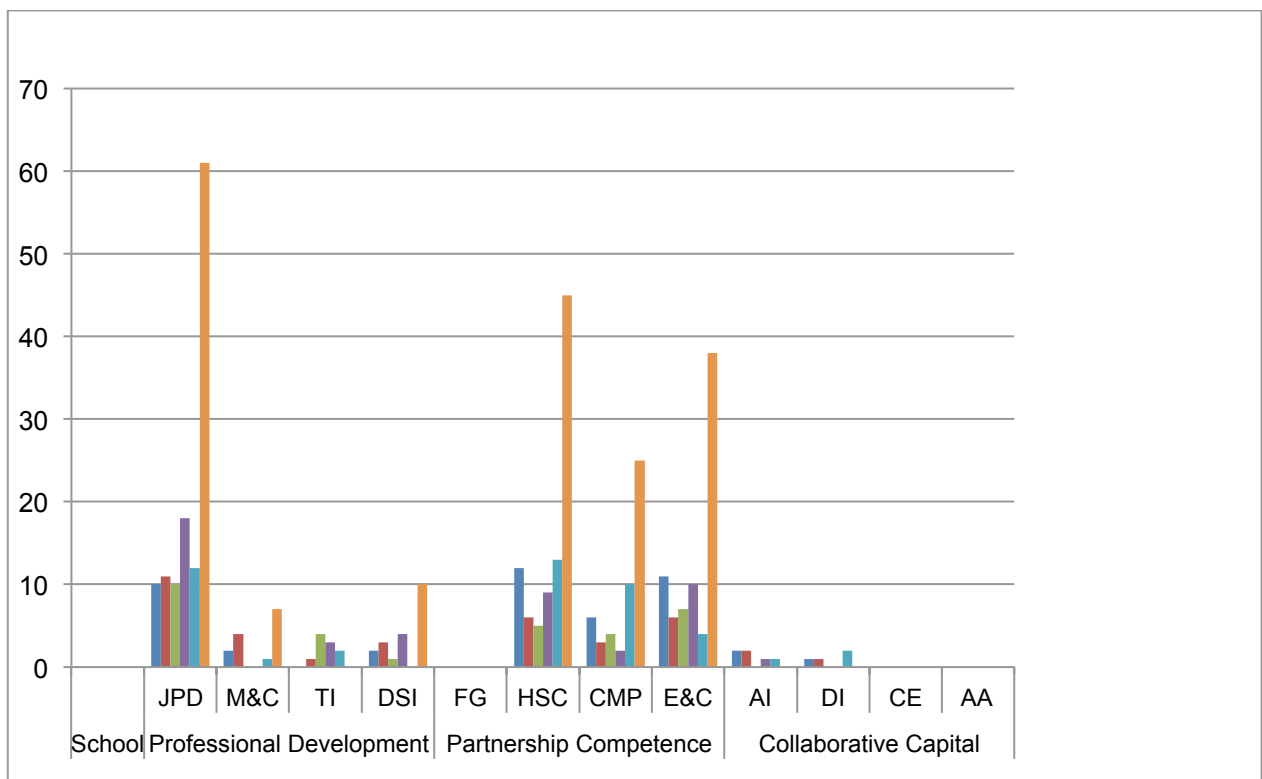
Figure 5.32 Analyses of 20 Interview Responses in 2015 (Each of the first five coloured bars shows responses for individual schools with the amber bar showing the strand aggregate.)

The responses to interviews held in June 2015 were recorded in the same way as that outlined above for 2014. The graph simply shows a numerical count of each time a response was coded as representing a particular strand within the model. In comparing the 2014 and 2015 graphs it is important to note the change in scale. Given that the number of interviewees remained constant at 20, there is a clear implication that they were able to say

far more about how the Trust was working for them. There were some changes in personnel because of movement of staff.

On the Figure 5.32, High Social Capital was the most mentioned strand with 27 codings. In 2015 this had risen to 45 but it was no longer the greatest number. It had been overtaken by Joint Practice Development which has risen to 61 items being coded JPD. Given the steps taken by the Head and Deputy group to widen participation over the year, this is significant feedback on the impact of their actions on the perceptions of those being included, particularly the Teacher group, from one of whom the above quotation is taken. This pattern is more in line with Hargreaves' expectation of the way his model works. However, it was recognised that there was a need to place an emphasis on developing social capital in the initial stages to aid the smooth move to Professional Development in order to develop Intellectual Capital in the second phase more effectively.

The three strands from the Partnership Competence dimension have all increased by similar amounts, maintaining a consistent relationship. Given the change in survey responses to items on Collective Moral Purpose, this might have been expected to move closer to the others. This could be because it is implicit within a lot of Joint Practice Development but without an explicit reference that would trigger a coding. This might also be the case with Evaluation and Challenge in the sense that being exposed to the ways in which other schools work can challenge assumptions but as one interviewee said, they were not yet at the stage where they would suggest that one approach is definitely better than another.

The pattern of responses from each school shows some variation, which probably reflects the range of different experiences by individuals over the year, and it would be misleading to make any judgements about individual schools on the basis of these data.

Analysis by Issues

1. **How has the Trust changed over the past year? What effect has this had on you as a professional?**
2. **The survey shows that high levels of trust are now established and that mutual benefits are being felt. What examples can you give of how greater openness is leading to improving practice in your school?**
3. **What examples can you give of how the partnership work that you have done has had a positive impact on pupils' learning in other schools?**
4. **Is there an example you can give of how being part of the trust has meant that you**

have been challenged to improve your practice? Have you been in a position to challenge anyone else?

From the formation of the Trust in September 2013, the Head and Deputy group has been working closely together to establish the original self-evaluation, plan for the second phase and implement the joint working described above. Their strength as a group is evidenced in several quotations that emphasise how supportive they find working as a group of five headteachers and five deputy headteachers. Here I have mainly quoted headteachers because four of the deputy headteachers have either been on maternity leave, been promoted to head or left their school.

> But also the relationship between the heads and deputies has strengthened further. So there's a lot more trust there between us than there was in the beginning. Because at first we were like, we don't really know you that well. Whereas now, we just tell each other everything. So we're getting a much more realistic picture of the schools and where we're at and the challenges that we're facing because we're not frightened to tell each other, we just tell each other. **HSC/E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School D

For the new headteacher within the group, support is built in. This was in School A that the performance data suggest has the most immediate need for rapid improvement:

> For my leadership it's been really helpful in my new role. Taking on a headship's quite daunting anyway to anybody but for me personally I found that step a bit easier knowing that I was going to have four colleagues who I work incredibly well with already as a deputy, now there to support me in headship. …And I know they're at the end of a phone or I can go and meet with my coach who's one of the heads regularly as well. **HSC/JPD** (Partnership Competence/Professional Development)

But the growth in Social Capital is very much seen as a means to an end as the group works to build their capacity for Analytic Investigation and Disciplined Innovation:

> I think we're looking as a strategic group as heads and deputies at how we can get even more rigorous with one another as that level of trust is growing and growing and growing. You know, where we are really going to put the support and unpick that and how do we know what we're seeing as truth and looking at that. **E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School E

This greater familiarity and trust is reflected in the comments of one individual who has moved from the SLT group to join the HD group. They demonstrate the reciprocity that is growing from the High Social Capital.

> So we've had our curriculum year leaders' meetings throughout the year… We have had collaboration visits so I spent two days at X and then we had a reciprocal team come here. We've done moderations and we've done writing across every year group. **HSC/Reciprocity** (Partnership Competence) Teacher School D

She goes on to relate how three of the schools experienced external moderation of assessments within the Early Years in 2015 and how useful it was to work together to prepare and feedback on the experience. As the survey suggests there was a significant move over 2014/2015 in the growth of Joint Practice Development. This is reflected in her responses to the first question following the two days at X, as mentioned above, which focused on evaluation of learning behaviour and involved an element of challenge. This had arisen from the headteacher and deputy headteacher annual evaluation meeting when School B evaluated their learning behaviour as "outstanding" and had asked a group from the other schools to verify their judgement. The judgement was verified but with some areas of qualification:

> For example, one of the things they flagged up was that whilst the quality of work in our books was amazing and the children took pride in their work … some of our displays were not so good at reflecting high quality. So we had an inconsistency between teachers, between areas of school in the quality of work being displayed. **E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School B

This provides a clear example of how the trust has enabled Evaluation and Challenge to become established and be valued by the recipient but it has also led to Joint Practice Development with School A.

> Well we're really trying to unpick our behaviour policy currently. I know when I spent the two days at B, I was really able to see how they implemented things. So we've been able to use that as a starting point rather than going from a blank page, we've been able to see something that's worked very successfully, have a conversation with their head teacher and bring it over and adapt it in our way. And it's very much … nobody looks at you badly when you do it. You can ring (head) at B and just say we

liked how you did it, talk us through it and she'd ping it over. There's no oh so you've got a problem kind of thing. **JPD** (Professional Development) Senior Leader School C

Although this example comes from a head/deputy interaction, the SLT group also provides an example of individual development. In response to a supplementary question, "Do you feel you benefited as a professional?" one Senior Leader member said:

Completely. When I went to do the maths one, it really changed the way I thought about maths. Just from observing in a another school and from that we've actually stopped setting here at School C because seeing how children learn more when they're not in groups, you know, in set groups, really made me realise how we were holding some children back by setting in maths. **JPD** (Professional Development)

The theme of learning behaviour also arose in another school where the SLT member said:

With our project, it's taken forward how we are getting children to assess their learning so they said, like, in reception the children were really clear on good and super learners. So we've introduced that now to Year One and Year Two because it makes it really simple for children to assess their own learning. So I have really taken not just from going to other schools but having people come here and observe in our school, you know, just the professional discussions that go around those. **JPD** (Professional Development) School E

Although there is a clear allusion to a coaching and mentoring role in the JPD between School A and B above, this part of the JPD process is not always explicit and, perhaps, the following highlights a possible development point.

We haven't done a lot of coaching with others. We've done a lot of meeting with people at a similar level to us. So all maths subject leaders get together and we discuss things and we look at good examples across different schools. So not so much coaching. **C&M** (Professional Development) Teacher School D

Implicit within this comment is that coaching might take place in a hierarchical scenario rather than between peers where it might be more mutual. The role of leadership within the groups is mentioned by two respondents with the implication that Talent Identification might be growing organically as the schools work together. One is in the context of a music concert

that the schools organised for the summer of 2015 to bring children and parents together from the five schools.

> From the word go, she got the music, she organised everybody, she was on the stage conducting, she spoke on the stage… So that made a massive difference and it went ahead and it's been done. So actually, there's two sides to everything. Someone needs to be in charge. Perhaps we need to elect a leader in each group next year. **TI** (Professional Development) Teacher School C

This theme of expertise and leadership is also reflected in the comments from another member of the SLT group when commenting on the effectiveness of subject leader groups.

> I think it's to do with what's on the agenda at those meetings and how they are being run and facilitated by people who have the expertise to do that. So, for example, if we take a moderation of writing, I would want those meetings to be open and honest and run by someone that has a strength in their understanding of children's writing but also in the ability to open up discussions and dialogues. **JPD/TI** (Professional Development) Senior Leader School B

The Teacher Group interviews clearly demonstrate the extent to which all professional staff have now become engaged as part of the Trust. One respondent sums this up:

> It's changed in the fact that a year ago I didn't really know anything about it…whereas now I know we are one of five schools. We had inset day training last September. **DSI** (Professional Development) Teacher School E

The impact of this change of outlook is reflected in the following comment that shows a developing culture of collaborative problem solving:

> Well last year, we did a couple of moderation meetings... really building a relationship I think last year. Because you don't really want to air your dirty laundry to other schools. But we built quite a lot of trust last year so this year we've been a lot closer and we are more open to talk about what's happening in our settings and if we have issues, talking to the other teachers from the other schools and getting some more opinions. .... You might be thinking of the same things and can't think of another solution, but other schools can contribute to that. **HSC/JPD** (Partnership Competence/Professional Development) Senior Leader School C

This is reiterated by another whose brief is to develop enquiry-based learning:

> Well, the biggest change has definitely been the relationships between schools. I think we've been fortunate because we were part of the… network before and we've been quite used to that collaborative learning and those kinds of practices. But because we're now part of the… Academy (Trust) I think we see the same people a bit more frequently so you've… this probably sounds silly but you get to know people straight away. So you're not constantly getting to know someone new and you can kind of build upon those relationships and you can kind of get straight to the heart of whatever it is you want to talk about. **HSC** (Partnership Competence) Deputy School D

The last three quotations from the teacher group convey a clear sense of their increasing engagement and empathy with the concept of collaborative school improvement but this has been having a growing impact on practice as the following response shows.

> Obviously there's a lot going on at the moment with the new curriculum with the change to assessment… So it's been really great that I've been able to see how and actually trial in moderation meetings how to use these different assessment tools and see how they worked. So when we had a recent meeting about how we would change it for the school, I had quite a clear vision because I'd seen how it was being used with other schools. **JPD** (Professional Development) Teacher School A

In another case the JPD is more explicit and involves direct coaching in ICT.

> Yeah, I've helped another school with their infrastructure and to do with their networking whatever. I was actually asked to go in and I've had a chat through and shared my ways, but also helped them, hopefully coach them through seeing where they want to go next. I've definitely been able to do that... I was able to support another school with e safety. **C&M/TI** (Professional Development) Teacher School B

> **Issue 1. How would you describe the ways in which the ability to work collaboratively has grown in the past year? What examples can you give of what has helped this development and what have been the barriers?**

In the case of the first four interview questions, the first one often led to respondents naturally answering elements of the following three with minimal prompting to sustain the conversation. As is clearly shown by the above quotations there is a very positive narrative, which was borne out by all those, interviewed. The final question asked respondents to reflect on the skills of collaboration that they have developed and whether there were any barriers to overcome. One headteacher was able to explain some of the underlying reasons for how the mutual evaluation visits had run so smoothly in most cases. This was based on her previous experience of working within a collaborative group.

> So considering it was the first year, I think it was hugely successful…we went in with here's the protocol, here's how it works. What do you want to explore? We had our joint staff meeting where we got all the teachers together and we talked about what do you want to experience as a visitor, what do you want to experience as being visited? So all the practicalities that had grated and caused irritation during what I remember (previous collaborative), we'd managed from that experience to eradicate all of those. **HSC/E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School D

In terms of barriers, one of those previously alluded to has been changes of staff, particularly at deputy headteacher level and its impact. There is also a strong focus in this quotation on the need to manage expectations of staff whose enthusiasm for collaboration has been so positively affected. It perhaps sounds a cautionary note.

> So you lose the knowledge, so it's then building up that knowledge and that trust from others. It's like everything; it's the time constraint you know. We've had subject leaders meet and they want to meet more frequently and do more and everyone wants to have a concept around their area. Well, that's fantastic, but the logistics of making that happen and the cost of releasing people, bringing in coaches, it just isn't manageable. **DSL** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School D

At a time when recruitment of teachers is problematic, particularly in the south east of England, staff changes cause anxiety both about capacity to collaborate and about maintaining intellectual capital. On the other hand there is clear evidence that the teachers within the Trust are becoming more effective collaborators and benefiting from the opportunity.

> I certainly notice class teachers feeling more confident and more articulate about discussing whatever it is they are discussing. But it is done in a more professional

way. They are looking at pupil outcomes and they are having, you know, real professional discussions as opposed to being side-tracked and really focusing…The deeper level of thinking's definitely there **JPD** (Professional Development) Deputy Headteacher School E.

The development of coaching skills was also cited as underpinning the ability to work collaboratively. In this example, it is coaching leaders which, given the information above about changes in leadership, will be important in sustaining the group's Collaborative Capital.

> From my point of view, my personal coaching of other leaders has been fascinating for me… because also you are coaching someone when you don't necessarily have a full picture of their school. The other people that have developed their skills maybe, I'm thinking finance. I'm thinking of school business managers who have done lots of benchmarking… And governors. Skills of governors have improved throughout the work with the Trust. **C&M/JPD** (Professional Development) Headteacher School A

The examples above were drawn from the comments by headteachers and deputy headteachers who might be expected to have a strategic overview. The issue about time constraints also occurs among the SLT group but they also introduce a new issue, that of aligning systems in the curriculum. In doing so, the leadership skills of influencing seem to come to the fore.

> I had to think about it a bit first. Thinking is this really the way we want to go? What will be the challenges in terms of planning? ... But because I was able to put all the positive things forward everyone was on board straight away. Because it has actually reduced the amount of planning. **DSL** (Partnership Competence) Senior Leader School E

> But the other thing that we've found challenging is assessment and being able to assess and moderate work together when everyone's using a different system. But that's just been this year. So …hopefully, next year when they decide how we are going to be assessing all together in the same way that would be easier. **Disciplined Innovation** (Collaborative Capital) Senior Leader School B

Giving and receiving challenge was frequently mentioned during interviews but the quotation below puts the issues and process in a particularly insightful way.

Not that I think my game needs upping! It does challenge you in the way that you think about things and the way you do things, because everyone does things differently, especially in Early Years. Everyone's provision is different. You'll see someone doing something and think, oh gosh, they're doing it that way I need to make sure I do it that way because it's really good. If they're not doing it in the same way as you, I've challenged them and said why are you doing it that way? … Then people will challenge you as well on the way you do things and it makes you think differently. Because sometimes you get stuck in the way you're doing things and you don't really think why am I doing it that way? And someone says why've you done that? You're like, oh, and you have to think about it and think, oh, actually that's probably not the best way to do it and you change it. I suppose quietly competitive as well. Everybody is. Not in a horrible, I'm going to beat you, kind of way, just like oh, let's see why you're doing it that way because it looks really good and I want to be a little bit …Yeah. **E&C** (Partnership Competence) Teacher School D

Another respondent from the SLT group highlights the double-edged nature of freedom and control in collaborating when she discusses autonomy. Having reiterated how important personal relationships are she then goes on to say:

And being given a bit of autonomy about what each of the groups discuss has been quite good although I have to say that the… group has gone off a bit, does that make sense? So while that autonomy has been great, actually we need to pull ourselves back together and decide what it is we need to spend our time doing. I mean I would absolutely hate it if the heads started saying, "Right, at the…meeting you need to discuss…" It would be horrendous. So they're trusting us and delegating that to us which is great but we've just got make sure that we don't let everyone down and just drink tea and chat… It should be very much whoever feels they have the skill to facilitate that particular meeting based on what's on the agenda, is the one that runs the meeting. **DSL** (Partnership Competence) Teacher School A

Not everyone shares that view about the limitations of autonomy and would like more.

No, I wouldn't say there's any barriers. I think what would be good… is having greater freedom to be able to go and visit schools and actually see things in action. But not just to go for a visit but with a specific aim in mind… **Disciplined Innovation** (Collaborative Capital) Teacher School D

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The importance of working within a common structure is cited by many respondents, particularly from the Teacher group, some of who are new to the process. This is particularly applied to the schedule for meetings that enables teachers to plan ahead and provides deadlines for action. The following respondent having mentioned the above, draws attention to the issue for some teachers of belonging to more than one group and having a professional relationship with a larger group of people.

> I think the barriers are sometimes not knowing some people well enough. So I now say within my… subject leadership I say yes we all know each other very well. With... group not quite as well. And I don't think there's many Key Stage 2 within the Trust… so for some things you're only getting half. **DSL** (Partnership Competence) Teacher School C

The commitment to Collective Moral Purpose is implicit in many of the quotations in this section but it does not always contain the rigour suggested by this teacher who makes clear her view of the longer term, not as a barrier but as a future development in holding schools to account.

> It would be nice if we could go back after doing a review, maybe a term or two terms afterwards, be then asked back into the same school that we went into so that we could then have a look at any practices that they had decided to put in, and it would be nice to see if we've had any influence. And likewise to have schools come into us and see if we've moved forwards... Because it's all well and good saying yeah, give this a go and then never following it up. **Analytical Investigation** (Collaborative Capital) Teacher School D

Summary

From the analysis above, it is clear that a step change has taken place within the Trust and Joint Practice Development (JPD) is becoming firmly entrenched as the major activity within the group. From the outset in 2014/15, opportunities for teachers to learn from each other have been a major priority with a timetable of events and meetings which are appreciated by all teachers at all levels. From the conversations, which were transcribed, this was the highest area of coding which, in itself, is a clear acknowledgement of the success of the strategy devised by the HD Group. There are examples where Coaching and Mentoring (C&M) are taking place but also a suggestion from one respondent that this could be seen as a formal hierarchical process and not necessarily as a peer to peer one which may have

reduced the perception of how embedded it is becoming. Although, initially, Talent Identification (TI) was not addressed in a formal way, for example, through an audit, there is evidence that the skills and expertise of individuals are coming to the fore and being recognised. There is also an acknowledgement by some that this is a positive development. High Social Capital (HSC) has also continued to increase within the context of JPD along with Collective Moral Purpose (CMP) and Evaluation and Challenge (E&C). While HSC is often referred to explicitly by respondents, CMP is more implicit within the conversations between professionals at all levels. There is a great deal of evidence that individuals and schools are very willing to share their practice for the benefit of all. This spirit of working together has also been shared with pupils and parents through the joint summer concert, which took place this year. The Distributed System Leadership within Hargreaves' model is growing and there is evidence of success in the leadership of subject groups and review groups and suggestions by some that this is not universal. The HD Group is aware of this discrepancy of perception.

Evaluation and Challenge (E&C) has been built into the strategy for development by the creation of review groups, made up of a member from each school, who are invited to spend two days in a partner school evaluating an element of practice highlighted from the host school's evaluation. From the interview data, this has involved the development of HSC in a different context for a number of staff. Hargreaves (2012, p. 18) defines E&C as: "The ability of each school to evaluate the quality of education offered by partner schools and to offer challenges to help their practices improve."

There is clear evidence from the interviews of at least one example where this has taken place without the anxiety, feelings of threat or defensiveness that can be associated with challenge when there is a power relationship. This is due to the HSC already established and being grown further by working together supported by the concrete examples of reciprocity now evident.

The E&C context is also widened to include professional challenge provided by the opportunity to see and hear about how different schools go about things. Respondents at all levels display a reflective approach to their own practice when faced with new ideas and there are examples of this leading to changes/improvements in practice. There is only one example where there is a hint of defensiveness in an account about a moderation meeting (p.40). Overall there is openness to new ideas and a willingness to share them.
As Hargreaves says (2012, p. 22), his concept of Collaborative Capital can only grow out of the roots of the interactions between the strands of JPD and HSC. The accounts given by

respondents show very high levels of this kind of interaction, for example between E&C and JPD, and the importance of the growth in reciprocity as HSC has grown to include the majority of teaching staff.

Of the two elements that make up Collaborative Capital, there is strong evidence that Collective Social Capital has been established and growing evidence that Collective Intellectual Capacity is developing positively. The way in which the strategy to widen participation during the academic year 2014/15 has been so successful, suggests that Organisational Capital is effective and the growth of Distributed System Leadership highlighted above can only strengthen what has already been achieved by the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Group. There does not seem to be a linear relationship in the development of Collaborative Capital from its component parts but it appears that strong foundations are being built through the process with the proviso that elements such as Coaching and Mentoring and Talent Identification could be addressed to make them more explicitly part of the process. From a discussion after the interviews took place, there is capacity within the group for this to be achieved. One of the member schools has a strong coaching philosophy that has been modelled by the head. Teachers work in pairs to carry out observations and discuss strengths and areas for development and use coaching to support each other in developing solutions. Careful management of the pairings has improved the quality and consistency of teaching.

Although I have made brief references in this chapter to the lenses described in the literature, in the following chapter I will explore these implications in greater depth and relate the findings that arise to the issues raised by the literature about the role of a school-led improvement.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion - It's All Very Well in Practice but How Does It Work in Theory?

Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to summarise the implications of the findings from Chapter 5, and draw any conclusions that might support groups of schools that seek to collaborate for their mutual improvement. At this stage it is important to remind ourselves of the research questions to ensure that we return to the original purpose of this case study. I will then explore how the findings illustrate or amplify the three theories that form the lenses through which the case is studied and finally, draw any conclusions that may be possible.
The original objective and questions were:

> **The objective of this study is:** To find out how school to school collaboration works in practice within a new academy trust of five primary schools.
> **The main research question is:**
> **To what extent does the formation of an academy trust support school to school collaboration and improvement during the first year of its existence?**
> **The subsidiary research questions are:**
> *How well does Hargreaves' (2012) model of collaboration work in practice?*
> *What are the patterns of Hargreaves' dimensions and strands in operation across the five schools?*
> *To what extent does the development of the collaborative partnership follow the sequence laid down by Hargreaves?*
> *What variations are there in the perceptions of the developing partnership between governors, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers within and across schools with reference to Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1986)?*
> *What evidence is there within the schools' joint evaluation that school improvement has resulted from collaboration?*

From what has been written in previous chapters, particularly in Chapter 3, it could be assumed that the concept of a school-led system for school improvement through collaboration has become an orthodoxy underwritten by central government and influential writers on educational leadership. Some writers such as Chapman and Muijs (2013) have qualified the arguments by analysing closely where gains can be demonstrated and where

there is less evidence. More recently, Croft (2015) has challenged the whole notion of collaboration between schools as a major engine of school improvement. He cites Oates, T.

> Without dismissing the intuitive persuasiveness of the idea that schools may achieve gains through collaboration, Croft finds the theoretical basis for much collaborative enterprise wanting. Collaboration-for-its-own-sake is seen as a passive and somewhat voyeuristic conceit of analysts curious to see how it unfolds in different settings (Croft, 2015, p. 1).

Before proceeding to discuss what the findings suggest about the process and impact of collaboration on the schools in this study, it is perhaps a good time to return to what the term "school improvement" can be construed to mean. This is explored in Chapter 2 but Croft's challenge to collaboration lies in his narrow definition of school improvement as synchronous with learning outcomes in terms of measurable results at the end of each key stage of education. To some extent this represents an over-simplification of the education process as one of inputs and outcomes and he is selective in his reference to Chapman and Muijs who, although they do identify "performance federations" as leading to quicker improvements in pupil outcomes, also show tentative evidence that secondary academy federations show similar effects from the third year of federation. As was stated in Chapter 2, page 16, school improvement through collaboration is necessarily a gradual process. Croft is perhaps premature in rushing to judgement by downplaying the importance of developing cultural links and social capital between schools as essential foundations to sustainable school improvement. David Hopkins defined school improvement as, "a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change" (Wrigley, 2003, p. 29). This emphasises both the learning outcomes referred to by Croft and the leadership development and collegiality that he sees as a separate issue. Given the examples cited above about the time taken to bring about school improvement through collaboration, it seems appropriate to reverse the aspects which Hopkins includes in his definition of school improvement so that the enhanced student outcomes would follow the increasing leadership capacity. While this might be a beneficial process where outcomes are already good, it might be less so where there is an urgent need to improve results in a school which is underperforming, as in the case of School A.

The discussion below will focus largely on the extent to which collaboration has developed school capacity for improvement. As a postscript, it will also address the final subsidiary question about the schools' own evaluation of the improvement achieved. It is interesting to note that the Ofsted Framework of September 2015 has altered the order of the main four

aspects that are judged in measuring the extent to which schools require improvement so that leadership comes first, followed by teaching, then behaviour and well-being and, finally, outcomes in the sense that Croft describes. Indeed the criticism in the following quotation might well be levelled at this case study.

> Research proceeding on this basis does not aim to test the impact of the collaborative school-improvement infrastructure on pupil learning outcomes. Instead, the principal goal is to underscore the importance of collaboration between schools for staff development and support, professional collegiality, and for the maintenance of a particular conception of the public service ethos. The result is confusion around the nature and definition of what should be schools' primary task (Croft, 2015, p. 4).

While it might well be true that there is little research to date on the effectiveness of collaboration in changing outcomes for pupil learning, other than in cases where very weak schools have been partnered with outstanding schools, it does not follow that other efforts at collaboration are self-serving or confused in the way described. It is much more likely that researchers are observing an evolution rather than a revolution as schools take on responsibilities hitherto seen as the domain of LAs.

In taking on the role of LAs, academy chains are assuming the three key functions of the "middle tier" which the NFER team reporting to the Education Select Committee Report in 2013 described as:

- Develop a long term vision and strategy for teaching and learning that moves, beyond compliance and to which all partners sign up
- Develop a framework for school to school support,
- Embed evaluation and challenge (Aston et al., 2013, p. 3).

These three elements are at the heart of a self-improving school system and as Greany said in quoting McKinsey and Company and which was previously quoted on p.19:

> 'Unleashing greatness' requires more than cutting back on government, raising the accountability bar and waiting for improvement to flourish: for example, McKinsey and Co found that while systems focusing on moving from Awful to Good tended to focus half and half on interventions that increased school accountability versus

interventions that build capacity, in systems moving from Good to Great, the split was 78% on capacity building versus 22% on accountability (Greany, 2014, p. 31).

With the proviso that I shall return to at the end of this chapter, the schools involved in this case study are on the journey from good to great and, therefore, the main issue for the remainder of this part of the discussion will be the extent to which they have developed increased capacity for school improvement through collaboration.

A Self-Improving School System: Towards Maturity

Throughout this case study, there has been an unrelenting focus on how effective and accurate Hargreaves' analysis of the components that make up collaboration is in practice. Both in the surveys and interviews, which provide the data for this thesis, they have been the key point of reference. Hargreaves first refers to a "maturity model" in his paper, "Leading a self-improving school system" (2011, p. 8). He outlines the model which when "fully developed and tested" could serve four key functions:

- A guide and support to alliances and partnerships "stepping stones" during their development,
- A set of metrics by which progress in forging and sustainability of alliances and partnerships may be judged,
- A benchmark by which alliances and partnerships may be compared and contrasted,
- A set of success criteria by which policy implementation and outcomes in alliances and partnerships may be judged.

The second and fourth bullet points are the particular focus in this section and led to the development of the three subordinate questions below.

> *How well does Hargreaves' (2012) model of collaboration work in practice?*
> *What are the patterns of Hargreaves' dimensions and strands in operation across the five schools?*
> *To what extent does the development of the collaborative partnership follow the sequence laid down by Hargreaves?*

One of the criticisms levelled by Croft is that collaboration can be a vague process with no underlying theory. Hargreaves' model sets out to provide a hypothesis about how

collaboration between families of schools can develop. In doing so, it provides a language and a scale of measurement to evaluate whether schools are improving the quality of their collaboration and its outcomes in terms of trust, professional development and leadership capacity to bring about mutual improvements. It is undeniable that if, as a result of this process, all that happened was a mutual congratulation society and a mutual sense of well-being, the time and energy spent would be self-indulgent. In the example that forms this case study, there are a number of instances where, as a result of growing Social Capital, Joint Practice Development has improved outcomes in specific areas of schools' practice. An example of this is the improved Early Years practice and governance cited in Chapter 5.

Although there may be times when the model does not follow the sequence outlined in a literal fashion, the linkages between High Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose and Joint Practice Development leading to Evaluation and Challenge have now become implicit in the working of the Trust. There is evidence of this in the interview statements from headteachers, senior leaders and teachers illustrating some of the depth to which these aspects are becoming embedded. From a quantitative standpoint the block graphs in Chapter 5 show a clear growth in most areas and an increasing trend for more strands to move into the developing and embedding levels of Hargreaves' taxonomy, particularly for middle leaders and teachers. The improvements in High Social Capital and Collective Moral Purpose are the key foundations that will enable the collaboration to bear fruit in improved teaching and higher outcomes. Although there are early examples of increased capacity in Early Years and Governance in one school through the process of Joint Practice Development, it remains to be seen where else such gains can be made. From the earlier interviews with headteachers it is clear that the main focus is on developing trust:

> I think we're looking as a strategic group of heads and deputies at how we can get even more rigorous with one another as that level of trust is growing and growing and growing. You know, where we are really going to put the support and unpick that and how we know what we're seeing is true and looking at that. **E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School D

There is also a clear view that trust is not an end in itself but a means to mutual improvement. This statement very much heralds the discussion that I will address at the end of this chapter about the extent of school improvement that is taking place and whether bringing it about by working as a collaborative is always the most effective way. There is a strong sense of obligation to work together and a growing clarity about lines of accountability but at this stage it is too early to come to definitive conclusions about the level of impact.

To conclude, it does seem that the model presented by Hargreaves enables the development of collaborative working to be analysed and tracked effectively by an external researcher. Although in this case it was not being used pro-actively by the schools to evaluate their own journey, there is good evidence that it might be used in this way as it could enable them to measure progress and address weaknesses promptly. The patterns through which the collaboration developed in this case study do raise some serious questions about some alternative models, where hard-edged accountability and challenge through mutual inspection might be the first priorities. What is clear is that, although Hargreaves shows each strand as a separate entity, it is the iterative relationship between them that enables schools to develop Collaborative Capacity. They do not, of themselves, provide a step by step guide to school improvement through collaboration, particularly as there is no explicit reference to improved outcomes. However, they have enabled me to demonstrate that there is a strong commitment to system leadership and building greater capacity at all levels within the group with headteachers as "architects of trust" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 10).

Although the graphs developed from interview data show a marked shift from respondents talking mostly about High Social Capital to one where Joint Practice Development has a much higher profile, I have also identified that Talent Identification and a collaborative culture of Coaching and Mentoring are much less evident. If High Social Capital and improved Collective Moral Purpose are going to enable Evaluation and Challenge to bring about the improvements in the quality of teaching that might lead to improved outcomes, there will need to be a clear recognition of where this capacity lies and a mechanism for supporting individual teachers in practice development. Hargreaves (2012, p. 10) paints an interesting vignette of a Teaching School Alliance where the development of Coaching and Mentoring has been systematically addressed, alongside Lesson Study and Action Research Projects, as an engine of school improvement. This enables the knowledge-transfer and practice improvement that lie at the heart of capacity to improve outcomes. One barrier to a self-improving school system might lie in the comparison between the scenario described above and that previously quoted below, where the advantages of a Teaching School Alliance are absent and limit the resources to develop coaches among teachers:

> It's like everything; it's the time constraint you know. We've had subject leaders meet and they want to meet more frequently and do more and everyone wants to have a concept around their area. Well, that's fantastic, but the logistics of making that

happen and the cost of releasing people, bringing in coaches, it just isn't manageable. **C&M/TI** (Professional Development) Headteacher School D

But it could enable it to develop among headteachers and deputy headteachers:

From my point of view, my personal coaching of other leaders has been fascinating for me… because also you are coaching someone when you don't necessarily have a full picture of their school. **C&M/TI** (Professional Development) Headteacher School B

Or where there is specific expertise, which may be in short supply:

Yeah, I've helped another school with their infrastructure and to do with their networking whatever. I was actually asked to go in and I've had a chat through and shared my ways, but also helped them, hopefully coach them through seeing where they want to go next. I've definitely been able to do that... I was able to support another school with e safety. **C&M/TI** (Professional Development) Teacher School B

There is, therefore, a mixed picture of views about Coaching and Mentoring. From what has been written above, it does seem clear that Hargreaves' model has a great deal to offer schools if they use it pro-actively to plan and evaluate their progress as a collaborative. In doing so, the issue of ensuring sufficient coaching capacity from the outset, could be addressed. The initial successes cited in the first round of interviews in supporting Early Years practice grew from some specific expertise among the deputy headteachers who were able to offer advice and show how effective settings could be managed and then pay follow up visits to support implementation. The deputy headteacher group has traditionally been expected to be able to provide exemplary teaching in primary schools and would seem to offer a solution to the resource issue highlighted above as the development of a coaching culture could be seen as a natural part of their role. There is readily available guidance based on research to support them in doing this such as that provided by the NCSL (Linden, 2011), CfBT (Lofthouse, 2010) or describing specific practical models such as Thomas does with STRIDE (2010). Indeed, as the quotation below illustrates, advocates of coaching can provide evidence that it is cost effective.

Coaching can be seen as a way of streamlining costs for schools, as it offers a cost-effective, internal and personalised approach to professional development, rather than more costly, externally provided CPD, with its limitations of lack of tailored

personal focus and potential mismatch to individual skills and needs (Linden, 2011, p. 19).

This could enable a more structured approach to making the best use of the available talent by training coaches and mentors, which would ensure that the shortcomings of the "sharing good practice" model are avoided and that specific improvements can be targeted. There are many groups of schools coming together to collaborate for mutual improvement but from my observations as a School Improvement Adviser; very few make good use of Hargreaves' work. It might not be sufficiently accessible without some mediation or it may need to be abbreviated to give a less complex overview, but a refreshed model would have much to offer schools today. A version that is specifically focused on primary schools that are not part of a Teaching School Alliance would, in this case, have been more accessible in the sense that it would have more immediacy. From the evidence gathered during this study, a refreshed Hargreaves' model would also benefit from the addition of more specific guidance about pre-requisites, sequencing of development activities and possible pitfalls of using collaboration as a means to school improvement. Previous experience of the process can be a great asset as this quotation illustrates:

> So considering it was the first year, I think it was hugely successful…we went in with here's the protocol, here's how it works. What do you want to explore? We had our joint staff meeting where we got all the teachers together and we talked about what do you want to experience as a visitor, what do you want to experience as being visited..? So all the practicalities that had grated and caused irritation during what I remember (previous collaborative), we'd managed from that experience to eradicate all of those. **HSC/E&C** (Partnership Competence) Headteacher School A

Although I have cited examples of challenge leading to improvement where schools have invited support, for example with Early Years, Governance and display of high quality outcomes, these mostly relate to one of the schools within the Trust. I have previously mentioned the RAG (Red, Amber, and Green) Meetings that the schools hold annually to make each other accountable, using self-evaluation against the Ofsted Framework criteria. I shall return to these in the postscript at the end of this chapter with a further discussion about the place of Evaluation and Challenge. Hargreaves points to the need to use "acknowledged failure" as a springboard to becoming more effective as Disciplined Innovators. He quotes a medical example from Atul Gawande (2007) about firstly the "willingness to recognise failure and then a determination to seek a solution rather than paper over the cracks." (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 25)

Communities of Practice

As I intimated in the introduction to Chapter 3, Communities of Practice appear to be a fact of life in Primary Education that can influence collaboration for better or for worse, depending on the extent to which there is a shared culture. As Wenger (2002, p. 51) is at pains to point out, this means that they must be "cultivated". There is a wealth of evidence that, over the second year of my observations, the criteria set out for successfully shepherding the various groupings of teachers so that they can work as Communities of Practice have been successfully applied.

The HD Group established a "rhythm" for each community of teachers by drawing up a timetable for the year. Many of the interviews capture the feeling of familiarity and excitement that has grown over the year and, in most cases, there is a growing sense of the value of these interactions. Teachers are bringing their previous experience to bear and there are positive examples where practice is being questioned in the light of working with others, even to the point of one school moving from setting in mathematics to organising learning in mixed ability classes. There is also evidence of informal leadership developing with comparatively junior colleagues able to bring expertise learned in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to bear. There is a real sense in which the energy created and the continuity enabled can contribute strongly to Joint Practice Development, although the extent to which this will make a direct contribution to school improvement will depend on the capacity of senior leaders to harness and maintain direction as the following quotations from Chapter 5 demonstrate.

> I certainly notice class teachers feeling more confident and more articulate about discussing whatever it is they are discussing. But it is done in a more professional way. They are looking at pupil outcomes and they are having, you know, real professional discussions as opposed to being side-tracked and really focusing…the deeper level of thinking's definitely there. **JPD** (Professional Development)

> And being given a bit of autonomy about what each of the groups discuss has been quite good although I have to say that the … group has gone off a bit, does that make sense? So while that autonomy has been great, actually we need to pull ourselves back together and decide what it is we need to spend our time doing. **DSL** (Partnership Competence)

No, I wouldn't say there's any barriers. I think what would be good …is having greater freedom to be able to go and visit schools and actually see things in action. But not just to go for a visit but with a specific aim in mind… **Disciplined Innovation** (Collaborative Capital)

They do show some variability in outlook with the first showing some positive shoots in terms of school improvement, the second perhaps a need for closer control and the third a stronger sense of purpose. To provide balance these statements need to be put in perspective with others in Chapter 5 as they are outweighed by the positive ethos that the pro-active formation of Communities of Practice has created, which includes some informal Evaluation and Challenge.

Cultural Theory and Collaboration

The ideas explored above about the ways in which a group of schools can begin the journey of collaborative school improvement do raise some of the issues highlighted by Cultural Theory. This addresses the tensions raised by the apparent paradox between freedom and control and the solutions that combine them to achieve specific purposes. The example of Arsenal Football Club quoted in Chapter 3 has a particular relevance here. The creative solution which arose from the tension between the council, the club and the community illustrates how effective the interaction between the hierarchy, the individual actor and the solidaristic element can be in providing a solution, albeit a "clumsy" one. In the example of this case study, although there are individual schools and a growing community of teachers, the hierarchical player is notably absent at a macro level. Although the LA offered to play this role, it was rebuffed and, therefore, the energies of the group may not have been sufficiently focused where they were most needed as the priorities were seen more in terms of developing collaboration than in urgently improving underperformance. The nominal hierarchical actor in the school scenario is the office of the Regional Schools Commissioner but at no time during the study were any of the schools contacted about the patterns of performance shown in Chapter 4 in Table 4.1. Without this top down pressure, each individual school has tended to benefit in its own way from the collaboration but there has been no clear overall priority. The evidence cited in Chapter 4 and expanded below suggests that this has been to the detriment of the narrow definition of school improvement. The hierarchical actor could have focused the Trust's efforts to find a shared solution to the issues faced by School A but its absence allowed a more generalised focus on collaboration to prevail. As the Postscript below suggests, this is now being realised but at a slower pace than the regulatory framework created by Ofsted would require.

In the context of creating a Trust, there has been a collaborative initiation phase so that the necessary practical and legal provisions can be put in place to gain academy status. This involved a period of consultation with employees and with the parents. The small amount of evidence gleaned from interviews does suggest that for some members of teaching staff, the reality of being part of an academy trust did not immediately become apparent but has grown as they have experienced the launch event and started to work with colleagues. Working in a collaborative does not require that schools become academies and not all of the examples quoted by Hargreaves have left LA control. Headteachers and deputy headteachers largely led the initial development work during the first year of this study with participation from Early Years practitioners and those responsible for outcomes in core subjects who took part in moderation exercises. Both the initial survey responses and the interviews show clearly that the extent of wider knowledge and involvement was limited.

The move to deeper, more egalitarian or "solidaristic" ways of working has been fostered during the second year of the Trust with some of the effects highlighted in Chapter 5 and discussed above. This has raised some of the tensions reflected in the quotations, where there is a very egalitarian approach within the working groups of teachers. There are examples where it has worked very effectively, with talented individuals naturally assuming leadership roles, as in the example of the music concert. There are also examples where individual groups of highly reflective professionals are providing challenge in an informal way and there is development of practice in pedagogical skills such as questioning and the organisation of mathematics in one school. The cross school visits have also led to some challenge and reciprocity as in the example of display, which appeared to act as a learning experience for the observers as well as the observed.

The development of Communities of Practice is building directly on this social or "solidaristic" layer of collaborative working, notwithstanding the hints by some participants that they might welcome a stronger hierarchical lead. This certainly suggests that the Trust is high on the group dimension of the grid drawn up by Hood (Hood, 1998, p. 9) containing, as it does, some good examples of distributed leadership. The interaction between hierarchical and egalitarian elements is illustrated by the changes from setting for the teaching of mathematics referred to above. This may have arisen from the groups of middle leaders acting as a Community of Practice but to achieve a whole school change will have required leadership from the headteacher and deputy headteacher. This is in stark contrast to the example previously cited in Chapter 3 where the senior leadership hierarchy stifles innovation beyond the freedom to change a worksheet. Although the groups are all expected

to conduct meetings with an agenda and to take minutes, the interview responses suggest that they are seeing the opportunities to meet as an important part of their professional development

One aspect that arises from the first round of interviews was the extent to which those taking part felt that there are shared values among the schools upon which such a decentralised approach to school improvement with "professional learning communities" will depend. One advantage of this approach might lie in the sustainability of the Trust where it does not depend on any one charismatic individual for its leadership. There is a resonance with what Rowan (1990) calls a modality of "professional controls" where there is broad consensus about good pedagogy. He goes on to highlight the importance of coaching and facilitation in achieving this, an idea that is well aligned with that of Hargreaves above.

Hargreaves' model has enabled this case study to provide an analysis of what has gone well in developing collaboration within the Trust while at the same time helping to identify what might be needed to make it even more effective. Now that the focus has moved from developing High Social Capital to Joint Practice Development, the need to identify where individual and school strengths and weaknesses can be found is important. This will enable leaders to put in place systematic support for transferring knowledge between schools by using talented individuals alongside coaching and mentoring to ensure that development is targeted where it is needed most. A coaching culture seems most likely to achieve this without the negative impact of creating labels such as Outstanding and Requires Improvement that would be likely to result in barriers to the smooth flow of knowledge and a diminution of trust.

Postscript

To return the original research question:

> *What evidence is there within the schools' joint evaluation that school improvement*
> *has resulted from collaboration?*

There has been a plethora of evidence gathered through the surveys and interviews in this case study that collaboration between the five schools in the academy trust has developed very positively and that there has been a decisive shift in focus from the nurturing of High Social Capital to the development of Joint Professional Development. There are instances of changes in practice as a result of the interactions between groups of teachers, intended to improve teaching and eventually, outcomes. The study has covered two academic years in order to be able to make comparisons at different points in the development.

Notwithstanding the diminishing resources that schools in England are receiving and the rapid pace of change in the curriculum and assessment that some respondents allude to, most of the data about collaboration points in a very positive direction.

In this final section I will return to my question about the extent to which school improvement has followed the collaboration. Hopkins highlighted the two planks of improvement as capacity and outcomes. While the growth in leadership capacity has been well illustrated by the examples above, there are very few that refer to outcomes. In outlining the sample in Chapter 4, I quoted the Ofsted judgements on the five schools. School A was judged to be Good, School B was also judged as Good, School C remains with an out-dated judgement of Satisfactory, School D and E were judged as Outstanding.

Since becoming academies none of the schools has been inspected by Ofsted but the dates of the previous inspections range from seven to three years ago. There have also been changes to Ofsted Frameworks over the years with the latest iteration operating from September 2015. These Ofsted Reports are no longer valid as becoming an academy automatically leads to the creation of a new school.

However, I began this chapter with a short introduction about outcomes as a measure of school improvement and have constructed the table below to show how these have changed over the past three years. I have taken three key indicators, the Phonic Screening results from Year 1, the Key Stage 1 results and the Key Stage 2 results in reading, writing and mathematics combined, which add to those quoted in Chapter 4.

| School	Year	A	B	C	D	E
Phonic Screening Year 1	2013	69.5%	71.7%		80%	87.8%
	2014	56.6%	91.4%		74%	67.8%
	2015	34%	93.3%		79%	73%
Key Stage 1 Reading L2+	2013	78.4%	79.7%		95.4%	92%
	2014	98.2%	90.7%		96.7%	98.9%
	2015	87.5%	93.1%		92.0%	92%
Key Stage 1 Writing L2+	2013	71.9%	81.4%		95.4%	88.5%
	2014	92.9%	88.9%		95.6%	94.4%
	2015	82.1%	93.1%		89.2%	88.6%
Key Stage 1 Mathematics L2+	2013	80.7%	91.4%		95.4%	95.4%
	2014	87.5%	94.4%		98.9%	98.9%
	2015	87.5%	93.1%		95.4%	100%
Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Mathematics Combined L4+	2013	43%	82%	78%		
	2014	67%	76%	74%		
	2015	61%	92%	79%		

Table 6.1 Phonic Screening and Key Stage results from the sample schools

As Table 6.1 shows there are a variety of outcomes among the sample schools and it would not be appropriate to attribute any of these results to the membership of the Trust, as there has not been sufficient time for results to be influenced in a significant way. School B appears to be on an upward trajectory in most respects and this reflects comments from interviews about Early Years and Governance. Schools D and E are sustaining high outcomes at Key Stage 1 although results for Phonic Screening are more variable. School C is working hard to improve outcomes so that they reach national averages. School A appears to perform less well with a very low result for Phonic Screening in 2015 and very low outcomes at the end of Key Stage 2 over the three years, in fact it appears to have declined. The Department for Education has set a Floor Standard for schools at Key Stage 2 of 65% attaining Level 4 (the expected level) in reading, writing and mathematics combined. In order to fall below the standard, a school must also fall below the median value for progress between Key Stages 1 and 2. Although I have only quoted attainment outcomes above, School A also does not meet national progress requirements. For this reason, if it was a school within a LA, as the key hierarchical actor it could have created a package of challenge and support from the Trust with a clear action plan, an annual Leadership Review and half termly Review and Challenge Meetings. The support would come from consultancy in English and mathematics and additional leadership consultancy at no additional cost to the school. Although Ofsted inspectors judged the school as Good in 2011, it would be unlikely to sustain that grading in 2016 unless there are rapid improvements. This does raise

a question about the limitations of school to school collaboration as a means of rapid school improvement where the conditions of Cultural Theory, the interaction of the hierarchy, Trust and individual school, are not present. Although much has been achieved to develop capacity within the Trust, when immediate and sustained action is needed, is it sufficient?

Each November the Trust holds a RAG Meeting where each school presents its own self-evaluation for scrutiny by the other members. This is a formalised process and the evaluations are based upon the criteria for inspection in the latest Ofsted Framework. The information is presented as a written text and in diagrammatic format as a "wheel".
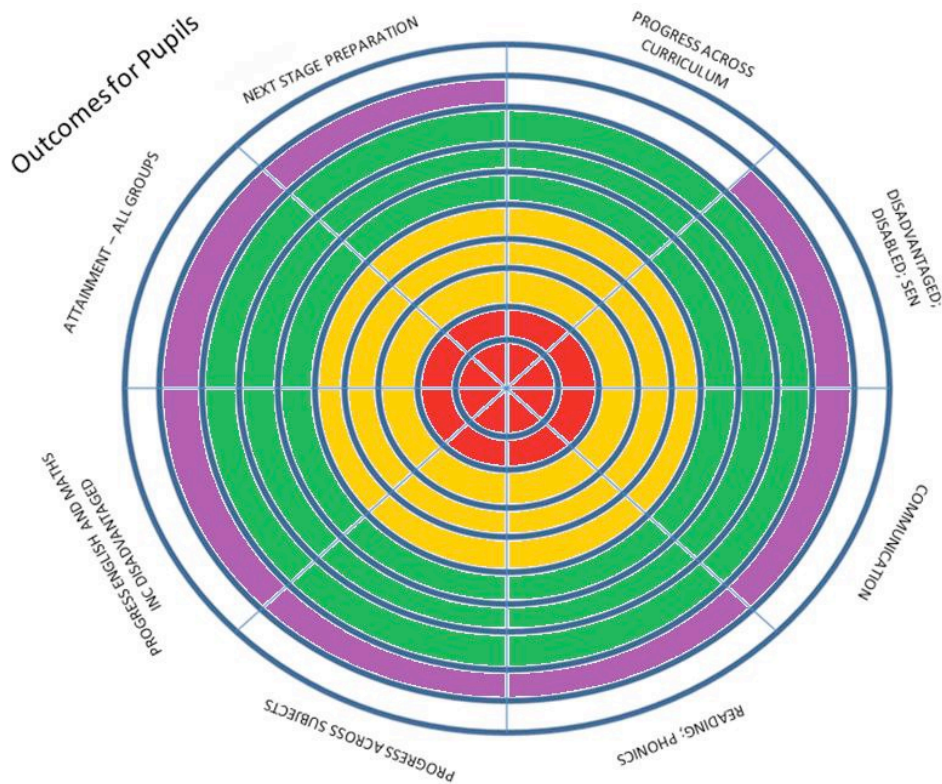
Figure 7.1 An Example of an Evaluation Wheel

Figure 7.1 has been chosen as purely illustrative of the process. If a school could only complete the inner two rings in red, its self-evaluation would be that outcomes in that area would be Inadequate. If it moves into the amber area but not the green, it would be evaluating outcomes as Requiring Improvement. The green rings signify Good and the purple Outstanding. Papers are circulated well in advance so that colleagues have time to prepare challenging questions to prompt deeper reflection. Minutes are taken so that proposed actions can be recorded. Although this is a robust process where schools are performing well, where there is a significant issue it is likely that it would need to take place more often than annually.

Following the RAG Meeting in November 2015, the four heads visited School A as a matter of urgency to construct a package of support to address the issues raised by the outcomes. It remains to be seen whether such a level of support and challenge can be maintained until outcomes improve. Unless they can, the quotation from Croft on page 119 of this chapter could well be prophetic. To that extent the answer to the question at the beginning of the section must be that it is too early to say but that there is an appetite and a commitment to ensure that improvement does result in the near future. It is apposite to return to Greany's (2014) point in Chapter 2 where he points out that where school systems are moving from a weak position to a good one the balance between capacity building and intervention was 50/50 whereas for those moving from great to good it is more likely to be 80/20 in percentage terms. The need for a greater focus on intervention will be a test of the newly developed capacity to lead improvement.

At the End of the Day When All's Said and Done

The original research question at the outset of this case study was:

To what extent does the formation of an academy trust support school to school collaboration and improvement during the first year of its existence?

From the evidence gathered over 2014 and 2015 there is little mention of the Academy Trust, indeed, for some members of staff its reality had only begun to become realised at the time of the second interviews in June 2015. Anecdotally, during a visit to one of the headteacherss involved during December 2015, she commented that at least she did not have to worry about becoming an academy. For many primary schools this has become a more focused issue since the return of the Conservative government following the General Election in May 2015. The manifesto contained a commitment that all schools will become an academy by the end of this Parliament in 2020. To that extent, the group of schools, which form the content of this case study, are pioneers at the frontier of a new era in school improvement.

As I outlined in Chapter 2, Robert Hill (2012) had concluded that the harder edged accountability that comes with belonging to a multi academy trust had been found to have a greater impact on the quality of school improvement than less formal linkages. He acknowledged that the evidence for this was limited and that to adopt a national approach based on the academy model will require a deep maturity on the part of schools. The growth of primary academies has been slower than that in the secondary sector. In September

2013, there were 63% of secondary schools that had become academies and only 13% of primary schools. The HMCI Report for 2015 shows that in the LA in which the case study schools are located, there are now 18% of primary schools as academies. This growth is likely to continue as the Department for Education has declared an intention to issue a Green Paper on the academisation of all schools in early 2016.

The original commitment made by all of the schools in the Trust when they became academies has provided them with a clear focus on developing the framework for collaboration that this study has demonstrated. This has been sustained despite leadership changes at headteacher and deputy headteacher level. Although it might be argued that having taken the step of forming the Trust, there is no choice but to be fully committed, no evidence has been forthcoming that there have been any doubts by senior leaders. At the most recent RAG meeting, it was made clear that as an academy trust, there is an obligation to find the capacity to fully support School A on its road to improving outcomes. It is possible to suggest that without the commitment of academy status, collaboration might not have developed so quickly but that may be something of a chicken and egg argument. Without the commitment, academy status might not have happened. The case study has not been definitive in answering that question but it could be fair to say that, faced with a need for concerted and immediate action, the work achieved by the Trust has placed it in a far stronger position to bring about school improvement than it would be otherwise.

The evidence strongly supports the contention that the Academy Trust has supported collaboration with some less certainty about how this has led to improvement of a sustainable nature that will impact on outcomes. There are some positive indications that changes are being made to individual and school practice as a result of the framework established by the Trust that could lead to significant improvement in teaching and outcomes. The two year timescale in the question is perhaps more symptomatic of the limited scope of the case study than a realistic expectation that the answer would be fully affirmative. As the literature has shown there have been attempts in the past to develop collaborative working to support school improvement that have not been sustained but few that have achieved the depth of mutual learning described in this case study. As Fullan said:

> Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching... The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things (M. Fullan, 2010, p. 67).

To misquote Matthew Arnold and to partially agree with Croft, "Collaboration is a good horse but it must be ridden somewhere!"

Footnote

On 14th November 2016, the Trust held its fourth RAG Meeting with headteachers and deputy headteachers presenting their evaluations for the previous academic year. School A was able to present figures that showed that outcomes for Phonics Screening at Year 1 had improved to 77% from 34%. At the end of Key Stage 2 results for the new assessments in Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined reached 51% which is compared to a national average of 53%. At 11.30 that morning the headteacher of School A received a telephone call to say that an Ofsted inspection would take place on the following day. At 11.40 on the same day, a similar phone call was received by the headteacher of School B. Both inspections duly took place on 15th November. Both schools received a judgement of "Good", thus sustaining previous judgements but against more rigorous frameworks. "Good" in Ofsted terms covers a broad spectrum of schools and close reading of the reports implies that School A is at the lower end, while School B narrowly missed being judged "Outstanding".

During 2016 School A had received two monitoring visits from representatives of the Regional Schools Commissioner and one of these included discussions with headteachers from other schools in the Trust. A decision was taken that no further action was needed, implying that the pace of improvement at School A was deemed sufficiently rapid.

Although these events took place beyond the scope of this case study, they do complete the picture by giving more evidence about how school to school collaboration can result in improvement. It also illustrates the growing role of Regional School Commissioners as the hierarchical player although, in this case, that role can only be seen as reinforcing the need for improvement.

The Implications for Schools, Policy and Practice and Research

Implications for Schools

Developing trust within partnerships.

From the findings of this research and the discussions above it is possible to draw some implications that might be usefully considered by schools entering into collaborative arrangements. For collaboration to be successful in terms of both improving leadership capacity and outcomes for children, there have to be high levels of trust at the levels of headteachers, deputies, senior leaders, teachers and, by implication, governors. This is clearly illustrated by the graph of responses to the initial set of interviews in this study (Figure 5.12). It is also resonated in the responses themselves where: "School leaders model trust, both in their relationships within their own school and with the leaders of schools with which they are in partnership" (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 13).

Areas of strength to address partnership needs. Do others agree?

Are there any particularly talented individuals within the staffing of the partnership who can be deployed to address specific development areas?

The second and third areas which arose through the interview data was that of having a clear idea of what strengths individual members can offer and what they are seeking in terms of support. There are examples in the study where this is to the fore, such as in Early Years and the gains made by School B and where there is recognised expertise in leading the joint music event. However, in some of the interviews with subject leaders, there was evidence that this was less well understood. This would suggest that an audit and verification by headteachers at the outset could save time and be profitable in selecting project leaders. This could be developed into a clear plan so that it can be shared with all stakeholders to establish a clear sense of direction, priorities and how time will be deployed.

Coaching and Mentoring. Collaborative Skill Development
Is there a common approach across the partnership?
Is there an over-arching partnership plan for developing the skills of collaboration among staff?

Hargreaves (2012, p. 10) highlights the importance of coaching and mentoring as key strategies in enabling the transfer of knowledge and skills that underpin successful Joint Practice Development. Evidence from this study suggests that the schools involved did not see this as a high priority. This is linked to the issue of talent identification discussed above. Although the study did find examples of successful knowledge transfer, there remain some instances where opportunities appear to have been missed. The deep listening and questioning skills embodied in effective coaching are key to effective knowledge transfer and the development of new knowledge. They also promote trust and possibly avoid the divisions between expert and novice suggested by some interviews.

Joint Practice Development within the Partnership

This follows logically from the above points about the need for clarity about individual strengths and areas for development and the resources that the collaborative/partnership can offer. Although School A appears to have benefited considerably from membership of the Trust, the time taken to achieve this might have been shorter had it been planned for at an earlier stage. It was only after two years that the Trust headteachers drafted a plan with built in support.

Implications for Policy and Practice

From what has been written about this study, it is clear that being part of a collaborative structure has benefited the members, notably Schools A and B but that improvements for School A only came about when High Social Capital and Joint Practice Development had become part of the Trust's culture along with a sense of Collective Moral Purpose. Although the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) set out plans, "to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership through school-to-school support and peer-to-peer learning," progress in this direction has been slow. Earlier I have quoted Greany's analysis (2014) of the contradictory policies at work. This is echoed by Ainscow (2015) who argues:

> that these difficulties arise from policy contradictions, not least in relation to pressures created by the emphasis on competition, high stakes testing and accountability procedures (p. 159).

It is interesting to note here that the timing of the Ofsted inspections (accountability procedures) was a significant element in the "happy ending" to this case study. Had it come

a year earlier, the impact could have been far more destructive, both for School A and for the Trust.

Ainscow argues that national policy makers "need to foster greater flexibility at local level in order that practitioners have the space to analyse their particular circumstances and determine priorities accordingly" (2015, p. 169). This chimes well with the findings of this case study. The details of such a complex process of school improvement through collaboration are not amenable to central regulation.

Although the Trust came together for a number of reasons, mainly historical, for collaboration to become a national or even LA-wide strategy for school improvement will require more than a laissez-faire approach. The work undertaken by London Challenge and the Greater Manchester Challenge both included the formation of families of schools. In the latter there were 58 primary families and 11 secondary, each containing between 12 and 20 schools. The aim was to:

> Group together schools that serve similar populations, while encouraging
> partnerships amongst schools that are not in direct competition with each other
> because they do not serve the same neighbourhoods (Ainscow, 2015, p. 80)

A key tool in unlocking the strengths and areas for development for families of schools and individual schools is sophisticated comparative data. Ainscow explains how this fits into a key set of assumptions that resonate with the findings of this case study. He labels these assumptions as "making the familiar unfamiliar" (p. 83). These he lists as:

- Schools know more than they use;
- The expertise of teachers and school leaders is largely unarticulated;
- Evidence is the engine for change;
- Collaboration is socially complex;
- Leadership must foster interdependence.

Systematic developments in collaboration are unlikely to happen by chance. There are important implications for the roles of LA administrators and support staff. It would mean a change to responding to the development of improvement strategies from within schools. That said, LAs are well placed to play a brokering role in both researching and bringing together families of schools, as discussed in the context of Wigan above. They are also in a

position to provide sophisticated data and support for their use. The expertise of school advisers could be used to monitor and challenge schools in relation to the agreed goals of collaborative activities, whilst leaving the ultimate responsibility for school improvement activity with headteachers.

Implications for Further Research

Although the scope of this case study is limited to a single Trust which might well not be typical of "families of schools" described above, the findings have a more general currency in connection with Hargreaves' model of collaboration. The schools in this study were not made aware of the model from the outset and did not use it pro-actively to guide their development as a Trust. Therefore, although there are a number of positive developments highlighted in this study, an area for further research could be to use the model pro-actively and measure its impact. From my work with other partnerships of primary schools, where there are not explicit trust-building measures, the step beyond sharing of data and peer monitoring to Joint Practice Development is hindered. A broader study of how High Social Capital is developing across a range of different groupings within a geographical area might also shed light on the best starting points for the facilitation by LA staff alluded to above or those representing the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The role of research and enquiry in schools is also an area that appears to have strong possibilities for creativity in tackling deep seated issues such as the under-performance of disadvantaged pupils. Drawing on the work of Michael Fielding, Ainscow suggests:

> Joint Practice Development involves interaction and mutual development related to practice; recognises that each partner in the interaction has something to offer; and is research informed, often involving collaborative enquiry (2015, p. 160).

Clearly there is no shortage of further avenues for enquiry as the English educational landscape continues to change and schools increasingly undertake the role of self-improvement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The Initial Survey Letter

Dear   ,

As you know, I am an EdD student at the Institute of Education at University College, London. I am now in the fourth year of my course, which involves designing and writing a thesis of 45,000 words. My chosen topic is school to school collaboration as a means of improving teaching and outcomes for pupils. As well as becoming acquainted with the literature in this area, I will also be carrying out some first- hand research of my own. Within the scope of the course and time available, this will be on a relatively small scale and will take the form of a case study approach, looking at the development of the Academy Trust.

With your permission, I would like to carry out a survey of governors and staff this term and in January 2015 to help map the development of your partnership over the course of a year. I have based the survey on a model produced under the auspices of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (formally NCSL). I plan to follow up the survey with individual interviews with the head teacher, deputy or senior leader, middle leader and teacher at each school if this can be arranged. I will construct the interview format, based on the outcomes from the survey.

I would be grateful if participants could complete the initial survey electronically and return it to my personal e mail address at tony.dimmer22@gmail.com by the end of Spring Term 2014. The instructions for the completion of the survey are attached separately.

If possible, I would welcome access to the outcomes of the self-evaluation exercise carried out in November of 2013 as this would form a very useful baseline for measuring future improvements and the extent to which school to school collaboration has contributed to any changes.

From an ethical standpoint, my research could be seen in conflict with my role as a school adviser. In order to keep the two roles separate, I will ensure confidentiality and will not identify any individuals or schools in my written study. Participation by individuals is purely optional although the more participants in the survey, the more reliable its findings are likely to be. I will make the general outcomes from the study available to participating schools as it proceeds and will make a summary of the final report available, once it has been evaluated by the university. I will not make findings available to Babcock 4S or Surrey LA although, with your permission, I may share the findings with colleagues and other groups of schools. If you have any questions or concerns, I will be happy to try and answer them.

Please could you confirm by email that you are willing, on behalf of your school, to participate in my research study and the number of teaching staff and governors that could be involved. I would be

grateful if you could circulate the survey and instructions internally as this will avoid me directly asking individuals to respond.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Dimmer Tony Dimmer EdD Student

Appendix 2

Partnership Survey Letter

The survey below is part of the data collection for my EdD research entitled, "A Case Study of School to School Collaboration as a Means to Self- Improvement". I am very interested in gaining a greater understanding about how schools working closely together can take control of their own improvement and support teachers in helping pupils to learn even more successfully. I will be writing up my study in 2015 after looking at progress over a year. All contributions to the study will be confidential and I will not use names of schools or individuals in my writing. To this end, I am explicitly not collecting this data as part of the survey but will use a key so that I can check my own inputting to include all contributions.

Instructions for Completion

The purpose of this survey is to gain an insight into how members of the school community see the development of the partnership at this stage.

Attached to these instructions you will find a survey which consists of five banks of statements, each divided into four sections. The five banks are entitled Joint Professional Development, High Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose, Evaluation and Challenge and Alliance Architecture. I have included a short definition within each. The four sections are labelled A – D and there is an inbuilt sequence where most elements contained within D are connected to a more sophisticated stage of development that at A. However, it is quite possible that elements from all four sections could apply at this stage of the survey. Each separate item under each section is a numbered sentence.

To complete the survey, I would be grateful if you could highlight those sentences in each bank of statements that you believe to be true, leaving those which you either do not see as true, or which are unclear, as blank. I would prefer it if you could do this electronically on your copy and return it directly to me at tony.dimmer22@gmail.com by the end of January.

Once all of the survey documents have been returned and analysed, interviews will be held with a sample of members of each school community to deepen my understanding of their thoughts.

Key for contributions:

Schools: Bxxxxxx = A, Bexxxx = B, Hxxxxxx = C, Hxxxxxxx = D, The Xxxxxxxx = E

Participant types: Governor = 1, HT or DHT = 2, Senior Leader = 3, Middle Leader = 4, Teacher = 5.

This would mean that a teacher at the The Xxxxxxx would be an E5 and the HT at Bxxxxxx would be an A2.

Many thanks,

Tony Dimmer   Tony Dimmer EdD Student

Appendix 3

Partnership Survey 2015

The survey below is part of the data collection for my EdD research entitled, "A Case Study of School to School Collaboration as a Means to Self- Improvement". I am very interested in gaining a greater understanding about how schools working closely together can take control of their own improvement and support teachers in helping pupils to learn even more successfully. I will be writing up my study in 2015 after looking at progress over a year. All contributions to the study will be confidential and I will not use names of schools or individuals in my writing. To this end, I am explicitly not collecting this data as part of the survey but will use a key so that I can check my own inputting to include all contributions.

Instructions for Completion

The purpose of this survey is to gain an insight into how members of the school community see the development of the XXXX partnership at this stage. Last year many of you completed a similar survey and I shall compare the responses as a part of the analysis to see if any areas have changed. Attached to these instructions you will find a survey which consists of five banks of statements, each divided into four sections. The five banks are entitled Joint Practice Development, High Social Capital, Collective Moral Purpose, Evaluation and Challenge and Alliance Architecture. I have included a short definition within each. The four sections are labelled A – D and there is an inbuilt sequence where most elements contained within D are connected to a more sophisticated stage of development that at A. However, it is quite possible that elements from all four sections could apply at this stage of the survey.

Each separate item under each section is a numbered sentence.

To complete the survey, I would be grateful if you could highlight those sentences in each bank of statements that you believe to be true, leaving those which you either do not see as true, or which are unclear, as blank. This year I am using paper copies of the survey. I would be grateful if you could complete your survey and return it to your HT by the end of January.

Once all of the survey documents have been returned and analysed, interviews will be held with a sample of members of each school community to deepen my understanding of their thoughts.

Key for contributions:

Schools: Bxxxxxx = A, Bexxxxx = B, Hxxxxx = C, Hxxxxxxx = D, The Xxxxxxx = E

Participant types: Governor = 1, HT or DHT = 2, Senior Leader = 3, Middle Leader = 4, Teacher = 5.

This would mean that a teacher at The Xxxxxx would be an E5 and the HT at Bxxxxx would be an A2.

Many thanks,

Tony Dimmer Tony Dimmer   EdD Student

Partnership Survey Form

Participant School A B C D E   Participant Role 1 2 3 4 5   Please delete as appropriate

Section 1 Joint Practice Development

Joint practice development differs from "sharing good practice because:

- *It is a joint activity in which two or more people interact and influence one another;*
- *It focuses and teachers' professional practice, not just knowledge;*
- *It is a development of the practice, not simply a transfer from one person to another.*

This third feature is the most important. It naturally becomes a development because when two or more people are involved in a relationship of mentoring or coaching, the originator of the new practice goes beyond the process of simply transferring it to a receiving colleague, for two reasons. First, the recipient asks questions of the coach, and some of these questions force the coach to think about the practice in a new way. Second, as the coach explains and supports the recipient's learning, he or she reflects on the practice and thinks about it in new ways. Both the recipient's questions and the originator's reflections strengthen the sense of reciprocity as the practice is further developed to become a co-constructed improvement.

A	B	C	D
1. The school encourages staff in principle to share good practice, as well as in practice on professional training days and sometimes after attendance on external courses. 2. Staff development is not seen as a high priority in the school. 3. Most staff do not see professional training days as important to their professional development, which is seen as the responsibility of individuals.	1. The school has instituted peer observation sessions. 2. It encourages coaching and engages in learning walks for staff. 3. It is moving steadily towards a model of CPD that focuses more on the improvement of classroom practice. 4. Pairs and triads of staff engage in JPD projects within the school.	1. The school has evolved its CPD close to the practice model, with regular mutual observation of lessons, followed by coaching sessions as routine, as well as on professional training days with partners. 2. JPD pairs and triads work across schools in the partnership. 3. Pupils are becoming involved in JPD as co-constructors of better teaching and learning.	1. The school has a highly sophisticated model of professional development that integrates initial teacher training (ITT) and CPD into a coherent whole, in which leadership development begins in ITT and progresses to senior leadership roles and succession planning. 2. JPD is embedded in all professional development and applies across partnerships. 3. Staff are skilled in the design and management of innovation and the school serves as an innovation hub.

Section 2 Partnership Dimension: High Social Capital

At the heart of partnership competence is social capital which consists of two elements, trust and reciprocity. Trust includes goodwill, open and honest relationships, reliability (consistency and dependability) so that mutual respect develops. Reciprocity includes a sense of mutual obligation to exchange ideas and practice.

A	B	C	D
1. There is limited experience of building trust across schools at headteacher and senior leader levels in a few areas. 2. Goodwill exists on all sides, but relationships are not yet sufficiently open and honest. 3. There is belief among one partner's staff that the partnership is about a one-way transfer of professional knowledge and skills. 4. There is anxiety among staff of the other partner(s) that they are treated in deficit terms, or 'we're being done to'. 5. Governors are wary of partnerships, seeing more costs than benefits.	1. Trust, with openness and honesty, have been established at SLT level and are now being established among all other staff across schools. 2. There is agreement at SLT level that all sides have something of value to offer to other partners. 3. Action is taken to identify what each partner and each member of staff can offer to the other(s) and what might be sought from the other(s). 4. Governors remain divided on the benefits of the partnership. 5. Some cross-partnership governors have been created.	1.Trust is well established among staff and increases among governors and key stakeholders. Trust audits take place from time to time. 2. Reciprocity in action exists at all levels, with high levels of satisfaction at mutual gains. 3. Partners do things *with* each other, not *to* each other. 4. Most governors now support the partnership and recognise the benefits. 5. When a new partnership activity is mooted, the question 'How will it boost our collective social capital?' is always asked.	1. High levels of trust are now well established and at each level there is sufficient confidence and experience to advise and support other partnerships in the art of establishing and sustaining trust. 2. Success in effective reciprocity is validated and quality assured externally. 3. Staff have experience of supporting other schools in how to establish the principle of reciprocity and operate it in practice to improve teaching and learning.

Section 3 Partnership dimension: Collective Moral Purpose

Collective moral purpose exists when the moral purpose of each individual school in the partnership to its own pupils becomes extended to all learners in the partnership.

A	B	C	D
1.Teachers direct their moral purpose at the pupils in their immediate care. 2. As the school enters into partnerships, there is a growing commitment to care about the success of partners and the linked achievement of their students.	1.The headteachers and senior staff have accepted the philosophy and practice of system leadership and are now taking action to distribute the ideas of system leadership to other levels in the school, leading to a growing sense of collective moral purpose.	1.The principles and practice of system leadership are now well developed among the whole staff and action is being taken to extend it to governors and students. 2.Progress is being made in transferring the philosophy of collective moral purpose to partner schools and to parents.	1.The principles and practice of system leadership are fully distributed within all partner schools. 2. Collective moral purpose boosts collective capacity for school improvement. 3.Staff are now able to induct other partnerships in the art of achieving collective moral purpose.

Section 4   Partnership Dimension: Evaluation and Challenge

Evaluation and challenge includes the capacity of each school to evaluate the quality of education offered by partner schools and to offer challenges to help their practices to improve.

A	B	C	D
1.As the extent of the partnership is limited and under the close control of the headteacher and senior staff, the need for processes of monitoring and evaluation is limited. 2.The idea of evaluation and challenge between headteachers provokes anxiety and defensiveness. 3.The partners do not see challenge as inherent in deep partnerships and so do not challenge one another at any level.	1.The ability to judge the benefits of partnership activities and calculate transaction costs is being developed among senior staff as appropriate processes of monitoring and evaluation are devised. 2. As the social capital (trust and reciprocity) between partner headteachers grows, they begin, somewhat tentatively, to challenge each another and enjoy the benefits.	1. The skills of monitoring and evaluation of partnership activities are well distributed among staff, as is the skill of maximising benefits whilst minimising transaction costs. 2. Reciprocal challenge is firmly established among senior leaders. 3.To improve the quality of JPD activities, Evaluation &Challenge are being developed at all levels of staff, as social capital steadily increases.	1.The partnership has built the skills of monitoring, evaluating and quality assuring partnership activities into all its leadership development activities and is using this experience to support other schools and partners. 2. Reciprocal challenge is treated as a key feature of a self-improving partnership and is built into all leadership and professional development.

Section 5 Collaborative Dimension; Alliance Architecture

A	B	C	D
1.Most schools in the partnership have limited experience of partnership- building and existing partnerships are shallow.	1. The partnership is gaining strength. 2. After some early difficulties and tensions, clarification of the terms of the partnership and allocation of roles and responsibilities restore confidence in the partnership. 3. Means of future conflict resolution have been agreed among school leaders. 4. Attention is being paid to the interactions of the four key strands: JPD, social capital, collective moral purpose and evaluation and challenge.	1.The partnership has now extended well beyond senior leaders and has become part of the partner schools' normal and natural ways of working at all levels, including governors as well as staff. 2. Conflicts and problems are now relatively rare and are quickly identified and resolved. 3. Collective moral purpose means the partner schools have taken ownership of all students in all the schools. 4. How the four key strands interact is understood by all senior staff, which helps to shape policy development.	1.The school knows how to build and sustain effective partnerships, including how to bring a partnership to an agreed end where and when this is appropriate. 2. The school offers a service (advice and active support) to schools that either embark on new partnerships or find themselves in difficulties with an existing partnership.

Appendix 4

A Coded Transcript

Bxxxxx-HT/DHT

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Interviewer: OK. That's starting now. OK. So it's Txxx and Exxxx being interviewed for this round. I'm going to start with the questions that came out of the survey and then I'm going to ask you one or two questions about things that were surprising that came out of the survey. But just a general one for starters. How do you think the Trust has changed over the last year?

Female Voice 1: From my point of view there's been a lot more involvement of teachers across the school doing a lot more collaborative work and staff meetings and meetings with subject leaders and moderation as well. So there's been a lot more involvement, whereas previous to that it had really just been Tina and I. Distributed Staff Info/ Dist Sys Lead

Female Voice 2: I would agree. Much more lower down, all the way through the levels people getting together, collaborating, supporting each other and challenging each other, which is nice. But also the relationship between the Heads and Deputies has strengthened further. So there's a lot more trust there between us than there was in the beginning. Because at first we were like, we don't really know you that well. Whereas now, we just tell each other everything. So we're getting a much more realistic picture of the schools and where we're at and the challenges that we're facing because we're not frightened to tell each other, we just tell each other. HSC/E&C

Interviewer: Oh good. That's good. I was going to ask you what effect it had had on you as a professional. I guess you could just say what you like now?

Female Voice 2: I find the support at my level tremendous, because actually being a Head of a school, you can only really talk to your Deputy. We don't have the same colleague network of support that people have elsewhere in the school. So for me, it's like they're my colleagues, and I see them almost more my colleagues than I see people in my own school now. Because if I've got issues that I want to talk through, they're the people I talk to. So it's good. HSC

Interviewer: Have you done any mutual observation of lessons?

Female Voice 2: Between the Swan schools? We haven't. It has been something that we've talked about but we haven't yet done it. We've talked about it for next year.

Interviewer: OK. And have any other members of staff observed in any of the other schools?

Female Voice 2: They've been to observe, haven't they?

Female Voice 1: They have, yes. Through the project [unintelligible 00:02:35]

Female Voice 2: But not in terms of … they've been for their own benefit. So there've been people who've gone to observe people because they're good at, or, you know. We spent for example quite a bit of time in the early years at Oaktree.

Interviewer: Right. What happens when somebody comes back from one of those sort of visits?

Female Voice 2: Hopefully then practice improves. If I use the Xxxxxx example, they brought back the structure of the day and various other … lots of ideas and then we implemented them together here. JPD

Interviewer: And do you support them in doing that.

Female Voice 2: Oh yes, yes. I met with the staff after they'd been, they'd implemented … Actually they just wanted to implement the whole thing. There was no discussion needed. They were just like, yeah, it's fantastic, let's just do it. JPD

Interviewer: So you didn't have to coach them?

Female Voice 2: No. It was just –

Female Voice 1: They just took it on board, didn't they?

Female Voice 2: It was a new member of staff. So we had new fresh attitude. Yeah, let's go for it. They were very, very positive and it's actually turned our early years practice around. JPD

Female Voice 1: But also the members of staff that were in the early years have taken that on board and embraced it, haven't they? [unintelligible 00:03:53].

Female Voice 2: We've had also a member of … our ICT coordinator's been over to advise teachers in other schools about our ICT provision. So she's been over and looked at their systems and talked to them. So it's at that level as well as in the classroom. It's slightly more technical stuff. What else have we had? Lots of things. Mentoring and coaching

Female Voice 1: The collaborative projects they've observed, different members of staff have been out and observed in other schools on whatever the other school's agenda was, and the same here. We've had a project in, we had

members from the other schools coming to observe here. They weren't making judgments as such, but they gave feedback on what they saw.

Interviewer: So what was your project?

Female Voice 1:   It was all to do with behaviour and safety I think.

Female Voice 2:   Learning behaviour. We were asking them to look at our learning behaviour. We had wanted to self evaluate ourselves outstanding for our learning behaviour. We wanted them to verify whether or not felt that we were being realistic. So it was quite … there was a bit of rigour to it. It came out of the Swan wheel day when we evaluated our behaviour and safety as outstanding and then we wanted them to verify that. So they came in with the task of saying was it outstanding or was it not. E&C Analytical Investigation?

Interviewer: And did they verify it?

Female Voice 2:   They did. But with some areas that we hadn't thought of for improvement. For example, one of the things they flagged up was that whilst the quality of work in our books was amazing and the children took pride in their work and everything else, some of our displays, and I say some of our displays, were not so good at reflecting high quality. So we had an inconsistency between teachers, between areas of the school in the quality of work being displayed on the walls. So they picked that up.

Interviewer: Oh, that's good.

Female Voice 2:   So we did some inset training.

Female Voice 1:   Yes, and actually, it was using the Xxxxx schools wasn't it?

Female Voice 2:   It was a new girl that came and said.

Female Voice 1:   So we used her expertise, she came and delivered some inset training here. It had a really positive effect, didn't it? JPD

Female Voice 2:   Everyone went display mad. **Disciplined Innovation**!?

Interviewer: Oh. Great. That's good. You mentioned already that trust is much higher. I'll tell you the question, but if you feel you've already answered it then … In the survey, there was an increase generally overall in levels of trust. I was going to ask if you could give some examples of how greater openness was helping you to improve. But is that what you were saying?

Female Voice 2:   Well certainly at Head level I described how that's helping. But also I think lower down. Talk about moderation –

Female Voice 1:   Yeah, moderation. All of the year groups moderated across the Xxxx Trust and I was involved in years three, four and five. They were certainly looking at what they'd like to moderate and kind of bashing out which KPIs that they wanted to moderate against and which were kind of the most, I suppose the most important ones in their year group. There was some really good open discussions about that and it was really nice hearing kind of professional discussions but they weren't afraid to kind of share their views and also listen to others' views and kind of compromise but equally all kind of getting what they wanted as such. So it was really nice to see that honesty and that comfortableness in that environment to kind of go OK, I'm in a team of professionals but actually I want this best outcome because if this works, then actually I'll be able to moderate and know all my judgments are right. So the conversations that came as a result of that were really good. And I think moving forward, it'll only strengthen. It was one of the first times they've got together as year groups, so they were a bit … some of them were, you know, new relationships that they were building. So I think moving forward they'll be able to build on that and certainly our moderation will only improve as a result of that. HSC

Female Voice 2:   And our subject leaders have got together too and we've got some nice projects. We've got a Swan concert this week that the music coordinators have put together. So that's children from all five schools getting together to sing that they've all learned the same things. So we've got projects like that. I think they're finding that network of support really good. So they can talk to someone about the issues of trying to make science better in the school, whatever it is. So they've got those ideas and that network of support and sharing of good practice which they can then put into all five schools, which is nice. You know, we've done this, oh tell me about that. We're doing that at all levels now. So I've contacted Barnsbury about inductions to see if there's anything they're doing that we're not doing. It's a case of let's all do the best. We've shared practical resources, you know. Our values boards, they're going to get some of those. Things like that too. So sharing at all levels and people being open to that sharing and honest about it and wanting to improve. I think what's hit us recently as well with the change to the OFSTED is that we are going to be responsible for the standards in the other schools. So it's in our interests as a school to make sure that the other schools in the Trust are doing equally well. Whereas before maybe there was an element of competition in the sort of deeper thinking. Like are we better than them? Whereas now I think there's begun to be a shift towards we need to make sure we're all doing really well. I think that goes down through the levels and it will only get stronger as Em said. Collective Social Capital/Collaborative Capital/Collective Moral Purpose

Interviewer: Yeah. Just one sort of … really a bit of a technical question just for you two. On the survey there was a statement that said trust with openness and honesty have been established at SLT level and now being

established among other staff across the schools. But interestingly the responses from Heads and Deputies dropped from last year to this year. Do you have any thoughts about why that might be the case?

Female Voice 2: I would think they were answering is as in they didn't feel that the trust was there between the rest of the school as opposed to the trust dropping. Because when you listen to that question, it's asking about trust through the rest of the school. So I would imagine that rather than saying there's less trust between the Heads, they were saying they didn't feel that the trust elsewhere was quite there yet.

Interviewer: Quite as strong. It's just that was the … it's B1 and B2 there. You can see there's a drop in the overall and the main reason for the drop in the overall was the responses from Heads and Deputies. Because when you look at ...

Female Voice 2: Maybe we don't trust each other any more.

Interviewer: When you look at SLT, the first one's gone up. So it must be the Heads and Deputies one that's taking that down. When you look at teachers …because   that's all gone up, teachers.

Female Voice 2: <mark>We've had people on maternity, we've got a new Head of course and a new Deputy. Maybe</mark> … HSC and staff turbulence.

Female Voice 1: Yeah, there's been quite a lot of change hasn't there.

Female Voice 2: There are changes in Bxxxxxxx, aren't there?

Interviewer: Yes. So it could be to do with changes of staff, yeah. OK. That's great. I just wanted.

Female Voice 2: I definitely don't feel that the trust has gone down between the Heads and the Deputies. Definitely not.

Female Voice 1: <mark>And what I see from being part of it, being away for six months or so, then coming back, there's definitely more openness and more trust. The conversations feel kind of more honest and open.</mark> HSC

Female Voice 2: Yes. We're talking about challenging each other more.

Interviewer: You've given me some examples of how teachers practice has improved. Can you see any impact on pupils?

Female Voice 2: Well as a result of the teaching practice improving, yes.

Interviewer: Right. Because you were talking about display, for instance. Was that the quality of the children's work on display or the way it was displayed?

Female Voice 2: That was the way it was displayed. So in that case, I mean the impact on the pupils there would be oh, you know, my teacher's valuing my work because they're displaying it beautifully. So there would hopefully be some impact there. In terms of pupils, I think it's the quality of the provision which is impacting on the pupils. So where we're improving standards of teaching or improving our curriculum or making sure we're moderating correctly, all of that will have an impact on our pupils. Because of we're not moderating correctly and our next steps are not quite right, then that's going to slow progress isn't it? So everything that we're doing I think will impact. JPD Impact

Interviewer: But have you got any specific examples at this stage?

Female Voice 2: You could use that one. Moderation leading to accurate assessment on the part of the teachers would mean that the children were being steered correctly, wouldn't it? You could use the early years example –

Female Voice 1: The early years is definitely better.

Female Voice 2 Children reaching a good level of development this year, 75%?

Female Voice 1 75%.

Female Voice 2: We're looking at around 75% whereas last year it was 51 and the year before 25. So we're looking at rapid improvement in our early years and that's because of the new systems, because of the way they're teaching and because of the impact of the Xxxx, I think. Largely, not totally but largely. Disciplined Innovation; Embedded JPD

Female Voice 1: Yeah. That's a huge impact.

Female Voice 2: Yeah. And we've hopefully impacted on other schools. I know Hxxxxx's been doing some work with The Hxxxxxx on maths and there's more needed there I think. And we've just recently arranged with Bxxxxxx that we're going to put more support in there to see if we can unpick why their results are not better. Because obviously Cxxxxx being new, she needs that support and she's not quite sure where it's going wrong. So we've offered to go in and try and unpick with her where it's going wrong. When she gets her end of year data we'll have a look at the data with her initially. That might be where we start doing some joint observations with her and give her the confidence to identify exactly what's the – JPD, M&C

Interviewer: What's … yeah. What it is. In a sense that could be a challenge. Have you felt any particular challenges coming from the other schools in the group?

Female Voice 2: There was moderation issues at Year Six.

Interviewer: You were challenged that you were being too lax or too …

Female Voice 2: Our Level Five was doubted. But actually we've just been moderated and it was a 5A so we don't think we were being lax but, it's flagged up that maybe one of the other schools has been too harsh, which could be affecting their levels. So that would do their pupils a service of saying actually you don't have to have everything to be that Level Five. They agreed to differ in the end.

Female Voice 1: I think they did, yeah.

Female Voice 2: But actually our moderation has shown that we were probably right. E&C

Interviewer: Oh that's good.

Female Voice 2: Unless the child's made more than a level [unintelligible 00:15:51]. You never know.

Interviewer: Was there a big time lag then between …

Female Voice 1: There was a time lag.

Female Voice 2: Half a year?

Female Voice 1: Yeah.

Female Voice 2: Yeah. But to have gone from a four to a 5A.

Interviewer: I see what you mean.

Female Voice 2: And I don't think his writing had changed that much.

Female Voice 1: No, I think it was still the core of what it was, was there and there's probably tweaking.

Female Voice 2: But yeah, so we challenged there and we've talked a lot among the Heads about more challenge in the rag day procedure. So not accepting but actually going OK, we would like to. So it might be this year, we've talked a lot about it but we haven't actually made any concrete decisions, but it might be this year that following the rag process they say to us, OK Bexxxxx, you reckon that your safeguarding is outstanding. That's what we would like to come and unpick please. Or by looking at each other's data you're telling me that your teaching and learning is outstanding. I'm seeing your maths may not be from your data. I would like to come and look at the maths teaching in your school and see whether it is in fact. So it's about us knowing each other's skills better and starting to unpick and resolve. Because we're not there just to challenge, we're there to

support. So I think it's really important that you don't just pick holes in people and then walk away. It's about saying OK, we've noticed that this could do with some improvement, why don't we come and do? So it's about plugging gaps for each other, really. AI

Female Voice 1:   Yes, it is.

Female Voice 2:   Closing the gap [unintelligible 00:17:25].

Female Voice 1:   Closing the gaps.

Interviewer: Have you learned any particular collaboration skills do you think in the way that you go about things during the last year?

Female Voice 1:   I think certainly the openness from what I saw from moderation and things, the openness has enabled more professional discussions. I certainly notice class teachers feeling more confident and more articulate about discussing whatever it is they're discussing. But it is done in a more professional way. They are looking at pupil outcomes and they are having those, you know, real professional discussions as opposed to kind of being side tracked and really focusing on ah, but that's only in that aspect, you know, we need to look across the whole year group. Is this something we can actually moderate, how can we practically do it. That deeper level of thinking's definitely there. Improvements in E&C/JPD

Female Voice 2:   From my point of view, my personal coaching of other leaders has been fascinating for me. I've really enjoyed coaching leaders.

Interviewer: Right. So how have you gone about that?

Female Voice 2:   Just through the discussions that I've had with the other heads and them with me. But coaching other leaders is very different to coaching other staff. Well not very different but it's different to coaching teachers and people in your own school. So that's been interesting. Because also you're coaching someone when you don't necessarily have a full picture of their school. So that's been interesting. The other people that I think have developed their skills maybe, I'm thinking finance. I'm thinking the school business managers who have done lots of benchmarking. So that's maybe a skill that they didn't have before. They've been benchmarking their financial expenditure and income against each other. So that in terms of a skill developed. And governors. Skills of governors have improved through the work with the Xxxx Trust. Who else has improved? Can't think really. Obviously teachers with what they've picked up. But actual collaboration skills, I'm not sure. Coaching and Mentoring

Interviewer: OK. I'll stop it there.

[End of recorded material at 00:19:48]

Appendix 5 Table of Data Collected

Date	Type of data	Method of Collection	Analysis	Reference
January 2014	Survey 1	Individual Paper Forms	Excel Spreadsheet Feb – March 2014	Chapter 5 pp 77 - 85
June 2014	Semi Structured Interviews 1	Digitally Recorded	Transcribed July 2014 Analysed August 2014	Chapter 5 pp 86 - 98
January 2015	Survey 2	Individual Paper Forms	Excel Spreadsheet Feb – March 2015	Chapter 5 pp 98 - 114
June 2015	Semi Structured Interviews 2	Digitally Recorded	Transcribed July 2015 Analysed August 2015	Chapter 5 pp 114 - 127