



A CASE STUDY  
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES  
OF LEADERS AND TEACHERS WITHIN  
*THE OPPORTUNITY NORTH EAST VISION*  
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

---

Saarah Deebie Elizabeth Abu-Nijaila


Doctorate in Education

School of Education, Communication and

Language Sciences

Newcastle University

Submission deadline – 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025

I declare that this submission is wholly my own work: 



## Acknowledgements

There are many people I will be forever grateful to for their support, encouragement, advice and inspiration throughout Doctoral studies and in particular, with this thesis.

Firstly, I am most thankful to Newcastle University School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences and the opportunities I have been afforded, since embarking upon initial teacher training here in 2003. The Newcastle University alumni discount helped me to finance studies more affordably following teacher training, including the completion of a Master's Degree in 2008, and the completion of this Doctorate in 2025.

I wish to thank each participant without whom this research would not exist. I am especially appreciative of Partner School and all those who had any involvement in the partnership work, from which so much was gained. I am grateful to everyone in Host School for their support and for making school such an enriching place to be each day. Thank you for everything.

I would like to thank all panel members for their expertise and advice throughout the process. These were Kim Cowie, Dr Sara Ganassin and Professor David Leat. I would like to express an extended thank you to David, as a brief conversation we had during my first two weeks of teacher training was pivotal. I was overcome with imposter syndrome and close to dropping out, however one interaction with David, which resembled a coaching conversation motivated me then, and has helped to sustain me in my career and subsequent studies since. Thank you!

It is difficult to describe in words the gratitude I have for my two supervisors; Dr Pamela Woolner and Dr Hanneke Jones. They have both been the very best that I could ever have hoped for and the ideal, dynamic duo. I know how immensely fortunate I have been to benefit from their guidance throughout. I have learned so much from both Pam and Hanneke and have certainly grown through their wisdom, warmth and proficiency. I will really miss our supervisory sessions, although immensely challenging at times. The awesomely apt imagery rich analogies that arise from Hanneke, and the fascinatingly intellectual and informative frameworks that radiate through Pam have been both enlightening and entertaining. Thank you both for your solidarity and for getting me here. All the valuable time you have invested in the supervision of this study and in me, is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Lastly, but by no means the least, I wish to convey my love and heartfelt thanks to my husband and two children. The highest praise goes to them, for their enduring patience over the last few years and for supporting me unwaveringly, to maintain our mantra of "*Never give up!*"

## **Abstract**

Many secondary schools across North East England in high poverty settings struggle to meet government enforced examination attainment targets, including Progress 8 measures, where no contextual adjustments are made for socio-economic adversity. Schools unable to meet examination outcomes receive additional scrutiny and pressure through the politicised educational landscape of performativity.

Research into school improvement partnerships and coaching within these, indicate some potential for struggling schools to be supported and practitioners within to have their self-efficacy reaffirmed during the process. However, the sustainability of such work in challenging contexts is difficult to maintain over time.

This study is set within my professional context, of an inner-city high poverty secondary school. Lived experiences of the partnership, from the perspectives of nine staff members involved, in the two-year, Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) school improvement partnership strategy, are explored via interviews.

I employed a qualitatively led mixed methods, case study research design approached from the paradigmatic stance of pragmatism (Morgan, 2014), underpinned by social justice (Cresswell, 2015). A school improvement partnership is the case and depicts the deficit model of school improvement whereby a high performing school, supports a school which has been labelled as low performing, or in this case, a “failing school” (DfE, 2019).

Findings from interviews, with three senior leader participants from the supporting school and six participants from different levels across the supported school, provide valuable insights into their experiences during the partnership and how this differs for practitioners based on their professional roles, power and agency. My position and journey as an inside-researcher, further contributes to this study.

Conclusions highlight how different practitioners experience the SIP, with a range of emotions evoked. A model for school advancement (6.2.1) proposes macro, meso and micro level school advancement approaches, which if adopted, could contribute to social justice and more equitable and ethical ways of schools working together.

## Contents

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction .....	1
1.1 Childhood poverty and educational outcomes.....	5
1.2 Educational outcomes in my professional context and the ONE Vision (2019) SIP .....	9
1.3 Deprivation, attainment gaps and wellbeing .....	11
1.4 School improvement partnerships and coaching as mechanisms of support and challenge.....	12
1.4.1 Coaching as a form of professional development in education.....	14
1.4.2 Early experiences of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and coaching.....	16
1.5 Coaching caution.....	17
1.6 Schools facing challenging circumstances (sfcc) .....	18
1.7 Research questions.....	21
CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review .....	23
2.1 Literature review – approach .....	23
2.2 Social justice as a driver for educational change.....	25
2.2.1 Accountability and socioeconomic adversity in education.....	26
2.2.2 Accountability and performativity in education .....	28
2.2.3 Performativity, poverty and the curriculum .....	29
2.3 Collaboration for school improvement purposes .....	33
2.3.1 The deprivation deficit and school improvement partnership work .....	36
2.3.2 Contextual sensitivity for schools facing challenging contexts .....	37
2.3.3 School improvement partnerships and coaching between schools.....	39
2.3.4 ideology and reality of partnership and coaching in a politicised education system .....	41
2.3.5 The critical friend – support and challenge versus surveillance and discipline .....	45
2.4 Working conditions and climate during educational change .....	47
2.4.1 Cooperation and change .....	49
2.4.2 Trust and relationships.....	51
2.4.3 Reciprocity .....	55
2.5 Joint practice development.....	58
2.6 Summary of the literature review .....	60
CHAPTER 3 - Methodology .....	64
3.1 Research Stance .....	64
3.1.1 Paradigmatic Approach.....	65

3.2 Conceptual Framework .....	68
3.3 Design frame - case study.....	70
3.4 Research context – Partner School.....	70
3.4.1 Research context – Host School .....	71
3.5 Participant selection .....	72
3.6 Semi-structured interviews .....	75
3.6.1 Interview climate.....	77
3.6.2 Interview questions.....	80
3.6.3 Interview data .....	81
3.7 Bias .....	83
3.8 Limitations .....	85
3.9 Ethics .....	88
CHAPTER 4 – Findings .....	90
4.1 The new teaching and learning model .....	95
4.2 Codes and themes found within the interview transcripts .....	97
4.3 Seven themes found within each interview transcript.....	100
4.3.1 Character and Support .....	102
4.3.2 Climate .....	106
4.3.3 Collaboration .....	111
4.3.4 Consistency.....	114
4.3.5 Negatives .....	118
4.3.6 Positives .....	125
4.3.7 Time.....	131
4.4 Interconnectivity between the seven most dominant themes .....	140
4.4.1 Character and support summary .....	140
4.4.2 Collaboration summary.....	142
4.4.3 Climate summary.....	142
4.4.4 Consistency summary .....	143
4.4.5 Positives summary .....	144
4.4.6 Time summary .....	145
4.4.7 Negatives summary.....	146
4.4.8 Super Themes .....	148
4.5 Patterns within the remaining codes .....	149
4.6 Codes prominent to participants from Partner School.....	151

4.6.1 Codes prominent to participants from Host School.....	151
4.7 Findings recap.....	152
CHAPTER 5 - Discussion .....	154
5.1 Overview .....	154
5.2 Methodology and research design .....	155
5.2.1 Possibilities and problems .....	155
5.2.2 Qualitatively led mixed methods .....	158
5.2.3 Data saturation versus information power for validity .....	161
5.2.4 Confirmability versus conformability .....	161
5.3 Research questions.....	162
5.4 Conceptual framework for the discussion of findings .....	163
5.5 Experiences of the partnership.....	165
5.5.1 Cooperation and change and the impact of, and on, climate and time .....	165
5.5.2 Contextual sensitivity and the curriculum: addressing disparities and being brave for better outcomes in schools facing challenging circumstances.....	170
5.5.3 Scrutiny and surveillance in relation to leadership, management and the managed.....	174
5.5.4 Trust and relationships established through character and support.....	179
5.5.5 Reciprocity through collaboration.....	183
5.6 Recognising the emotional impact of school improvement when facing challenging circumstances .....	185
5.7 Position, power, participation and agency .....	189
5.8 Cultivating confidence through joint practice development.....	193
5.9 Returning to research questions.....	196
CHAPTER 6 - Summary, conclusions and recommendations .....	200
6.1 Conclusions and contributions to knowledge.....	200
6.1.1 Contributing to wider knowledge.....	201
6.1.2 Face-to-face value: considering an ethical coaching approach for future SIPs in sfcc .....	202
6.1.3 Developing practitioner understanding .....	203
6.2 Recommendations and implications for future policy, practice and research	203
6.2.1 A model for school advancement and future research .....	205
6.3 Epilogue of final reflections.....	208
Bibliography .....	210

Appendices.....	231
Appendix A: Participant information sheet and invitation to participate .....	232
Appendix B: Declaration of informed consent .....	236
Appendix C: Partner School - senior leader interview schedule.....	237
Appendix D: Host School – senior and middle leader interview schedule .....	238
Appendix E: Host School – teacher interview schedule .....	239
Appendix F: Coded transcript extract .....	240
Appendix G: Costa’s (2008) Three Storey Intellect - lesson objective trigger words	241
Appendix H: Example series of lessons slides .....	242
Appendix I: Keywords and definitions - Y9 Drama, autumn 2 <sup>nd</sup> half-term.....	244
Appendix J: Definition slide .....	245
Appendix K: Revised marking approach – one page overview .....	246
Appendix L: Questioning strategies.....	247
Appendix M: Character and support interview extracts .....	248

## Tables

Table 4.1: Participant career overview.....	92-94
Table 4.2: Codes found within participant interview transcripts.....	97
Table 4.3: Prominent themes which emerged through coded analysis.....	97
Table 4.4: Codes and counts applied to participant interview transcripts.....	98
Table 4.5: Patterns within the remaining codes.....	150

## Figures

Figure 1 - The reflexivity chain for ethical coaching (Iordanou <i>et al</i> , 2017, p.97).....	4
Figure 1.1 - Between-school segregation of long-term disadvantaged pupils, KS4, 2006–2019. (Gorard, 2022, p. 457).....	8
Figure 1.2 - Percentage of long-term FSM-eligible pupils scoring above national mean capped points scores, 2006–2019. (Gorard, 2022, p. 457).....	9
Figure 3.1 - Conceptual framework for pending research.....	69
Figure 4.1 - Contextual timeline.....	91
Figure 4.2 - Character and support.....	102
Figure 4.3 - Climate.....	106
Figure 4.4 - Collaboration.....	111
Figure 4.5 - Consistency.....	114
Figure 4.6 - Negatives.....	118
Figure 4.7 - Positives.....	125
Figure 4.8 - Time.....	131
Figure 4.9 - Interconnectivity between the seven most dominant themes.....	140
Figure 4.10 - Super themes.....	148
Figure 5.1 - Overview of the research problem and response.....	154
Figure 5.2 - Conceptual framework for the discussion of findings.....	164
Figure 5.3 - Eight rungs on a ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969).....	190
Figure 6.1 - A model for school advancement and further research.....	206

## CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

This introduction provides an overview and sets the scene, establishing the need for this research, whilst locating the research context and my professional setting of a high poverty secondary school, Host School (pseudonym) within the North East of England within this, where I serve as a senior leader. I have seen firsthand, the adverse effects of poverty on adolescents, and the impact this has on education, and vice versa over the last twenty years, during my career in high poverty secondary schools. This has prompted me to explore socioeconomic inequalities through this thesis and to consider how school improvement efforts may better counteract associated challenges. The position of this research is progressive in terms of trying to find ways through, to reduce social disadvantage.

Whilst my practitioner and leadership experiences have had some influence on me undertaking this research, this is not about leadership. In this thesis, I write as an inside researcher about the lived experiences of leaders and teachers within the Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision (2019) school improvement partnership (SIP). This study is about how senior practitioners from the supporting school of Partner School (pseudonym) approach and enact support, and how those in the supported school of Host School, experience this. This research provides a rare look into the lived experiences of the supporting and the supported practitioners within a SIP. Their contributions to interviews, two years into the SIP, provide valuable and often candid insights, not only into the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, but also around the context of working in a high poverty secondary school in the current educational landscape, and the ensuing emotional impact.

The DfE (2019) endorsed Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision SIP was launched in Host School in June 2019, following concerns from the DfE regarding falling examination outcomes. Key leaders from Partner School, as a high performing school, were assigned to lead the ONE Vision (2019) SIP within Host School. Partner School's pupil demographic contrasts to Host School's, with much higher levels of pupil deprivation within Host School. This research centres around the lived experiences of six practitioners from Host School, including a senior leader, two middle leaders and three teachers, as well as three senior leaders from

Partner School, during the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. As a qualitatively led mixed methods, case study research design, the partnership work between Partner School and Host School is the case. This research is approached from the paradigmatic stance of pragmatism (Morgan, 2014), underpinned by social justice (Cresswell, 2015).

The ONE Vision (2019) SIP depicts the deficit model of a school improvement partnership, with one high achieving school enlisted to support a low performing school. Before honing into SIPs, it is crucial to illustrate the politicised educational landscape within which high poverty schools, like Host School, exist. This is highly relevant to set the scene around the challenging climate within which Host School participants work. Schools which serve high levels of pupil deprivation are known to encounter poverty related challenges. Engle and Black (2008) document the effects of deprivation on school readiness, highlighting how a lack of nutrition combined with high levels of stress and mental health concerns are more prevalent in children facing poverty, and that this negatively impacts longer term academic achievement. McKinney's (2014) research, examines the relationship between child poverty and school education. McKinney (2014) confirms low economic status as a significant barrier to children being able to succeed in school. Ball's (2018) research titled "The tragedy of state education in England: reluctance, compromise and muddle - a system in disarray", criticises the regime of testing which further disadvantages the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, these are not recent revelations. Writing some decades earlier, Burton and Weiner (1990) identify that despite a range of attempts to reform the educational system towards more equitable education, this has only led to intensified inequalities with incongruous interventions perpetuating, rather than alleviating social inequalities. Burton and Weiner (1990) confirm poverty as hindering educational outcomes and they identify systemic inequalities in the education system in England, as further damaging to those living in deprivation.

Schools located in high poverty settings clearly have a lot of important, high stakes work to do in order to address disadvantages. This work is however taking place amidst a political backdrop of performativity and school inspection, and in both cases there is a distinct divide in outcomes for schools with more affluent pupil cohorts, when compared with those who have not (Thompson, 2020). End

of secondary by school examination results dismiss the hard-hitting consequences of deprivation, as no contextual adjustments are made (Goldstein and Leckie, 2019). Unfortunately, the current education system in England seemingly favours the financially fortunate, whilst those with low socioeconomic status are systemically subdued. Consequently, many schools, like Host School are branded as “failing” and subsequently become assigned a school improvement partner, who often work in very different contexts, with different demands, as is the situation in this case study. This is not to be disparaging about any supporting schools, such as Partner School, who invest time and talent to try to make a difference for the better. Rather, this is to make explicit, how the dynamics of the deficit model of SIPs have been determined by an education system in England, that despite many strengths, is still struggling to establish an even level playing field, for those living in poverty.

Despite deprivation related disparities, SIPs have been confirmed as having some impact on struggling schools (Armstrong, 2015, Chapman and Mujis, 2013). Coaching is often applied as a mechanism of support within school improvement work (Kickbusch and Kelly, 2011) too. Some proponents of coaching may be quick to highlight risks involved in applying coaching in situations linked to accountability, like school improvement efforts tend to be. Nonetheless, benefits are known to arise through an ethical coaching process (Iordanou *et al*, 2017), hence coaching within SIPs is also considered through this research, as coaching did play a part in the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and the lived experiences of most participants. When I initially started this research, I had thought that coaching played a much larger role than it did, based upon my own practitioner experiences within the SIP. As an inside-researcher, I learn that the exposure, different participants have to coaching varies according to power, positionality and agency within the SIP. This aspect provides priceless insights about how mechanisms of support differ across different levels within Host School during the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, offering insider insights about what features of support are considered most and least profitable, from the practitioners within.

Coaching is discussed in detail later (1.4.1, 1.5, 2.3.3, 6.1.2), however within this research, coaching relates to the principles and practices of coaching, rather than being attributed to any specific coaching model. Principles of coaching in the

context of this research align with what lordanou *et al*, (2017) frame as “ethical coaching practice” (lordanou *et al*,, 2017, p.3) in terms of the essentialism and essence of what effective coaching should look, sound and feel like, and what it should aspire to achieve. Whilst lordanou *et al*, (2017) have high regard for “Values and Ethics in Coaching” (lordanou *et al*, 2017) as their book title suggests, lordanou *et al*, (2017) warn coaches against becoming overly occupied with rigorous rules around codes and ethics in coaching, as the focus should not be “on solving ethical issues but, rather, on creating those conditions and conversations that will bring them to the surface” (lordanou *et al*, 2017, p.186). Figure 1, taken from lordanou *et al* (2017, p.97) provides a clear point of reference in terms of locating ethical coaching, as a reflexive practice for both the coach and the coachee. Figure 1 illustrates the principles and practices of coaching to which this study subscribes and is expanded upon in 1.4.1.

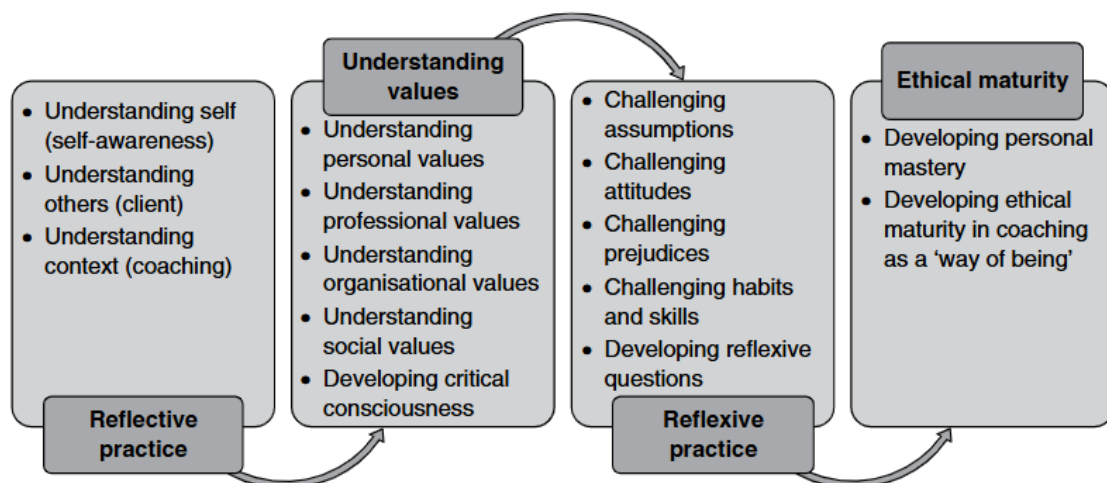


Figure 1 - The reflexivity chain for ethical coaching (lordanou *et al*, 2017, p.97).

My position as an inside researcher is a strength of this study. This has granted me access to rich research material pertaining to the lived experiences of key practitioners from Partner School and Host School during the SIP, resulting in profound, and at times, provocative discoveries. Being an inside researcher has also brought with it some inner battles and breakthroughs between my research and practitioner self, which are well documented (3.6.1, 3.7, 3.8, 5.2.1, 5.2.2). Ultimately, this research details several journeys, those of each of the nine participants within the SIP and my journey as an inside researcher too.

Having provided some context for this research, adverse effects of poverty worldwide, across England and the North East of England will be discussed next. Thereafter, opportunities and challenges prevalent within the secondary education system across England, and the extent to which these may counteract or exacerbate poverty induced inequalities are highlighted. The political landscape of mainstream education in England, since the introduction of the White Paper (1944) is considered within this. Issues schools face when educating cohorts with a high percentage of children facing socioeconomic disadvantage, amidst a backdrop of performativity in secondary education in England, are then explored in greater detail.

After establishing the social, political and educational background for this research, the focus switches to SIPs and coaching within SIPs. The advantages and disadvantages of coaching in education and SIPs as mechanisms of support are considered in relation to schools and practitioners who serve in high deprivation contexts, identified as in need of improvement. Collectively, the areas covered through this introduction establish the background, context and need for this research.

## 1.1 Childhood poverty and educational outcomes

Almost half of the world's population of children are affected by poverty (UNICEF, 2022). One billion children are living in multidimensional poverty without access to health, nutrition, housing, education, sanitation or water. Action for Children (2022) report that the UK has 3,900,000 children living in "relative poverty", as calculated according to their household income being below 60% of the average annual income for that year. End Child Poverty Coalition's (2022) figures from 2015-2022 indicate a further 9% decline across the North East of England, escalating child poverty figures for this region to be the highest across the country at 38%, overtaking London at 35%. In the UK, all children have access to statutory education, as regulated by the Department for Education (DfE). Schools across the UK receive pupil premium (GOV.UK, 2023) funding and additional financial investment to further support those who fall into the socioeconomically disadvantaged category. Nonetheless, harrowing effects of poverty on a child's

educational outcomes and life chances remain well documented (Engle and Black, 2008; McKinney, 2014). Examination outcome data which compares socioeconomically disadvantaged learners with their non-disadvantaged peers, provides one measure from which to assess whether or not attainment gaps are being narrowed during key primary and secondary milestones for each child. Metrics to monitor pupil progress across different socioeconomic backgrounds are well-intended, yet inadvertently inhibit inclusive practices as Ball (2018) and Daniels *et al*, (2019) highlight. The performative pressure placed upon schools across England to be grade driven for pupils, does risk individual needs being overlooked, and in the worst-case scenarios, sees increasing numbers of pupils being placed out of school, via permanent exclusion (Daniels *et al*, 2019).

In research focussed on social justice and the national curriculum, Burton and Weiner (1990) identify a common belief between critics of the education system in England, prior to the Education Reform Act (1988). Critics were concerned that:

... despite the good intentions of the 1943 White Paper and the 1944 Education Act — to provide 'education for all' and 'equality of opportunity' — schooling had failed in the latter, even if it had succeeded in the former.

(Burton and Weiner, 1990, p.204).

Subsequent to such criticism and other related issues, the Education Reform Act (1988) introduced the national curriculum across England, after which, Headteachers had a legal responsibility to adhere to the national curriculum within their schools, to provide:

- (a) the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils of different abilities and maturities are expected to have by the end of each key stage (attainment targets).
- (b) the matters, skills and processes which are required to be taught to pupils of different abilities and maturities during each key stage (programmes of study).
- (c) the arrangements for assessing pupils at or near the end of each key stage for the purpose of ascertaining what they have achieved in relation to the attainment targets for that stage (assessment arrangements).

(HMSO, 1988, p.2).

Nationally-set standardised attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements imposed via the national curriculum appear to have been well intended. Looking at what is presented above (HMSO, 1988 p.2), on the one hand could be deemed as a determined approach to reduce social

inequalities, by endorsing higher expectations and quality for, and from all. Controversially however, the Education Reform Act (HMSO 1988, HMSO 1989, HMSO 1993) and the national curriculum within this have been considered by some as detrimental to social justice (Burton and Weiner, 1990; Sinclair *et al*, 1994). Expanding upon this, Burton and Weiner (1990) assert that the:

...Education Reform Act continues the drift in educational policy and ideology, begun by the Callaghan government, away from the concepts of education 'for all' and equality of opportunity established in the 1943 White Paper, towards education for 'differentiation', 'wealth generation' and 'enterprise'.  
(Burton and Weiner, 1990 pp.222 - 223).

The national curriculum continues today and runs throughout the primary phase (4-11 years of age) and extends through to the end of the secondary stage (11-16 years of age) for those in mainstream education. Within this, English, Maths and Science are established as core foundation subjects with eight additional subjects forming a compulsory part of a schools offer. Secondary schools have the additional expectation to teach pupils a foreign language. Points of assessment are set from which to measure and report pupil outcomes, against subject related attainment targets at 7, 11 and 16 years of age. The national curriculum has improved upon the former deficit of the tripartite system of grammar, technical and modern schools (Burwood, 1992), by making certain that pupils from all backgrounds have access to all areas of knowledge. The national curriculum has continued to determine the educational offer, undergoing updates along the way, in response to the changing world.

Additional, national interventions have been asserted to address social injustice and support schools to do so also. Pupil premium (GOV.UK, 2023) funding was first allocated in 2011, to provide schools with additional money to invest in improving the attainment of socially disadvantaged pupils. This also made those pupils identified as disadvantaged more attractive to schools, due to the additional funding allocated to them. Since then, schools appear to have become more accepting of pupils from poorer backgrounds, as Gorard's (2022) research into the evidence and impact of pupil premium funding on school intakes and attainment in England confirms. Gorard (2022) found that between-school segregation reduced since the introduction of pupil premium funding as presented in figure 1.1.

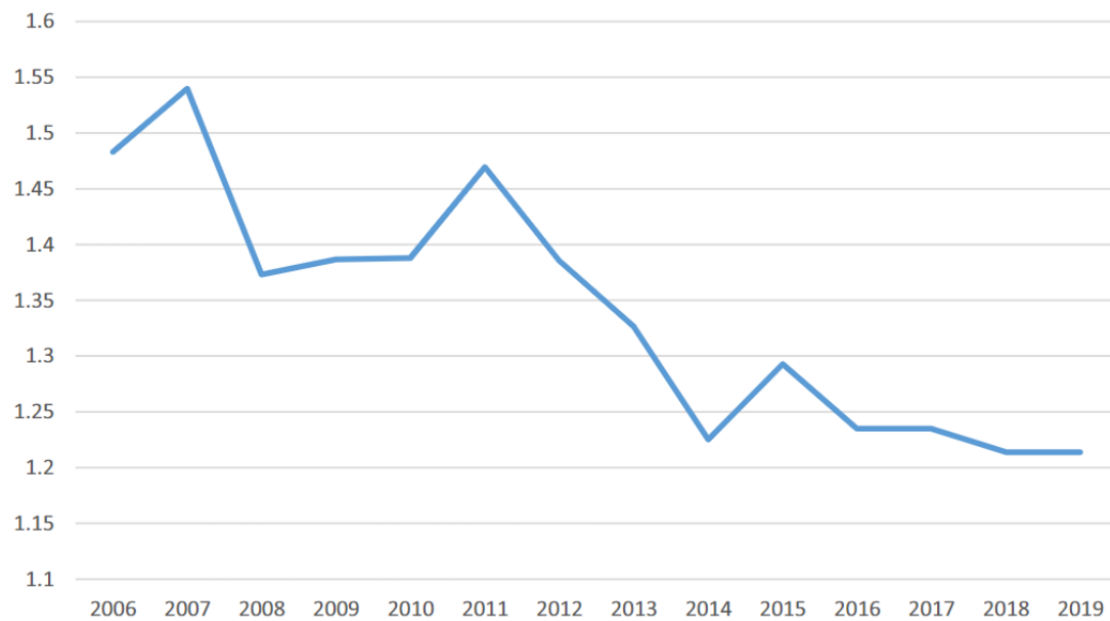


Figure 1.1 - Between-school segregation of long-term disadvantaged pupils, KS4, 2006–2019. (Gorard, 2022, p. 457).

Reduced gaps of between-school segregation are confirmed here, however the graph also indicates issues from 2014 which align with declining outcomes and increasing demands to examinations, as will be discussed next. Despite being unable to confirm a causal relationship, Gorard (2022) reveals an evident correlation between less segregated school systems and poverty attainment gaps. Interestingly, within the same research, Gorard (2022) presents how the changes to external secondary school examinations, first introduced in 2014 had a negative effect on the attainment of pupils from poorer backgrounds. As such, this situated two government policies in tension with one another, as the percentage of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds exceeding national mean capped scores fell rapidly, as figure 1.2 (Gorard, 2022, p. 460) illustrates.

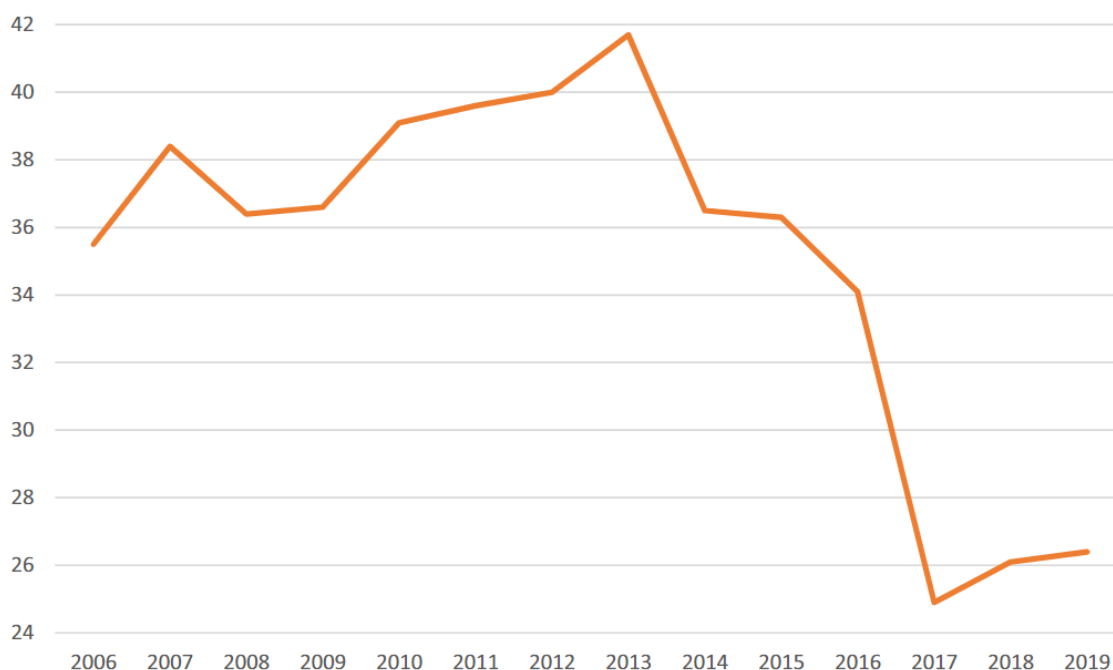


Figure 1.2 - Percentage of long-term FSM-eligible pupils scoring above national mean capped points scores, 2006–2019. (Gorard, 2022, p. 457).

A clear and drastic decline for pupils scoring above national mean capped scores in their end of secondary examinations, is presented here for those learners identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. This is really concerning, as Gorard (2022) states:

... Something very serious seems to have happened in and after 2014 that undid all of the previous progress and more, making the system far more polarised by disadvantage than it had ever been. (Gorard, 2022, p. 459).

This coincides with increased demands in secondary examinations via a reduction of coursework and the introduction of Progress 8 measures (3.4.1).

## 1.2 Educational outcomes in my professional context and the ONE Vision (2019) SIP

Changes over time which are further detrimental to those facing deprivation, resonate with what had been happening in my professional context of Host School too. Despite well-intended and deliberate attempts to narrow the education gap and attainment outcomes between pupils of high and low economic status, significant inequalities have been intensified. Host School's

examination results have followed the downward trend in validated external exams too. Triggered by this trajectory has been an increase in compulsory support for Host School through SIP work, initiated through the DfE. Thus, the ONE Vision (2019) SIP between Host School and Partner School was enacted, borne out of concerns around a decline in Host School's end of Key Stage 4 examination outcomes.

The ONE Vision (2019) SIP takes the form of a performance federation (Armstrong, 2015), whereby Host School as an underperforming school, is being supported by Partner School as a high performing school. This could be considered as an imposed partnership, as Host School having been identified as needing support, had to engage with the SIP. The headteacher from Partner School did however have a choice, as they were invited by the DfE (2019) to lead the SIP for Host School. Partner Head (pseudonym) accepted, as substantial funding made available through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP enabled them, and key personnel they wished to involve from Partner School, the capacity to do so. Furthermore, Partner Head knew the acting head of Host School, having worked together in a previous setting, hence there was a willingness from both parties to collaborate, to improve outcomes in Host School.

The research context of Host School is a diverse inner-city secondary school, serving over 1,100 pupils, with double the national average of learners in receipt of pupil premium. Almost half of Host School's pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), with over forty different languages spoken across the school. Pupils identified as having a Special Educational Need or disability (SEND) exceeds national averages, threefold. Around one hundred teachers and fifteen classroom support staff are employed at Host School, alongside a pastoral team of around twenty staff members. Despite working hard to find its way through, Host School has been identified as being at risk of becoming a "failing school" (DfE, 2019).

Partner School is situated 30 miles south from Host School, and is in a different Local Authority (LA). Partner School is an average sized secondary school positioned in a semi-rural setting. The pupil cohort is below the national average for free school meals (FSM), well below for EAL, and slightly under for pupils identified with SEN. Pupil outcomes for end of secondary examinations are well

above the national average and as such, Partner School is regarded as a high performing secondary school. Owing to Host school's examination outcomes, an overall judgment above "Requires Improvement" (Ofsted, 2021) has remained out of reach. Partner School's Ofsted judgments have remained "Outstanding" for over a decade. More contextual information is provided about Partner School in 3.4 and Host School in 3.4.1.

### 1.3 Deprivation, attainment gaps and wellbeing

The DfE (DfE 2019a, DfE 2019b) recognise the detrimental impact deprivation has on attainment. They report alarming attainment gaps between pupils from disadvantaged communities, in comparison to those from financially stable and affluent backgrounds, with these continuing to rise. Pupils impacted by generational poverty are increasingly likely to be impacted by low literacy levels, face difficulties in accessing the national curriculum, be impacted by poorer health and attendance, and struggle to attain the higher grades in national examinations (Thompson, 2020).

A damning report on behalf of the United Nations, conducted by Alston (2019) on extreme poverty and human rights, found that:

British compassion has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited and often callous approach apparently designed to impose a rigid order on the lives of those least capable of coping, and elevate the goal of enforcing blind compliance over a genuine concern to improve the well-being of those at the lowest economic levels of British society.

(Alston, 2019, p.5).

Whilst some green shoots are acknowledged within the report around a willingness of the British population to want to work and having received support from work coaches to do so, government prioritisation of austerity policies over accessibility of opportunity is heavily criticised. The report (Alston, 2019) states that many people facing disadvantage and disability have been forced into paid positions which are highly unsuitable and have only done so, under politicised duress. Closures to public recreational amenities such as libraries and parks have had a negative impact on people and communities. A significant increase in foodbank use is also confirmed in the report. Host School provides food parcels

within the community and has had to respond to a sharp increase in demand over the last few years too.

The welfare of those most in need in society is being neglected. The harmful effects of austerity policy on the wellbeing of children is seen across England's schools (Burn and Childs, 2016; Hanley *et al*, 2020) and becoming even more amplified in areas facing deprivation. Thompson (2020) identifies that schools with high numbers of children living in poverty are less likely to do well in Ofsted inspections. Unsurprisingly, the wellbeing of teachers who work in areas facing deprivation is negatively impacted too (Evans *et al*, 2022) and staff retention remains a real challenge across England (Marshall *et al*, 2022). Despite evident difficulties, schools situated in socioeconomically deprived areas are called to counteract the impact of financial inequalities through their curriculum (Burwood 1992), and have the added expectation of being receptive to additional external support and scrutiny to do so (Flores, 2012).

This study acknowledges the problematic politicised backdrop of education policy, which despite efforts to ascertain greater equality for learners impacted by poverty, unintentionally appears to have deepened divisions. This study also recognises that schools and their child and adult stakeholders, who are in settings facing challenging contexts are in the thick of it and have important, high stakes work to do. Until educational reform reassesses and reshapes itself, from my professional perspective, having worked in such schools for two decades, I assert that these schools which may be judged by others as "deficit", cannot afford to be defeatist. Instead, they must continue to find their way through, to do their best amidst socioeconomic and political performative adversity, for the pupils they serve. As, until there is an alternative, there really is no alternative, otherwise the effects of inequality risk increasing even further. Next, school improvement partnership work and coaching in education, will be discussed more broadly.

#### 1.4 School improvement partnerships and coaching as mechanisms of support and challenge

SIPs provide support and challenge with the intention of influencing improved system-wide change across a school. SIP work between schools continue to

grow in popularity and variety and have become more of a cultural norm across schools in England today. Coaching is applied in education as a tool to develop teachers to be able to address specific areas of need. There is wide acceptance that ...“coaching can play a significant role in teacher development and accordingly in school improvement.” (Kickbusch and Kelly, 2021 p.431). Kickbusch and Kelly (2021) further recognise the pertinence of placing coaching as a strategy for teacher development at the heart of school improvement, with a particular focus on “coaching to design for learning.” (Kickbusch and Kelly, 2021 p.432). Whilst SIPs and coaching may not provide a panacea for the effects of poverty, there is increasing evidence to suggest that SIPs can provide some relief (Armstrong, 2015) and that coaching can constructively impact school improvement (Hollweck and Lofthouse, 2021).

There is a plethora of available research identifying the characteristics required to facilitate effective partnerships and the challenges involved (Coleman 2012, Chapman and Muijs 2013, Swaffield 2015). There is however a gap in independent empirical studies in the field around:

... the change process and the development and maintenance of relationships when schools enter into collaboration.

(Armstrong, 2015, p.5).

The educational landscape outlined earlier on in this introduction uncovers a sense of isolation for struggling schools, their communities (Alston, 2019) and their pupil and staff populations who suffer to succeed according to enforced expectations (Thompson, 2020). The research gap identified by Armstrong (2015) is therefore a highly relevant one to SIP work and to wider society today, as productive relationships can provide an effective remedy for isolation. This area warrants further study, as schools facing challenges have a greater chance of effective change, when receiving support which is sustained over time and where relationships are upkept (Chapman and Muijs 2013, 2014). Coaching as a tool to support school improvement is highly relevant to this study, as from the outset of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, coaching practices were being utilised through the work of key leaders from Partner School, as the supporting school. Furthermore, this appeared to have contributed to relationships between colleagues across the two schools, who were previously unknown to one another,

appearing to form fairly well, even despite evident differences between the two school contexts.

#### 1.4.1 Coaching as a form of professional development in education

In 2003, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003) expressed that coaching "... could have the power to transform teachers' professional learning" (DfES, 2003, p. 23). Regarding coaching, there remains an array of professional possibilities within which the practice of coaching may be undertaken to enhance practitioner development. Joyce and Showers (1981) recognise coaching as a continuous process aimed at enhancing the application of knowledge and skills within the classroom. van Nieuwerburgh and Barr (2017) identify that "coaching initiatives in educational settings are about ensuring positive experiences for both learners and educators" (van Nieuwerburgh and Barr, 2017, p.507). Bachkivora *et al*, (2014) recognise coaching as "a powerful vehicle for increasing performance, achieving results and optimising personal effectiveness." (Bachkivora *et al*, 2014, p.1). The national framework for coaching and mentoring (CUREE, 2005) commissioned by the Department for Educational Standards (DfES) outlines:

... coaching is a structured process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of professional learner's practice. (CUREE, 2005, p.4).

Whilst each of the definitions provided here differ in their descriptions, collectively they capture the essence of coaching as positive professional learning and development which benefits educational practitioners and their pupils. This study ascribes to this, whilst placing value on coaching being underpinned by principles which align with "ethical coaching practice" (Iordanou *et al*, 2017, p.3) as clarified within the introduction and illustrated in figure 1. This considers a coaches aptitude to apply reflective practice by possessing understanding of personal, professional, organisational and social values with overt critical consciousness. The former informs and advances a reflexive, alert state, enabling the coach to challenge assumptions, attitudes, prejudices, habits and skills, and to develop reflexive questions. Hereafter, the milestone of ethical maturity is accomplished

through personal maturity, whereby coaching becomes a “way of being.” (Iordanou, et al, 2017, p.97).

In the interest of balance, I remain conscious that coaching is not always ideally implemented and can even at times be counterproductive, depending upon the effectiveness, or indeed ineffectiveness of its execution (Ellinger *et al*, 2008, Lockwood *et al*, 2002). Synonymous with an array of definitions attributed to coaching, there are a wide variety of coaching models which are applied in education. Coaching could be criticised as being an unregulated hotchpotch, due to its many manifestations, however each approach serves a specific purpose, per respective overarching coaching discipline. This includes and is not limited to: peer coaching (Lofthouse and Leat, 2013; Showers, 1984), executive coaching (Fulmer and Vicere, 1995, Bono *et al*, 2009, Nelson and Hogan, 2009), instructional coaching (Knight 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011) and cognitive coaching (Costa and Garmston, 2016). Lofthouse and Leat (2013) ascertain peer coaching as a process whereby “...teachers co-operate to better understand, and to foster development in their teaching practices.” (Lofthouse and Leat, 2013, p.8). Executive Coaching seeks to advance the efficacy of leaders and the performance of their organisations (Nelson and Hogan, 2009). Knight (2012) defines instructional coaching as a formalised approach within which practitioners are taught to:

...learn very specific, evidence-based teaching practices such as formative assessment (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, and Chappuis, 2009) or cooperative learning (Slavin, 1983). (Knight, 2012, p.103).

Bair, (2017) explains that cognitive coaching is founded upon the notion of individuals possessing:

... inner resources to achieve excellence; the role of a coach is to activate these inner resources by providing nonevaluative guidance to a colleague seeking professional improvement. (Bair, 2017, p,80).

Contextual coaching is the most recent addition (Gorrell and Hoover, 2009; Valentine, 2019; Hollweck and Lofthouse, 2021). Hollweck and Lofthouse (2021) found that coaching which is bespoke to the school context is better able to benefit the setting. They affirm contextual coaching as “a legitimate practice that leads to school improvement.” (Hollweck and Lofthouse, 2021, p.400). Sentiments of Hollweck and Lofthouse (2021) suggest that there is no correct

way to apply coaching, and rather than seeking to shoehorn a one size fits all approach, a contextualised approach to coaching is more valuable. Although a universal approach to coaching is not necessary, there is common agreement that ethics and values such as core principles of trust and confidentiality coupled with the creation of conditions to foster open communication, co-created learning, and reflection (Iordanou *et al*, 2017) enhance the credibility of coaching across all areas.

#### 1.4.2 Early experiences of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and coaching

I have experienced several short-lived SIPs since the start of my career in secondary education in 2004, working with pupil populations with disproportionately low socioeconomic status. This did change in June 2019, when Host School became partnered with Partner School for three years. My professional responsibility within Host School at the time was as a senior leader in charge of teaching and learning across the secondary age-range. I was partnered up with Partner Deputy Head (pseudonym), who was the teaching and learning lead from Partner School. Professional, supportive relationships between senior leaders at Partner School and Host School seemed to be swiftly established and these have been maintained. In 2025, despite the formal partnership work having ended in 2022, links between senior leaders across Partner School and Host School remain secure.

Many of the benefits and ethics attributed to coaching covered in 1.4 and 1.4.1, appeared to be present from quite early on within the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and as such provoked me to think deeply about the role coaching may be playing within the partnership. This was compelling for a few reasons; firstly, the partnership was distinctively different from any others I had experienced as the face-to-face, on-site support was significant. Secondly, I believed a coaching approach was being applied in most encounters I was either part of, or became aware of. Thirdly, key leaders at Partner School seemed to be swiftly integrated and accepted within Host School, despite working in a contrasting context. This, I thought may be stemming from key figures within Partner School investing in forming respectful, developmental, yet non-judgmental relationships, such as the

ones found in effective coaching partnerships. Lastly, of real curiosity was that, to the best of my knowledge, “coaching” was not mentioned directly at all from anyone in Partner School or anyone in Host School during the partnership, although it seemed fairly obvious to me that coaching was an intentional feature of the support, and that I was being coached within this too.

My research background is in coaching and during the ONE Vision (2019) partnership, I have observed and experienced a range of practices which I perceive resonate with coaching. Examples include and are not limited to teachers within Host School being taught to plan and deliver lessons using Costa’s (1987) Three Storey Intellect. In addition, I had been supported by Partner School to oversee the day-to-day implementation of this approach across Host School. Furthermore, I attended a weekly one-to-one catch-up with the lead for teaching and learning from Partner School, which resembled a coaching conversation. Similar sessions occurred with regularity between senior and middle leaders across Partner School and Host School. Practitioners were partnered up, received support and took action in response to a school improvement and development plan.

Coaching within a SIP is not a unique situation, it is however an under-researched area. Studies about coaching within school improvement efforts are widely accessible, however research into coaching within school improvement partnership work, is really difficult to find. This further warrants my own research as being able to contribute to this research gap, whilst also providing a lens through which to consider the lived experiences of participants as enactors and beneficiaries of coaching within the ONE Vision (2019) SIP.

### 1.5 Coaching caution

Whilst I advocate coaching in a range of school situations, I comprehend that caution ought to be employed when considering coaching in relation to school improvement, as Lofthouse and Leat’s (2013) study into peer coaching unearthed:

We have been very struck by how frequently teachers involved in coaching have been keen to keep senior leaders at some distance from coaching, because of the threat of the imposition of school improvement agendas,...

(Lofthouse and Leat, 2013, p.17).

Whilst coaching may be a liberating force for many, overthrowing “command and control” with “empowerment” (Towell 2013; Jones 2015), it can be a harmful process for others, according to the context and credibility of the coaching. I accept Lofthouse and Leat’s concern (2013) regarding the influence of senior leaders and school improvement agendas within coaching. I acknowledge concern regarding my own position within the school improvement partnership, my senior position within Host School and potential bias therefore within this research. Whilst I am partnered up with a counterpart from Partner School, they hold the seniority within the professional relationship, thus alleviating, although admittedly not eradicating some bias concern. My professional role within the research context and ONE Vision (2019) partnership is one to remain cautious of, however it also offered a real research privilege, as I was able to be close up on a daily basis to the research environment and participants within this.

## 1.6 Schools facing challenging circumstances (sfcc)

Host School like many secondary schools in England today is failing to meet government set floor targets and fits the description of a “school facing challenging circumstances” (sfcc):

...Schools failing to meet standards or ‘floor targets’ and those serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities have become known as schools facing challenging circumstances (sfcc).

(Chapman and Harris, 2004, p.219).

‘Floor targets’ refer to examination outcomes for secondary school leavers and the level the government expect each school to achieve against certain benchmarks, none of which are contextual. A school’s performance against floor targets is a dominant measure by which the government judge a school as failing or succeeding. Since qualifying as a teacher in 2004, I have chosen to work in secondary schools facing challenging circumstances due to the rich experiences I encountered in one during my probationary year. Undeniably, these are demanding environments to work in, with youngsters and educationalists being

exposed to hard-hitting and often extreme effects of poverty (Thrupp, 1997; Thrupp and Lupton, 2006; Mulford *et al*, 2008; Douglas *et al*, 2020). From my own experience, there are however many rewards attributed to working in such environments, including the strong sense of community and camaraderie which can occur between pupils and staff when motivated to work together to do their best to diminish deprivation gaps (Fullan, 2003). Arthur *et al*, (2023) identify those teachers who manage to sustain long-term careers in schools serving socio-economic deprivation, do continue to do so if they perceive that they are:

... making a difference to pupils, the wider community and society; creating positive relationships with pupils; supportive colleagues and feeling valued by school leaders. (Arthur *et al*, 2023).

Factors identified by Arthur *et al*, (2023) which encourage teachers to stay working in challenging schools have motivated me to remain in such contexts and prompts further appreciation and thought around supportive relationships within schools, as having an enduring effect. Even though support may be available from within a sfcc, external scrutiny is always present, as the performative pressure to close attainment gaps and improve student outcomes persists against the educational landscape of an enforced, narrowed national curriculum and accompanying accountability framework (Crocco and Costigan, 2007).

Government intervention via SIPs are commonplace for schools facing challenging circumstances. SIPs have taken many different forms over the years and continue to do so (Armstrong, 2015). Halsey (2005) and Lindsay (2007) observe that schools encounter a range of experiences when working in partnership, and recognise that improvements cannot always be guaranteed. A study by Mujijs (2015) about school to school collaboration between schools does reveal some success for those in primary performance federations:

...pupils in partnership schools outperformed their peers in matched comparison schools, with the strength of the relationship growing over time, than in matched comparators. (Mujijs, 2015, p.575).

Chapman and Mujijs, (2014) ascertain ... “performance federations have the most positive influence on student attainment.” (Chapman and Mujijs, 2014, p. 361). Granted, student attainment is not the only valued measure by educationalists. A broader vision in terms of a school’s ability to educate their students by endorsing positive principles of integrity, compassion, fairness, and love of lifelong learning,

in addition to fostering citizenship and personal, economic, and social skills (Day and Leithwood, 2007; Mulford and Silins, 2011; Putnam, 2002) are highly valued. A strong sense of moral purpose and what Fullan (2003) refers to as the “moral imperative for school leadership” (Fullan, 2003) promotes the overall growth and development of the whole child. These positive principles arguably deserve a higher investment. UNESCO (2016) aspires to achieve inclusive and equitable education, asserting that:

Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. No education target should be considered met unless met by all. (UNESCO, 2016, p.7).

Successive governments continually assess the success of secondary schools across England narrowly, prioritising the performance of pupil populations in examinations, which continue to lead to more favourable outcomes for the middle and upper classes. Hutchinson *et al*, (2018) confirm stark differences between the outcomes of students from disadvantaged areas, identifying that the most socioeconomically deprived in our society, demonstrate the greatest gaps in their attainment. The one size fits all model of mainstream education and examinations is well intended in terms of giving all pupils access to all areas of the curriculum. As introduced in 1.1, the reality however is that most schools facing challenging circumstances, remain unsuccessful at yielding a set of end of secondary national results whereby socioeconomically disadvantaged pupils are securing the same level of academic outcomes, as their non-disadvantaged peers.

Pre Covid-19 pandemic figures from the Education Policy Institute and Fair Education Alliance by Hutchinson *et al*, (2019) reveal an 18-month disadvantage gap separating the progress between socioeconomically deprived pupils when compared with their more financially secure counterparts. The gap is much wider for those facing persistent disadvantage, increasing to almost twenty-three months. A gap exceeding three years was reported for pupils with Gypsy/Roma heritage compared to White British pupils. 16% of Host School’s pupil population have a Gypsy/Roma background and the impact of these gaps in learning is seen in daily practice. Post-pandemic data confirms that adverse effects of school closures and remote learning, have further hindered and widened the gap for

those experiencing poverty, (Azevedo *et al*, 2022). The UNESCO (2016) vision is honourable, as is the DfE financial and strategic investment into ensuring high quality qualifications for all. The reality however, remains somewhat distant. Those entrusted to teach and enhance life chances of children disadvantaged by socioeconomic circumstances, are called to counteract contextual challenges.

Cockerill *et al*'s (2021) study into approaches taken across Primary schools in Northern England to close attainment gaps for pupils facing deprivation, indicates some green shoots, albeit set within the primary sector of education. They identify that some schools do make progress when faced with adverse poverty, and as such, Cockerill *et al*, (2021) propose that:

... a structured regional approach using local trusted voices could bring about improvement to ensure high achievement for socio-economically disadvantaged students. (Cockerill *et al*, 2021, p.7).

Studying the ONE Vision (2019) SIP between Partner School and Host School through a research lens, I hope may contribute to understanding and practice of how to best support students and staff who, despite additional government funding are still swimming against the poverty and performativity tide.

## 1.7 Research questions

This study seeks to explore:

### **How is support enacted and experienced within the Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision (2019) school improvement partnership strategy?**

This qualitatively led mixed methods case study focusses on the lived experiences of key staff involved in the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. The following sub research questions have been devised to address the overarching research question:

**RQ1** How do leaders from Partner School enact support within Host School?

**RQ2** How do leaders and teachers at different levels in Host School experience involvement from Partner School?

**RQ3** Does support within this SIP align with coaching principles and practices and if so, what comes of this?

Next is a literature review which discusses, at the macro level; social justice as a driver for educational change, accountability and performativity in education. At the meso level; collaboration for school improvement, including partnerships and coaching within these, across schools. Thereafter, micro level concepts encompassing the emotional impact and lived experiences of practitioners involved in SIPs are explored. Then, a methodology chapter outlines the case study research design employed. This is followed by a chapter which presents and discusses the data before concluding with key findings and considerations for future research, policy and practice.

## CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 Literature review – approach

The literature review which follows sets the context of this research, by bringing structural inequality in schools, out into the open. How struggling schools fare, when working with outsiders (Jones *et al*, 1990) to address improvements, enforced by the same education system from which inequalities arise, is a central concern. Systematic coverage of pertinent macro, meso and micro level issues within a logical framework follow, starting with the macro level issue of social justice as a driver for educational change. Thereafter, meso aspects are explored, including accountability and performativity in education, and collaboration for school improvement purposes, including coaching, and partnership working across schools. Micro level concepts which link closely with the emotional impact and lived experiences of practitioners involved in SIPs and change, amidst the aforementioned backdrop of accountability, performativity and poverty in education are then studied. These include: working conditions and climate during educational change, cooperation and change, trust and relationships, and reciprocity. Then, a summary of macro, meso and miso issues is shared. Thereafter, Joint practice development is signposted as having some potential towards a more mutual and morale boosting, model of partnership working. Concluding this chapter, outcomes of the literature review are pulled together, with key themes identified for pending research.

A narrative literature review was considered most appropriate as this enables a researcher to be able to retrieve, understand and present available, wide-reaching, yet relevant research on a topic. Furthermore, this allows a researcher to identify any gaps in studies to better inform their own research. A narrative review was also favoured, endorsed by the claim that this approach allows the author to “...pull many pieces of information together into a readable format...” (Green *et al*, 2006, p.103). In addition, a narrative review it is claimed is ...“helpful at presenting a broad perspective on a topic...” (Green *et al*, 2006, p. 103).

Narrative literature reviews can be prone to more bias when compared with a systematic literature review, so steps to reduce bias were taken by maintaining an objective outlook and seeking alternative perspectives. Slavin (1995) advocates reviewers of research to ascertain “best evidence synthesis” (Slavin,

1995, pp.11-12) and whilst this has been aimed for, in the interest of transparency it should be noted that the literature review has been conducted based upon my “interpretation of principles.” (Hammersley, 2001, pp.545-546).

Empirical literature on social justice as a driver for educational change, SIPs, collaborative practice, and coaching within school improvement was engaged with. This was to ascertain relevant information and to begin to understand what is already written within these areas and to better understand, the lived experiences of practitioners involved. The search for literature relied primarily upon the Newcastle Library site and databases including ERIC, ProQuest, Scopus, JSTOR, Web of Science and separately, via google scholar. Criteria for the literature search included peer-reviewed, UK based research articles from the last 60 years. Key search terms were generated which led to the retrieval of most of the shortlisted research papers, although some were also retrieved via the related articles option. Beyond this, some studies were accessed as they had been recommended, whilst others were retrieved as they had been referenced in one study and were considered as relevant to read. Goldacre’s (2013) view of reading critically is transferable to me finding my research voice, recognising that I should not simply accept a piece of research as credible based upon assumptions. Therefore, each research paper was assessed according to the virtues of warrant, rigour, originality, and significance, rather than through my own stance, further alleviating bias concerns. Conscious of the importance of maintaining objectivity, contrary views were also actively searched for to enhance criticality. Studies included in the shortlist were considered thematically and the themes which emerged, informed each of the headings which follow this section.

Proficient research hinges on a clear question as the lynchpin; synonymously the literature review does so also. The literature review was instigated in response to the following question:

*What has been written about practitioner experience within school improvement partnerships and / or coaching, in relation to school improvement?*

The literature review which follows presents the main ideas prevalent in the field of social justice in education, partnership and coaching in relation to school

improvement with a particular focus on schools serving socioeconomically deprived pupil populations. The lived experiences of practitioners working in these contexts are considered, as related observations and reflections become threaded throughout the literature review.

## 2.2 Social justice as a driver for educational change

Education is widely considered as moral practice (Groundwater - Smith and Mockler, 2007), yet despite a range of research and government led drives to ensure equitable education for all, this remains elusive. Domina *et al*, (2017) assert that "...schools are egalitarian institutions that produce social inequality." (Domina *et al*, 2017, p.312). Streaming and social labelling which identify some as being at risk of leaving school early and others as becoming post-18 successes, alongside race and gender related stereotyping, are just some examples Domina *et al* (2027) provide as ways through which schools reinforce castigating categorisation of pupil groups. Gatekeeping of entry into schools, via set criteria through which schools either accept or reject applicants, tends to cast out marginalised pupil groups, thus schools in middle class areas, tend to maintain a middle class pupil demographic. Strikingly, schools as sorting systems, categorise children in ways which conflict with opportunity for social mobility and far from being moral practice (Groundwater - Smith and Mockler, 2007), they contribute to "...the most persistent inequalities in contemporary societies..." (Domina *et al*, 2017, p.3.15). Educational research from Thrupp, (1997, 2023); Reay (2017); Hutchinson *et al* (2019) and Hutchings (2021) further highlight inequality in education by communicating desperate disparities between the educational experiences of those youngsters who live in poverty and those who do not. Their work is upsetting and urgent and as such, I include it next to advocate for social justice as a driver for educational change.

Thrupp (1997) argues that educational policy contributes to the reproduction of a class structure which unfairly favours privileged social groups. Over 25 year later, Thrupp (2023) confirms that the "middle class have too many friends in education" and "that not enough educators are really defending the interests of the poor." (Thrupp, 2023, p.117). Reay (2017) conducted five hundred interviews with children about their experiences of living in a working class family. Reay's (2017)

work confirms how these children have limited economic resources and as such, face significant social and cultural barriers which alienate them within the education system. Educational policies and curriculum content, render the school experience to be one of exclusivity, orientated towards middle class children. Hutchinson *et al's* (2019) research challenges notions of the national curriculum and examination system in England as being an opportunity for all to succeed, confirming that the GCSE attainment gap between the most and least privileged has stopped closing. At secondary school level, the gap between the most and least affluent pupil populations, has widened at almost two years (Hutchinson *et al*, 2019). A prediction of almost one hundred years is provided in terms of the time it could take to close the attainment gap, if this trajectory continues. Hutchings (2021), shares how social mobility remains limited, as policies aimed at addressing issues remain unfruitful and unfulfilled, with the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils being apparent, well before they even start school. Thinking about the lived experiences of pupils living in poverty, unable to compete fairly in education with any true chance of parity seems unethical and elitist. There is an immediate call therefore, for social justice as a driver for educational change to comprehensively and compassionately address the adverse effects of poverty, in and through education.

### 2.2.1 Accountability and socioeconomic adversity in education

Thrupp and Lupton (2006) recognise that rather than being an equitable equalizer, education policy and schooling can deepen disparities. They found that the majority of schools placed in special measures were those with low socioeconomic status. The accountability arena whereby odds are operating against the socioeconomically deprived, are in effect disadvantaging the disadvantaged and rather than required educational reform (Simmons and Smyth, 2018) to endorse equity, struggling schools are too often further oppressed as they become categorised as 'failing.'

Thrupp's (1999) research set in New Zealand secondary schools concluded that socioeconomic status:

... affects school processes in numerous ways which would cumulatively boost the academic performance of schools in middle class settings and drag it down in low socio-economic settings. (Thrupp, 1999, p.309).

Several years later, Thrupp and Lupton (2006) call for school context to be taken more seriously across secondary schools in England, on the grounds of social justice. In doing so, they acknowledge that “contextualisation, misused, can be antithetical to social justice.” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p.318). Rather than excusing low performance however; Thrupp and Lupton (2006) call for context to be considered to inform bespoke intervention, so that improvements may be made, where they are needed the most. Furthermore, they assert a need for fairer reporting systems related to outcomes to take into account, the socioeconomic context of a school’s pupil population.

Whilst schools may be considered as contributing to both social justice and social injustice, there is a plethora of research which seeks to see what can be done to help practitioners within to address adversities. Research into collaboration between schools and school improvement partnership work, being a strong example, as advocated by Hargreaves (2001, 2003), Fullan (2004) and Armstrong (2015). Hargreaves (2001, 2003) and Fullan (2004) advocate collaborative practice between schools as beneficial for school development and systemic change. Armstrong (2015) promotes school improvement partnerships as being able to positively impact examination outcomes. Erring on the side of caution however, Huxham and Vangen (2003, 2012), and Thrupp and Wilmott (2003), question the validity of partnerships as the solution for school improvement. This is especially the case for those schools serving the most socioeconomically deprived communities, where school improvement efforts tend to be particularly focused, in order to get struggling schools to fulfil accountability driven demands. A dilemma is clear here as the accountability system which identifies schools for improvement via partnership work, is partly accountable for the situation they face of falling below politically enforced expectations, which predominantly impacts schools facing socioeconomic deprivation. Practitioners and pupils working in struggling schools, remain in a continuous cycle of enforced and unfulfilled accountability measures, accompanied by subsequent compulsory intervention, including SIPs and coaching as mechanisms from which to enforce

improvements. Thus, a climate of performativity is established, which can be both crippling and affirming for practitioners, as will be discussed next.

### 2.2.2 Accountability and performativity in education

Ball (2000) offers a working definition of performativity:

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or a system of 'terror' in Lyotard's (1984) words, that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change.

(Ball, 2000, p.1).

Performativity in education is part and parcel of the teaching profession today (Holloway and Brass, 2018). Ball (2003) documents a telling teacher reflection, in response to the performativity regime which was emerging at that time:

It's as though children are mere nuts and bolts on some distant production line, and it angers me to see them treated so clinically. (Ball, 2003, p.216).

Over a decade later, Holloway and Brass (2018) build upon the work of Ball (2003) by comparing performative conditions of teaching today, to a decade earlier, concluding that:

...barely 10 years later, another group of teachers showed not only an acceptance of the accountability system, but a reliance upon it for gauging their value and improving their worth. (Holloway and Brass, 2018, p.380).

Thus, performative appears to have become normative and with the passing of time, top - down targets and benchmarks appear to be rallying rather than rivalling teachers, providing a precise system of:

... what teachers need to know and monitor themselves, improve themselves, and fashion themselves as professionals.

(Holloway and Brass, 2018, p.380).

Holloway and Brass (2018) describe how the teaching profession appears to have become so conditioned within the accountability driven arena of politicised educational policy. The impact being that teachers seek clarity and confirmation of their own professional identity and worth through performative related routines of monitoring and regulation. Interestingly, this appears to be a widely accepted, expected and unquestioned situation by teachers. Schools as sorting systems,

via their array of categorisation activity for pupils (Domina *et al*, 2017), also seem to provide a platform from which practitioners become complacently categorised within their professional practice. Thus, pupils and their teachers become confirmed or condemned through what has become, normative, performative practice. Clearly, categorisation within education impacts both pupils and practitioners, however for those youngsters facing poverty, and for their teachers, the impact can be intensely felt, as will be covered next.

### 2.2.3 Performativity, poverty and the curriculum

Performativity is arguably more contentious and problematic when bluntly applied within schools serving socioeconomically deprived pupil populations. Simmons and Smyth (2018) reference Reay's (2017) publication titled *Miseducation* as providing:

...sobering insights into how working-class culture is often disregarded, disrespected and violated by the strictures of the neoliberal school...

(Simmons and Smyth, 2018, p.249).

Criticism here, links to streaming within schools and limitations within the curriculum which tend to alienate, rather than alleviate working-class adversities in education. Granted, working-class does not always equate to social and economic disadvantage, however as Reay's (2017) research confirms; almost all those in receipt of free school meals, or in receipt of pupil premium tend to be working-class. Reay (2017) reveals that:

...the working-class experience of education has traditionally been one of educational failure, not success. Central to working-class relationships to state schooling is that it is not their educational system.

(Reay, 2017, p.76).

Building on from this, Simmons and Smyth's (2018) writing is wedged with profound political discontent towards the negating intrusion and impact of neoliberalism within education, the workforce and in wider society. They call it out, claiming:

...the structures and processes of education have nevertheless been fragmented and reconfigured to produce a complex quasi-market which systematically disadvantages working-class youth whilst simultaneously masking increased inequality in discourses of excellence, opportunity and ambition. (Simmons and Smyth, 2018, p.249).

A pedagogical plea progresses from this, whereby Simmons and Smyth (2018) raise the importance of upskilling teachers to be able to cultivate creative and critical learning in the classroom in order to challenge institutionalised inequalities. Relating points raised here to aforementioned findings from Holloway and Brass (2018) calls into question whether the teaching profession having adjusted over the last decade to a performative system of education, has inadvertently further endorsed inequity in education, or improved it?

Thrupp and Lupton's (2006) research communicates teachers expressing a need to be 'hard' and 'cruel' when positioning themselves within the poverty versus performativity discourse, as captured here:

... It sounds so cruel [but] what I've learned teaching in these kinds of areas is that it's not an excuse and you don't say 'poor little child'. You say 'yes, it's tough, it's hard, I want to support you and the best way to support you is that you leave here with 5 A-C passes so you can do what you want.'

(Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p. 319).

The transformational power of education must be capitalised upon to counteract poverty induced inequalities, rather than further exacerbating social injustice. Therefore, a combination of the above quote, within which students achieve against adversity through high expectations and support, combined with caring encouragement poses a favourable balance. Beyond this, a contextually conscious system is desirable, not to excuse hardships, however to better help educationalists and their pupils to thrive emotionally, socially, spiritually and academically.

Positioning my practitioner self within this discourse, I hold the perspective that deprivation does have a detrimental impact on people. However, my view as someone who experienced poverty as a child and who works with youngsters from deprived communities today, is that a socioeconomically deprived starting point does not need to become a determiner of outcomes, or a limiter of life chances. Rather, such circumstances can, and often do become

motivational for educationalists and students to work together, to make a difference to diminish deprivation gaps (Fullan, 2003) within and through education. The role of education to enhance opportunity and enhance the odds for the economically deprived cannot be dismissed. Dedicated practitioners and schools can see past poverty, and riches can resonate from such contexts to heed Thrupp's (2023) call for practitioners to defend the interests of the most socioeconomically deprived pupils in our communities (Thrupp, 2023).

All schools face their own challenges, and it should be recognised that at the other end of the spectrum, schools serving an affluent audience, have to respond to high levels of student stress relating to exam expectations and excessive pressure from parents. Subsequent undesirable demands may be placed upon the teaching profession working with financially privileged pupils. Recent reports (Sutton Trust, 2021) relating to the pressures placed upon teachers due to the Covid 19 pandemic, revealed that an immense amount of pressure was placed upon teachers and schools, from parents to inflate student attainment grades, in more affluent areas.

A significant portion of pupils from Partner School are from financially prosperous backgrounds and related to this, Partner School has to navigate high levels of parental interest and involvement. Whilst this is mostly supportive, this can be overly critical and demanding at times, as confirmed by Partner Deputy Head. Granted, each educational establishment faces obstacles, however the examples provided here also reinforce disparities, representing the socioeconomically advantaged parent as a savvy active influencer with the intellectual capital to further heighten the academic gains of middle class children (Thrupp, 2016). Hutchings's (2021) publication affirms this notion:

... social mobility is limited by a 'glass floor'; those from higher social classes use a range of strategies to ensure that their children do not drop down the social scale. (Hutchings, 2021, p.137).

In summary, regardless of the socioeconomic status of pupil populations, high levels of accountability are customary across all contexts. Practitioners in education strive to support students to thrive socially, spiritually, morally, and academically; however, heightened accountability and a constricted focus on

academic attainment appears to eclipse other endeavours. Examination outcomes continue to communicate currency and kudos in a competitive society. Affluent pupils and their parents are better equipped to navigate the narrowed curriculum (Hutchings, 2021). The politically prescribed English Baccalaureate (DfE, 2019) is a strong example of the narrowing of the curriculum, although the DfE (2019) may argue to the contrary. Prosperous pupils become profiled as those most likely to become academic successes.

Disappointingly, social and ethnic diversity seems to be dismissed in such curriculum decision making, thus deepening disadvantage. A strong example being the restricted range of languages which pupils may qualify in as part of the English Baccalaureate. This excludes Eastern European languages as well as many others. Beyond the English Baccalaureate, GCSEs only remain available in some languages. Relating this point to Host School and many others serving a wide range of ethnicities, with a high proportion of pupils who have EAL, many of whom have limited secure English on entry; it seems unfair that multilingual pupils, such as the Gypsy/Roma cohort (16% of Host School) are unable to secure a qualification in their own language, as this opportunity does not exist within the English education system. Many then struggle to secure quality outcomes through the rigour of the GCSE English curriculum too.

Those compelled by the moral imperative (Fullan, 2003) can make a difference, however wider changes must be mandated if equity through education is to be realised. Hutchings (2021) reflects upon the disturbing outcomes of the PISA report (2018), indicating low levels of satisfaction from pupils in England relating to their school lives, when compared with their counterparts from across Europe (OECD, 2019). Hutchings (2021) sympathetically stresses the following:

...many children, and particularly those who are disadvantaged, experience only failure must be contributing to these low levels of satisfaction. Children and young people need to experience the joy of learning, get a sense of achievement from acquiring and using new skills, and learn to live with others, communicating, negotiating, cooperating and collaborating. (Hutchings, 2021, p.164).

Linking Hutchings's (2021) above appeal here with earlier discussions, there is a consistently occurring call to re-culture the education system in England and to enable and energise schools to place greater value on communication,

collaboration and citizenship among staff and pupils (Hutchings, 2021; Klassen and Anderson 2009; Johnson *et al*, 2012; Dale and James, 2015). Granted, all schools face their own challenges, however those facing high levels of deprivation and deemed as needing to improve in difficult circumstances have high and heavy performative, curriculum, and moral demands to meet. Maintaining a strong sense of professional worth and helping youngsters to ascertain a sense of self-worth whilst doing so too, without having to be hard and cruel (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006) is no mean feat. Working with other schools to try to do so, whilst clearly contentious within the deficit dilemma of school improvement, does offer an opportunity to overcome some obstacles.

Macro issues which have been raised here, contextualise the need for social justice as a driver for educational change and as an absolute necessity and human right. Added to this, accountability and performativity in education and the adverse impact this has on pupils and practitioners situated within socioeconomically deprived contexts, appeals for an equitable education system. It has also been recognised, that SIPs can be both problematic and progressive within the performative regime, for sfcc.

Next, meso level aspects of collaboration and SIPs will be considered, commencing with collaboration for school improvement purposes and the origins of collaboration between schools.

### 2.3 Collaboration for school improvement purposes

Between 1987-1988, Jones *et al*, (1990) reported over 140,000 collaborations amounting to 40% of schools across the United States of America. These partnerships are amongst the earliest reported within educational research and relate to outside organisations supporting schools, rather than school to school collaboration. Collaboration with and between schools can be enhanced by a practitioner's abilities to be willing and able to collaborate. Internal opportunities within schools prepare practitioners for collaboration, as colleagues may be encouraged to pair up to plan or to problem solve around an issue. Many students and teachers experience sophisticated collaborative practices such as Kagan's (1989) structural approach to cooperative learning. Despite many schools now

operating open door policies and collaborative practices internally, some teachers still favour working behind closed doors, in isolation (Kuh, 2016). This indicates some unease and concern about potential judgment from another. Kuh (2016) confirms that some practitioners who may appear resistant to collaboration and change, prefer to remain protected within the confines and comfort of isolated working, where they may avoid criticism and fear from another. So, whilst some practitioners have become used to conforming to performative customs such as observations and appraisal, through which to interpret and understand their professional identity (Holloway and Brass, 2018), others have aimed to avoid situations whereby their practice becomes watched, criticised, or categorised.

Despite difficulties pertaining to working with others, Jones *et al*, (1990) illustrate partnership as a “popular reform strategy” (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.1). Early models of collaboration are explained as those which are bought into on a voluntary basis “to serve both mutually shared and unique self-interests” (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.119). Surprisingly, Jones *et al*, (1990) note that even when partnerships are voluntarily entered into, there is a balancing act to behold between gains and frustrations:

...partnership remains contingent on personal gains outweighing normal frustrations from working with outsiders. (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.120).

The sense of an external partner as a stranger is communicated within the term of “outsiders” here. Even where there are benefits to behold, external help is echoed as being somewhat problematic and worth only embarking upon if there is a benefit to both parties. Furthermore, the suggestion is that frustration is an inevitable part of the partnership process, when working with “outsiders” (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.120). Knowing that conditions are not easy to establish and that complexities are inherent, even via voluntary collaboration does provoke thought about how collaboration may manifest, when one school is made to work with another.

Many school improvement partnerships have been and continue to be enforced via top-down government led interventions. Consequently, the voluntary element dissipates for those involved in school turnaround projects across America (United States Department of Education, 2009) and within schools deemed to be

failing across England today. Whilst collaborative activity in schools in England have been around for decades, formal partnerships gained momentum in England since the City Challenges (2003-2008) initiative launch, under New Labour's rule.

City Challenges (2003-2008) was aimed at improving failing schools in London. Within this time, the DfES funded comprehensive research to form the national framework for coaching and mentoring (CUREE, 2005) which encapsulates the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring in relation to pupil learning to inform an outcome orientated approach to staff development. At the same time, a national SIP initiative was also phased in by the Labour government across England's schools from 2005, with the aim of assigning each headteacher with a school improvement partner (DfES, 2004, 2005, 2006). Regardless of context, schools were expected to receive five visits in an academic year from their school improvement partner, until the phasing out of this strategy by the coalition government in May 2010. School improvement partners consisted of those working for the Local Education Authority (LEA), or from serving local and national Headteachers. The aim was to provide direct support and challenge to headteachers via school improvement partners, known as "critical friends" (Miliband, 2004).

Tantamount to SIPs and coaching, the notion of a critical friend has a range of differing definitions applied, as will be expanded upon in 2.3.5. Successive governments have continued to promote SIPs, as such they have continued to evolve. In the earliest forms, these tended to be dogmatically directed, whereas today, a more progressive approach of collaborative cohesion is growing with many schools opting to work with others, towards mutual interests. SIPs now take many different forms (Armstrong, 2015) and remain a prominent feature within school improvement efforts across England today. Although, schools identified as needing to improve by the government, are not afforded the option of working their way through challenges with a school of their choosing. Rather, another school is selected for them, which often faces different demands, hence the dynamic may be one of difference and difficulty from the outset, as will be considered in the section which follows

### 2.3.1 The deprivation deficit and school improvement partnership work

Schools serving high numbers of socioeconomically deprived pupil populations are more likely to be the ones identified as requiring the most improvements in comparison to socioeconomically advantaged contexts (Holloway and Brass, 2018). As such, they are designated a school improvement partner as the government ensure that “failing” schools partner up with “successful” schools in a “self-improving school system.” (DfE, 2010, para 7.4). Evans *et al* (2005) raise concerns regarding the deficit model of partnership:

... ‘partnership’ often denotes a deficit model, with more successful schools supporting (or in some cases taking over) less successful ones.

(Evans *et al*, 2005, p.223).

The deficit model criticised by Evans *et al* (2005) indicates a hierarchy and is better known as a performance partnership, whereby a school having achieved the accolade of being a successful school, becomes paired with one identified as underperforming, to generate improvements. The deficit discourse clearly arises out of issues within the aforementioned performativity and accountability arena, entrenched within the English education system.

Whilst contentious on the one hand, conditions within contextually challenging school contexts can be so demanding that an additional professional or professionals brought in via a formalised partnership can cultivate growth and capacity. King and Bouchard (2011) concur, noting that further strength can be secured within such schools, however they are careful to point out the need for balance between external pressure, internal capacity and “context-dependent assistance” (King and Bouchard, 2011, p.664) to implement change. King and Bouchard (2011) recognise that external interventions, underpinned by contextually specific coaching and collaborative practices which focus on instruction and teacher development, can enhance learning. In order to be successful however, King and Bouchard (2011) found that there needs to be sufficient flex within policies to meet individual school contexts, whilst also ensuring that enough time is provided for new learning and organisational change to take root. This, they consider as necessary in order to support and reshape teacher development and practice in a way that impacts learning.

The Partnership between Partner School and Host School is an example of a performance partnership. It is questionable whether a partnership imposed upon a school to improve may be seen by those involved as a partnership, which by its very definition communicates parity, or if it is viewed by its function as a hierarchical intervention. The extent to which practitioners within and across Partner and Host School consider the partnership as fitting the deficit model, (Evans *et al*, 2005) or as building capacity (King and Bouchard, 2011), or something else remains to be seen. The section which follows considers the need for contextual sensitivity for schools facing challenging contexts.

### 2.3.2 Contextual sensitivity for schools facing challenging contexts

Contextual sensitivity is recognised as an important factor in the facilitation of effective school improvement (Hallinger, 2018), and SIPs (Allen, 2007). Allen (2007) communicates contextual sensitivity as promoting “positive cultural conditions” (Allen, 2007, p.308), most notably in what has been deemed as the “deficit model” (Evans, 2005; Allen, 2007, p.305), or a performance federation (Armstrong, 2015). Rather than rallying up enthusiasm within schools for a proposed SIP, reluctance ensues through the labelling of “some schools as failing, or causing concern,” thus placing “restrictions on the willingness of those involved to take risks.” (West, 2010, p.96). Hierarchy stigmatizes such relationships (Evans *et al*, 2005), contradicting the concept of partnership in its purist sense.

The White Paper (DfE, 2010) highlights the need to “create a school system which is more effectively self-improving” (DfE, 2010, p.73). Since then, advancements in this regard amplified, as local authorities continued to have reduced authority over schools. SIPs have great potential to heed the call for a self-improving school system (Armstrong, 2015), however stakeholders involved need to navigate fine and fragile lines if they are going to come anywhere close to cultivating a culture conducive to cohesive collegiality. It is also questionable, how possible this is within the performative and competitive school system when supposedly ‘well to do’ schools teaching predominantly middleclass cohorts are telling those working in high poverty contexts to ‘do well’, when facing very

different demands (Thrupp 1997; Thrupp and Lupton, 2006). Performance federations, despite the denoted hierarchy do however, appear to be faring well (Chapman *et al*, 2013, Armstrong, 2015). Chapman *et al*'s (2013) study confirms that performance federations do make a difference. This research builds upon earlier studies by Chapman (2009, 2011) to confirm that performance federations have a positive impact on student outcomes, thus indicating potential for local solutions via school to school support, for schools identified as facing challenges.

Armstrong (2015) concurs in a review of the evidence surrounding effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement, affirming performance federations as "...those which have the most positive influence on student attainment." (Armstrong, 2015, p.13). It is important to highlight here that changes to examination measures, first introduced in 2014, would not have been reflected within this. As Gorard (2022) indicates, as presented in 1.1, there was a definite and steep decline for pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding from this point onwards. In the interest of transparency, it is also worth highlighting that research by Armstrong (2015) into SIPs is funded and endorsed by the DfE.

West (2010) recognises the need for school improvement efforts to be "handled sensitively" as "not to further disadvantage schools and groups of learners that are already struggling against the odds." (West, 2010, p.109). Hallinger (2018) highlights the need to consider: the broader political picture, the school as an organisation, the local area, and a schools demographical make-up in addition to the attributes possessed by the leader. A differentiated approach which is personalised per school and takes account of a diverse range of school specific characteristics is suggested here. Relationships between partnered schools should be formed with a clear focus and shared understanding and appreciation of contextual complexities within the supported school.

SIP practices based upon an understanding of school context present a progressive, yet too frequently unfulfilled prospect. Hallinger (2018) reflects:

...research syntheses which report *what successful leaders do* have tended to strip away the 'context specificity' needed to help practitioners understand *how to apply* findings in different schools.

(Hallinger, 2018, p.6).

Owing to a shortage in studies for practitioners on how to achieve the 'how to', in practice, Barth (2006) and Hallinger (2018), redirect practitioners involved with school improvement to draw upon their "craft knowledge" (Barth, 2006, p.8) and "wisdom of practice" (Hallinger, 2018, p.19). What Hallinger (2018) describes here is a practitioner working in partnership, who is better equipped to apply findings for school success in practice, and in a contextually sensitive way. Coaching within school improvement partnerships, like any intervention in a high need setting is not a panacea for poverty induced inequalities, however it does offer some potential from which to provide contextually sensitive support and to translate staff development into classroom practice. SIPs and coaching within these will be considered in 2.3.3.

### 2.3.3 School improvement partnerships and coaching between schools

Showers (1984) emphasises the essentiality of coaching to ensure school improvement endeavours have impact when translating teacher training into the classroom. Fullan (1982) identifies that even when initial improvements are made whereby teachers transfer training into practice with some success, this tends to tail off within a relatively short amount of time. These observations from both Showers (1984) and Fullan (1982), may in part explain why previous school partnership efforts I experienced seemed to fade out. Optimistically, there is promise within the premise that with focussed follow-up via coaching, school improvement efforts, incorporating staff development may be realised (Showers, 1984). Lochmiller (2021) recognises the merits of coaching in being able to move schools forward, endorsing a case for contextualised coaching in a school improvement capacity to be explored further. Within this, Lochmiller (2021) asserts an urgent need to:

...conceptualize and define how coaching in school improvement contexts differs from coaching practice aiming to enhance individual instructional or leadership practice. (Lochmiller, 2021 p.397).

Regardless of whichever form a SIP takes, or a coaching approach may align with, it is clear that each situation is as unique as the school setting within which these practices exist. Coaching as an example, is described as "different things to different people." (Denton and Hasbrouck, 2009 p.155). Armstrong (2015)

outlines different types of school partnership, whereas Chapman and Mujis (2013) recognise the scope between tightly formal to informal 'ad hoc' practices across partnerships. Considering such contrasts, Chapman and Mujis (2013) view these as "poles of a continuum" as oppose to dichotomies (Chapman and Mujis, 2013, p.355). This observation by Chapman and Mujis (2013) prompts reflection regarding the merits of applying different approaches of partnership practice intuitively according to the situation and school context at hand. Similarly, the same may be said of coaching, as Heineke (2013), recognises that "...there is value in coaches who are aware of and use the complete continuum of coaching models/stances..." (Heineke, 2013, p.429).

Cox *et al* (2014) consider coaching as "a good match for the enormous diversity of individual and organisational needs if approached in an informed way." (Cox *et al*, 2014, p.156). Education is not averse to variations of styles within and across numerous disciplines. The method to be applied, ought to be determined by the context, need and desired outcome, and as such is likely to stretch and flex across a continuum. Given the range of coaching approaches and applications, some consistency in practice ought to be secured to set a standard for coaching and to encourage coaching practices and relationships which are underpinned by ethical practice to be mutually established (Iordanou *et al*, 2017). Linked to this, Iordanou *et al*, (2017) assert the importance of creating the right climate and conditions for coaching conversations to flourish, so that deep and developmental discussions around issues of an ethical nature may be brought to the fore and actively addressed (Iordanou *et al* (2017).

The climate around any SIP from which coaching is implemented, will undoubtedly have an influence on the uptake and buy-in from recipients involved. Whilst 'partnership' and 'coaching' may resonate positively with practitioners who have been afforded opportunities to enter into such interventions willingly, this may not necessarily be the case for those who have to engage in SIP and coaching practices to improve. This scenario is explored next, as the ideology and reality of partnership and coaching in a politicalised education system is studied alongside the ensuing impact on professional wellbeing.

### 2.3.4 ideology and reality of partnership and coaching in a politicised education system

Compulsory collaboration between educationalists for school improvement purposes, as imposed by policy makers and the resulting tensions, have been well documented for decades. Hargreaves (1990, 1994) conveys intensified in-school interactions during the change process, as captured within the term of “contrived collegiality” which:

...replaces spontaneous, unpredictable, and difficult-to-control forms of teacher-generated collaboration with forms of collaboration that are captured, contained, and contrived by administrators instead.

(Hargreaves 1994, p.196).

The contrived culture of control and imposed change within schools as communicated by Hargreaves (1994) here, continues to be of concern in England’s schools today and is cutting across schools as colleagues collaborate across sites.

It is evident that where SIPs are driven by performativity to raise standards and outcomes as determined by examination results, a discourse of dichotomies is prevalent. “Pressure and support” (Chapman and Harris, 2004 p.219) “high challenge, high support” (Evans *et al*, 2005, p.224), “trust and mistrust” (Coleman, 2012, p.84), “...open to being supported, resistance occurred in others” (Mujis, 2015, p.581) remain commonly cited experiences from the perspectives of the recipients within SIPs.

At the heart of each educational institution involved in a path of improvement through school partnership work, are practitioners with feelings. Emotions experienced can be intense, as Dale and James (2015) cover well in their study about the importance of “affective containment.” The absence of affective containment can be detrimental to staff and students. Dale and James (2015) examine the relationship between organisational and personal change, surmising that minor change which is welcome by recipients results in “low affective content” which is a comfortable state. At the other end, “high affective content” arises out of radical, unwelcome change, resulting in “anger, resentment and enmity” (Dale and James, 2015, p. 96). Different reactions are to be expected as practitioners encounter change and embark upon improvement journeys. The surrounding

ethos and approach of the improvement work can set the right tone, rather than set emotions apart and deepen dichotomies, especially if importance is placed upon “affective containment during educational change, ... for feelings to be expressed and ... used productively...” (Dale and James, 2015, p. 106).

Pressure and support is a dominant theme within coaching discourse too. So, to consider coaching in a similar vein, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) make distinctions between developmental and technical coaching. In doing so, the issue of “contrived collegiality” arises again, via their assertion that professional peer coaching prioritises implementation, education and contrived collegiality, above development, training and collaborative culture (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990). Parallels are clear between partnerships and coaching here, albeit with a focus on tensions, rather than how these may work in tandem to support school improvement. Kostin and Haeger’s (2006) study into coaching to sustain school improvement acknowledges the presence of pressure and support, however in doing so they provide an alternative perspective with more promise. Kostin and Haeger (2006) identify that:

... an outside coach properly prepared and sensitive to individual and whole school concerns, can provide a balance of pressure and support to initiate and sustain meaningful school improvement.

(Kostin and Haeger, 2006, p.29).

The potential of coaching to support school improvement efforts is endorsed here, albeit with the proviso that the right conditions are in place such as the coach being prepared and possessing contextual sensitivity.

The recurring pattern of pressure and support within and across school improvement and coaching practices on the one hand presents tensions, however on the other hand, applying pressure and support cohesively and strategically can serve to advance progress too. Relating this idea to an everyday example in education, a student is more likely to work hard to submit an assignment on time and to the expected standard, with effective support from their course leader and the accompanying pressure of meeting a deadline and assessment boundaries. Linking this principle to the context of improving schools in difficult and challenging contexts, Chapman and Harris (2004) provide a solid example of pressure and support as beneficial, they note that a climate more conducive to positivity and progress was established via Headteachers who

praised the school, and clarified pastoral and academic expectations, as well as promoting mutual respect. A salient strength found in the NCSL study of amongst the most successful Headteachers in handling school improvement situations, was how they instilled a time sensitive focus on securing high standards of academia, alongside an insistence on achievement from their child and adult stakeholders (Chapman and Harris, 2004).

The sense of support and pressure blending together is well captured here as is the sense of cultivating the climate of value and high expectations, thus illustrating the impact of cohesively combining support and pressure to bring about change. Success relies on striking the right balance and skills. If a lack of resourcefulness lies within, as Elmore (2003) contends, changes will not easily be made. Elmore (2003) argues that practitioners at the heart of school improvement need to possess the acumen to be able to counteract challenges, otherwise pressure associated with external accountability will have adverse effects.

An abundance of acumen may not be enough to penetrate politically mandated measures for improvement, as Hatcher's (2014) research reveals. Hatcher (2014) examines as a case-study, the development of a new partnership model propositioned by a local authority in a large city in England. Hatcher (2014) tracks its transition from a local authority led model, to a headteacher initiated one. Within the paper, Hatcher (2014) condemns government SIP networks as coercive rather than collaborative, criticising them as follows:

Control over the schools in the new partnerships is exercised externally by government through the coercive power of the performativity regime, policed by the regulative powers of Ofsted and the DfE and the threat of forced takeover by academy sponsors. (Hatcher, 2014, p.367).

Whilst the planned approach of schools working together seeks to embrace the ethos of partnership, the politicised and pressurised climate of performativity remains at play, thus placing a political wedge in working practices between partnering schools. Pressure and support may in part, provide a profitable purpose in the short-term, however many schools including Host School serve some of the most deprived pupil populations and in doing so, operate in a constant state of needing to improve as they consistently fall short of meeting

non-contextualised accountability measures. Pressure and support therefore becomes an expected way of existence, rather than a welcome one. Hatcher (2014) suggests a way forward via:

...opening up the potential of the new partnerships to become the vehicle of a public–professional alliance for a more democratic, egalitarian and emancipatory vision for the local school system. (Hatcher, 2014, p.269).

Hatcher's (2014) vision for partnerships to become the driving force of a "public - professional alliance" (Hatcher, 2014, p.269), presents a more desirable picture. This does however appear to be an unfulfilled vision, as of yet.

The extent to which partnerships may actually become emancipatory in reality under the present political climate and context of prescribed partnership work is questionable, as Woods and Woods (2005) elaborate. Rather than viewing school to school partnership as a beneficial alliance, Woods and Woods (2005) condemn the inherent "practical power relationships" (Woods and Woods, 2005, p.23). Scepticism accompanies the sentiment of 'partnership' when those placed in positions of support over exert their power when working in a school improvement capacity. Woods and Woods (2005) challenge "...the idea of partnership that is built into the policy discourse that labels it as partnership" (Woods and Woods, 2005, p.23). The suggestion here is that politically fuelled interventions are implemented under the pretence of partnership, when they are often viewed as something less constructive by the stakeholders subjected to these.

Instead of bridging between schools, barriers borne out of the perceived deficit model (Evans, 2005) may emerge between partnered schools, as West (2010) observes that "...even the most well intended of interventions can themselves create barriers to progress" (West, 2010, p.95). West (2010) communicates a fine line between well intended intervention provided by the partnering school, when this becomes experienced as intrusion by the beneficiary school. Well intended intervention conveys a positive supportive measure, however if ill introduced and poorly executed, any SIP strategy is likely to be ill received by the recipients and hinder progress. Chapman and Fullan (2007) concur, whilst comprehending the difficulty posed in striking the right balance as they identify "...finding the dynamic balance between tight and loose is the perennial dilemma". (Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.208). Chapman and Fullan (2007) acknowledge the "top-down,

bottom-up dilemma” inherent in school improvement when “limiting tightness” and “diffusing looseness” (Chapman and Fullan, 2007, p.209). Partnership it seems cannot be confirmed as ‘partnership’ by its very title, which evidently encapsulates some cynicism.

Distinctly, there is an array of approaches and agendas from which SIPs arise and these present problems as well as opportunities. Partnerships which seek to meet the ideology of partnership are more likely to cultivate a constructive alliance. Linked to this, the notion of a school improvement partner or a coach as a critical friend provides a step, albeit a small and tentative one towards this ideology being met in practice and will be discussed next.

### 2.3.5 The critical friend – support and challenge versus surveillance and discipline

The concept and practice of being a “critical friend” was the focus of research by MacPhail *et al* (2021) who explored the role of the critical friend in supporting and enhancing professional development in schools. They apply Costa and Kallick’s (1993) definition:

... a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.  
(Costa and Kallick, 1993, p.50).

This remains one of the most cited definitions of a critical friend in education today. In the context of Costa and Kallick’s original (1993) publication, a critical friend is posited as a person who lends a lens from which to see new possibilities to enhance the practice of another, across different layers of the school system. This coincides well with bringing together school partnership and coaching. Critical friend (Costa and Kallick, 1993) coverage can be widespread, including and not limited to classrooms, professional development sessions and across administrators. Criticism is considered as an “art” (Costa and Kallick, 1993, p.51), conducive to self-reflection and evaluation. The role of the critical friend is to work through a critical friend process with their peer, to foster thought and self-reflection without the need for the recipient to defend any decisions. MacPhail *et*

al (2021) identify complementary common ground between coaching, mentoring and critical friendship in education, as they affirm that critical friendship may be present in both mentoring and coaching roles (MacPhail *et al*, 2021).

In a study of effective coaching relationships, van Woerkom (2010) reveals that the notion of a critical friend as presented by Costa and Kallick (1993), is considered by a significant number of coachees as “crucial” (van Woerkom, 2010 p.264). Whilst there may be some support for the coach as a critical friend, Swaffield (2002) critiques the contradiction posed in the description yet sets semantics aside to make sense of Costa and Kallick’s (1993) definition. Swaffield (2002) does so by placing a hypothetical partition between the people and the actions involved “...as in being a friend to the headteacher and teachers as people, whilst at the same time being a critic of their actions.” (Swaffield, 2002, p.3). Swaffield continues the debate surrounding the critical friend in SIPs, as over a decade later, Swaffield, (2015) presents possibilities and problems owing to the dynamics of the critical friend, school improvement agenda:

The SIP programme could be interpreted as a commitment to the entitlement of headteachers to support and challenge, or as a mechanism for surveillance and discipline. (Swaffield, 2015, p.61).

Swaffield’s (2015) insight presents poles of a continuum between the opportunity of support and challenge, versus uninvited monitoring and regulation in an already stringently supervised educational system. There is, as Swaffield (2015) recognises, variability and subjectivity in what constitutes to the phenomenon of ‘support’. This discussion brings to the fore, the persistence of problematic perceptions owing to contentious contextual constraints which can pull professionals who lead school improvement and recipients, in different directions.

On the one hand, a school improvement partner or coach as a critical friend presents possibilities for improved support and practice, when welcomed and well facilitated. On the other hand, when rooted in surveillance and criticism, critical friendship through SIPs and coaching can be damaging to practitioners, relationships and contradictory to the cause. Climate has been referred to through various sections within this chapter, due to the importance and impact of climate on the lived experiences of practitioners, during SIP endeavours. Climate will be focussed upon further now, as working conditions and climate during educational change are explored first, followed by cooperation and change, trust and

relationships, before lastly looking at reciprocity, as micro level issues are now honed into in 2.4.

## 2.4 Working conditions and climate during educational change

Cucchiara *et al*, (2015) observe intensified working conditions and an increase in workload for teachers involved in school turnaround projects, however remark that “working conditions are good when teachers feel they are supported and capable of being effective.” (Cucchiara *et al*, 2015, p.282). During challenging times of change, such as a school being placed in a category of “special measures” (Ofsted, 2021) and subjected to intensified external support and scrutiny, it appears that decent working conditions may still be achievable, if facilitated appropriately. Satisfaction in the workplace ensues when teachers’ social conditions at work encompass positive collegial relationships, within a trusting, respectful and open school culture; (Klassen and Anderson, 2009; Johnson *et al*, 2012).

Investing time to create opportunities for teachers to come together to talk and to communicate openly is advocated to enhance improvement efforts within struggling schools, as Johnson (2020) identifies in an interview with Heller (2020) titled “Organising schools so teachers can succeed.” Within the interview, Johnson (2020) explains what makes some schools working in high poverty contexts more successful at maintaining positive working conditions. Johnson (2020) identifies that schools are more likely to be successful in sustaining change, when teachers within are regarded as genuine partners by the headteacher and where they are involved in the identification of challenges which are specific to their particular school. Furthermore, Klassen (2020) emphasises the benefits of teachers who get to address challenges in practice, by working side by side with the headteacher. Related to this, Evans and Benefield (2001) recognise the importance of leaders in schools, possessing understanding of “the key issues upon which the acceptability of an individual's work context depends” (Evans and Benefield, 2001, p. 305) and how this may help or hinder staff morale.

The consequences of not cultivating a respectful and communicative climate during significant change, can be costly, as illustrated in the study by Dale and

James (2015) referenced in 2.3.4. Their research presents the need for “affective containment” which “enables feelings to be fully experienced and to be used productively” (Dale and James, 2015, p.92) as part of the change process. Their study explores a situation of unwelcome change in a college agricultural campus, and highlights the adverse effect of neglecting a need for “affective containment” during this time. It is clear from the background provided by Dale and James (2015), that change was necessary at the agricultural campus concerned. Unprofessional and blurred boundaries had occurred between students and staff in what had become an idle institution. It is not the change that is contested by the staff and students within the agricultural campus, although many did aim to resist change. Rather, the lack of consultation and communication about the imposed changes created animosity amongst some staff within, which then spread to some of the students, with dire consequences.

Dale and James (2015) document how the approach taken of those instigating intensive and unwelcome change within the agricultural campus is called into question. “Outsiders” (Jones *et al*, 1990) imposed their agenda for change without communicating with, or involving the staff and students, and this propagated antipathy. Consequently, some influential, despondent staff members projected their dislike of change and their distaste and disregard towards the “outsiders” onto some students. Subsequently, a deer hut which had been erected by the outsider tasked with improving the college, was burned down by the influenced students. The students concerned were punished by being permanently excluded. Although an extreme example, it emphasises the emotive side of educational change, recognising and repositioning the professionals and students as people with extreme emotions within this. Providing time and space for “affective containment” (Dale and James, 2015) to allow all parties involved to express and channel feelings productively in any change process, is therefore prudent.

Working conditions and climate during educational change are also well covered by Hargreaves (2004) who finds some agreement with studies by Dale and James (2015) and Klassen (2020):

Inclusive change and reform processes that engage teachers' knowledge and commitments are more likely to increase teachers' professional

involvement in school improvement and reduce the anger and anxiety that divert their emotional energies into attacking others and protecting the self.

(Hargreaves, 2004, p.306).

School improvement and change efforts which are inclusive by valuing the knowledge and commitment of teachers is echoed by Hargreaves (2004) here. Hargreaves (2004) encourages those leading change to positively engage teaching staff as a way to reduce anxieties and annoyances, which may otherwise be unleashed onto others.

Change is an inevitable part of any teaching career, however depending upon school context, those under persistent external scrutiny linked to underperformance in examinations, as is the case in Host School; change can seem incessant. Findings from Kiefer's (2005) research into ongoing change across a range of different organisations reveals that, as a person's exposure to organisationally enforced changes increase, so too does the detrimental impact this has on their working climate, wellbeing, future prospects and interactions from within and towards the institution. Essentially, incessant change exasperates the aforementioned lived experiences of those on the receiving end of change, for the worse (Kiefer, 2005, p.890). Linking these findings from Kiefer (2005) to schools facing challenging circumstances undergoing ongoing improvement initiatives, one can see how staff within may be prone to being at increased risk and exposure towards negative experiences, if each change is not well managed on a practical or personal level.

Regardless of the intensely emotional extent to which reactions to change linked to imposed school improvement may be experienced by practitioners on the receiving end of these, change inevitably continues. The sub-section which follows explores the relationship between cooperation and change.

#### 2.4.1 Cooperation and change

Hasbrouck and Denton (2005, 2007) indicate that a teacher who is not actually collaborative can still be coached as long as they are able to be cooperative. This premise by Hasbrouck and Denton (2005, 2007) could on the one hand be

regarded as positive, in that coaching may still have an impact, even where the coachee favours solitary working. On the other hand, this could resonate with Ball (2003), aligned with Foucault's (1979) assertion whereby recipients of reform, such as the aforementioned "cooperative" coachee have been produced via "technicians of behaviour", their task "to produce bodies that are docile and capable" (Foucault 1979, p.294). According to Girardet (2018), change in practice only takes root when actioned and realised in practice by the individual practitioner. Intended change therefore is interdependent upon how the recipient relates to and regards the proposed or enforced change and whether or not they respond through action. Whilst a willingness to work together may seem sufficient at surface level, it is important to maintain an awareness that this may not necessarily be rooted in a genuine readiness to be involved. On the contrary, "cooperation" may be owing to passive acceptance and at worse, to the "terrors of performativity." (Ball, 2003).

One cannot assume that cooperation and change can be opted into or out of by everyone. Depending upon circumstance and where different people are positioned within society, as depicted by Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation (5.7), there are the "haves" who assert themselves as hierarchically superior with citizen control at the top of the social ladder, and the "have nots" at the very bottom, who are perceived by the "haves" to be hierarchically inferior, and in need of being cured or educated (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). Cooperation in the case of the "have nots" is elusive as their lowly position exposes them to coercion as they are placed in a manipulated non-participatory position. Six other rungs lie between the top and the bottom rungs, with each ascending step presenting levels of increased participation and ultimately, power towards the very top of the ladder. Whether or not the top rung may be reached by everyone is synonymous with the quandary of social mobility and how feasible it is for all to experience upwards mobility in a society which seemingly sorts, categorises and contains people based upon socioeconomic starting points, social standing, race and gender (Domina *et al*, 2017).

The complex nature of cooperation and change has been considered alongside positionality and power. Thinking through the issues raised throughout this chapter linked with social injustices, contributes to a deeper understanding of the

political and school climate practitioners and pupils in schools facing challenging contexts, have to fathom. Pupils and practitioners who work in high poverty settings, stand on fragile and fragmented foundations which make upwards mobility a significant struggle. Coaching within a SIP can be helpful, however owing to hierarchical challenges, establishing trust and relationships during an imposed SIP is not easy to achieve. The sub-section which follows explores trust and relationships further.

#### 2.4.2 Trust and relationships

Trust is the most common theme within the retrieved research papers on coaching and SIPs. Relationships within both coaching and school partnerships being an intimately related, close second. Robertson's (2009) study focuses on coaching leadership through partnership. Robertson (2009) asserts the need for "high levels of trust" (Robertson, 2009, p.40) to allow leaders working in partnership to bypass hierarchies and to share their vulnerabilities as vehicles for growth. Here, the potential of partnership as a learning relationship to transcend teaching and learning and learning and teaching across all stakeholders is cyclically rooted in relational trust and reciprocity. Robertson (2009) applies a Maori definition:

... ako - the teacher as learner and the learner as teacher", not distinguishing between teaching and learning as a practice.

(Robertson, 2009, p.42).

The practice of teaching and learning is increasingly referred to as learning and teaching across schools, placing learning as the higher stake, however the removal of any hierarchy by Robertson (2009) moves beyond this and as such poses a powerful proposition for practice. If one were to apply the same philosophy to partnership and coaching practices, whereby the roles of coach and coachee, and supported partner school and supporting partner school become interchangeable, it paves a clearer path for relationships based upon trust, rather than power. Relating this finding to my research study, it will be relevant to explore whether relationships and trust are built and sustained, or destabilised and subverted at different levels through the partnership work.

Both coaching and SIPs share as a benefit, the perspective of outsiders who are able to lead individuals or groups towards better ways of being. This is based upon an assumption that the coaches or improvement partners concerned are credible and dependable and the supported staff are at least, cooperative. Drawing upon other research in the field, Robertson (2009) highlights the importance of the outside eye to:

...achieve double- or triple-loop learning that is rich and critically reflective (Argyris 1976) and will lead to reflection on action, in action and for action (Schoen 1987). (Robertson, 2009, p.43).

Time is needed for a practitioner to firstly accept and then to adapt in accordance to what an outside observer may suggest. One needs to be able to place trust in them and be trusted by them, this comes with building a relationship over time. This is not always achieved within SIPs. Woods and Woods (2005) provide two opposing examples of impressions expressed by different colleagues regarding their school improvement partners. One colleague reported the impression they held of their partner, in terms of their “educationally friendly philosophy and background” (Woods and Woods, 2005, p.26), whereas another recounted “they were sharks!” (Woods and Woods, 2005, p.26).

Heineke’s (2013) study on coaching discourse reveals the necessity for a coach to be a good listener, to be able to create trust by keeping confidences, and be available and credible. These were considered important by coached teachers, although the teachers involved acknowledge “... this is not easy and often takes time.” (Heineke, 2013, p.418). Interestingly, in the same study, a coached practitioner spoke figuratively of having “her hand slapped” by her coach. (Heineke, 2013, p.417). Within this research, Heineke (2013) notes that one coach in the study declares that “listening” is one of the most important skills of a coach, yet the same coach provided limited opportunity for their coachee to speak during their interactions. These latter revelations seem at odds with the empowering ethos of coaching. This raises the importance of applying proficient coaching skills (Fletcher and Mullen, 2012) when coaching and further endorses the need for coaching to be ethically underpinned (Iordanou *et al*, 2017). If the lived experience of the coachee conflicts with this, it is unlikely to be perceived as coaching, or may even risk leaving the coachee with a poor impression of

coaching, thus mistrusting and dismissing coaching as being of any benefit to them, hence wasting valuable time of both parties.

Trust and relationships rely upon mutual respect. This is an important consideration and requires tactful navigation in school improvement work, where a hierarchical power imbalance is inherent. The relationship between partnered schools is enhanced via the supporting school's ability to carefully consider the context and their communication with the supported school accordingly. Allen, (2007) captures the sentiments of one such school improvement partner "We don't want it to come over as "we know everything, and you know nothing." (Allen, 2007, p.306). The result of the recipient school in a partnership considering their supporting partner school as a "know it all" would indeed create resistance. Similarly, effective communication from a coach is fundamental to sustaining coaching relationships, as the situation of being coached can present some vulnerability and potential resistance too, if the coach adopts a judgmental approach. Heineke (2013) expands:

... if coaches are perceived as looking down on teachers and/or viewing the teachers as deficient, teachers will put up a wall and resist working with the coach. (Heineke, 2013, p.417).

Within the study by Woods and Woods (2005), views from secondary head teachers on a public-private partnership were collected and one headteacher noted the following in relation to the partnership:

People are so influenced by impressions... theirs hasn't been that huge... There hasn't been any of that vision.

(Woods and Woods, 2005, p.27).

Impressions formed of fellow practitioners and in this case, partners, heavily influence the buy in from colleagues involved. Perceptions of coaches involved in school improvement efforts are also variable and coach credibility forms a crucial part of trust and relationship building. Differences are apparent between intentions and actuality in SIPs and in coaching. Whilst opposing views of partners are presented here, both have validity as someone's 'truth' based upon their experiences and perceptions.

Chapman and Harris (2004) recognise that there will be a range in influence on practitioners across a supported school. They consider that this varies according to the style of the support applied. This ranges from "...raising teacher morale and raising expectations of teacher performance" (Chapman and Harris, 2004, p.223), to " ... erosion of professional confidence and capability", leaving those within "devalued and de-skilled;..." (Chapman and Harris, 2004, p.224). The latter example seems so far removed from any notion of support, rather this resembles repression and a climate from which unhealthy and untrusting relationships take root.

A paradox has been presented, as partners who asserted themselves as the supporting partner or as coaches, supposed that they were supporting or coaching. However, the reality from the lived experiences of the recipients, reveals that they were perceived somewhat differently. Those in the position of 'partner' or 'coach', may possess an extensive repertoire of knowledge and skills, however this is not enough. How credible and trustworthy a partner or coach is perceived to be, by a recipient or coachee, therefore has significance. Caring and contextually sensitive application in practice is needed. Effective partnerships and coaching relationships are unlikely to be formed without this firm foundation. In the context of accountability and within the deficit model of SIPs, which Host School is in, it is questionable whether authentic trusting relationships may be formed or forged.

Trust and relationships are enhanced by mutuality and reciprocity, however reciprocity can be compromised in situations whereby one struggling school is placed in the position of requiring support from a school identified as being successful, particularly when the characteristics between the two differ greatly. Opportunities for reciprocity may be difficult to realise when improvement related milestones are the main focus of the SIP, leaving limited time and scope from which the supporting school may reciprocate or at worst, not even be recognised as having anything of worth to share in return. Reciprocity will now be discussed in detail.

### 2.4.3 Reciprocity

Reciprocity supports the smooth running of any partnership, this remains the case within the deficit model of SIPs. Hargreaves (2014) challenges the assumption that the supported school has more to gain through the partnership than the supporting school, as Hargreaves reveals a contrary view based upon regular reports presented to him. Hargreaves recognises that in the deficit model of school improvement, staff from the higher performing school gain more from the experience owing to how the “sharing boosts both their self-image and their reflectiveness.” (Hargreaves, 2014, p.702).

Even when SIPs appear altruistically motivated, each partnership has the potential to provide adult and child stakeholders with mutual benefits between schools, even unforeseen ones. “Creating a learning community” (Chapman and Harris, 2004, p.223) is a motivating factor and recognised benefit of schools partnering up. This coincides with aims of the SIP movement (DfES, 2003):

Benefits to individual schools are important. But there are much greater system wide benefits to be had ... We have to create a learning community with the learner right at its heart. (DfES, 2003, p. 9).

Ambitions of achieving a learning community whilst theoretically and ethically sound are hard to accomplish in practice, as Dowling (2016) identifies a disconnect between professional development and transferability to practice:

...the relatively strong perception of being supported in professional development and collaboration is not entirely matched by practical outcomes. (Dowling, 2016, p.31).

Rather than connectivity between professional development and practice, Dowling (2016) acknowledges that a chasm is experienced by classroom practitioners who perceive “a gap between the ‘theoretical’ and the ‘practical’ day-to-day challenges...” (Dowling, 2016, p.32).

Educationalists at the chalk face in challenging contexts may therefore consider SIPs as yet another placebo practice, submissive of required reforms in education at a national and international level. Practicing in socioeconomically deprived contexts, one witnesses first-hand the prevalence of poverty and the challenges this presents for young people and their teachers. Partnering with another school therefore, may appear somewhat tokenistic in tackling social injustices,

particularly in relation to those which have been imposed by the education system.

Practitioners who demonstrate support for SIPs may be doing so pragmatically, seizing the partnership as an opportunity, or may on balance, share Coleman's (2012) understanding that "...collaborations are seldom the perfect outcome of explicit intent but instead are often clumsy solutions, ..." (Coleman, 2012, p.79). Pragmatically minded practitioners, able to conceptualise partnership as purposeful support, rather than imposed intervention or inspection, may be better able to adapt to SIP interventions.

Pragmatically minded or not, the educational elephant in the room remains that so many schools in high poverty contexts who are identified as "failing" via politicised measures, are forced further into submission due to result orientated regimes which favour the financially fortunate. For "failing schools" to be provided with a school improvement partner avoids any admission of the abhorrent effects of poverty in education, and of education on poverty. The problem in the 'failing school in need of support', scenario becomes the school, in need of support, rather than the inequitable education system in need of reform. Anderson's (2007) research into schools identified as causing concern and 'effective schools' as a strategy for improvement confirms:

The partnership initiative represents an example of a simple top-down solution to a complex problem; an over reliance on partnership and collaboration and a 'one size fits all' strategy... (Anderson, 2007, p.189).

It would make a refreshing change if the real reasons behind "failing" high poverty schools were unearthed and heard. Nonetheless, school to school support can be reciprocal and mutually beneficial for both parties, especially if practical outcomes are strived for. Anderson's (2007) research draws upon the work of Myers (1998) and Stoll and Fink (1996) and their own findings, to form a typology of partnerships which are insightful in understanding why reciprocity between partnerships may, or may not be achieved. Anderson (2007) reveals four partnership typologies, salient features from each are presented here:

The 'striving' partnership - partners trust each other; they value and respect one another's judgements and opinions. Teachers in both schools are increasingly convinced that the partnership supports their development and achieves a collegiate culture.

The 'swaying' partnership - working together but it is 'touch and go' whether the partnership will survive. Relationships are respectful; often cordial but not collegiate.

The 'sinking' partnership - initial enthusiasm from the dominant effective partner is gradually drained by the resistance and lack of commitment from the other, who is lukewarm and is seen not to 'pull his/her weight.'

The 'sunk' partnership - an inept pairing from the start. The partners feel forced into the partnership but are uncommitted and reluctant to work together. The relationship between the headteachers is dysfunctional and characterised by lack of trust and respect.

(Anderson, 2007, p.182-183).

Based upon the typologies provided, it is revealing that only the 'striving' partnership resonates with a reciprocal SIP experience. Interestingly, in Anderson's (2007) study of seven SIPs, only one was identified as striving, two as swaying, two as sinking, and two as sunk (Anderson, p.183). Reciprocity, it seems is hard to find in a SIP depicting the deficit model of a school 'causing concern' being supported, or improved by an 'effective school'. Reciprocity is more likely to be achieved if neither partner holds a deficit view of the other, or of either school context.

Macro, meso and micro level issues in and through education and school improvement have been explored via a social justice lens. The need and significance for this study has been further enriched and endorsed through this literature review. At macro level, practitioners in education are called upon to become friends (Thrupp, 2023) to those most marginalised in society. This is a moral calling, so that achievement and a sense of belonging and morale are not kept at a distance, from those who are most disadvantaged within and across communities. At meso level, the politicised accountability and performativity arena have been identified as problematic. In turn, this negatively influences micro level aspects of SIPs, as the climate and working conditions imposed during enforced change impacts cooperation, trust, relationships and reciprocity.

Next, attention is drawn to joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) as a potential practice in education, which could offer some way forward for schools wishing to work in partnership more progressively than what current SIP models tend to afford. Thereafter, a detailed summary of the literature review is provided.

## 2.5 Joint practice development

Critical of a lack of accountability from the government in the White Paper (2010) for struggling schools, via their push towards a “self-improving school system” (DfE, 2010), Hargreaves (2014), considers the conditions needed to facilitate this. Responsively, Hargreaves (2014) identifies three dimensions towards a self-improving school system, the first being “professional development”, the second “partnership competence” and the third “collaborative capital” (Hargreaves, 2014, p.701). Within each dimension are four strands and one of the strands under professional development promoted by Hargreaves (2014), which I consider as aligning with SIPs, peer coaching (Lofthouse and Leat, 2013) and this research, is “joint practice development” (Hargreaves, 2014, p. 702). Hargreaves (2014), considers “joint practice development” which moves beyond the deficit model of one hierarchical partner imparting “good practice” to its “done to” partner (Hargreaves, 2014, p.701).

Adapting and expanding on the idea of joint practice development, originating from Fielding *et al* (2004), Hargreaves (2014) promotes a version whereby:

... all the parties, schools as well as teachers, plan to go beyond their present practice, even though one party may clearly be more skilled than the other(s). It is not so much a transfer as a joint commitment by all the parties to get better at the practice than they now are.

(Hargreaves, 2014, p.702).

Hargreaves (2014) communicates a compelling vision of mutual mucking-in through joint educational endeavour. Partnership which embraces principles of joint practice development, diminish, rather than eradicate the deficit dilemma here, as some hierarchy may still stand. Nonetheless, narrowing the gap between the transfer of professional development theory into practical outcomes becomes more achievable as:

... routine practice and professional development fuse into one another. Secondly, the relationship between the teachers and/or the schools is one of reciprocity, not deficit.

(Hargreaves, 2014, p.703).

Hargreaves found limited examples of joint practice development within schools, however, where strong elements were observed, Hargreaves (2014) highlighted how schools branded this their own way, such as “collaborative working” (Hargreaves, 2014, p.702). A successful feature in schools where joint practice

development was found, was staff training opportunities being integrated alongside and within day-to-day school activity, rather than being an add on. This links with contextual sensitivity as professional development opportunities are connected with the daily needs and functioning of the school, rather than being a disparate bolt on. Reciprocity based on equity, rather than deficit was another distinguishing characteristic of school-to-school support within joint practice development. An example of this was one school spending their training day in a partner school, during what was a normal school day for them, to focus on a particular area of practice. Reciprocally, the same process was repeated the other way around. The idea being that each school has as much to learn from the other. Thus, joint practice development, if well enacted could extend boundaries of reciprocity towards parity and progress.

At its most advanced state, Hargreaves, (2014) identified joint practice development as occurring at leadership level, yet not in a top-down way, rather in leaders between schools admitting and addressing areas they wish to change within their own schools and working with one another through trust and mutuality to do so. Along with other dimensions and strands, Hargreaves (2014) promotes joint practice development as being able to contribute to schools being better able to become self-improving systems.

Through the reviewed literature on SIPs, contextual tensions have been confirmed within the deficit model, where the supporting school and the supported school have been partnered together for school improvement purposes. Even so, research also indicates that benefits can, and still do arise between two schools being made to work together. This scenario does however resemble a system of support which brings definite difficulties and also some good, arguably resembling a “clumsy solution” (Coleman, 2012, p.79). The notion of “joint practice development” (Hargreaves, 2014) on the other hand presents a different and more favourable prospect. A dynamic prevails, whereby schools choose to work with one another to develop in a way which values that contexts, strengths and challenges differ across schools, whilst also viewing each as being able to learn and benefit from one another. This emanates a more equitable vision of schools working together. Regardless of which approach is adopted by one school working with another school, this may still remain contingent on the quid

pro quo quandary of "...gains outweighing normal frustrations from working with outsiders." (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.120).

## 2.6 Summary of the literature review

Engagement with literature, has brought to the fore a range of interrelated issues, which when considered in relation to both the practitioners leading and those receiving SIPs, contributes to a heightened appreciation of the lived, day to day realities for all involved. Dichotomies which seem to run deep within scenarios of collaboration, coaching, partnership and of critical friendship, are of real interest; as some of these resonate with some of my own professional experiences and observations of SIPs within Host School. Furthermore, some research findings around this have really challenged my own viewpoint, making me consider other perspectives and experiences, different to my own.

I possess a positive disposition and as such always veer towards optimism. Previously, I had considered this a strength, however I now concede that my outlook on challenges as opportunities has perhaps concealed to me, how other people may view and experience situations differently. A motivator for me, may be a stressor for them. Those who choose to work in isolation (Kuh, 2016) as an example, those who have had negative experiences of coaching, like the teacher who received a metaphorical hand slap by their coach (Heineke, 2013), and those who experience frustrations from working with "outsiders" (Jones *et al*, 1990, p.120). This leads me to consider how the experiences of those I work with, some of whom are the participants involved in this study, differ to my own within the partnership and call me to question, what lived experiences of education and change are *really* like for them.

Professional identity or mis-identity as I see it, as a conditioned means of compliance within the confines of performative culture emerges through the work of Foucault (1979), Ball (2000, 2003), and Holloway and Brass (2018), as relevant. This provokes further thought about professionals, positionality, power and agency and makes me reflect whether educational professionals, myself included have become mere "technicians of behaviour", and if our prior calling to teach may have been reduced "to produce bodies that are docile and capable"

(Foucault 1979, p.294) or, is there an alternative and if so, how do we ascertain this to reclaim professional identity and pupil interest. Whether or not upwards mobility on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) is even plausible or possible for practitioners working in a sfcc, or if positionality remains fixed, have become aspects I wish to consider further and to be able to understand and provide a research informed response to.

Some elements around working conditions and climate during enforced change are predictable, such as an increase in workload compromising climate in the initial stages of change. Less anticipated and somewhat alarming however, is how heightened anxiety and emotions ensue, as demonstrated in the research by Dale and James (2015), advocating "affective containment" (Dale and James, 2015, p. 92). The significance and impact of culture to sustain workplace satisfaction in schools during times of challenge and change is a positive highlight, as it was confirmed that a positive culture can transcend a range of tribulations. Of course, such a culture cannot be assumed and needs to be established, which can be easier said than done with regards to the "terrors of performativity" (Ball, 2003) and contextual challenges prevalent in high poverty schools. However, knowing that the right culture can make school improvement related changes feel better, even in difficult times, offers some hope. The essentiality of people-centred interactions and support via positive collegial relationships, within a trusting, respectful and open school culture; (Klassen and Anderson, 2009; Johnson *et al*, 2012) shone through as a transformative take-away. The culture of the SIP work, is therefore worthy of exploring from participant's perspectives, as are the emotional aspects of change.

Ethically underpinned coaching (Iordanou *et al*, 2017), critical friendship and joint practice development offer some potential to help struggling schools too, if enacted well, and as such will be revisited. Common factors arise between each of these three approaches, including the trusting, developmental, dialogic, non-judgmental and humanistic quality inherent in each; if employed effectively, as ethical paired practice. Ethically endorsed partnering up for coaching, critical friendship or joint practice development can be at risk of becoming overlooked in achievement orientated agendas, despite having such progressive value. A key thread, worthy of further exploration is to learn whether or not the ONE Vision

(2019) SIP provides any insights into any of these ethically orientated approaches to school-to-school support, to better promote empowerment, rather than “command and control” (Towell, 2013; Jones, 2015). The qualities attributed to proficiency in the areas of coaching (Fletcher and Mullen, 2012; Heineke 2013; Towell, 2013; and Jones 2015), critical friendship (Costa and Kallick, 1993; van Woerkom, 2010; and MacPhail *et al*, 2021); and joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) are of further interest too.

The profound effects of poverty, performativity and accountability on schools and their adult and child stakeholders remain of great concern to myself and to many researchers whose work has been referenced within this chapter. The harsh realities of poverty induced inequalities are incessant and deeply troubling, however for those such as myself, feeling isolated in a struggling school situation, the abundance of research asserts that we are not alone. Within this deprivation dilemma, it is central to consider context whilst remaining overt to the fact that “contextualisation, misused, can be antithetical to social justice.” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006 p.318).

Each aspect which has been referred to so far in the summary of the literature review has relevance to this study, however most are well covered within the fields of school improvement partnership and coaching research already. What is less researched and much harder to source are studies into the lived experiences of practitioners during the process of a SIP. Upcoming research makes an original contribution by exploring the lived experiences of practitioners involved in the ONE Vision (2019) partnership and their reflections to subsequent SIP related, change activity. Perspectives of three key leaders from Partner School as the supporting school, and a range of six practitioners as the recipients of the SIP, including senior and middle leaders and teachers within Host School, will feature. Inclusion of practitioners from Partner School and Host School who work at different levels is intentional. This is to develop a deep understanding of how each individual practitioner participant experiences the SIP, and how similarities and differences occur across the different levels, even when each individual is seemingly involved in the same SIP.

Another strand to this study, is that the ONE Vision (2019) SIP does provide a practically orientated approach to school improvement, and as such may address the challenge which exists around support and collaboration falling short to meet practical outcomes (Dowling, 2016, p.31). The importance of hearing from local trusted voices in research is raised (Cockerill *et al*, 2021, p.7) as a powerful way to raise the profile of everyday realities for the people at the heart of a situation, and to influence improvements, not of the contrived kind (Hargreaves, 1990, 1994), but of the transformative type (UNESCO, 2016). I hope that this research may contribute to doing so also. The research methodology and methods I employ will need to be highly attuned to this and are presented next.

## CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

This chapter presents my research stance and explains the paradigmatic approach for this study. A conceptual framework outlining the case study is shared alongside a description of the design frame for this. Thereafter, contextual information is provided about Partner School and Host School which leads onto an explanation of participant selection for this study. Semi-structured interviews and related aspects including interview questions, climate and data are then considered. Sections on bias, limitations and ethics conclude this chapter.

### 3.1 Research Stance

Hodkinson and Macleod (2010) concede that the stance one takes towards how learning is generated, constructed, or acquired impacts upon methodological affinity and bias. Drawing upon my combined practices within education, I perceive that learning is mutually constructed. This premise influences my ontological position as constructivist and my epistemological view as interpretivist. Concurrently, my methodological preference is inductive and qualitative in nature. I am in allegiance with Guba and Lincoln's (1994) observations of the interpretivist-constructivist approach within which:

...the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the 'findings' are *literally created* as the investigation proceeds. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.111).

This affiliates with my world view that multiple realities exist, where truth is reciprocally constructed and continuously evolving over time. Notwithstanding, I recognise the contributions that both positivist and interpretivist paradigms play within social enquiry. I perceive that research design must be guided by research aims rather than research preferences. Therefore, a qualitatively led study which applied the advantages of a mixed model (Johnson *et al*, 2004) research design was employed. This was not to replace the positivist quantitative or constructivist qualitative approach "but rather to draw from the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both" (Johnson *et al*, 2004, pp.14-15). I acknowledge contrary views to my own, as Florczak (2014) questions the extent to which purists in the qualitative or quantitative paradigms may ever truly be able to immerse themselves in mixed methods research practice.

Florczak's (2014) assertion did not provide me with a concern or prevent me from applying a qualitatively led mixed methods approach within the pragmatic paradigm, however it does provoke conscious caution, evoking a need to remain self-aware at each stage of the research process.

Axiology, or in other words "...the role of values and their influences on the knowledge creation process" (Biedenbach and Jacobsson, 2016, p.140), is arguably of greater concern. How I consider the nature of ethics and how this impacts what I consider is of worth in wider society may impact what I perceive is of value within this study. Maintaining focus on following a course of action according to research aims as oppose to preferred ontological and epistemological methodology throughout, is as important as remaining alert to axiological influence. Florczak (2014) insists that the researcher who means to master mixed methods research must above all else, remain:

... reflexive and scrutinize their basic beliefs about the world and the manner in which they come to know and understand it.

(Florczak, 2014, p.280).

Quality and ethics should be inseparable and when consistently and conscientiously combined, assist research to attain Florczak's (2014) call for objective, critical reflexivity. Ethical issues and considerations run throughout this chapter and will also be returned to in the concluding section in 3.9.

### 3.1.1 Paradigmatic Approach

This research is approached from the paradigmatic stance of pragmatism (Morgan, 2014). I am aware of caution around misunderstanding and consequent misuse of 'pragmatism' resulting in "narrow approaches that reduce pragmatism to practicality" (Morgan, 2014 p.1045). Denscombe (2008) emphasises how issues borne out of the practical association of pragmatic as a word, makes pragmatic mixed methods research practice prone to being an "anything goes approach." (Denscombe, 2008 p.5). Morgan (2014) promotes a model of pragmatism which goes beyond a mere practical reliance of this approach based upon the notion of 'what works' and promotes pragmatism as a thorough philosophy to support mixed methods effectively. Morgan (2014) identifies

strengths in combining social justice research with classical pragmatism in a context bound way. Morgan (2014) highlights reciprocal benefits between classical pragmatism and social justice by highlighting the rich relationship between a researcher's prior experiences and the intended changes they seek to make through the research process. Morgan (2014) recognises the contextual, emotional and social factors which influence, motivate and collectively give strength to work on social justice, encouraging social justice research to extend and progress pragmatism further.

Through social justice led pragmatism, beliefs and actions continue to inform one another in a cyclical process. Pragmatic enquiry encourages all knowledge types to be considered in the pursuit of understanding a phenomenon. Pragmatism in terms of this research relates explicitly to the philosophical stance of pragmatism, (Morgan, 2014) whilst being underpinned by social justice.

Social justice orientated pragmatic inquiry is most pertinent to this research as:

The intent of the social justice design is to study a problem within an overall social justice framework that threads throughout the mixed methods study. (Creswell, 2015, p. 43).

Axiology and methodology are able to align in this approach as inseparable entities, therefore allowing integration of my philosophical stance and values towards social justice and transformative research to be of substance, rather than issues to detach from. This supports both my research and practitioner self, whilst providing a meaningful model from which to address research aims and questions well. As a practitioner having consistently served in schools located in contextually challenging and socioeconomically deprived areas, daily practice is led by a transformative and moral imperatively led calling encapsulated within Fullan's (2003) definition:

Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the gap between the high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens at school in a morally based knowledge society. (Fullan, 2003, p.29).

Consequently, it is from this moral calling that I propose that educational research questions should be inspired to benefit youngsters for whom education seeks to serve, so that *all* rather than a privileged *few* may thrive. Education is widely considered as a means to support "levelling up" (HM Government, 2022) to

enhance life chances. Evans *et al* (2005), however present a perspective which provokes thought and a call to action, on a much broader scale to address social inequality induced suffering, asserting that:

...the key issue of the gap in life chances between the rich and the poor in our society undermines any social interventions in education or other areas of social welfare. (Evans *et al*, 2005, p.231).

Granted, gaps in life chances are unable to be resolved by educational and social interventions alone, particularly as some can counterproductively create an even wider wedge, between the most and least affluent in society as covered in 1.1, 1.3. and 2.3.2. My experience in education has however privileged me with knowing many youngsters who despite being faced with socioeconomic adversity and significant hardship, have progressed to succeed. Experience, therefore sustains my beliefs as a practitioner and motivates action relating to this educational research.

Groundwater - Smith and Mockler (2007) posit that “Teaching is or should be moral practice.” (Groundwater - Smith and Mockler, 2007, p.209). This resonates with the earlier discussion in the literature review (2.3.2) relating to socioeconomic adversity in education as a motivating factor for some educational practitioners to want to make a difference in the most deprived areas. Within this, teacher motivation has been considered as being influenced by a range of factors, with moral purpose (Fullan, 2003) being a strong driver for some. Wilkins *et al* (2021) identify a new form of “neo-performative” practitioner in education with a “socially progressive” focus whose moral purpose and motivation is driven by the social justice and equity in education agenda. The statement posed by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) combined with the neo-performative drive described by Wilkins (2021) resonate with my practitioner and research self. These ideas are relevant to my methodology as this research seeks to provide rare insights into a SIP within a high poverty context and to see this through the eyes and hear this from the voices of practitioners at the heart of it. In doing so, I hope that only the most fitting support will feature in the future for staff and ultimately the pupils within my challenging, yet motivational school context and that there may be something within this study that may offer some assistance for other schools facing poverty induced challenges too.

Pragmatic social justice research is not defined on the basis of values and intent alone. Creswell (2015) outlines distinguishing characteristics which include the research question being informed by a particular theory or framework. In succession, this determines which participants will be invited to be involved, consecutively the data analysis is developed into themes which lead towards a call to action. Participation selection will be returned to in 3.5 and data analysis and themes will be expanded upon in 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4.8.

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

Aiming to avoid the danger identified by Denscombe (2008) of the “anything goes” approach (Denscombe, 2008 p.5), figure 3.1 was devised to capture the conceptual framework and overall methodological approach and methods which have been applied in the process of carrying out this research. Leshem and Trafford’s (2007) paper recognises a knowledge gap, noting that one third of doctoral students find difficulty in comprehending and then constructing a conceptual framework for their study. Responsively, Leshem and Trafford (2007) offer doctoral students guidance on establishing a conceptual framework and their following summary supports the approach I have aimed to adopt:

...the conceptual framework is a bridge between paradigms which explain the research issue and the practice of investigating that issue.

(Leshem and Trafford, 2007, p.99).

The conceptual framework presented as figure 3.1 communicates the vision in a clear and visual way, providing a strategic methodological map which I have followed in the pursuit of purposeful pragmatic social justice enquiry. Following on from the conceptual framework, an outline of the employed case study design is discussed.

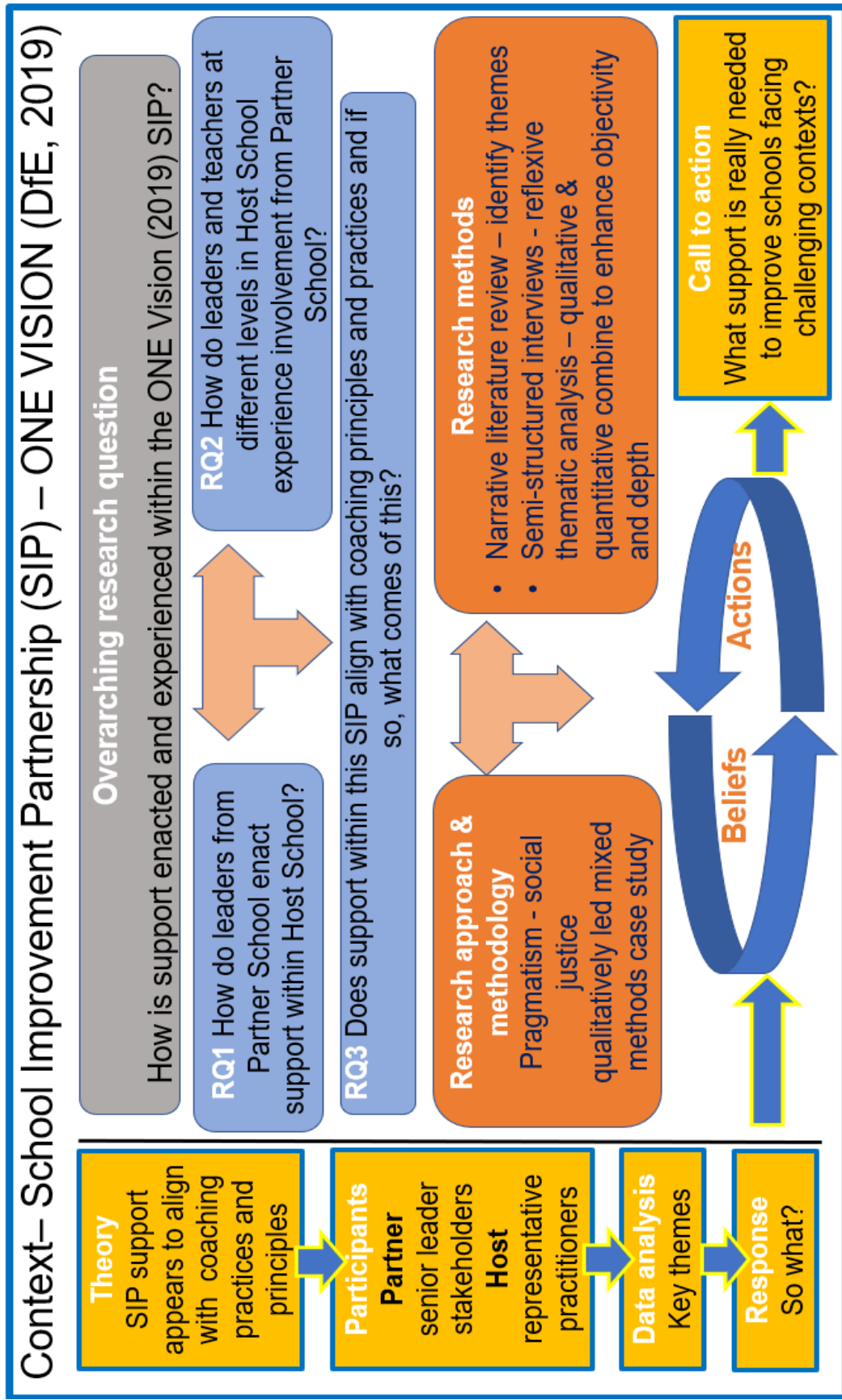


Figure 3.1 – Conceptual framework for pending research

### 3.3 Design frame - case study

This research seeks to explore the range in experiences of participants during the partnership and understand the approach taken by participants from Partner School in terms of how they establish and enact the partnership. How this is then lived through, by recipients in Host School, is of particular interest. Case study methodology is considered most appropriate to research the real-life context of the partnership between Host and Partner School and to “analyze the contextual conditions in relation to the case.” (Yin, 2014, p.50). Consequently, a case study spanning two years was employed. This allowed for deep analysis to be achieved as it is known to contribute to “knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political, and related phenomena.” (Yin, 2009, p.4). The outlook that was maintained was that case study outcomes would either be able to authenticate or challenge existing theories whilst generating new ones. The description for the case study type I carried out is defined as a single-case design and the partnership between the two schools is the holistic, single-unit of analysis (Yin, p.50, 2014). The single-case design seemed most appropriate to this research, as although the study includes two single and separate contexts of Partner School and Host School, the actual area of interest and analysis is the one partnership between the two schools.

### 3.4 Research context – Partner School

Partner School is an average-sized secondary school situated in a semi-rural agricultural town within England, in a different local authority to Host School. The social demographic of the school cohort is varied with students traveling in from a much wider area than where the school is situated. The percentage of students identified as SEN is 5.8%, which falls below the national average of 10.8%. Students with EAL make up 0.9% of the student population versus the national average of 16.9%. Those in receipt of FSM at any time over the last six years is at 26.6% which is almost at the 2020 national average.

Partner School previously labelled as “satisfactory” or grade “3” (Ofsted, 2009) over a decade ago improved to a “good” standard (2013) less than five years later and is now officially judged as an “outstanding” school (Ofsted, 2017 and Ofsted,

2022). Partner School remains at the top end of national comparative league tables published by the DfE. This had not always been the case for Partner School and the leadership currently in place have remained in situ for over ten years working together to take the school forward. Partner School's Progress 8 score for 2019 was "well above average" (GOV.UK, 2019) at 0.5, and was "above average" (GOV.UK, 2018) at 0.47 in 2018.

### 3.4.1 Research context – Host School

Host School is a larger than average-sized secondary school situated in one of the most populous urban areas in England, with high levels of deprivation. 56.4% of Host School's pupil population have been in receipt of FSM at any time over the last six years which more than doubles that of the national average of 27.7% for state funded mainstream secondary schools within the same period. Those who receive FSM tend to do so over a longer term too, mostly throughout their time at Host School. The percentage of pupils with EAL is 49.7% within Host School, compared to the national average of 16.9%. This also exceeds the norm for schools within the North East region. The percentage of pupils identified as having SEN is 30.7% compared with the national average of 10.8%. Evidently, a diverse pupil population exists within Host School, exceeding national averages for FSM, EAL and SEN, thus exacerbating contextual challenges. Rich in diversity, Host School encourages an inclusive ethos, as such there is a cohesive pupil and staff population for the most part, whose growth in character and culture is valued alongside academic achievement.

Host School was categorised as "well below average" (GOV.UK) with a Progress 8 score of -0.6 in 2019 compared with the local authority average of -0.27 and the national average of -0.03 for state funded schools (GOV.UK, 2019). In 2018, Host School's Progress 8 score was "below average" at -0.46, (GOV.UK) whilst in 2017 it was "average" (GOV.UK) at -0.13 and in 2016 it was "above average" (GOV.UK) at 0.42. Secondary schools across the North East region, including Host School, are amongst the lowest performing in the country (Hinds, 2019). In 2017, the new GCSE grading system was introduced nationally, with exams graded from 9-1 rather than A\*- G and a major reduction in coursework in favour

of formalised exams. Host School had previously been categorised as “Good” (Ofsted, 2013), pre-Progress 8 and pre-exam grading of 9-1. Host School has struggled to respond profitably to Progress 8 and the revised rigour applied to external examinations with a removal of coursework across most subjects. Literacy levels are low on entry with an average of 20% of secondary school starters below the functional reading age of 9 years and 6 months, and 50% below their chronological reading age. This presents a barrier to bridge in accessing the wider curriculum and when understanding exam texts and questions.

Host School has fallen below targeted examination grades for a three-year downward trend as evidenced by the inspection data summary report (IDSR) for secondary schools (GOV.UK, 2019). An interim Head was put in place in autumn, 2018 following a sudden departure of the previous Head. During the summer term of 2019, the ONE Vision DfE endorsed SIP and associated funding was offered to support Host School as a “failing school” (DfE, 2019) to progress from declining exam results.

The interim Head of Host School agreed to the matching up of Host School with Partner School as part of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP strategy. Approximately 30 miles separates Partner School and Host School. The Head of Partner School and that of Host School had previously worked together in a different school and context several years earlier, and as such already had an established working relationship from which to build upon, paving the way for the ONE Vision (2019) SIP to commence.

### 3.5 Participant selection

Given the nature of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and my position as an inside researcher, it was essential for me to elicit key features of the approach applied within the SIP between Partner and Host School as those involved viewed their lived experience of it, rather than how I did. Being closely linked to this research due to my role as a practitioner within it, I remained overtly aware of the positivity bias I brought, therefore it became integral to the integrity of this research that participant selection included those who may be likely to hold different views to

my own. The following captures what I consider as the ideal research state and conditions:

... getting into the field without disturbing it and looking and listening, until the lay meanings are understood in lay terms. There can be no imposition of meanings through hypotheses formulated in advance.

(Shipman, 1998, p.7).

Aspiring to achieve this research state is somewhat problematic when conducting research within one's own professional context, I cannot claim therefore to be without prejudice. I have hypothesised regularly throughout the partnership and the research process, as thinking and reflecting have become innate instincts for me, as they are for so many practitioners and researchers. Shipman's (1998) directive did encourage me to assert some, although not complete control over my stream of subjective consciousness towards a more open and objective position from which to seek, see, and make sense of "lay meanings" (Shipman, 1998, p.7). Carefully considered participant selection was pivotal within this.

Participant selection was approached from the angle of aiming to achieve a sample representative of a range of views and experiences from different positions within Host School, whereas those with most involvement in the partnership were selected from Partner School. Nine participants in total were recruited, three from Partner School and six from Host School. Partner School participants were selected via a purposive sample which targeted those best placed to offer the most insights associated with them having the highest profile within the SIP and being a regular presence within Host School. Subsequently, three key figures from Partner School were invited and recruited, these were all senior leaders and were the ones who had the most prominence within the partnership, due to the responsibilities they held within it. One was the long-standing Head from Partner School, responsible for overseeing the successful implementation of the ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) SIP, one was the Deputy Head who was partnered up with me directly to improve teaching and learning, and the other was an Assistant Head who oversaw the development of some non-core subject areas and Early Career Teachers within the SIP.

Six participants from Host School were sought, including one senior leader, two middle leaders, and three teachers. Mindful of sample selection bias, each

participant was selected for the broadly different perspectives they were considered to be able to offer. The Host senior leader was invited due to them being aligned with the Assistant Head from Partner School. One middle leader was recruited due to them leading a subject area identified for improvement within the SIP. The remaining middle leader was approached as they led a core subject and large team through this time of change and were able to offer a perspective different to their middle leader peer who was directly aligned with a leader from Partner School. The three leaders from Host School hold different, yet prominent positions within Host School and the SIP. Of the three teacher participants from Host School, one is a union leader, possessing a wider understanding of the impact of wellbeing and workload on staff as part of their wider professional focus. Another Host School teacher participant is a keen reader of educational research, known to be professionally assertive and critical of new initiatives. Both were invited due to being considered as reliable sources to offer counter views. The remaining teacher was invited due to them presenting a sense of typicality in terms of a regular teacher within Host School who was not partnered up with anyone from Partner School, yet was expected to get on board with the changes made through the SIP, as all Host School teaching staff were. One additional core teacher participant was invited, yet declined, citing time constraints.

All nine selected participants were staff members who had been employed within their respective contexts for at least ten years. This was intentional as it was important to this study to garner the experience and change process from those who had experienced prior SIPs and change as members of the teaching community, hence having common reference points from which to make relevant comparisons from.

Each participant provides a different lens from which to view the ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) SIP from. If further research was to follow on from this, it would be worth considering how the Early Career Teachers experienced the SIP and to explore any commonalities and contrasts when compared with the longer serving practitioners.

The participation information sheet and invitation to participate is presented as Appendix A and the declaration of informed consent, as Appendix B.

### 3.6 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a central source of qualitative and quantitative data generation within this study. Data generation and collection arose from semi-structured interviews which were conducted with each of the nine participants. The interviewing process is described by Gillham (2000) as:

... a conversation, usually between two people. But it is a conversation where one person – the interviewer – is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person. (Gillham, 2000, p.1).

As a research method, interviews “tend to be open-ended, narrative and holistic” (Greene and Hill, 2005, p. 13), thus offering much as a qualitative research method. Interviews can however, also complement quantitative data as part of a mixed methods approach. Being a practitioner within the context of Host School was beneficial, as access to participants was straightforward and the established professional relationships facilitated a communicative climate. A recognised disadvantage of being known to interviewees from both schools, was the threat of closeness and how being known to the participants may influence “respondent’s expectations of what the researcher wants to hear.” (Alvesson, 2003, p.169). Alvesson (2003) references and critiques Fontana and Frey (1994), who consider that familiarity between the interviewer and the interviewee, may indeed provide an empathetic foundation for reciprocal conversation between the two, in a way which garners a greater sense of reality. Alvesson (2003) concedes that participants may be influenced by the effect of “the available cultural scripts about how one should normally express oneself on particular topics” (Alvesson, 2003, p.169). Both points of view are valid and offer value in terms of understanding how participants may feel and function differently in an interview situation with myself. Given that I interviewed nine participants, it is likely that some engaged in part as Alvesson (2003) suggests and others as Fontana and Frey (1994) concede. Part of the process in participation selection did address concerns as I purposefully recruited Host Core Teacher and Host Lead. as they are known for being unapologetically and refreshingly open and candid. In the interest of ethics and transparency, this was made clear to them both at the point of invitation.

Reflecting on the idea of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ further, we each present a variety of faces or personas for different situations, contexts and audiences as we

habitually switch between private and public, professional and social roles on a daily basis. As a teacher, I communicate very differently with school pupils in school, when compared with my own two children at home. In terms of 'truth' therefore, I consider that 'truth' is both current and fluid, personal and valid and 'real' within the given situation, so that whatever any participant said at any point in time was their unquestionable 'truth' at that particular moment.

Taxer and Frenzel's (2015) study titled "Facets of teachers' emotional lives: A quantitative investigation of teachers' genuine, faked, and hidden emotions" extends the truth and reality discourse further. Taxer and Frenzel (2015) explore the extent to which teachers over or underplay their responses to situations within their school context. Taxer and Frenzel (2015) consider this as "inauthenticity" which is derived from "...either down-regulating an undesirable, experienced emotion or up-regulating an unfelt, desirable emotion." (Taxer and Frenzel, 2015, p.79). In relation to truth and reality, this realisation evokes consciousness, relating to the responsibility I considered myself to hold as an interviewer. Accepting the idea that truth is fluid and flexible, and that truth may be further enabled or disabled by the feelings of each individual participant in relation to their experience, helped to shape and inform the approach I took to explore and analyse interviewee responses. The emphasis applied, the emotion expressed and the style each participant communicated with was therefore assessed alongside the spoken word, valuing not only what was said, but how it was spoken. Whilst what was said and how it was said still risks being only part of a bigger picture, in doing so, I aimed to seize snapshots of significant substance.

Bridges (1999) endorses the outlook that educational research should be concerned with the truth in relation to the "matter(s) which are the focus of its enquiry," otherwise "it collapses into incoherence" (Bridges, 1999, p.597). I do understand that this approach may be contested by some who seek 'truth' via different means, such as Jones and Sigall (1971), Arken and Lake (1983) and other proponents of the "bogus pipeline" approach which coerces respondents into thinking that their responses will be assessed by a lie detecting device. The thinking behind this supposes that interviewees are more inclined to expose their less desirable behaviours, as the lesser of two evils when posed with the alternative of being untruthful or worst still, being branded a 'liar'. Such an

approach evokes major ethical concern, “despite the growing number of experiments reporting successful applications” (Arkin and Lake, 1983, p,87). The conditions and the climate which would surround such an interview are not conducive to the interview environment I would aim to create.

Kvale (2007) considers contrasting approaches without claiming one to hold higher value than the other, rather the strength of the approach applied is in being able to understand and work well within the associated epistemological framework. Kvale (2007) helpfully and creatively utilises two metaphors to draw distinctions between the interviewer being a “miner” or a “traveller” (Kvale, 2007, p.19). As a miner, interviewing is seen as “a process of knowledge collection” (Kvale, 2007, p.19) and for the traveller, it is “a process of knowledge construction.” (Kvale, 2007, p.19). Reflecting on these metaphors, the “traveller” is most aligned with my approach.

### 3.6.1 Interview climate

Considering the climate for the interview, pre-interview protocol was carefully considered, as was reducing “question threat” (Foddy, 1993). In a professional sense, three of the nine participants had seniority over me, one was on a par and five did not. I had at first assumed that those respondents I led, may be more at “threat,” and Foddy (1993) concurs, whilst also clarifying a contrary conflict, noting that researchers pose a research threat to those with higher status to themselves too. Foddy (1993) acknowledges concerns from higher status respondents, relating to questions which may help or hinder them and the way they are perceived. No interview question was designed to catch anyone out, rather they were designed with a view to catch people in, relative to research aims, thus heightening the chances of respondents being able to accept the requested information as “legitimate” (Foddy, 1993, p.123) and enhancing “trust” (Foddy, 1993, p.123). Explaining the multi-faceted relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, Douglas (1986) perceives:

...like any relationship, including the most friendly, it always involves some potential, or actual conflicts, that must be assiduously and creatively managed. However, it always involves some trust and cooperation.

(Douglas, 1986, p.26).

Providing participants with the interview schedule (Appendices C, D and E) well in advance and inviting them to edit, add or omit any questions according to their preferences, aimed to remove potential conflicts towards securing a trusting and cooperative climate. Even with such precautions, the fact that I am a member of one of the school teams involved may have had an influence on interviews. I perceive that the benefits of being inside the team as a “cultural member” (Mason, 2001) within Host School did outweigh the limitations. A key benefit was having access to both research contexts, participants and the data within these. Whilst I was unable to control the research environment, I was in a position to take care and control of the research and ethical considerations within this, thus enhancing climate and I did at all times, endeavour to do so.

Partner participants were invited to be interviewed at either Partner School or Host School, virtually owing to Covid-19, or at a neutral location of their choosing. Each opted to be interviewed within Partner School in three different locations, which they had each determined. Host School participants were provided with the option of being interviewed within Host School, in an on-site location of their choice, remotely due to Covid-19, or at a neutral place selected by them. Partner School was not offered as an interview location, as Host School participants had either spent limited, or no time within Partner School, hence it would not have been an appropriate space. Partner School participants on the other hand, had spent enough time in Host School that it made sense to offer this as a space to be interviewed within. Despite the offer of alternative spaces, all Host School participants decided to be interviewed within Host School, from the convenience of my office.

There were no omissions to the interview questions, as each interviewee agreed to answer all questions. There were some additional follow-up questions integrated within each interview, as and when opportunities arose to explore respondent comments more deeply. The interviews followed a tight structure in terms of each of the questions being asked as they appeared on the interview schedules. The actual interviews however, had sufficient flex within them in order to allow for interviewees to be able to flow further into areas of discussion which arose either through their varied responses, or via further follow-up questions from myself, prompted by their contributions. Having a quiet and undisturbed

space was beneficial in each case, as was remaining present in my research role to exercise quality listening with the intent of putting each participant at ease in the hope that this would facilitate free communication.

A research interview, like any research method cannot be assumed to 'work' just by doing it. Interviews in a range of circumstances can be daunting as Gillham (2000) notes that "for some groups the word 'interview' has negative connotations" (Gillham, 2000, p.5). This arouses consciousness regarding setting the right climate for respondents. Interview anxiety however is not limited to the interviewee, admittedly, I had experienced some nervous anticipation early on, pre-interviews too. However, the more I studied the method of interviews and developed a theoretical understanding that I was the "research instrument" (Gillham, 2000, p.4) within this, the more competent and confident I became. Essentially, developing the "traveller" (Kvale, 2007, p.19) mindset that none of this was about me really helped, it was about the conversation and facilitating that in the best manner possible, allowing myself to sink into the backdrop in order to allow the respondents and their thoughts, experiences and actions to take centre stage through their spoken words, whilst being supported to do so. The interview questions which I had prepared through a careful and thorough process also enhanced my own self-belief, as I was secure that these would serve the purpose well.

"Good contact" (Kvale, 2007, p.55) forms part of what Kvale (2007) refers to within "setting the stage", (Kvale, 2007, p.55) and I feel this was secured in each interview. Listening attentively and becoming comfortable in my research persona was helpful, as I remained guided by the research interview aims and what the interview sought to achieve. Having been on a range of interview panels previously, albeit not in a research context, I understood the importance of emotional intelligence in terms of making participants at ease. The quality of any interview however, regardless of how well this may be facilitated, is dependent upon the worth of the questions being asked and how these fit within the overall research aims and design, and will be discussed next.

### 3.6.2 Interview questions

Galletta (2013) perceives that the understanding one has of the literature, is influential when forming the research question, methods and analytical framework. Having conducted a literature review in advance of designing interview questions helped to inform the process of question design and subsequent analysis. Arsel (2017) draws distinctions between research questions and interview questions, advising that time spent in advance of interviews to think through interview protocol, supports in translating “etic research questions into emic interview ones” (Arsel, 2017, p. 942). Having invested substantial thought about the research question and interview questions, as well as the structure and the sequence of these was helpful, as was maintaining reflexivity throughout this process. The interview questions which were generated, yielded rich data during and post interview and as such serve the focus of this study well.

Each interviewee was interviewed once in the autumn term of 2021 which marked just over two years into the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. This seemed a most appropriate point in the research process, as the SIP work had been underway for a lengthy amount of time, whereby each participant would have had a range of different experiences to draw upon. Furthermore, any novelty effect of the initiative as new, would have worn off by this time, allowing for more of the lived reality to be revealed. Furthermore, interviewing participants two years into a partnership, I considered as beneficial in helping also to address the research gap and contribute to knowledge around relationships relating to SIPs being maintained and sustained over time (Armstrong, 2015).

I am aware of conditions required to facilitate interviews effectively, a main issue is to acknowledge and address power indifferences (Kvale, 2006). Each interviewee was provided with interview questions several weeks in advance of the interviews. A co-constructed quality was aimed for by inviting each participant to edit or omit any questions accordingly, pre-interview as per schedules presented in Appendices C, D and E. At the start of the interview, participants were also reminded that they could leave out, or rephrase any questions according to their preferences and that they may later omit, edit or extend upon aspects, after receiving their analysed transcript to check.

### 3.6.3 Interview data

Interviews were listened to multiple times and transcribed in full. Transcripts were then re-read and edited alongside listening to the recordings of the interviews to ensure that all spoken words were recorded accurately, and that punctuation was best placed to capture the actual flow of speech as it had been spoken. I assigned positive, negative or neutral tones to participant dialogue according to how each part had been spoken. Staying alert to vocal expression, intonation, emphasis and emotion within the interviews strengthened interpretation, enabling dialogue to be captured, not only as stated, however, most importantly as it was meant. Admittedly, one cannot always know for certain the exact meaning, as the speaker intended. As an extra measure, participants were provided with a copy of their analysed transcript and invited to confirm, challenge, edit or revoke any aspects.

Dey's (1999) proposition of "theoretical sufficiency," combined with Nelson's (2016) notion of "conceptual depth" informed my research response to the practical and ethical question of *what to, or not to* include within the analysis. Dey (1999) suggests that data collection and analysis may be concluded at the point that the researcher has garnered enough depth and gained sufficient understanding from which a theory can be constructed. Nelson (2016) prioritises quality in the data that is collected. Braun and Clarke (2021) expand:

From this perspective, theoretical saturation is as much, or even more, about the quality of data collected – their richness, depth, diversity and complexity,... (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p.202).

These combined calls for quality over quantity informed my decision to embark upon a thorough process of reflexive thematic analysis. Whilst much has been written about this, the following situates reflexive thematic analysis as being about "... the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process." (Braun and Clarke 2019, p. 594).

Rich interpretations of meaning are strived for, rather than a consensus or accurate response, however this is not to say that rigour is not required in a quest to find meaningful truths. Dilley's (2004) review of interviewing as qualitative research featuring the works of Seidman (1998), Kvale (1996), Rubin and Rubin,

(1995) emphasises the value in understanding for meaning, by tuning into the specifics of not just what is said, but how this is spoken and heard in relation to what was asked and what the interviewee is aiming to communicate. Navigating the facts within an interview, with more abstract aspects such as tone and intention is therefore a necessary part of the interviewing process.

In an attempt to truly 'hear' what was said and how it was spoken, I treated each transcript as its own entity by applying thematic coded analysis, distinct to each individual transcript. Thereafter, broader identification of commonalities and contrasts between codes were examined. As each interview was studied on an individual basis, the codes were not pre-determined. Codes for each interview emerged through thorough and repeated exploration of words, phrasing and tone. A main aim was to find meaning (Dilley, 2004). At times, codes were identified within part sentences and at others, codes were drawn out from longer sections of collective text. Coded analysis was then applied to help to identify themes. I colour coded text within the transcript and indicated a positive, neutral or negative tone of voice as seen in Appendix F. Further details about codes and themes extracted from interview transcripts are provided in 4.2.

Sipe and Ghiso (2004) regard coding as "a judgment call" and identify that the duality within this means of data analysis "... opens up possibilities, but always obscures other potential possibilities." (Sipe and Ghiso, 2004, p.482). Having shared findings with participants for their validation in each instance, helped to assure that "other opinions" (Becker, 1998, p.91) were sought, thus supporting, although not fully safeguarding a bridge between possibilities and obscured potential possibilities (Sipe and Ghiso, 2004, p.482).

In relation to coding, Saldana (2013) advises the researcher to be well organised, able to persevere, face ambiguity, be flexible, apply creativity, be rigorously ethical and have an extensive vocabulary (Saldana, 2013). Each characteristic here aligns well with what one would expect one to employ within the teaching profession, so this was not a challenge, although time to complete the coding to an expected high standard was. Involving the nine participants in interviews was important to this study, however it was only just a manageable stretch. A larger sample size may have jeopardised the overall investment and quality of what I was able to reasonably achieve as a lone researcher.

### 3.7 Bias

Hammersley (2003) judiciously awards joint prominence to the roles of educational researcher and educationalist. Hammersley (2003) does however highlight clear distinctions between the two, noting that the researcher owns factual claims, whereas the practitioner holds value claims (Hammersley, 2003). The social justice pragmatic design does present worth by going beyond the recognition of the values of the researcher and actually endorsing them. Hammersley's (2003) view was also of merit as a means to enable me to establish my research self, which I possessed far less experience in when compared with the vast experience I brought to this research as a practitioner. Therefore, Hammersley's (2003) assertion is one which was regularly reflected upon as I sought to establish myself as a researcher, ascertaining the research facts whilst maintaining awareness of the deeply held value claims I hold as an educationalist.

Bias concerns, whilst hard to eliminate due to the fact that I am in the leadership team of Host School and with heavy involvement in the SIP, have been considered throughout. Although qualitatively led, my approach merged into a mixed methods case-study whereby quantitative aspects were applied to support and strengthen findings. Drawing upon the benefits of quantitative methods added value, enabling me to see and hear greater depth and detail within what had been spoken and communicated by participants. I applied counts to each code whenever a different aspect of that particular code was presented within each transcript. For example, looking at Appendix F again, the code of consistency appears as two segments of speech, however within these, there are four distinct elements which become four different counts on that page for consistency. The first count is applied to Host School staff embedding the whole model, the second aligns with staff having resources shared with them to help them to be consistent, the third links to quality assurance of consistency and the last relates to CPD to support consistent application. So, in appendix F, despite two coded sections of communication about consistency, four counts would actually be applied to the code of consistency on that particular page of transcript. This number then increases, according to the remaining pages within the transcript and any further counts which may accumulate through the same

process. This method was consistently applied to each code within each transcript to reach the counts applied to codes as featured in 4.2, table 4.4. Integrating and interrogating quantitative and qualitative data contributed to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon.

Methods employed generated a lot of data and I remained conscious of how decision making around what to, or what not to include can become subject to researcher or participant bias. Relevant precautions were made as far as practically possible to reduce the influence of practitioner researcher bias. Rigour in my approach was achieved through staying sensitive to the research situation and emerging findings. Maintaining objectivity to avoid bias was supported by formally reviewing findings with participants and peers along the way. Respondent validation or “member checks” (Torrance, 2012, p.114) secured confirmability, whereby each participant was able to read and check their own transcript as well as being able to edit, retract or confirm whether or not the findings chapter captured the essence of their lived experience appropriately. Writing about triangulation, respondent validation and democratic participation in mixed methods research (MMR), Torrance (2012) promotes more qualitatively led mixed methods research as a lever for social justice by encouraging qualitative approaches and techniques which are more radical in nature. Through doing so, Torrance (2012) recognises the complexities involved, however places high value on such an approach to hone in on and honour perspectives of participants.

Attention to the perspectives of participants was a key consideration throughout the process and opportunities for democratic participation and respondent validation occurred from the outset. Each participant was provided with the full picture of what was going to be presented in terms of findings, including what they said alongside other participants, and my analysis of this, from chapter 4. Each participant had the opportunity to confirm or edit their contributions. No participant requested any changes, which was reassuring and could be taken to represent that my interpretation of their transcripts was considered fitting. Torrance (2012) recognises that respondent validation is an “...uncomfortable and challenging” (Torrance, 2012, p.120) process. Not providing participants with opportunities to retract, challenge, change or contribute to aspects, would

however be even more uncomfortable in my quest to conduct valid and ethical research.

Well, considered participant selection, including checking for alternative explanations served to reduce bias, as did carefully phrased questions. For example, the term 'coaching' did not even feature within interview questions, as although I wanted to find out whether coaching was part of participant experience within the SIP, I did not want to be suggestive as this would risk reliability of interview outcomes. I cannot claim that bias was eliminated, I can however confidently affirm that I did all that I could to avoid it.

### 3.8 Limitations

In this section, limitations are shared to “enrich the readers’ understanding of the study’s limitations and support future investigation”. (Ross *et al*, 2019, p.261). A recursive, emergent research design was maintained, rather than a fixed and linear design, and although this remained managed within the conceptual framework, replicability is limited within this approach. This was considered the best course of action to take towards addressing research questions as the benefits of remaining open when interpreting and responding to events and new information was considered more meaningful to this research. Questions posed by Shipman (1998) relating to reliability, realise that there are many variables at play owing to the individuals involved, their viewpoints and time and place. The research was carried out as reliably as it can be within the given context, however if this study was to be repeated with different participants, at a different period in time, in a different setting, the results may invariably differ. In the same context however, I perceive that repeating the same research with different participants, selected via the same methods would result in similar, although not exact findings, due to each person being unique.

A further limitation is found within criticism towards the case study method in relation to generalizability and the argument that this is hard to achieve. A counterargument is presented by Yin (2009), who asserts that “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin, 2009, p.15) and Larsson (2009), who argues against “a crude

common-sense singular meaning to signify the phenomenon” (Larsson, 2009, p.2). Ultimately, a research goal of case study method is not to accomplish statistical generalisation, rather it is to develop and generalise theories. Methods undertaken from the initial literature review, to data collection and analysis, focussed on exploring and extracting themes in a thorough way from which to generate some collective sense and theory. Granted, external validity cannot be confirmed, as universal generalizability could not be attained, however localised theoretical generalisations were sought in a bid to secure internal validity. Larsson’s (2009) paper does not commit to any particular rules or way to, or not to generalize in qualitative research, rather, Larsson (2009) emphasises the point that different lines of reasoning may be utilised, underpinned by case specific, “clever” and “wise judgments” (Larsson, 2009, p.22). Larsson (2009) advocates application of:

... clever judgments about the specific case. In the case of making generalizations, these wise judgments about how to deal with the specific case seem to be in great demand. (Larsson, 2009, p.22).

Details regarding the research sample and the “judgment” (Sandelowski, 1995, p.179) and method applied, were discussed earlier, however raised here is the importance of and need for “clever” and “wise” (Larsson, 2009, p.22) judgments pertaining to each individual case. The approach I engaged in by firstly qualitatively, then secondly quantitatively analysing the interview transcripts, definitely helped to meet the demands of making quality judgments which were very well informed as a consequence of the methods employed. As a lone and not yet fully qualified researcher however, the extent to which judgments made may be fully fitting to being “clever” and “wise” (Larsson, 2009, p.22) remains understandably questionable.

Next, limitations and opportunities within the sample and sample size are explored. Sandelowski’s (1995) research study on sample size within qualitative research states that sample size can be overlooked as “unimportant” (Sandelowski, 1995, p.179) within qualitatively led research. The fun, yet telling title of van Rijnsoever’s (2017) paper “(I Can’t Get No) Saturation: A Simulation and Guidelines for Sample Sizes in Qualitative Research”, indicates saturation as a challenge within qualitative led research. Wiley (1995) considers sample

size as “relative” (Sandelowski, 1995, p.179) and highlights the need for judgment to be applied relating to research approach and purpose. Braun and Clarke (2021) recognise that:

... meaning is generated through interpretation of, not excavated from, data, and therefore judgements about ‘how many’ data items, and when to stop data collection, are inescapably situated and subjective...

(Braun and Clarke, 2021. p. 2021).

Application of common-sense, care and curiosity appear to be endorsed by Braun and Clarke (2021) here. They repel the positivist persuasion to secure saturation and seek substance over sum. Braun and Clarke (2021) focus on quality which is not definable by quantity, as they reaffirm the importance of the research question and research aims in favour of exploring the quality of the theme to “...tell a compelling, coherent and useful story.” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p.207).

The range within the sample further enhanced my ability as a researcher to apply reflexivity by exploring stories from contrasting participant perspectives, thus the purposeful participant selection for the sample and the range within this, provided the desired depth. Following a formulaic neo-positivist call for saturation and greater sample size may have resulted in more information, yet this would not necessarily equate to greater insights. Notwithstanding, proponents of saturation may deduce that my sample size remained relatively small, as saturation and maximum variation cannot be claimed.

Time and resource are limiting factors within any research. Whilst I have been highly motivated and deeply committed to this research, I am conscious that a research team working on this as their sole project, may have been able to go into even greater depth and detail, if this was their full-time endeavour.

To summarise, my professional position within this research as a senior leader within Host School brought with it the advantage of accessibility to the research context, participants, and a range of data types. My professional role presented some power and hierarchy at different levels within this research too and therefore may have unintentionally influenced participants. Despite limitations, a sound footprint from which to fuel any following research in this area has been

provided, should another researcher wish to follow the steps taken in sequence and follow the same procedures, although one would hope for some evolution from this.

### 3.9 Ethics

Ethics, I reflect cannot be isolated to being one part of research, ethical considerations are constant, containing the research, rather than being contained within it. As such, ethics and ethical considerations have been regularly referred to already. Here however, I further affirm the approach adopted as well as confirming that formalised ethical procedures have been followed. As an inside researcher, this position presented opportunities as well as threats, and as such, the importance of ethical enquiry could never be underestimated. Establishing my research self ethically and openly at all times within this research was crucial. Teleological ethics (Punch, 2016) were strived for in an attempt to reduce any level of threat, with an emphasis on:

...choosing the best course of action...or 'utility' principle: What course of action in this situation is likely to result in the greatest good for all concerned? (Punch, 2016, p.43).

Bryman (2016) warns the social researcher about breaches in ethical principles, citing the following four areas identified by Diener and Crandall (1978) as requiring protection from transgressions:

1. Whether there is harm to participants;
2. Whether there is a lack of informed consent;
3. Whether there is an invasion of privacy;
4. Whether deception is involved. (Diener and Crandall, in Bryman, 2016, p. 125).

These aspects did not pose a risk within this research. I acknowledge that risks faced by an individual researcher, can outweigh those experienced as part of a research team. This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University on 16.08.2020. I have followed British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines and consulted the BERA (2024)

updates to ensure ethical compliance. The emphasis on participation rights was of most relevance within the updates. I can confirm informed consent, transparency and involvement of participants in decision making and feedback. More challenging to honour, is the protection of participants' privacy. Although a range of steps have been taken to keep identities of the schools and the participants involved private, anyone within either organisation who has been made aware of me conducting this research may be able to identify some of them. Furthermore, anyone really determined to find the identity of the schools and potentially, the participants within, could do so. Knowing this was a potential risk, it was made clear to participants, as part of the process of informed consent.

The timing of the partnership aligned with this thesis and drew me to this as a research area. In the interest of transparency, I made Partner Deputy Head aware of my research interests and intentions from the outset and asked them to check my thesis proposal before later inviting them to participate, alongside Partner School and Host School peers. Permission from Partner Head and Host Head was also sought, as aside from this being good etiquette, conducting research within and across their respective contexts, relied upon their approval too.

Throughout this study, I have kept the gender of participants neutral as a way to further provide anonymity. Each participant will only every be referred to by their pseudonym, which is a job role. Regarding job roles, these have been adapted so that job titles as pseudonyms are fitting with the type of work and position of each participant, without being an identical match. Non-Core Teacher and Host Senior Lead are not how job roles are referred to in either school context, yet these are still in keeping with the type of work both participants are employed to do. The career overview for each participant in table 4.1 was provided by each participant. Some of the information presented within this, does make each participant even more identifiable, however this was what participants chose to share about themselves. I did make minor edits to reduce this risk, such as replacing specific subjects mentioned by participants with more broad terms, such as 'core' and 'non-core subject'.

## CHAPTER 4 – Findings

The first part of this findings chapter presents what I found out through a range of interviews with the three participants from Partner School and the six participants from Host School, focussing first on seven key themes found within each transcript. Thereafter, interconnectivity across seven key themes and two super themes feature, before looking into patterns found within codes and how these differ between participants from Partner School and Host School.

Wherever appropriate, I include observations as an inside researcher within this chapter. Now, some contextual information relating to this research and significant events which arose during this period, is provided. Interviews were conducted in the autumn term of 2021, just over two years following the ONE Vision (2019) SIP launch in June 2019. When the partnership started, Host School was led by an acting head known to Partner Head for the first year and a half; thereafter, a new head was appointed to Host School.

During the SIP, both Partner School and Host School underwent school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the first school closure Host School experienced was from late-March 2020 until mid-June 2020, although many pupils did not return to school until September 2020, as families were not forced to send pupils in during this time, hence many opted out. The second lasted from mid-December 2020, until early March 2021. During this time, the school remained open for vulnerable and key worker children, however numbers of pupils in Host School on any day, rarely exceeded twenty pupils as part of this offer. This was despite concerted efforts to bring pupils into school. Shortly after the reopening of schools, following the second national lockdown, a new head was appointed to Host School.

Work as part of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP remained in place throughout this time. In some respects, work was amplified as we worked together to ensure an accessible online education offer for pupils from both schools during the period of compulsory school closures. Host School received a monitoring visit from Ofsted in March 2021 which confirmed that Host School was taking “effective action” (Ofsted 2021) to provide education amidst the pandemic. Host School received a further two-day Ofsted inspection in the spring term of 2020 which resulted in a second “requires improvement” (Ofsted, 2020) judgment; the former

one having been allocated in 2017. Figure 4.1 provides a visual contextual timeline of the aforementioned key events in chronological order, including when participants were invited to take part and when they were interviewed.

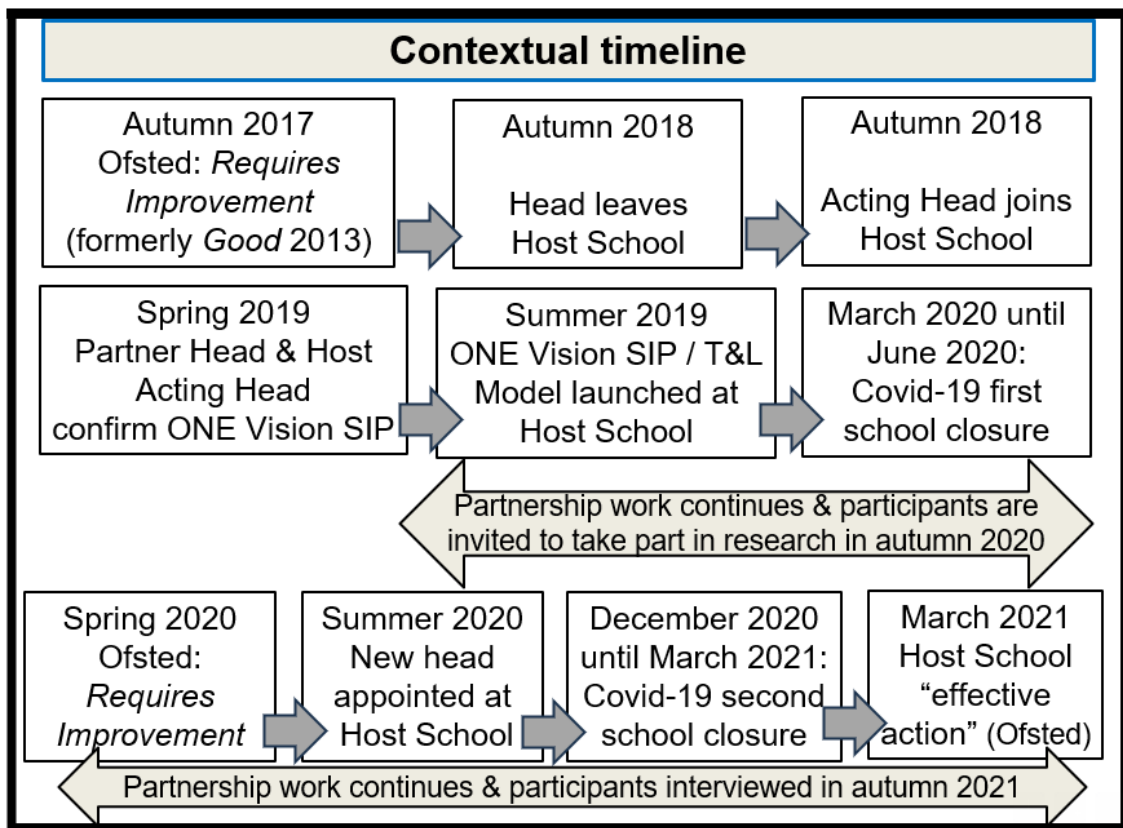


Figure 4.1: Contextual timeline

Some background information about the career journey for each participant has been provided by them, as presented in table 4.1. This is to support understanding of the different professional backgrounds and roles held, between them.

**Table 4.1 – Participant career overview**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Career overview</b>
Partner Head	Partner Head took over as Head at Partner School in (2009) at a time when the school required improvements (regarded by the local authority as one of its poorest performing schools and expecting an inadequate judgement from an imminent Ofsted inspection). During their (eleven) years as Head, in Partner School, Partner Head led Partner School to become an 'Outstanding School' (Ofsted) and raised the profile of Partner School, gaining a range of nationally recognised school awards.
Partner Deputy Head	Partner Deputy Head joined the school in September 2000 and had roles as a teaching Year Manager and Head of a core subject in the period up until 2009. Shortly after the appointment of Partner Head, Partner Deputy Head joined the school's senior leadership team with responsibility for teaching and learning. During that period, Partner School was judged to be 'Outstanding' and received a number of national awards, Partner Deputy Head continued to lead on this area.
Partner Assistant Head	Partner Assistant Head joined Partner School in 2007 as a Head of Faculty at a time when the school faced a number of challenges and was considered one of the lowest performing schools within the Local Authority. As Head of Faculty, Partner Assistant Head led a team of staff across three subjects from being amongst the lowest performing subjects in the Local Authority to amongst the highest. Since then, Partner Assistant Head has taken on further, whole-school leadership roles and has been part of the school's senior leadership team as the school has established itself consistently as one of the regions highest performing secondary schools.

Host Senior Lead	Host Senior Lead joined Host School in September 2008 following closure of the predecessor school. Host Senior Lead was originally a Head of Department for a non-core subject and then progressed as a Standards Manager for post-16 in 2009. Host Senior Lead remained in post-16 leadership with responsibility for assessment and teaching and learning until being promoted to School Principal for one of the 11-16 schools in 2016. From 2020 the school moved away from a schools within a school model and Host Senior Lead became Assistant Principal for a range of subjects before returning to post-16 responsibilities in 2023.
Host Core Lead	Host Core Lead joined Host School in September 2010 as a newly qualified teacher. Over the years, they took on gradual responsibility starting with working with the primary feeder schools. At the time, a school within a schools model was in place at Host School and Host Core Lead took on the leadership of a core subject in one section of the school, under the direction of a Head of Department. In 2019, they were offered a temporary Head of a core subject role before being made permanent in 2020 until their departure in the summer term of 2023 to take on a new Head of Department role within a middle school.
Host Non-Core Lead	Non-Core Head of Department joined Host School on its opening in September 2008, having been at the predecessor school since 2004. They held roles teaching History and had responsibility for SEN until 2015 when they became Head of a non-core subject. Alongside teaching they are also a Team leader for AQA in marking a non-core subject at GCSE. In 2023 they took on a larger, faculty-based role, as Head of more than one non-core subject.

<p>Host Union Lead</p>	<p>Host Union Lead joined the school in 2011 as a teacher in a practical subject and also working in the EAL new starters hub. After teaching in a practical subject for a number of years, they transitioned into being the only teacher in a non-practical subject and became a teacher in charge of that subject. In 2018, they introduced a new subject to Host School and had sole responsibility for planning and delivery of this, alongside their other subject. Around this time, Host Union Lead became a National Education Union (NEU) Health and Safety rep and started working more closely with senior leadership and the headteacher in their role as the NEU school representative. This work was especially significant over the COVID-19 era. They became an Advocate for the new teaching and learning model in 2020 and left Host School in August 2023 as they secured a role in a post-16 provision.</p>
<p>Host Core Teacher</p>	<p>Host Core Teacher joined the school in September 2010 as a teacher in two technically orientated, non-core subject areas, while also teaching a few hours of a core subject a week. In 2014, Host Core Teacher moved to full-time teaching of a core subject. Host Core Teacher was a member of a teaching and learning group that met weekly from 2016 - 2017. They remain teaching a core subject in Host School (2024).</p>
<p>Host Non-Core Teacher</p>	<p>Host Non-Core Teacher started their teaching career in 2005 at the predecessor school which closed down prior to Host School opening in September 2008. Host Non-Core Teacher then transferred over to Host School to continue to fulfil the position of teacher of a non-core subject. In 2019, they led a related subject across Key Stage 4 and 5 (14-18 years of age) and were the quality nominee for BTEC qualifications from 2020-2021. Host Non-Core Teacher left towards the end of 2021 to pursue a Master's degree.</p>

## 4.1 The new teaching and learning model

Many participants talk about the new teaching and learning model within the transcripts. So, it is helpful therefore to outline the salient features of what this entailed so that references to the new teaching and learning model may be better understood when reading this chapter.

The new teaching and learning model involved a new approach to lesson planning and delivery using the framework of Costa's (2008) Three Storey Intellect (TSI). The default position with this is to integrate each of the three storeys, in sequence within each lesson. Firstly, at the foundational stage of the lesson, known as the gathering storey, pupils garner key information and facts which are considered as vital to that particular lesson. Thereafter, the processing phase follows whereby pupils explore and make sense of information, thus building their knowledge. The third storey is where pupils apply knowledge as they use the learning gained, in context. There is a range of specific language linked to each of the three stages which inform the lesson objective for each storey. As an example, at the gathering stage, the objective may begin with '*discuss*', or '*observe*', whereas at the processing stage this may be '*explore*' or '*practise*', then at the applying stage one may be asked to '*assess*' or '*justify*'. The full range of objective trigger words from the TSI are presented as Appendix G. The TSI aims to develop critical thinking skills and increased independence. Rather than spending time producing individual lesson plans, Host School teachers were encouraged to spend time reflecting on their lesson resources and presentations. An example of what a series of lesson slides may look like, aligned with the TSI are shared as Appendix H.

Another element introduced through the partnership and the new teaching and learning model was an approach to addressing literacy in the classroom. Each subject produced a list of essential keywords and definitions on a half-termly basis (Appendix I). These were stuck into pupil books and engaged with during lessons. To support pupils to understand each keyword, a definition slide (Appendix J) per keyword was also produced, containing a relevant image and an example of the term used in context. Definition slides were displayed in lessons wherever that particular keyword was referred to. Further processes,

such as a revised approach to marking (Appendix K), and specific questioning strategies (Appendix L) were also introduced during the partnership.

Professional development sessions were provided whole school by Partner Deputy Head, and at subject level by Partner Assistant Head and by some other leaders from Partner School who are not included as participants within this study. Partner School practitioners had been using the teaching and learning model for several years beforehand, having built this up over the years. Planned changes to practice would be presented in a series of meetings before being translated into staff training sessions, predominantly devised and delivered by Partner Deputy Head, albeit informed by contextual advice and at times, input from Host professionals, including myself. Sometimes, I would co-present with Partner Deputy Head and this was the approach taken at the initial whole school launch event in June 2019, when the TSI approach was first introduced. I was taught about each aspect by Partner Deputy Head in advance of any roll out to Host staff, mainly through presentation and discussion, however also via some modelling as key staff from Host School would be invited to see some aspects in practice at Partner School. I was also consulted about timelines and invited to make edits to professional development sessions and to key messages based upon my knowledge of Host School.

Once CPD went 'live' to the Host teaching staff, a period of time for staff to practise and adapt would be allocated with accompanying fairly tight deadlines. A group of 'Advocates' from Host School were appointed, through an application process. Advocates got to learn about each aspect in advance of others and to troubleshoot and then support others to implement salient features of the new teaching and learning model. Host School's professional development calendar was adapted to include additional planning time, as the changes did demand this. Some staff, such as Host Union Lead who led two subjects, of which they were the only staff member of, did also receive additional time if their situation within this meant they had much more work to do than others, whilst adapting to the new teaching and learning model.

## 4.2 Codes and themes found within the interview transcripts

A total of twenty-eight codes were revealed across the nine interviews. These are presented alphabetically in the table which follows:

Table 4.2: Codes found within participant interview transcripts

alignment	buy in / willingness	change	character / Support	classroom practice	climate	collaboration
commitment	communication	confidence	consistency	contextual challenges	developmental	engagement / thinking
negatives	ownership	pedagogy	plan	positives	prescriptive	progress
progressive	relationships	scrutiny / surveillance	stringent	sustainability / improvement	time	vision

Seven of the twenty-eight codes appeared within each of the nine interviews, and are what I interpreted as prominent themes, these are presented in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Prominent themes which emerged through coded analysis

character / support	climate	collaboration	consistency	negatives	positives	time
---------------------	---------	---------------	-------------	-----------	-----------	------

Whilst it is significant that each of the above themes featured within each interview, it is important to note that this was to varying degrees as can be seen in table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Codes and counts applied to participant interview transcripts

THEME	PARTNER HEAD	PARTNER DEPUTY HEAD	PARTNER ASSISTANT HEAD	HOST SENIOR LEAD	HOST CORE LEAD	HOST NON CORE LEAD	HOST UNION LEAD	HOST CORE TEACHER	HOST NON CORE TEACHER
Negatives	7	15	7	2	8	5	28	26	18
Positives	3	18	8	8	6	3	45	2	3
Character / Support	5	9	13	16	3	2	11	1	12
Classroom Practice	10	2	5	7	0	0	0	0	0
Climate	8	7	12	2	1	2	4	11	2
Commitment	2	14	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Consistency	3	6	4	9	6	13	8	8	7
Time	7	13	4	9	9	9	4	10	16
Progress	7	12	9	9	6	3	0	0	7
Sustainability / Improvement	5	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vision	3	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationships	1	7	5	4	2	3	4	0	3
Collaboration	3	4	4	8	6	1	1	8	12
Buy-in / Willingness	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alignment	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
Contextual Challenges	4	5	1	8	3	15	0	0	11
Developmental	7	9	8	15	8	14	0	0	12
Ownership	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	8	4
Confidence	0	0	0	8	12	3	4	3	7
Scrutiny / Surveillance	0	0	0	5	0	1	13	16	3
Communication	0	6	9	8	4	4	12	10	3
Change	0	6	4	1	6	4	0	0	6
Prescriptive	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Pedagogy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0
Progressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0
Plan	0	5	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Engagement / Thinking	0	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stringent	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0	0

Table 4.4 provides an overview of codes per participant and includes the number of times each of the twenty-eight codes featured prominently within the interviews of the nine participants. Categorising the most dominant codes as seven themes was a qualitatively and quantitatively informed “judgment call” (Sipe and Ghiso, 2004, p.482).

The process undertaken to apply counts to codes was explained in 3.6.3, and Appendix F provides an example of one page of a coded interview extract. Here, I will provide one further example from one of the themes to explain in even more detail, how counts were applied to codes and how these contributed to the identification thereafter, of only selected codes becoming classified as a prominent theme. Counts were applied to what each participant said in relation to a code. This did consider both substance and sections of speech together. So, if a participant referred to one of the codes, ‘time’ as an example, a few times within one unit of dialogue, this would receive a count of one, only if the communicated dialogue about time was consistent with what had already been said in that particular section of speech. If the discourse linked to the theme of time raised a new or different point, pertinent to the theme of time within the same section of speech, this would receive a count of two or however many according to the number of perspectives provided by the participant, in alignment with the code. If the same point about time was made across different sections within the interview, this would still receive a count of one.

Time, or any code being discussed was still colour coded regardless of whether it was repeated, it just would not get additional counts for doing so. Identifying the themes through this method of quantifying the qualitative data was not to deny other codes, as in fact these were often encompassed within the prominent themes. ‘Character and support’ as an example also covers some of what was communicated through the code of ‘relationships’. Furthermore, no code was dismissed, as each code was revisited for any patterns and additional themes too, as not to overlook anything of value in relation to the research questions, as presented in 4.5, 4.6, and 4.6.1.

Every excerpt linked to each of the seven themes was retrieved from the transcript of each participant and then collated by me. This enabled me to look at what each participant said in relation to a theme as individuals, and as a collective

group too. Retrieved transcript extracts under the theme of character / support, provide an example, as Appendix M. Although the seven themes initially emerged as codes, the case for these each being translated into themes was made strong due to the fact that these all came through as relevant in each individual contribution from each of the nine participants.

Each participant had made such varied contributions, with some ideas much more prominent to some than to others, as indicated in the twenty-eight codes, formerly presented in table 4.4. So, when it became clear that seven out of the twenty-eight codes were raised by each participant, it was indeed compelling that there was some degree of commonality with seven out of the twenty-eight codes. With the focus of this study being about the lived experiences of each participant during the SIP, I had to stay attuned to research data and to consider these commonly communicated codes more deeply. Devoting time to delve into each as themes seemed to be the right thing to do, to really understand significant experiences from each participant, and as such, made the most research sense for me to pursue.

The approach I took of applying counts to coded transcripts provided objectivity and the opportunity to observe prominent experiences within the partnership from the perspectives of each participant as an individual. The counts enabled me to push beyond seeing themes as commonly lived experiences for participants and to realise that each interviewee had different lived experiences relating to each theme. If I had relied on qualitative analysis and insights alone, in the process of coding and thematic analysis, this may have been more prone to subjectivity and could have risked overlooking the most pertinent experiences for practitioners during the partnership. This approach also provided a sharper focus as what to, and what not to include, informed by theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999) and conceptual depth (Nelson, 2016).

### 4.3 Seven themes found within each interview transcript

Having explained the approach taken in arriving at the twenty-eight codes and seven themes within these through a process of quantifying new contributions within each code per interviewee, the section which follows focusses on the

seven themes which were raised within every interview, by each participant. The theme of character and support will be explored first, followed by: climate, collaboration, consistency, negatives, positives, and time. The constant comparative method (Thomas, 2017, Miles *et al*, 2020) has been applied to strengthen the selection process. Excerpts provided have each been carefully considered in relation to each individual participant, to ensure that each quote presented per theme does aim to capture the holistic essence of each contribution to that theme, albeit curtailed.

Some feedback I received from three participants after sharing findings with them to check for confirmability, was that the extracts appeared incongruent with their usual flow of communication. Whilst no participant asked for any edits to be made, their reflections relating to flow of speech made me want to make it really explicit here, that the transcripts featured have been lifted out from much larger extracts of otherwise well flowing dialogue. Sections of speech present only a fraction, albeit a significant one, of what was actually spoken by each individual. The aspects of transcript which feature throughout the presentation of findings have, as indicated by ellipses been edited, so that conversation before, after, and at times, during the verbal contributions have been omitted. Whilst I consider the excluded speech not to change any of the meaning of what is presented, it does change the flow of speech. It is appropriate to acknowledge therefore, that whilst the included quotes from participants are powerfully insightful and relevant to the research questions within this study, they do not represent the everyday proficient communication style of each participant. The whole narrative of each interview is not provided, due to wordcount, however significant snapshots from each participant are.

Comparative counts, such as (13/16) regularly appear within the commentary which follows and will be explained here. The first number is the number of counts that a particular participant accrued within a theme, and the second number represents the highest number of counts mentioned by the highest contributor within that theme, for comparison. To provide an example, the first appears in 4.3.1 as (13/16) for Partner Assistant Head, this refers to them having thirteen counts under the theme of character and support. The number sixteen indicates the highest count for that theme, which in this example is from Host Senior Lead.

Although (13/16) may look like a fraction or a sum, it is at no point intended to be one. (13/16) and upcoming counts are purely illustrative of participant contributions under a theme, compared with the highest counts, as this is helpful in understanding the range of experiences and how these often differed for individuals, within the same theme.

### 4.3.1 Character and Support

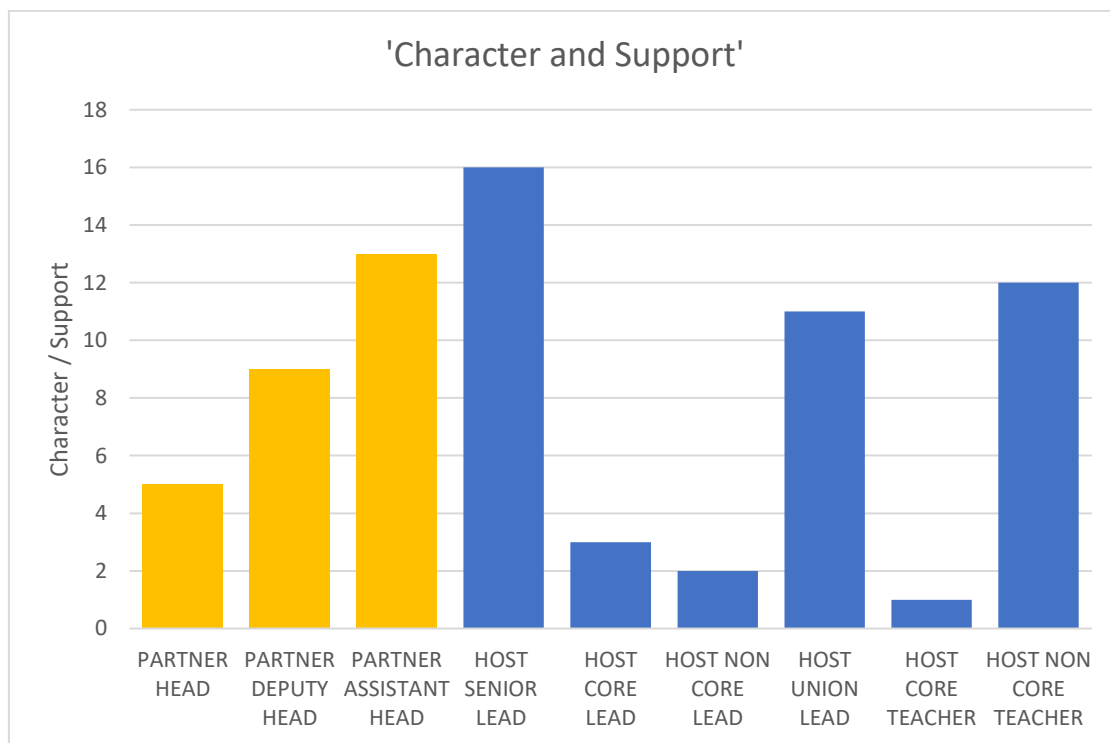


Figure 4.2: Character and support

The theme of character and support is illuminating as ‘character’ and ‘support’ are so inextricably linked and interchangeable within the transcripts that separating character and support into two different themes would risk losing some meaning. When speaking about what support was received, some Host School participants raise points linked to the impression they have about the character of certain Partner School practitioners and the perceived approach taken by some, as the following contribution from Host Core Teacher demonstrates: *“They’re very passionate and pragmatic, ...”*. (Host Non-Core Teacher).

Partner Deputy Head, when reflecting upon their role within the partnership and the support they are providing communicates in a way which reveals something about their own character, as captured here:

*... I certainly questioned myself... Am I doing as much in this supportive role as I should be, you know? Is there more that could be done?*

Partner Deputy Head

The excerpt from Partner Deputy Head's transcript uncovers some self-reflectiveness, drive and determination. Partner Deputy Head also communicates that their position within the partnership is a "supportive role." Character and support are indivisibly connected here and this connectedness was seen within the transcripts of others also.

Surface analysis of the character and support bar chart indicates that the interview responses show a variation in frequency, ranging from one reference of character and support by Host Core Teacher, to sixteen mentions from Host Senior Lead. There is greater range between Host participants and less range between Partner respondents, as the graph illustrates a range from five varied comments linked to character and support stated by Partner Head, to thirteen statements from Partner Assistant Head in this regard. There appears to be no notable pattern when looking at frequency alone linked to the theme of character and support, however of significance is the correlation between the three participants with the highest mentions.

Partner Assistant Head (13/16), Host Senior Lead (16/16), and Host Non-Core teacher (12/16) worked more closely together than any other of the participants, due to Partner Assistant Head being directly partnered up with Host Senior Lead to develop and improve outcomes in one of the subject areas they were responsible for. Host Non-Core teacher is a member of Host Senior Lead's subject team who received regular direct support from Partner Assistant Head, via this delegation within the partnership. Each of the aforementioned interviewees raise character and support, more so than any other participants and with a consistently positive tone, hence their high quantity of counts collectively indicate mutual regard for character and support. Considering what is common between them, this does appear linked to their working relationship and alignment with Partner Assistant Head within the SIP. Partner Assistant Head maintained a visibly high profile throughout the partnership. Partner Assistant Head was frequently on site in Host School leading CPD, collaboratively planning the curriculum, undertaking lesson observations and carrying out work reviews alongside Host Senior Lead. Additionally, Partner Assistant Head maintained

open lines of communication online and via the telephone and made time to talk through developments whenever their Host colleagues called upon them to do so. The benefits of Partner Assistant Head having made themselves so accessible, is highlighted in later contributions from Host Senior Lead and Host Non-Core teacher.

When examining two participants whose transcripts contribute some of the lowest counts for character and support, attention is drawn to Host Core Lead (3/16), and Host Core Teacher (1/16). Both Host Core Lead (3/16) and Host Core Teacher (1/16) are from the same core subject team, which is insightful. Responses from Host Core Lead and Host Core Teacher linked to character and support include both positive and neutral tones. Combining this with the low number of references to character and support, suggests that whilst it did feature, it did so with much less prominence in their partnership work, when compared with their aforementioned peers. The professional from Partner School who was linked up with Host Core Lead and Host Core Teacher, was not seen on site in Host School at all during the partnership. Their working partnership predominantly took the form of online meets and email communication. This suggests that the difference between face-to-face, in context support, compared with working with one another from a distance, does have an impact on the way character and support is received and subsequently perceived. On site, in person support being identified as more preferable and productive.

Analysis of words spoken and the use of tone play an important role in understanding and relaying points from each participant linked to character and support. Most mentions were spoken in a positive tone, whereas some were spoken neutrally. No negative tone was applied when doing so, therefore, this could indicate that character and support is considered as a fairly straightforward and at times, well accepted element within the partnership, albeit to varying degrees.

Extracts relating to character and support within Appendix M share some distinct commonalities. The practice of coaching is cited by five different participants, these being Partner Head, Partner Deputy Head, Partner Assistant Head, Host Senior Lead and Host Non-Core Teacher. Each respondent from Partner School identifies coaching as a salient feature within the partnership. Partner Head

clarifies coaching as a mechanism in place, stating *"It's about people, coaching others"*. Partner Deputy Head asserts coaching as a *"deliberate choice"*, whereas Partner Assistant Head reflects that although they have not been using the term "coaching" within their partnership work, it is at play, expressing *"...if we were to boil down what coaching is, is that happening? Yes it is."* Coaching is clearly intentional as captured through the transcripts from Partner Head and Partner Deputy Head, who confirm coaching as a pre-planned part of the partnership work. The perspective of Partner Assistant Head is interesting within this, as they recognise coaching is in place within their partnership work, however that this has occurred innately, rather than consciously.

The two participants from Host School who recognise and refer to coaching as part of their lived experience within the partnership are Host Senior Lead and Host Non-Core Teacher. Host Senior Lead posits *"... the support really it's we've had consistent coaching"*. Host Non-Core Teacher adds *"... going back to coaching work it is feeling that you have got the support vehicle using that ..."*. Both were aligned with Partner Assistant Head and benefitted from more in situ support than other participants. It is apparent that coaching between Partner Assistant Head, Host Senior Lead and Host Non-Core Teacher occurred. Conditions conducive to coaching, in terms of Partner Assistant Head being available, approachable, credible, supportive and helpful are also confirmed through the transcripts.

Despite coaching having been planned to occur in other areas within the partnership, it has been less obvious in practice from the perspective of other Host participants. Whilst I do not feature as a participant within this research, I was a participant in the partnership and from this position, I can confirm that coaching was enacted by Partner Deputy Head who I was aligned with to develop and improve the quality of teaching and learning across Host School. Partner Deputy Head provided regular face-to-face coaching on a one-to-one basis, over a two-year period. Prior to this close analysis of participant transcript, I would have been confident that coaching was a distinguishing and dominant feature within the partnership, partly owing to my practitioner experience within this. The realisation here however that coaching was not a widespread experience for all Host participants, prompts me to question whether more should have been done

between Partner and Host School and across Host School to enable coaching to cascade to more colleagues. Furthermore, this raises the point that although involved in the same SIP, different practitioners were exposed to different opportunities within this.

Further connections across the transcripts related to character and support, assert credibility, quality CPD, pragmatical practical approaches and helpfulness from Partner School as valued by Host participants. Having considered character and support in some detail, the section which follows will now focus on analysis of the theme of climate.

### 4.3.2 Climate

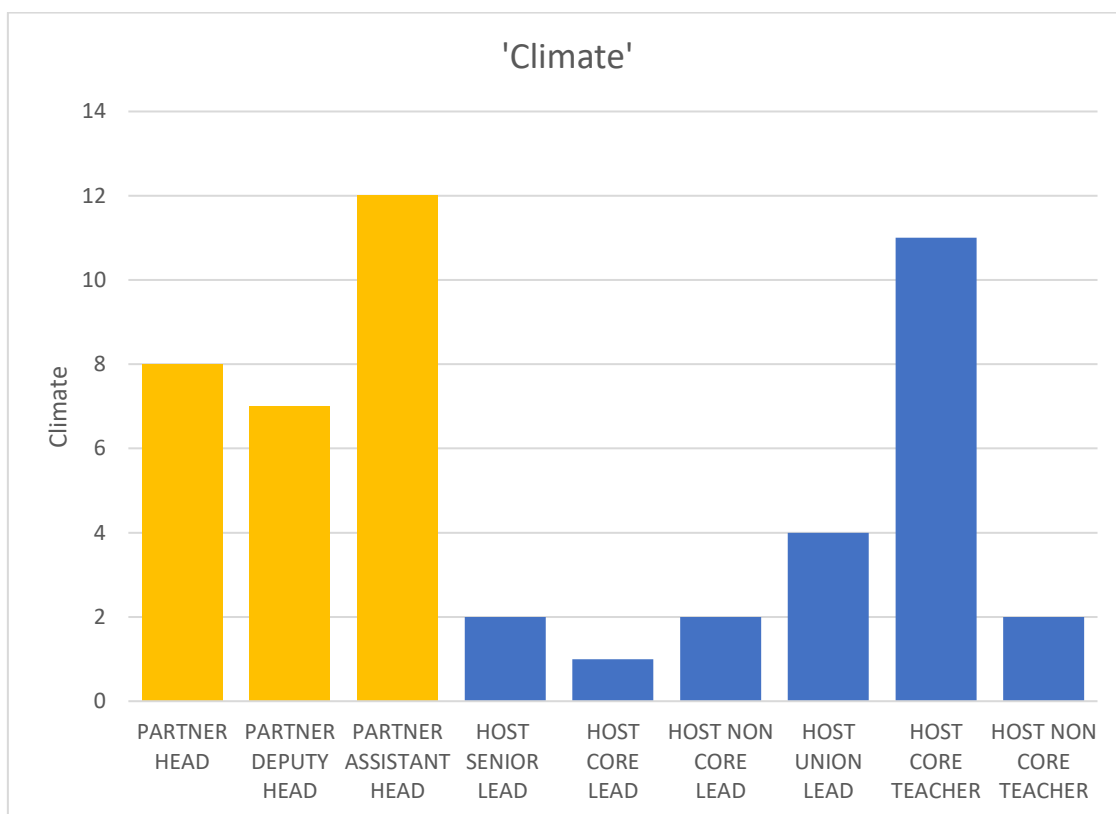


Figure 4.3: Climate

Of immediate interest when looking at the climate bar chart, is a distinct difference between the three participants from Partner School who provided more frequent and varied commentary on climate. Partner participants have twenty-seven counts for climate collectively, which is in sharp contrast to the six Host

participants with only twenty-two counts for climate between them. A conscious focus on climate is indicated within the discourse from Partner School participants. To explore this further, selected extracts taken from larger sections of transcript around climate will be discussed next.

Dialogue centred upon climate from Partner participants ranges from considering climate within the classroom and the wider school for pupils, to having regard for staff climate and wishing to maintain this in relation to the SIP, and beyond. Regarding the school climate, Partner Head (8/12) shares their vision for pupils, firstly in general terms, before locating this within Host School, stating:

*I just think kids need to enjoy being the age they're at, they can enjoy the school, enjoy being with their friends within this. ... create that sort of fun atmosphere. ... 100% of the time... you should be able to feel that...*

Partner Head

Discourse here navigates from the broad vision of children enjoying school life with friends at every stage, then goes onto relate this vision for the climate they wish to create within Host School. Partner Head states *"You can feel it when you walk into classrooms... classrooms are different places."* Here, Partner Head reflects upon progress which was made within Host School, acknowledging that a positive difference occurred through the SIP work.

Partner Head later expands to incorporate staff within this too and the sense of fulfilment they want staff to experience through the anticipated improvements through the partnership. Partner Head expresses *"... of course, happy staff, you get a staff who feel more satisfaction from their work."* This strong sense of wanting to enhance the working climate for youngsters and adults in education is on the one hand simple, yet on the other complex as it is not so easy to achieve, particularly during the change process. Of note, the vision for having *"happy staff"* is not followed up with any recognition from Partner Head of having seen or felt that there is a happier staff body within Host School.

Less of a range occurs between Partner participants, with a high of twelve from Partner Assistant Head (12/12), to seven from Partner Deputy Head (7/12). Looking through transcript extracts from Partner Deputy Head and Partner Assistant Head, which have been coded according to climate, both demonstrate

some care and consideration towards Host staff in the context of Host School being the recipients within the SIP. Partner Assistant Head highlights:

*...as much as you can tell people it's going to be a supportive process, people have heard that quite often and then it's not been, and so right from the outset, you know that's been the key message ... It's entirely about support... as for months of working in partnership with people, we can't drag people along, you know. ... we've got to bring people with us.*

Partner Assistant Head

Partner Assistant Head shares some understanding here of previous improvement interventions within Host School, which demonstrates some contextual sensitivity. Furthermore, they have weighed up the importance of working for people as reflected in *"It's entirely about support"* with the need to get people on board to move things forward together as captured in *"... we've got to bring people with us."* The sentiment of bringing people at Host School along with those leading the SIP from Partner School, is also shared by Partner Deputy Head who notes:

*...bringing people with you willingly ... that's something that's very much been a kind of consideration all the way through, ...* Partner Deputy Head

Partner Deputy Head's response here suggests forethought about bringing staff at Host School along with them willingly, and this also highlights that the intention to do so was kept at the fore *"all the way through."* Partner Assistant Head attests *"...and in terms of the dynamics, they're perhaps more positive than I might have anticipated."* (Partner Assistant Head). Initial concern around dynamics expressed from Partner Assistant Head here, regarding relations with Host School colleagues, concludes that the working climate became a productive one, from their perspective.

Partner Assistant Head and Partner Deputy Head's overt awareness that Host School and professionals within may feel 'done to', does appear to have served them well as this contextual sensitivity enabled some steering in the direction of 'doing with'. In school-to-school improvement partnerships, a level of hierarchy exists, as in this case whereby Host school is being supported by Partner School. Hierarchy does not however have to be haughty, it can be humble and so it appears that the latter was intentional from Partner School Deputy Head and

Assistant Head. Whether or not this was reflected within the experiences of Host School recipients, is considered next.

Host Non-Core Lead (2/12) demonstrates a commitment to supporting the climate during a significant change within their subject team. Following concern about declining examination outcomes in their subject, a directive from Partner School Head was communicated through Host School Head for Host Non-Core Lead to have to change exam specifications and accompanying schemes of work swiftly. Host Non-Core Lead recalls how they became resolved to approach the management of this forced specification change with their team:

*At the point where this was happening, I could have made it, could have made it more difficult, but that wouldn't have done them any favours whatsoever. I would have been doing them a disservice because they work hard, ... Just having a complete positive moving forward circle of trust. You know they can say what they want in this place, and then we'll just let's get over it. Let's get on and let's move forward.* Host Non-Core Lead.

Whilst Host Non-Core Lead does not directly declare their own dissatisfaction with the decision making which resulted in them having to change exam specifications here, this is implied within *"I could have made it, could have made it more difficult, ..."*. Also, implicit here is a sense that, even when unwelcome change is thrust upon Host Non-Core Lead, they know that ultimately, they have to accept it and advance, even if it conflicts with their own professional judgment and will to do so. Furthermore, Host Non-Core Lead suppressed their own reservations in order to bring their team along with them in the process, supporting them by providing a climate of trust for concerns to be communicated, so that they and their team could *"get on"* and *"move forward."*

Whilst a 'done to' approach was anticipated and actively avoided by Partner Deputy Head and Partner Assistant Head, this does not appear to have always been the case from Partner Head. Partner Head was leading the partnership work and as such was charged with overall responsibility for the SIP. Partner Head does state that their leadership style is predominantly *"constructivist and collaborative"* by nature, however within the same interview, they also assert that their leadership style is *"whatever it needs to be"* according to the situation. Declining results within the subject led by Host Non-Core Lead was met with authoritative leadership from Partner Head. Whilst climate was impacted for Host

Non-Core Lead, they worked through, managing the climate around this change within their team to advance accordingly.

It is important to note that there is a wider range between responses for climate with the most for Partner Assistant Head at twelve counts, to Host Core Lead at one. Host Core Teacher (11/12) makes varied contributions around climate. At times, they reflect on previous school challenges which impacted climate, before this SIP, as presented here:

*So, highlights would be to do with how my preferred way of teaching, ... I can now teach in an observation, how I taught for the other 39 weeks of the year, and it be appreciated.* Host Core Teacher

There is an indication that previous school observation processes were problematic in Host School and that a change for the better was brought about via the processes introduced by Partner School. A later, concluding comment from Host Core Teacher which is presented below is insightful in this regard:

*The SIP are trying their best given that they're up against a staff population who if I'm honest are on the whole disaffected...* Host Core Teacher

Here, Host Core Teacher recognises best efforts from Partner School, whilst at the same time sharing their view of Host School's staff population as somewhat disenfranchised. Of note, is Host Core's years of experience within the context of Host School which covers almost two decades. The indication here is that intentions from Partner School to support and bring people from Host School along with them, did have some effect, even when it may have been difficult to do so.

Host Union Lead (4/12) recognises a positive shift in climate linked to changes in classroom practice, brought about through the new model for teaching, they share:

*There probably is maybe some deeper element of people of, ... people even enjoying teaching in general, like motivation wise.* Host Union Lead

This could be considered an endorsement, as Host Union Lead is a confidante to many professionals across Host School in an official capacity, owing to their position as both a teacher and union leader for one of the largest national teaching unions. The uplifting vision from Partner Head of "happy kids" and "happy staff" seems within reach when reading Host Union Lead's transcript

extract here. Reflecting upon overall contributions under the theme of climate, improvements in classroom practice appear to have been fairly well received, although the benefits of buying into change have been pitted against contextual pertaining pressures, both past and present.

This section on climate has revealed some positives in terms of the support provided by Partner School, whilst on the other hand revealing something about staff dedication, despite serving against a backdrop of disaffection.

### 4.3.3 Collaboration

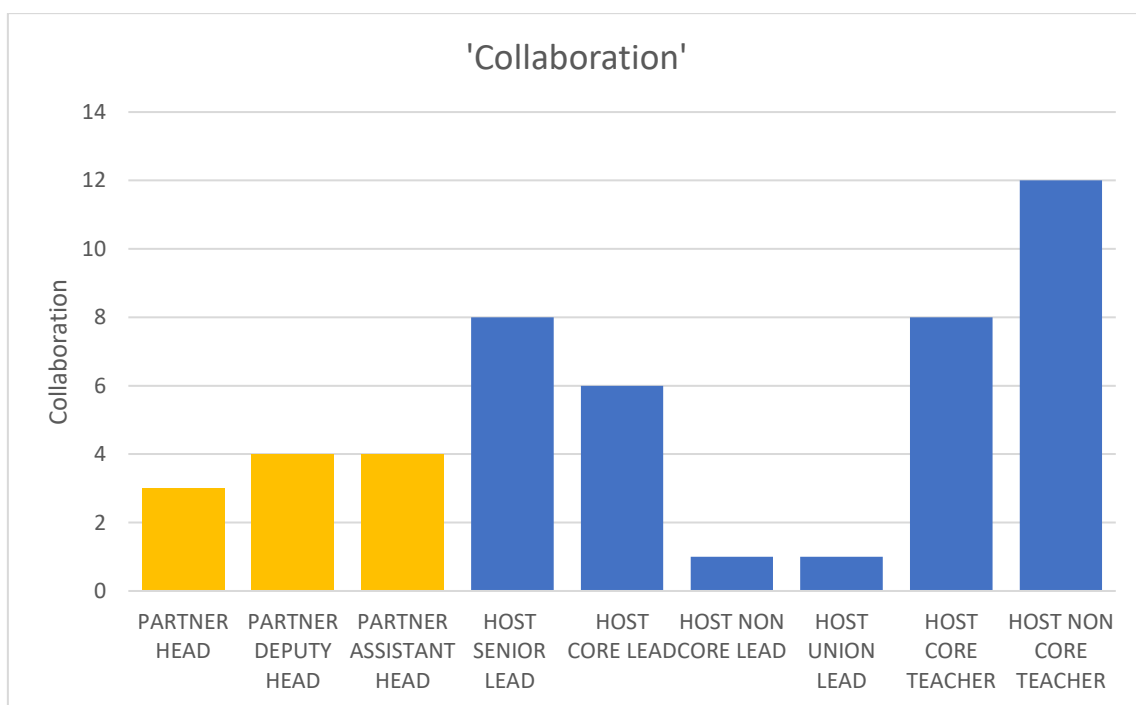


Figure 4.4: Collaboration

Collaboration as a theme when looking at the bar chart, presents Partner participants as having each made a similar number of contributions about collaboration. The relatively low responses around collaboration range from three from Partner Head (3/12), to four from Partner Deputy Head (4/12) and Partner Assistant Head (4/12). A formerly held misconception of mine is challenged here, as the mechanics of the partnership are made clear. Partnership as a term does instil a sense of working together and collaborating to many, indicating a sense of equality in the process of doing so. Partnership in the sense of this partnership

and those experienced by schools facing contextually challenging circumstances more often than not, depict the deficit model, as covered in 2.3 and 2.3.1. This recognition is not to criticise this approach, rather to highlight that despite fitting the deficit model of school partnership, collaboration featured within each of the nine interview transcripts as a common experience and theme.

Partner Head envisages how the partnership may become more collaborative “eventually”:

*... eventually, what I would like to see is people spending time in both schools, so, for the staff at Partner School to be spending some time, even a half-term or a month or whatever, in Host School learning about how you manage the challenges of the multicity of ethnicities...* Partner Head

Partner Deputy Head recognises Partner School as the drivers within the partnership whilst endorsing the merits of the partnership as contributing to their own professional development:

*I think the process of working with another school has actually supported myself and others here to reflect on our own practice on numerous occasions. ... Whilst a lot of the developments may be coming from ourselves in terms of what the developments were, the expertise elsewhere, we would benefit from working with those people.*

Partner Deputy Head

Here, Partner Deputy Head shows recognition for some people within Host School as possessing “expertise” and being beneficial to work with. This detail is an important one as it provides a sense of professional respect for experts within Host School, as opposed to a repressed view of the supporting school as doyen and the supported school as deficient, which can be a perception of the deficit model. Writing momentarily from a practitioner perspective here, having been a recipient of various school improvement strategies over two decades, one can become susceptible and succumb to a position and a feeling of not being good enough, and of being in need of improvement as a professional. Host Core Teacher’s earlier description of “disaffected” staff, may in part be attributed to this experience too.

Partner Deputy Head provides a powerful counter perspective further on, when considering themselves as being in “need” of Host School’s support too, as they explain:

*... there could never be a sense that this was Partner School doing something to another school. You know that there had to be that sense of partnership. That sense of conversation ... Making sure we, we shape it together. ... we knew at the start I needed to piggyback onto ... the credibility of leaders at Host School. I needed that because on my own, ... I don't have that.*

Partner Deputy Head

Vulnerability combined with practical and professional wisdom aligned with Aristotelian phronesis (Steyn and Sewchurran, 2021), resonates here. Partner Deputy Head considers themselves as having to “piggyback” onto the credibility of others at Host School, thus evoking a sense of humility and will (Morris *et al*, 2005). Approaching the partnership from this angle, edges closer to collaboration and to some extent avoids arrogance which could otherwise be a risk, if a supporting school established themselves as the external experts. Partner Assistant Head acknowledges themselves as leading in the Partnership, as the ones creating a model and sharing what they do, whilst advocating reciprocity as a future return too:

*... working with Host School, it's very much about creating a model where by sharing what we are doing, that's fundamental, and it, and ideally, it becomes a two-way process.*

Partner Assistant Head

An increase in workload for schools undergoing school improvement is a common experience as is well documented (2.4). Host Non-Core Teacher (12/12) makes the most contributions to the theme of collaboration at twelve counts and in doing so, cites the opportunity to share workload as a positive outcome:

*...we are much better now at sharing resources and sharing workload. Sharing assessment and that has been one of the one of the plus points of the partnership.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

To be clear, staff did report an increase in workload, however of interest here is the sense of sharing from Partner School with Host School, and then Host School practitioners sharing amongst their own teams thereafter too. Increased collaboration across Host School seems to have been stimulated from both the initial sharing of resources from Partner School, and from the fact that the partnership brought with it an increase in workload, which had to be shared amongst the staff within Host School, in order to be more manageable.

Host Senior Lead expresses high regard for their professional connection with colleagues from Partner School:

*...we have forged a really close working relationship with our colleagues and counterparts at Partner School, and in particular with Partner Assistant Head. What they've essentially provided for us has been a really, really forensic level of support... we have a shared vision and curriculum. ... hopefully into the future it can be a little bit more reciprocal, ...*

Host Senior Lead

An intensive level of support is confirmed via “...a really, really forensic level of support...”, however this appears well thought of by Host Senior Lead here, although they do assert a future hope for Host School to be able to reciprocate. Whilst gratitude is communicated, so is a want to not always be the supported ones in need, a plea perhaps towards greater shared ownership and increased professional pride. This also mirrors the hopes from Partner staff for eventual reciprocity.

#### 4.3.4 Consistency

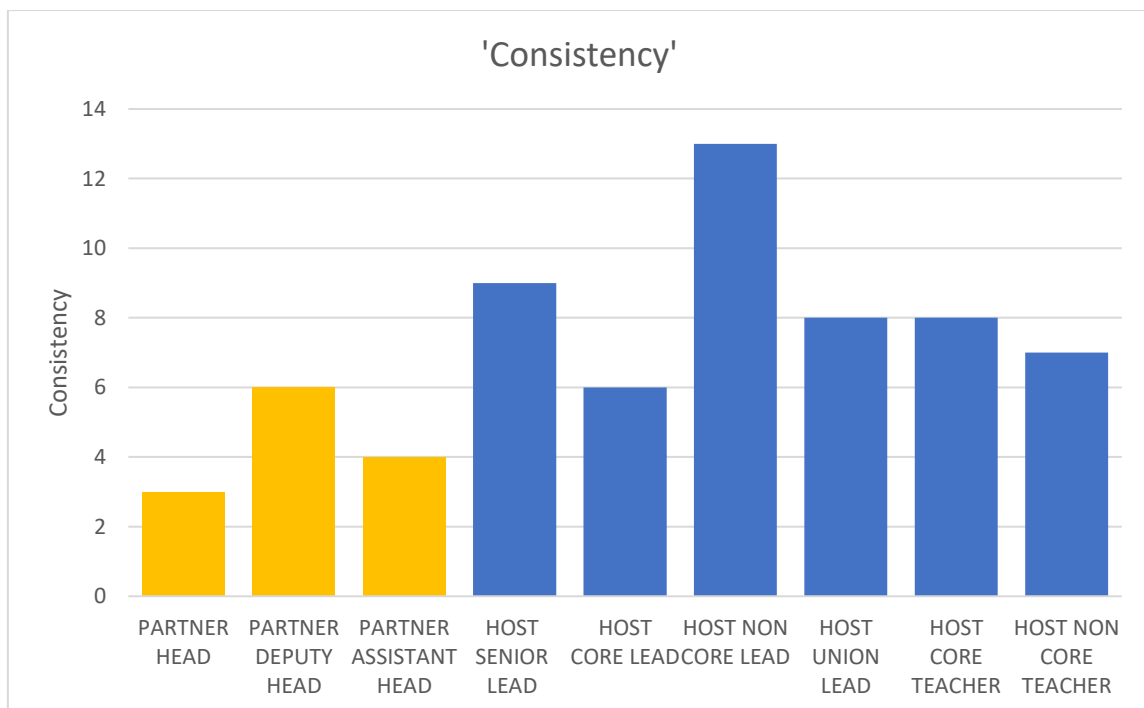


Figure 4.5: Consistency

At the time that the partnership was first introduced, one of the aims was to address inconsistency in teaching and learning and to get classroom practice to reach a consistently effective standard. Whether or not participant contributions around the theme of consistency indicate anything about this having been achieved, is worthy of consideration. Consistency is overwhelmingly mentioned most by participants from Host School. This is interesting, as this really does indicate some genuine partnership, as although the teaching and learning model to improve consistency was led through Partner School, this was in response to what Host School requested and needed from Partner School. Consistency is mentioned most by Host Non-Core Lead with thirteen contributions. They reveal some background to Host School, relating to the consistency of classroom practice:

*... we've always had a clear vision of what the school needs to do, but there hasn't been a clear model across the board.* Host Non-Core Lead

An experience of vision without clear guidance and direction for practice is implied here. Host Non-Core Lead expands to discuss the more decisive direction of travel created through the partnership work, expanding in some descriptive detail:

*So, we want to get across that river, and we might have had a rickety bridge or something, but now we've got a solid boat and we all need to be in the boat because there's no bridge anymore. If you try to use the bridge you can fall off and it's that... We all need to be moving that way. ... there's different ways of rowing, as long as we're all rowing in the same direction.*

Host Non-Core Lead

This suggests Host School becoming a moving school (Fleming and Kleinhenz, 2007). Within this, is a new expectation for all staff members to move the teaching and learning model introduced through the partnership, forward together. There is also a recognition that some may row differently to others, via a solid structure, rather than a rigid straightjacket. Momentum carried through the partnership for Host School to move forward, guided by a clear sense of direction is conveyed.

Despite best intentions to stay on track, distractions do invariably arise in schools, however on this matter, Host Non-Core Lead explains how they find clarity and focus through the teaching and learning model:

*I go back to that sort of solid, clear model that I've been able to then hang my hat on that and push it forward rather than get distracted by other minutiae.* Host Non-Core Lead

It appears that clarity gained through improved consistency, provided an anchor for leaders within Host School to ground their focus and practice, when having to lead their teams to implement and embed elements of the new teaching and learning model.

Despite Partner Head (3/13) contributing the least references within the theme of consistency, what they do say is revealing in terms of the process of partnership work and establishing where the focus for improvement should initially begin. Consistency in the classroom was Partner Head's starting point for the SIP, as they share:

*So, I felt that the starting point had to be in the classroom, and trying to ensure that there was a consistency of practice, regardless of which classroom, the child was going into, which teacher they were seeing, which subject, ... there had to be that consistency.* Partner Head

Partner Head was the strategist and overseer of the SIP, and whilst they were not so much front facing in Host School beyond the initial launch in June 2019, their vision was. Partner Deputy Head picked up responsibility for being the face of the partnership, leading professional development. They reflect on the approach whilst on the ground in Host School:

*When we first started, it was a little bit more of a straitjacket, because, you know, we've got a bit of a default sequence that we would expect to see most of the time. You know, at first a lot of it is kind of potentially top down, a lot of the development. You know a lot of whole staff CPD, "this is the approach, this is what we want for consistency." But that that sliding scale, there will be a shift where, whilst that will continue, ... more and more ownership will come onto the individuals.* Partner Deputy Head

Acknowledgment of the tight to loose approach as outlined in 2.3.4 is seen in many school improvement ventures and voiced here too.

Continuing with the thread of confidence, Host Core Lead reveals an increased sense of their own confidence which seems to have been created through the consistent approach to quality assurance processes, introduced through the partnership, as they reflect:

*... I think the clarity ... it makes, you know, I feel confident going into a lesson observation or a book review and being able to give some feedback and for staff to have that conversation... if it's not there. Whereas, in the*

*past, I think not that it was unfair, but I think... staff were unclear of what was necessarily expected, because it wasn't the same across all the subjects.*

Host Core Lead

Host Senior Lead highlights the strength within the stringency of consistency:

*We've got to have a zero-tolerance approach on anyone deviating from it and not having the same quality. So, we all know the direction of travel ... but as soon as we start to deviate from that direction of travel, we've just got someone that comes in and puts us right back on the road that we need to be on and that is through their just consistent support.*

Host Senior Lead

Host Union Lead endorses earlier sentiments "... we all sing from the same hymn sheet and we all got moving in the same direction." (Host Union Lead). Whilst a stringent "straitjacket" has been confirmed in part, consistency as a key strength gained through the partnership, comes across again and again. Host Core Teacher looks back at teaching before the introduction of the teaching and learning model:

*Before I couldn't say, this is what I do, this is how I do it, but now because it's close to the vision of what the new teaching and learning model is, I can. No one knew what we wanted, that's not this school, that's the whole of education for the last 20 years, that no one knew what they wanted, everyone was trying to figure things out.*

Host core Teacher

Host Core Teacher appears appreciative of the partnership work in paving a way for them, amidst the turbulent landscape of education.

I have selected one final extract to conclude this section which links to Host Non-Core Lead referring to staff at Host School as having "a solid boat" now. Completely unaware of Host Non-Core Lead's contributions, confirming the SIP work as having equipped them with a "solid boat", Host Non-Core Teacher shares an analogy whereby Host School is likened to a "big ship":

*... it's a big organisation, it's like, you know, if you can imagine trying to try to steer a big ship and get it to go in a different direction. It's, it's a big old heavy thing to try and turn, but I think this is actually really helping everybody to go in that... same direction, uhm?*

Host Non-Core Teacher

Consistency is arguably hard to achieve, particularly as part of a change process, as it can be a mighty endeavour, like trying to reroute a large and unruly vessel.

Despite the heaviness of the ask and the task, it does appear that greater consistency had been achieved and well received through the partnership.

### 4.3.5 Negatives

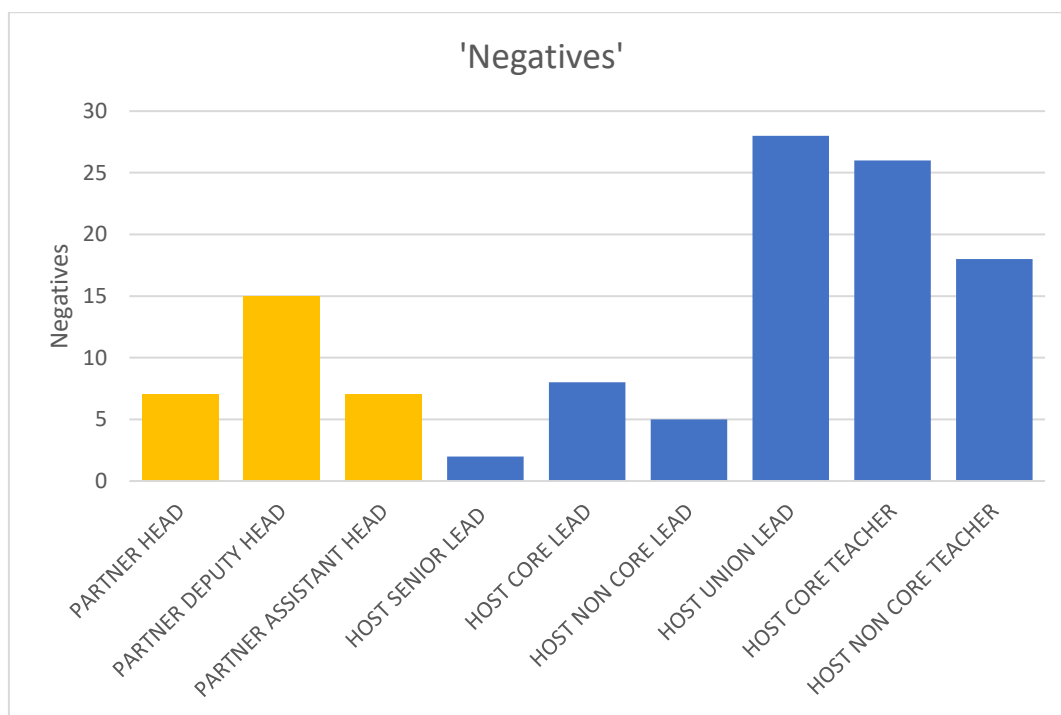


Figure 4.6: Negatives

Before findings under the theme of negatives are presented in full, it is necessary to clarify that negatives and positives are separate themes in their own right. They are not, as often is the case when positives and negatives appear close together, one versus the other, or there to draw comparisons from, or to make contrasts between the two explicit. Nor do they stand to highlight positives and negatives within the partnership, although at times, there is some referencing to this within transcripts under the themes of negatives and positives. Positives and negatives arose as themes due to the significance of each across all nine participant transcripts. Each time a positive was clearly highlighted, whether this was about the SIP or other aspect of lived experience, this was coded accordingly, as was the case with negatives. Granted, there is some relationship between positives and negatives as themes in this study, however not more or less so than when looking at any other theme. One connecting strength of positives and negatives as themes however, is how this has enabled the range in lived experiences to be

looked at, and better understood for participants. Host Union Lead being a strong example who experienced the highest highs and the lowest lows as depicted by them making the most contributions to both negatives and positives. Although, this was not the purpose of including negatives and positives as themes, it is one of several benefits in having done so.

The inclusion of both negatives and positives as themes within this research is to present “meaning united stories” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.2). A consistent approach was applied to identify all seven themes, including negatives and positives to become “interpretative stories built around uniting meaning” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.3). As such, each is separate, in terms of having their own theme status, when considered alongside the other five themes. Negatives and positives as themes, like their five counterparts, have identical authenticity as themes, as they could not be thought of, or predetermined prior to analysis. Aligned with Braun and Clarke’s (2022) clear distinction; negatives and positives, like the other themes “... contain diversity, but they have a central idea that unifies the diversity.” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.2).

Whilst each theme does collectively contribute to “meaning united stories” (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.2), I refrain from declaring the themes of negatives and positives as having equal status, as negatives as a theme arguably has the highest status out of all of the seven themes. This is due to the profoundly powerful illuminations which emerge, including personal and heartfelt insights communicated by selected participants, under the theme of negatives. This deeply contributes to understanding of how intensely emotional, the lived experiences of some participants are.

Negatives as a theme provides a platform from which to explore a range of challenges. Intriguingly, a small number of these are directly linked to the partnership work. Most negatives either connect to aspects of Partner School and Host School pre-partnership or are farther reaching, covering concerns owing to either, the wider educational landscape or to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Partner Head makes the least contributions to negatives (6/28) when compared to other Partner participants. Partner Head identifies ineffectuality of one subject area within Host School as a negating factor within this. Partner Head identifies:

*... so you've got the vast majority successful, with the other end, ... other subject, which is, which has not been successful at all. But again, there's a reason for that. And the reason being sometimes it comes down to people, ...* Partner Head

Here, Partner Head highlights substantial success within some subjects at Host School, as a direct result of them working in partnership with their counterparts at Partner School. Partner Head asserts failings from a particular subject area who have *"not been successful at all"*. In doing so, Partner Head identifies that this is due *"to people, ..."*. In this particular scenario, one specific subject lead within Host School was really reluctant and resistant to change. So, in terms of progressing with aspects assigned through the partnership, the subject concerned is considered as having *"not been successful at all."* As an inside researcher, I concur with Partner Head's viewpoint, in terms of the subject in question not being onboard or progressive with partnership activity, they were in fact wilfully obstructive. Whilst on the one hand, a perspective is provided by Partner Head here as having *"not been successful at all,"* on the other hand, the subject leader concerned may on the contrary, consider themselves as being *"successful"* for having held onto their old and own ways of being.

Teachers within Host School, as represented by Host Union Lead, Host Non-Core Teacher and Host Core Teacher, provide the most contributions around the theme of negatives and each will be looked at next. Host Union Lead has the highest number of negatives documented at twenty-eight counts, however when looking at positives as a theme, they also provide the greatest number of contributions at forty-five counts. In terms of negatives, Host Union Lead refers to the initial stages of the partnership work as *"daunting"* as they express their concerns:

*Is it another thing, another sort of fleeting thing in the night sort of thing that will be here today, gone tomorrow and we invest a lot of time and stuff in and then it disappears? So, you worry at that stage, at the beginning stages of like, will it be something that sticks around?* Host Union Lead

References to *"another"* twice in this excerpt, highlight previous school improvement endeavours which have perhaps fallen short, alongside wasted work and time. Host Union Lead expresses a sense of being overwhelmed from the outset by not knowing how the partnership and their part within this would play out. Host Union Lead also explained how *"... it was tough... in the beginning"*

*because you have to sort of get your head around it and get to grips with it ...”*  
(Host Union Lead).

Host Union Lead’s use of language is emotive and keywords stand out within the transcript, of *“fear, ... struggle, ... worry, ... stressor, ... alone.”* (Host Union Lead). Contradictory to the principle of partnership; isolation, it appears was experienced by Host Union Lead, in the early stages. The feelings of *“fear”* and *“daunting”* are resonated by Host Non-Core Teacher too, who explains:

*... And so the first feelings were: “Oh well, this is all being put upon us. We’re going to have to plan all of this from scratch”, and that was quite daunting. ... I remember there was a bit of a, a bit of a fear about it.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

Change can evoke a range of responses and schools are so often called upon to make a range of changes to curriculum, policy, procedure or practice. Space to share concerns or raise questions and check-in about aspects of change was made available to Host Leaders involved in the partnership. Teachers not directly partnered with a Partner counterpart did not have a formalised chance to communicate any concerns, unless like in the case of Host Non-Core Lead and their team, their subject lead had recognised a need for this, as the next section explores.

Host Non-Core Lead had provided space for team members within their subject to offload. Host Non-Core Lead reflects upon their role in this regard during the partnership, as they share the importance of:

*...supporting the team and making sure that we get there and when they’ve felt a little bit, ... troubled or they’ve had questions or don’t see why we’re doing something, ... having that complete circle of trust.*

Host Non-Core Lead

Host Non-Core Lead discloses that their subject team members felt *“troubled”* and uncertain at times. Having acknowledged this at the time by providing an outlet for troubles to be shared via the *“complete circle of trust”*, it seems team members were able to be emotionally supported. If all subject teams within Host School had the opportunity of a communicative space to share any concerns, staff may have felt better supported and equipped for change, as the aforementioned fears and anxieties may have been alleviated. Establishing space and mechanisms for open communication across all levels, via several

interconnecting circles of trust may have helped to better harness the emotional side of the change process. An emotive response to partnership induced change was experienced, with some intensity by some individuals within Host School.

Host Core Teacher contributes the second highest negatives at twenty-six counts. They share their perception of the way heads of department responded in the early stages of the SIP:

*A negative note, I would say is that when it first arrived, it was a straitjacket. ... and the heads of department were very, very scared of doing anything that might possibly deviate.*  
Host Core Teacher

Again, a sense of fear is expressed as Host Core Teacher observes heads of department as being “*very, very scared...*”. Host Core Teacher’s excerpt suggests this as being linked to anything against the planned actions as part of the partnership. Incidentally, Host Core Lead’s transcript also indicates that deviations were dismissed, however in doing so, they provide some further insights as to why this may have been the case. Host Core Lead expresses:

*And like everything, it's got its positives, and it's got its negatives. Some of the, I guess one of the downsides, I found is just the limited options when making decisions. ... So when things happen in that if I don't necessarily think that's the right decision for our pupils. You don't really have much option.*  
Host Core Lead

Host Core Lead is informative as they indicate “*limited options*” when it comes to decisions made via the partnership, which conflict with their own views on what is best for pupils within Host School. Not being able to deviate, even when Host Core Lead considers it better to do so is therefore considered as a “*downside*” of their work with their partner from Partner School. Although Host Core Teacher describes heads of department as being “*very, very scared of doing anything that might possibly deviate...*”, based upon insights provided by Host Core Lead here, an alternative view may be that heads of department may be “*very, very scared of*” *not* being able to deviate.

Interviews provide insights to challenges faced in both schools pre the ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) SIP. Host Senior Lead recalls previous SIPs as they compare the inadequacies from the past with the present:

*You'll get a lot of SIPs coming in, writing reviews, writing external reviews, but what you then don't get is that next stage of support:*

- *How have you got on with that?*
- *How was that colleague managed?*
- *Is there anything else I can do to support you with that?*
- *What about this next action?*
- *How have you managed to get on with that?*
- *Have you used the resources that we gave you?*
- *What's been the success like?*
- *Do you need some further training?*

*It's very rare that you would get that follow up, but we've had that follow up for nearly two years, and if there's anything that we're struggling with, we get additional support with it.*

Host Senior Lead

Whilst clearly critical of past partnership ventures, Host Senior Lead values the follow up support from Partner School. When reflecting upon working with other schools prior to this partnership, Partner Deputy Head seems to have had a similar experience, as they explain:

*There were other points where it had been a meeting or two with someone, and then it kind of vanished into the ether just a little bit.*

Partner Deputy Head

Some common ground is struck between Host Senior Lead and Partner Deputy Head in terms of previous partnership endeavours having been short lived. The One Vision (2019) SIP did have significant funding attached, which meant that selected staff from Partner School were granted time to work closely with practitioners within Host School. This enabled the partnership model to stretch to something far more superior than previous consultancy models had allowed, whereby a SIP may visit a couple of times a year, each time leaving a list of things for improvement. The frequency of face-to-face time, and practical support with follow up, provided through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, offers a welcome shift from consultancy, to coaching support. Funding made it possible for face-to-face time to be invested in this SIP which penetrated beyond saying what needed to be done from a distance, by providing practical support in situ. Time is discussed later as a theme within its own right.

Negatives about the wider educational landscape and curriculum related challenges are raised by Host Non-Core Teacher who states:

*... that's a huge challenge for us in this country, ... we're kind of constrained by the curriculum, and this is what we have to teach them*

*and... It's hard, it's, it's really hard. I mean, we, we do our best as, as kind of public servants to deliver. These are increasingly more and more challenging times.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

Demands of the national curriculum and “*what we have to teach*” are highlighted here as a hardship, as Host Non-Core Teacher repeats “*It's hard, it's, it's really hard.*” Host Non-Core Teacher expands upon challenges inherent within the socioeconomically deprived context and cohort of Host School, stating:

*You know the content that we have to deliver... and yet, the students that we have coming through don't have the skills and, and... you know the knowledge. And the understanding that's required to, to, even get close to understanding some of it. So, I, I don't know what the answer is. ... But you know, we, we, we do our very best, and that's, that's what we do.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

Whilst curriculum and contextual hardships are highlighted, this is permeated and underpinned by a clear sense of duty and calling expressed by Host Non-Core Teacher who considers themselves and their Host School counterparts as doing their best as “*public servants to deliver*” to do “*our very best.*” The acknowledgment of adverse circumstances here relates to Host School and wider educational demands, rather than any presented through the partnership work.

Host Core Teacher shares similar views, however with some resentment towards the position of Partner School as the supporting school, due to their context serving different levels of deprivation, in comparison to Host School:

*... if I'm honest though, there is a resentment and a belief that they are telling us to do different, in different circumstances and that... They're from a school where the kids behave and the kids are from families who want to do well.*

Host Core Teacher

Host Core Teacher is direct in sharing their sense of “*resentment*” and their reason for this. Demographically and socioeconomically, the contexts of Partner School and Host School do contrast. Time was taken by Partner leads to gain greater understanding of Host School’s context, however the extent to which contextual sensitivity can be truly understood by anyone who has not been immersed in a similar school context, is called into question here.

Lastly, Covid-19 will be considered. Covid-19 is cited as a negative from each participant from Partner School. Partner Head highlights how the pace of the SIP has been slowed down “*... because of Covid, ... things have been delayed a little*

*bit, I'm a little bit frustrated, ...*" (Partner Head). Partner Deputy Head concurs that:

*The biggest challenge, ... would just be around the pandemic and related to things like the delivery model has had to change...* Partner Deputy Head

Partner Assistant Head shares that owing to the pandemic:

*... Early Career Teachers... that program has had to be reshaped a number of times... that has been a challenge...* Partner Assistant Head

The pandemic did not pause the partnership, rather the pace and place of planned improvements took a revised format, more fitting to the situation and in line with legal sanctions linked with social distancing imposed during this time. Subsequently, the partnership work flexed, responsive to circumstance and need.

#### 4.3.6 Positives

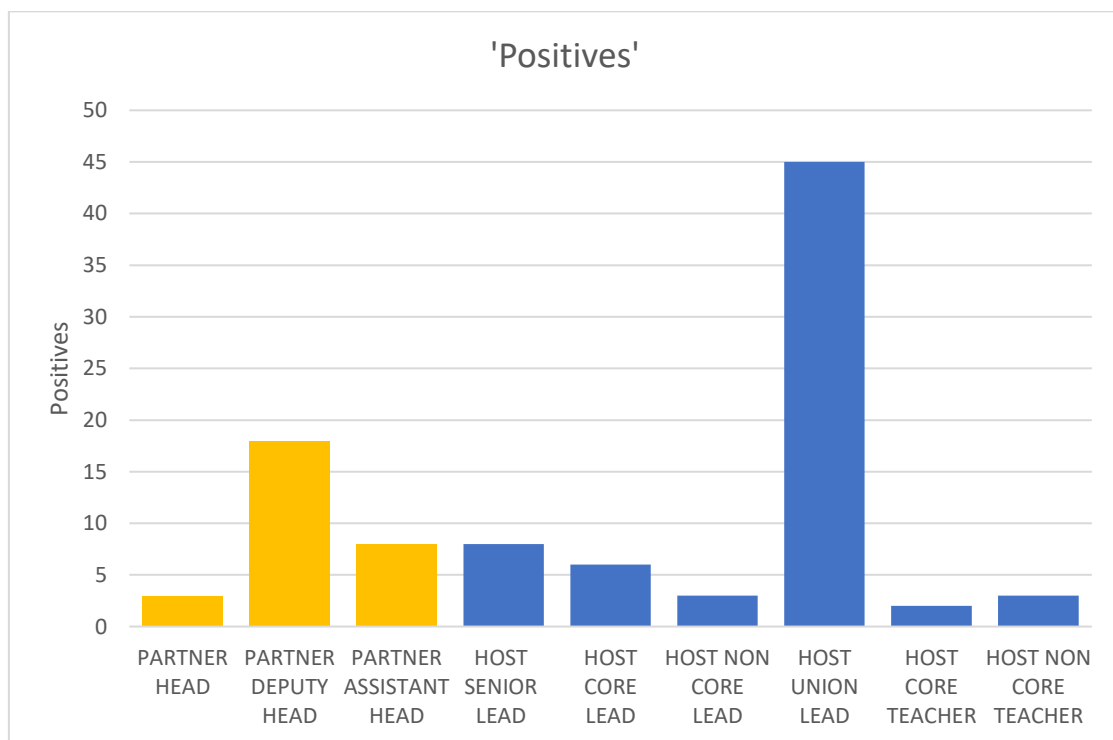


Figure 4.7: Positives

Host Union Lead at 45/45 counts, makes the most references to positives. Host Union Lead is somewhat of an anomaly within this, as the next highest counts are from Partner Deputy Head at 18/45. Host Union Lead does also contribute the most to negatives at 28/28, so this could be attributed to them being more openly expressive than others, or it could be related to their standout position as

a teacher of a lone subject. This may have increased their positive and negative contributions, as they demonstrated growth and had some autonomy as an independent subject, responsible for every change achieved within their subject. Host Union lead was also impacted by how onerous and isolating this had been in the early stages of the partnership work.

Exploring Host Union Lead's use of language under the theme of positives is enlightening. As the partnership work had progressed, Host Union Lead reflects:

*So, I definitely felt it's been enjoyable in terms of refining my teaching. I'd say to being more focused and driven... I feel like I've become quite a skilled teacher and confident and that I can give to others, ... I've changed in, by being more direct. Being more aware of the students and how they learn... It's quite simple to run with, but because it's simple, it allows people to adapt.*

Host Union Lead

Host Union Lead expresses enjoyment in terms of the impact they have seen in their own teaching. This is coupled with them being upskilled and becoming confident as they assert *"I feel like I've become quite a skilled teacher and confident."* Host Union Lead also indicates how they can *"give to others"* and considering their *"lone"* starting point, it is worth acknowledging Host Union Lead later became an Advocate, providing support for other colleagues within Host School too. Host Union Lead's partnership journey evokes a vision of transformation, from tribulation to triumph; although this could also be indicative of them wanting to help others to overcome feelings they had once experienced of being anxious and alone.

Host Core Teacher at two counts and Host Non-Core teacher at three counts make the least contributions to positives as a theme. These are the only two practitioners who are not leaders amongst the participants and as such could be considered as representative of the Host teaching population, albeit from a very small sample. Negatives at twenty-six counts from Host Core Teacher and eighteen counts from Host Non-Core Teacher, far outweigh their positives. Reflecting upon this prompts me to return again to the idea that the way practitioners at different levels perceive their place and ability to participate positively within the partnership may relate to their position, or power within it. This aspect will be an area of focus within the discussion chapter in 5.7.

Host Core Teacher summarises the work undertaken to implement the new teaching and learning model through the partnership, by stating “... *it's been worthwhile.*” (Host Core Teacher). Their second and final contribution to positives is preceded by some controversy and conflict owing to their view of previous processes surrounding lesson observations, prior to the partnership. Host Core Teacher asserts:

*Another highlight was the most recent observation, it was the first time I've never... done a non-jazzy lesson. I did the content of the lesson based on how I feel that pupils learn best and it was received well by the observer. And it's quite a big deal. ... it's quite a big deal that to swear; the whole world of the bullshit that we used to have to go through in lesson observations is gone.*  
Host Core Teacher

Although Host Core Teacher does focus on the improved process towards lesson observations introduced through the partnership here, there clearly is some uprooting of unearthed frustrations from past practices, experiences and subsequent emotion. Host Core Teacher suggests that style over substance had previously been favoured, as captured in their reference to now being able to do “*a non-jazzy lesson*”. Host Core Teacher draws me back to ideas explored in 2.3.1 of how professional identity or mis-identity have become defined by monitoring and measuring (Holloway and Brass, 2018) and will be discussed in more detail in 5.5.1 and 5.5.3.

Host Non-Core Teacher, when reflecting upon previous school improvement ventures over the last decade, identifies this SIP as having longevity, stating:

*Whereas this one seems to stick. It seems to have stuck, and I don't remember another initiative in all the years that I've been teaching, I don't remember another one that seems to have stuck quite so well, so that's a real positive, isn't it?*  
Host Non-Core Teacher

They later go on to share:

*I just think it's, been, uh, it's been a good, definitely a good thing to do. ...and yeah, this has certainly been a helpful. Helpful thing for us to use.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

The use of past tense here when confirming their belief that involvement in the partnership was positive and useful, is interesting when considered alongside earlier contributions from Host Non-Core Teacher. A picture is created of Host Non-Core Teacher having made it to the other side of something which has been hard work, yet ultimately helpful.

Positives from participants from Partner School cover a range of areas. Partner Head summarises *“I would say, the majority of it, in my opinion has been successful. .... There’s sort of, there’s a range of successes.”* (Partner Head). They later describe their overall experience within the partnership as *“Overwhelmingly positive. Far better than I hoped for.”* They seem to have gained a sense of satisfaction from working with others and are motivated by this.

Partner Head raises working with their Partner School colleagues as a benefit, stating:

*I enjoy working with the people that I work with, which has been, how it's been at Partner School for a long time. So, when I come to work each day, it isn't a chore coming to work.* Partner Head

Partner Head confirms their sense of *“feeling really proud”* at points on visits to Host School during the partnership. Partner Head shares how they *“...look to see, is the experience of kids getting better?”* They also consider themselves as learning through the process and getting something positive out of this side of the work, explaining:

*So, yeah, I get I get satisfaction from my part in the learning, you know, it's not about me, it's about students, but from a personal point of view, that's how I feel.* Partner Head

Under the theme of collaboration, Partner Head identified themselves as being most attuned to a collaborative and constructive approach in leadership and their excerpts under the theme of positives are people, pupil and progress centred. Linked to this idea, Host Union Lead states:

*I always feel like now it's about determining progress, it's pupil and people centred, and that, to me, is like the core of that essentialism aspect of it.*

Host Union Lead

As the overall leader of the partnership, Partner Head’s own attributes of being pro-people, pro-pupils and pro-progress remained high profile and became widespread. Interestingly, Partner Head’s own motivators for success seem to have positively influenced the SIP work and the recipients, as is seen here.

One of the first statements made by Partner Deputy Head under the theme of positives, refers to some of Host School’s previous progress, they state *“There was the sense of a school that at points had done pretty well or very well, ...”* (Partner Deputy Head). Rather than viewing and approaching Host School as

deficit, as is sometimes a risk with school partnership work, this suggests they took time to gain an understanding of previous achievements within Host School. Partner Deputy Head appears to have considered successes from when Host School had *“done pretty well or very well”* as a springboard for future success. The positive outlook presented in this transcript excerpt is synonymous with the way Partner Deputy Head presented themselves in person, when they were within Host School during SIP work. Whether or not this was always the consistent sentiment behind the scenes is not known, however, whenever front facing in and within Host School, it was.

Partner Deputy Head, shares common language with Partner Head as they also express the partnership as being *“overall overwhelmingly positive to this point.”* Similar to Partner Head, there is also a reflection upon the opportunity to enhance their own practice through the work, as they reflect:

*There's another advantage there because you have had to again develop that mindset, that kind of ethos around questioning what we do. Right?*

Partner Deputy Head

Another positive identified as *“a huge success”* by Partner Deputy Head is *“the model of the initial supporters”*, (Partner Deputy Head). This refers to the group of ten teaching staff members within Host School who were appointed as part of the Advocate team to trial elements of the new teaching and learning model in advance of others, to support and coach other colleagues to adapt.

Partner Assistant Head shares how working relationships between the two sites were *“going really, really, positively... that working relationship is a really positive one.”* (Partner Assistant Head). Their enjoyment of working with others comes through strongly, as they also share:

*For me it was an opportunity to get involved and do something else and my strength I think has always been working directly with people. It's just always been the thing I've enjoyed the most.* Partner Assistant Head

Host Senior Lead, having worked the closest with Partner Assistant Head, affirms the positive working relationship too:

*... one of the highlights, and one of the opportunities has really been working with Partner Assistant Head because they are an absolutely amazing colleague who has inspired all of us through the staff training, no matter how long we've been teaching for, ... It's really nice to work with*

*inspirational colleagues who have enthused us... and really breathed some life back into the subject area...* Host Senior Lead

When asked if Host Senior Lead had any other comments to share at the closing stages of the interview, they contributed:

*Only that I think we've been very lucky to work with Partner School and I can't think of another school that could have been so generous in spirit. This has been done with such generosity of spirit from the start.*

Host Senior Lead

The appreciation expressed by Host Senior Lead here, whereby they see themselves as having been most fortunate to work with Partner School is an accolade to the partnership. This could however also indicate a sense of relief when compared to previous school improvement initiatives, critiqued earlier.

Positives from other Partner participants include an improvement in a minimum standard, as Host Core Lead shares:

*... everybody has... a minimum bar now to get to, and that bar is higher than where it was with some staff. So that is, for me, is like definitely the biggest positive.* Host Core Lead

Host Non-Core Lead found the structure of the new teaching and learning model a key strength. Regarding this, Host Non-Core Lead explains “... *the whole thing it's crafted so well together...*”. Host Non-Core Lead. They also express gratitude to their fellow subject department head from Partner School for providing anything Host Non-Core Lead asked for. Host Non-Core Lead states how they “... *can't be more than complementary, because what we've asked for, we've got.*” Host Non-Core Lead. Gratitude is shown here, however this is also demonstrative of the dynamic between the two schools, with Partner School as the donating partner and Host School as the beneficiary.

Reflecting upon the overall merits of the teaching and learning model introduced, Host Non-Core Teacher summarises simply, yet tellingly “... *yeah, this has certainly been a helpful, helpful thing for us to use.*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). There have been a range of initiatives which Host School participants have been introduced to over their time working in Host School, as raised within this chapter. Host Non-Core Teacher confirming with some certainty here that the teaching and learning model implemented through the partnership has been “*helpful*”

provides a welcome review and also indicates progress made from unhelpful to helpful school improvement practices.

Whilst positives have been confirmed by all nine participants, there could be some potential risk here, and perhaps more so than with any other theme, for both Partner School and Host School participants to judge the partnership and associated actions as a success. Time, money and work invested would be difficult to declare otherwise, as this could be damaging, particularly to morale. Like all themes however, positives were not sought through this research, they were found within it. This provides some assurance around participant bias, yet due to the human element involved, this cannot be fully prevented.

#### 4.3.7 Time

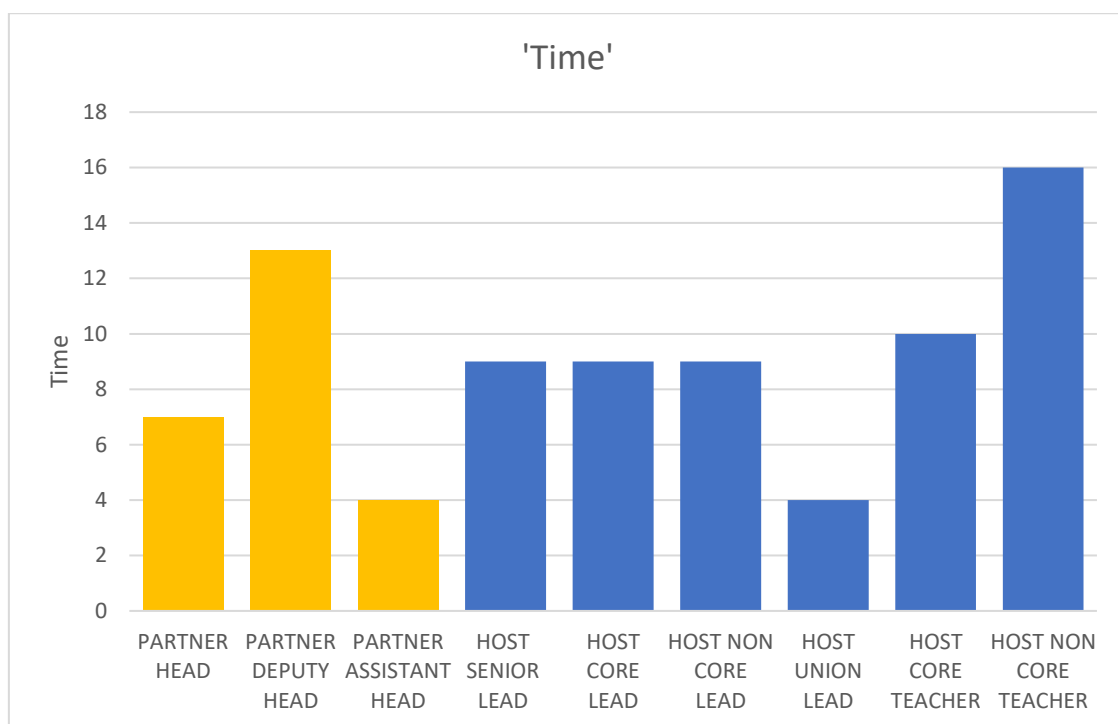


Figure 4.8: Time

Partner Deputy Head with thirteen counts (13/16), Host Non-Core Teacher with sixteen (16/16) and Host Core Teacher with ten (10/16), make the most references to time. The lowest number of references to time come from Partner Assistant Head (4/16) and from Host Union Lead (4/16). The range is in line with two of the themes already covered of consistency and collaboration, which also saw a

significant difference between the highest and lowest counts. Looking at the bar chart for time, a more even distribution amongst participants is presented.

Host Senior Lead, Host Core Lead and Host Non-Core Lead are all on a par with (9/16) contributions around time. Given that they are all leaders working in the same context, this could suggest that they shared common experiences around time from spending time with colleagues from Partner School and also in terms of time constraints faced too. Out of the remaining Host participants, marginally, Host Core Teacher (10/16) and more pointedly, Host Non-Core Teacher (16/16) present the highest contributions to time. As the only two teachers with no leadership responsibility, this presents some significance as they appear to have found time more demanding than their colleagues within Host School. Host Core Teacher and Host Non-Core Teacher also made the least references to positives, alongside Host Union Lead. There are some clear differences between the lived experiences of staff at teaching and leadership level within the partnership, pertaining to their professional position and agency within this. This aspect will be explored further within the discussion chapter in 5.7.

Partner Deputy Head has the highest counts under the theme of time, when compared with their Partner School colleagues and as such will be explored first. Partner Deputy Head's interview transcript indicates forethought about investing time to establish a productive connection between Partner School and Host School and with myself, who they worked most directly with in Host School. Partner Deputy Head states:

*I think at that point when it was identified. It was just taking... Hopefully, you know, taking time to begin to develop a positive working relationship, and I think a big part of that was there could never be a sense that this was Partner School doing something to another school.*

Partner Deputy Head

Caution combines with emotional intelligence here as Partner Deputy Head considered in advance, the need to establish a positive professional relationship. Time taken to do so, Partner Deputy Head indicates as being important to avoid the danger of Partner School appearing to be “*doing something to another school*” (Partner Deputy Head).

Comparing this approach where the aim is to ‘work with’, rather than ‘do to’, with previous partnership work, the time which was made available through the One

Vision (2019) SIP did allow much more time to build positive ways of working between Partner School and Host School colleagues. The funding provided, did create capacity for fairly intensive support to occur, without which, time and support would have been scaled down significantly. Partner Head recognises how helpful time can be as an enabler for professional dialogue and to create space for actions to be addressed:

*... people have got to have the time to discuss things in detail and work ways forward together, rather than if you're rushing, you tend to just say: "do it this way," because you've got deadlines and no discussions, so it's "just do it this way... and that doesn't build a cooperative sort of relationship.*

Partner Head

Greater time investment in SIP work underpinned by a desire to 'do with' rather than 'do to' as demonstrated by Partner Head and Partner Deputy Head welcomes a shift from the deficit dialogue prevalent within many SIPs.

Partner Deputy Head makes several references to timeframes in relation to plans, one example being *"There was a clear kind of timeframe in terms of what would happen and when."* (Partner Deputy Head). A strong sense of direction is clear. Accompanying this is an understanding of the demands and realities of teaching alongside the pursuit of priorities, as reflected here:

*You know, I always think people can only have one priority or two priorities at a time... that reality for teachers who are teaching 45 lessons out of 50 or 25 lessons a week. It's, it's a little bit different, ...*

Partner Deputy Head

Practical wisdom is demonstrated again, as although Partner Deputy Head has a leadership role with reduced teaching hours, they still appear to have realistic expectations and are considerate of people, priorities and workload within this.

Earlier, it was noted that Partner Head had considered one subject area as not being successful in the partnership due to the people pertaining to this. Partner Head had also identified Partner Deputy Head as *"...the right person to be involved."* (Partner Head). Having the right people from Partner School, in role and on-site in Host School to fulfil the ONE Vision (2019) SIP had been a conscious choice, which Partner Head had given some thought and time to. Some professionals are well-suited to inspiring and motivating others through building trust and relationships, whereas others are not, as highlighted in 2.4.2.

Host Non-Core Teacher with sixteen counts under the theme of time, talks about striking the right balance with workload, planning and the creation of lesson resources. Host Non-Core Teacher talks through the process of dividing up workload when moving towards the newly introduced teaching and learning model:

*There was sort of looking at individual staff workload and sort of judging what was the best way for the department to divide up the planning based on, you know the timetables that we have... the expertise that we have, you know, the hours that we work.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

In this instance it is useful to share that Host Non-Core Teacher spoke with a positive tone of voice, as this does help to interpret that Host Non-Core Teacher viewed the process around how planning was shared amongst their Host based subject team, as positive. Consideration of contractual hours, timetables taught and areas of strength were taken into account, thus suggesting a fair and strategic response. When talking about their desire to do well for pupils and create high quality teaching and learning resources, there is also a recognition of the realities of time being finite, as Host Non-Core Teacher ascertains:

*You know, I mean like it's a double-edged thing because if you made all of your lessons like that, super-duper with all the links and everything, you wouldn't have time to do anything else, so it's about trying to find the right balance...*

Host Non-Core Teacher

From looking at time invested in planning more broadly, to how time is spent in individual lessons, Host Non-Core Teacher reflects on some contextual challenges of “*Trying to fit all of that content into one hour.*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). They reflect:

*...that may just be because of the sorts of students that we have. They need a lot of repetition. ... even though you've explained it once you have to explain it three or four times before you know some of the kids in the class have actually got it. ... then you've got ... behaviour and things that you often have to deal with ... that's not necessarily the new teaching and learning model, it might just be aspects of teaching here.*

Host Non-Core Teacher

Host Non-Core Teacher communicates their experience of teaching in the context of Host School facing challenging circumstances. The associated demands of needing to teach social skills including listening as well as metacognition and how

to behave well, whilst delivering a content heavy curriculum, have informed their experience and view of “*teaching here*”.

Host Non-Core Teacher appreciates “...one of the best things about this partnership is that we haven't just dropped it after a year.” (Host Non-Core Teacher). Host Non-Core Teacher provides an insight here, indicating that sustained school improvement initiatives within Host School appear to have struggled to surpass one year, whereas the partnership work between Partner School and Host School has persisted. The idea of persistence relating to school improvement occurs again here.

Host Core Teacher with ten counts makes the third most references to time. Similar to Host Non-Core Teacher, they talk about time invested to develop resources:

*I've invested, a significant amount of time, ... to edit and adapt resources, ... then made these edited lessons available to other members of the department. ... I have created a bunch of resources ... I've spent a large amount of time using Edexcel exam builder to pull the questions from that, from the exam papers, so that kids can apply. The time spent doing both, it's been worthwhile.*

Host Core Teacher

A lot of time was spent on developing several resources by Host Core Teacher, however they regard this as being “*worthwhile*”. Time spent on additional work is viewed positively by Host Core Teacher, as colleagues and pupils have been able to gain from these. The creation of new resources demanded time, however some wasted time was eradicated too:

*Yes, it just yes. Just clear lines. Yeah, and all that wasted time has been cut out like, like cutting and sticking and stuff as an example, like that's gone.*

Host Core Teacher

Host Core Teacher acknowledges there is a positive shift in time investment and value gained for themselves, where they assess the merits of worthwhile work alongside the underpinning ethos of the new teaching and learning model which promotes staff to question “*Is it doing the right thing? Is It necessary?*” (Host Core Teacher). Alongside this however, they also recognise how some staff appear pressurised, as they identify:

*There's a slight, slight workload issue, where driven by fear of not been seen to be doing enough, it causes staff resentment.*

Host Core Teacher

Here, Host Core Teacher expresses their own frustrations with some colleagues who appear to create unnecessary workload which they consider to be borne out of a need to be seen to be doing more, due to “*fear*.” (Host Core Teacher). This then has a ripple effect on other colleagues which, as Host Core Teacher confirms “...*causes staff resentment*.” Host Core Teacher reveals their disapproval here of colleagues who do more, as this then risks becoming the expected norm. These ideas will be picked up again in 5.5.3.

Host Core Teacher describes an uncomfortable situation they were faced with, which could have increased their workload further, if they had not spoken up. Host Core Teacher explained that their senior subject leader had seen additional marking which was in excess of what the marking policy directs. However, as a result of the senior subject leader liking what they saw, in the next core subject team meeting, the senior subject leader stated that they were going to make the extra marking commonplace for the whole subject team. Guided by the revised marking policy from the new teaching and learning model, Host Core Teacher was able to speak up and provide a counteracting argument, as they recall:

*... from the marking policy point of view... and I already looked it up, and I said it verbatim... “Is it, is it actually doing the right thing?” “Is it?” ... What's the phrase? “Is it necessary?” ... So, I said it ... and I thought well, maybe I've saved myself a lot of work there by saying it...* Host Core Teacher

Host Core Teacher’s response here became a resolve, as the marking policy remained as was, with workload remaining at “a good level at the moment” (Host Core Teacher), rather than workload being ratcheted up and resented. So, it seems, that through Host Core Teacher referencing the revised marking policy and questioning time investment and associated benefits, this situation and the subject team were able to avoid additional work. Senior Core Lead appears to have been swiftly swayed, albeit temporarily into tasking team members with more to do in the way of marking. It would have been worth exploring whether the senior subject leader wanted to introduce more marking because they thought it was best for the pupils, or whether they felt it necessary to show that their subject is doing even more. Some practitioners within Host School, as can be seen from this example remain compelled, pressurised or conditioned to create more work and whilst this may be owing to a sense of threat, this also presents a

threat to time, workload and wellbeing. The emotional impact of school improvement will be returned to in 5.6.

Looking at the transcripts within the theme of time from the other participants within this research, Partner Head as the overall lead has a focus on timescales and pace, noting *“I think we'll probably need to kind of in some areas, pick up the pace.”* (Partner Head). Partner Head stresses the need to dedicate time in their own school as well as in Host School as the supported School:

*... when you're supporting the school, ... with a lot of intensity, and you need to spend a lot of time in schools... You can't afford to just to leave the home school, ... you can't afford to leave that school short staffed, ... So, if, if the One Vision (2019) project hadn't been around, we wouldn't have been able to have myself, ... to have all of us involved, we wouldn't because we wouldn't be available so much...* Partner Head

Capacity to enact school to school support is considered from Partner Head, as is care for their own school, ensuring Partner School does not get left without, whilst supporting another school. Recognition is given to the One Vision (2019) SIP as creating capacity for leaders within Partner School to be *“involved”* and *“available.”* (Partner Head). Without the One Vision (2019) funding, the SIP, as it was, could not have happened as Partner Head states *“... we wouldn't be available so much.”* (Partner Head). During the interview, Partner Head reflects on overall time invested, they share:

*I think if I could turn the clock back to when I personally got involved with Host School, I think, I think it was the right decision. It was the right thing to do.* Partner Head

Doing the right thing is often attributed to integrity and to being a leader. Doing things right is regularly associated with being a manager. Here, Partner Head in their approach to the partnership, by wanting to do things right by their own school and through leading the partnership between Partner and Host School demonstrates a desire to lead and manage well. A sense of value gained through the partnership is verified by Partner Head in their confirmation that *“It was the right thing to do.”* Partner Head did lead and manage the partnership well, however admits that if the funding which made time available for themselves and their selected Partner School peers to provide support, was not included, their involvement would not have been possible.

Partner Assistant Head reflects on the impact of Covid-19 on time, particularly when having to re-map the Early Career programme and CPD. Host Senior Lead talks about how generous time from Partner Assistant Head has been:

*When we need it (time) for anything new that we're doing, or for any changes that have come up, we've consistently had the time that we needed, and I think that is probably one of the distinguishing characteristics which gives strength.* Host Senior Lead

Host Core Lead explains how they appreciated the gradual approach applied in adopting new practices:

*... the CPD as we did it, ...it was introduced to us, the benefits were shown. ... then it was like that drip feed approach, which was really good. It wasn't like, let's change everything we're doing immediately. ... breaking it down into smaller steps has really helped having somebody at Partner School to go to has helped.* Host Core Lead

Time taken to transition to new ways of working worked well for Host Core Lead, however they do identify that the time that they were afforded, is not easy to provide to others, when new staff join the team:

*... one of the things I'm struggling with now, actually is the new staff that come over, they haven't had the same drip feed approach that we've had. And yet they're sort of thrown into the deep end in this. Especially like the beginning of the year, there's not really the time as much to give them the detailed CPD that we got.* Host Core Lead

A reflection point occurs here in terms of how schools may best be supported to sustain school improvement, and what staff induction and training may look like for those who join later. As time moves on, it is likely that some staff will leave Host School and that additional staff will join, hence a structured approach to staff induction and development based around the teaching and learning model will support leaders such as Host Core Lead when welcoming new teachers to their team. Advocates did provide some coaching and training for others, and their work could extend to staff induction in the future.

Host Non-Core Lead speaks of how they benefitted from on hand solutions in a timely manner, from Partner School when they faced problems in transitioning over to a new examination specification within their subject. They acknowledge:

*So instead of us taking five or six years to solve the problems, they've got the solutions and there might not be the solutions you want to use for the long term, but it stops that sort of, you know, like the stuttering start, ...*

Host Non-Core Lead

Before the directive for Host Non-Core Lead to change to a new examination specification, they had already adapted their resources to align with the new teaching and learning model. Only after this, did the instruction come to change specification, so already adapted resources needed much bigger changes or were fully replaced again to meet the criteria in the new examination specification. This put a constraint on time. Host Non-Core Lead questioned the timing of this additional change:

*At one point, I think it's been quite clearly demonstrated that I don't think it was the right time with the right year group because it's put us quite clearly on the back foot and we are behind, which added a level of stress to the process that didn't necessarily need to be there.* Host Non-Core Lead

Demands on time were placed upon Host Non-Core Lead and their team, as they highlight that the timing of the change was far from ideal. So, time and timing seemed to have taken their toll on Host Non-Core Lead and their team. Even so, the switch was made. This also links back to perseverance and in this case, it seems that there was an imposed need to, rather than a desire to change specifications, at such short notice.

Host Union Lead cites *“workload for me was probably my biggest sort of stressor when we started this, ...”* (Host Union Lead), however they also acknowledge that they were *“given extra time, which is probably my main support that I needed.”* (Host Union Lead). Host Union Lead was given an additional hour a week to help them to get what they needed to do, done. Similar to Host Core Lead, they appreciate:

*...not just jumping onto the next thing too quickly. It's quite nice to be able to have a chance to reflect and refine and things like that ... just giving people a chance to sort of like embed stuff and refine stuff, ...*

Host Union Lead

#### 4.4 Interconnectivity between the seven most dominant themes

This section seeks to understand the connections between the seven most dominant themes. Figure 4.9 illustrates the relationship between the most prominent themes and the position of each theme in relation to another, as unearthed through the presentation of the findings.

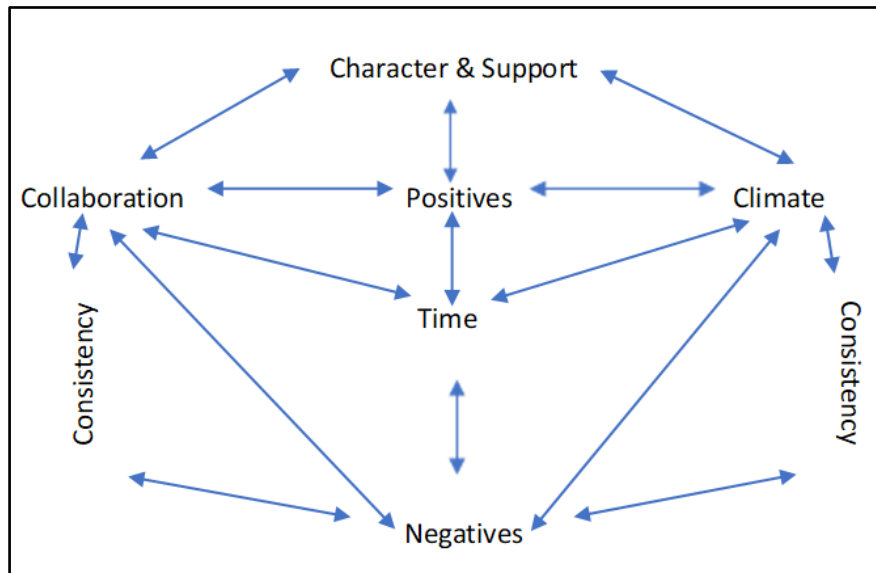


Figure 4.9: Interconnectivity between the seven most dominant themes

Character and support will be explored first, thereafter, the remaining six themes will be looked at according to their position on the diagram. Flowing from the upper left side with collaboration, through to the upper right side to climate, followed by consistency on the outer sides, then from the top, to the bottom of the spine to cover themes of positives, time and negatives.

##### 4.4.1 Character and support summary

Character and support are highly influential within the partnership. Where participants within Host School have received plenty of face-to-face time through coaching support from a peer at Partner School, confirmation of collaboration and a positive climate linked to this ensues, as figure 4.9 presents. On the contrary, where such support has not been experienced between Partner and Host colleagues, or among Host practitioners, collaboration and climate is more complex, emotive and problematic. The lower end of the spine within figure 4.9

reflects how the latter approach, detrimentally impacts the themes of time and negatives.

Despite high value being placed upon the one-to-one, in person approach of support provided by selected leaders from Partner School, leaders at Host School manage, rather than coach teachers within Host school to adapt to the new model. The supporting school function as leaders within the partnership, and the leaders within the supported school operate as managers. Teachers within this become managed. A hierarchical division of the style of support available seems to exist. A link to the theme of time arises here, as those who received one-to-one partnership time reflect positively on this, under the theme of time.

Five out of the nine participants recognised coaching as having had some role within the partnership. Three participants from Partner School and two participants from Host School confirm coaching as part of their lived experience within the partnership. Participants from Host School who had minimal or in some cases, no face-to-face time with their counterpart from Partner School, do not make any references to coaching and had much less to say within the theme of character and support.

Unsurprisingly, face-to-face on-site support was favoured and valued by the Host participants who received this. A positive account of the character of their Partner colleagues ensued. Positive views held by Host participants, about Partner participants within the theme of character and support interconnect with themes of positivity and climate, as these themes were influenced by character and support. Linking the theme of character and support with the two themes of collaboration and negatives, distant methods of communication via email or online meets which occurred less routinely, were not as well thought of. In these cases, minimal references to character and support were made. Only positive or neutral tones were applied within the discourse relating to the theme of character and support, with more positive tones and comments being applied by those who had either invested time, or had time invested in them, working face-to-face with colleagues from Partner School, within Host School.

#### 4.4.2 Collaboration summary

Despite the partnership depicting the deficit model, with Partner School supporting Host School, collaboration was confirmed at occurring at different levels. It was revealed that collaboration came from Partner School supporting Host School, and then through practitioners within Host School collaborating with one another at an increased level, to fulfil actions arising through the partnership. This aligns with the theme of time, as time was spent deciding how best to divide increased workload due to the changes being made. Furthermore, collaboration saved some time as the workload was shared out. Increased collaboration between practitioners across Host School was viewed as a positive consequence of the partnership, even though the partnership involved an increase in workload and a need therefore, for more collaboration and time.

The importance of collaboration with leaders from Host School was carefully considered by Partner Deputy Head, recognising their own position as an outsider, needing to “*piggyback onto the credibility*” of professionals within Host School. Some interconnectivity with the theme of character and support exists as Partner Deputy Head drew upon good character and support from within Host School. Partner Deputy Head expressed that there had been “*numerous occasions*” through working with Host School that self- reflection around their own practice had been enhanced. Across both schools, hopes were expressed for more reciprocity to develop over time.

#### 4.4.3 Climate summary

Climate as a theme encompasses a range of thoughts, ideas, experiences and emotions. Overall Host School colleagues were positive about the climate surrounding the partnership work. Despite historical disenfranchisement within Host School from previous school improvement efforts, a productive and progressive climate was seen through the partnership, even when unwelcome change was insisted upon.

When considered in isolation, climate as a theme presents a fairly positive picture as per its position within figure 4.9, alongside positives. However, climate is impacted by time and subsequently negatives, as the diagram also reveals. Initial

unrest around the partnership was experienced by some participants, as this was seen as another change in a history of many, with limited time to invest in “*yet another initiative*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). A range of emotions were experienced by Host participants, particularly in the early stages, some of which were extreme.

Due to the inherent setup within the deficit model of SIPs generally, it is difficult to determine whether or not the working climate between a supporting and a supported school may be mutually experienced. In the case of Partner School and Host School however, a climate conducive to productive work and progress appears to have been realised, as time progressed.

#### 4.4.4 Consistency summary

Consistency as a theme mainly links to participant clarity around the new teaching and learning model. Independent of one another, Host Non-Core Lead and Host Non-Core Teacher compare Host School to different modes of water transport. Host Non-Core Lead explained how practitioners in Host School are all rowing in the same direction now, whereas Host Non-Core Teacher compares Host School to a heavy ship which has been turned around and steered on course. Host Non-Core Lead appreciates clarity within the newly introduced teaching and learning model, as this prevents them becoming distracted by other minutiae, as they remain on route.

Host Core Lead appreciates how the new quality assurance processes made it more straightforward and streamlined when monitoring teaching and learning activity, as everyone knows the expectations. This was attributed to having clear criteria to aim to meet across Host School. Host Core Teacher values increased fairness and transparency from clearer expectations now, as they had regarded previous monitoring processes as being too subjective and inconsistent, depending upon which member of staff was conducting these. Host Senior Lead affirms how the heightened expectations around quality assurance and standardised lesson expectations set the right tone for teaching and learning. They appreciate how this helped to “raise the bar” in the subject area they lead, so that greater quality could be cultivated across their subject team. Straitjacketed

initial implementation of the teaching and learning model was confirmed by participants from both schools. Host School participants explain how this secure structure was helpful in improving consistency across teaching and learning. The initial straitjacketed approach aligns with authoritative direction, whereby through tight control, consistency had been established.

Due to the vulnerable position of Host School as a school facing challenging circumstances, the controlled implementation of the new teaching and learning model seems to have been perceived as more of a life jacket than a straitjacket by Host teaching staff. Connected to the theme of negatives, some participants suffered with heightened anxiety at the start of the change process. As the partnership progressed, the sliding scale shifted from control, through to consistency and towards increased confidence, as Host participants became more familiar with the new teaching and learning model. The idea of participation is pertinent here, as is agency and will be revisited in 5.7.

Host participants regard improved consistency as a well-received outcome. This is in part supported by a recognition from participants within Host School that previously, they had been lacking in clear direction around consistent expectations for classroom practice. Practitioners within Host School seem to have been ready, and therefore more receptive to redirection in this regard.

#### 4.4.5 Positives summary

Positives feature the highest range as a theme, thus alerting attention to the fact that different participants hold very different professional and subsequent, emotional positions within the partnership. This aligns in part with the themes of character and support and consistency. The extent to which one has agency, within or through the partnership, the more positive it is for individuals. The range observed within positives is significant, as for some, their lived experience relating to the SIP was far more positive than it was for others. This links to collaboration, as many positives are attributed to participants having experienced meaningful participation, according to the contributions they made, and opportunities to work with others.

Host Union Lead shared how they had progressed over time to find enjoyment in being upskilled and how they had grown in confidence after adapting to the new teaching and learning model. Much stemmed from the support they were able to offer others within Host School during the process. This positive reaction and action originated from the theme of negatives, as Host Union Lead's desire to help others arose from initial negative emotions they had experienced.

Positives from Partner School participants, relate to their own professional development as much as they do to the development of Host School, and some positive mutual benefits were confirmed. Partner Assistant Head was positive about having a new opportunity, one within which they could work with others, recognising this as a strength of theirs. Host Senior Lead cited working with Partner Assistant Head as one of the highlights. Host Senior Lead was inspired and enthused by Partner Assistant Head, valuing their positive influence on other members of the Host subject team, thus connecting positives with character and support too.

Host Core Teacher described the partnership work as "*worthwhile*", whilst Host Non-Core Teacher said this was a "*helpful*" thing to do. Furthermore, they were pleased that the processes introduced via the partnership were standing the test of time. Partner Deputy Head demonstrated an appreciation that Host School had done well at points previously. Having recognised the potential in previous strengths seems to have set a positive tone for the partnership work. Partner Deputy Head also benefitted from reflecting on, and questioning themselves and wider practice, through their pivotal role within the partnership.

#### 4.4.6 Time summary

Partner Head and Partner Deputy Head place importance on investing time to build effective working relationships with colleagues across both schools. Partner Head emphasised how their commitment and contribution could not have been confirmed without the financial support and subsequent time made available. Care for both schools and having time to make the partnership a success, without allowing anything in Partner School as the supporting school to slip in any way, was a crucial consideration within this. Host Senior Lead valued the time they

were afforded through the partnership. Partner Deputy Head was keen to establish mutuality as they did not want the partnership to be one school imposing on another, thus linking back to the theme of climate and considerations covered in this regard. Host Core Teacher found the newly introduced processes, time consuming to adapt to, however in doing so, they found greater value in how their time was being invested, due to pedagogical gains. Host Non-Core Teacher perceived that there remained a “*creeping pressure*” from some staff within Host School to be seen to be doing more.

Participants from Host School who experienced the most face-to-face time with staff from Partner School, were grateful for the time invested in support for them. Some Host participants were pleased with the gradual approach employed when being introduced to the new teaching and learning model, as this allowed them time to adjust, although time was tight. An appreciation was also shown from Host School participants towards additional planning time which was allocated to them, as this provided the opportunity to refine and develop their practice.

References participants make to time seem synonymous with the time they had invested in them as individuals, or the time they were able to invest in others. Teachers who were expected to transfer CPD into classroom practice were challenged by time. A link to collaboration and time co-exists here, as Host participants who got to spend quality time with Partner participants, view time more profitably, whereas those who did not, do not.

#### 4.4.7 Negatives summary

Out of all of the themes unearthed, negatives are underpinned by the greatest range in tone, with the most negatives and neutral tones presented through vocal expression. This aligns with contributions made under the theme of time, many of which were emotively underpinned from Host participants.

Three teachers from Host School collectively contribute the most to negatives, these are Host Non-Core Teacher, Host Core Teacher, and Host Union Lead. Host Non-Core Teacher shared concerns about the educational landscape, with curriculum and content demands placed upon teachers to deliver a one size fits all model to pupils, regardless of pupil background and ability. This relates back

to the theme of consistency, as schools here are seen as having to fit into the same mould of a centralised and prescribed curriculum model of education, regardless of cohort, or context. Host Core Lead criticises a lack of autonomy around decision making at subject leadership level, particularly when decisions made via Partner School did not seem to be the right fit for pupils within Host School.

A range of negative emotions are experienced by participants at teacher level. Furthermore, Host Non-Core Teacher observes the emotions of middle leaders, sharing their perception of subject leaders having appeared “*scared*” to deviate from the prescribed model. Host Union Lead shared feelings of being daunted in the roll out stages of the new teaching and learning model, they also expressed a range of emotions experienced during the process “*fear, ... struggle, ... worry, ... stressor, ... alone.*” (Host Union Lead). Host Non-Core Lead disclosed “*troubled*” as a feeling experienced within their team during the partnership work. Partner Head considered one subject area within Host School as “*not successful*” at all within the partnership linked to a perceived lack of willingness to work with their allocated partner from Partner School. Within the same excerpt, Partner Head does draw attention to the “*... the vast majority*” having been successful.

Time and negatives connect, as Partner Head compares their intensive work with Host School to other short-term and subsequently short-lived systems of school-to-school support they had been involved in. Partner Deputy Head resonates this experience and view. Similarly, Host Senior Lead was disapproving of previous, seemingly fleeting SIPs when compared with their richer experience with Partner School. Further links to the theme of time can be drawn upon here, as the less time is invested into partnership work, the more likely this is to be viewed as a negative, unsustainable model of support. All three participants from Partner School cite the impact of Covid-19 as a negative, thus connecting to the themes of time and character and support, as face-to-face opportunities for on-site support were impacted.

#### 4.4.8 Super Themes

Out of the seven themes, two major, or super themes have emerged, which I am titling as 'transformational' and 'operational'. *Transformational* includes themes of: character and support, collaboration, positives, and climate. *Operational* incorporates themes of: time, consistency, and negatives, as presented in figure 4.10:

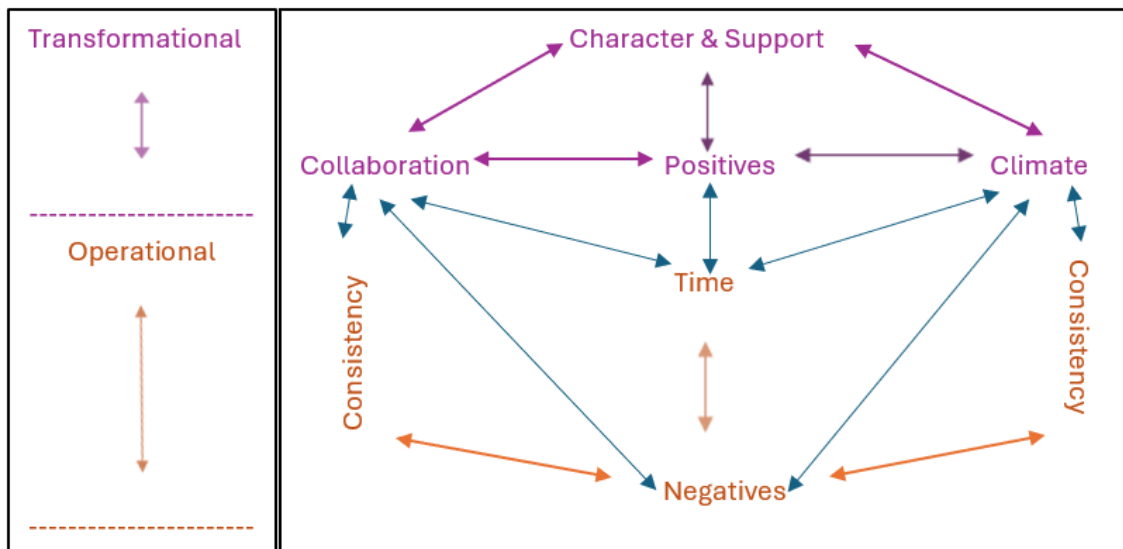


Figure 4.10: Super themes

Interestingly, when looking back to figure 4.9 and here at figure 4.10, the themes which are grouped under *transformational* are all presented above the themes gathered as *operational*. *Transformational* could be regarded as a higher tier super theme and *operational* as a lower tier super theme, however it is more complex than this. *Transformational* is no more superior than *operational*, however, the higher tier aspects by their fairly liberating nature encompass an openness, they are overt and as such, function very much above surface level as more likely to be seen and heard about in practice. Related to their position in figure 4.10, *transformational* aspects are easily observable and transparent through interactions between participants at different levels and across the organisation. *Operational* aspects on the other hand, are to varying degrees, constraining and as such are more likely to be internally processed and harboured by participants along with confined emotions. The emotional impact of the super theme of *operational* is significant, yet is kept covert.

Character and support, collaboration, positives, and climate, are fitting with *transformational* as these aspects are very much spoken about as opportunities relating to change and progress being made through the SIP. A common thread of face-to-face interaction and support runs between each theme encompassed within the super theme of *transformational*. Time, consistency and negatives align with the super theme of *operational*, as these are most regularly referred to in relation to the day to day running of the SIP and having to make it all work, even, and often amidst challenges. A common thread which runs through each theme encapsulated within *operational* as a super theme, is that of managing. Managing here for each participant covers managing change, competing demands, and emotions within this. Much of this, like its position in figure 4.10 is kept below the surface, kept hidden in the shadows for individual practitioners in terms of them grappling with operational aspects, mostly in isolation. Had this research and the interviews not been conducted, I would have remained ignorant to this in terms of the challenges and complexities experienced by participants, many of which are emotionally charged for individuals during the change process.

#### 4.5 Patterns within the remaining codes

Each of the seven themes covered by each participant have been explored and then summarised and connected to conclude this section. Before this chapter is fully concluded however, it is worth remembering that the seven themes were drawn from a total of twenty-eight codes which are worth exploring for any patterns.

Focussing on the remaining codes, table 4.5 presents some interesting patterns. Highlighted in orange are codes which were not mentioned by Partner participants. The codes not referred to by Host participants are indicated in yellow. Themes which were talked about by either Partner or Host participants are indicated in green.

Table 4.5: Patterns within the remaining codes

THEME	PARTNER HEAD	PARTNER DEPUTY HEAD	PARTNER ASSISTANT HEAD	HOST SENIOR LEAD	HOST CORE LEAD	HOST NON CORE LEAD	HOST UNION LEAD	HOST CORE TEACHER	HOST NON CORE TEACHER
Commitment	2	14	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Progress	7	12	9	9	6	3	0	0	7
Developmental	7	9	8	15	8	14	0	0	12
Vision	3	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relationships	1	7	5	4	2	3	4	0	3
Sustainability / Improvement	5	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Communication	0	6	9	8	4	4	12	10	3
Change	0	6	4	1	6	4	0	0	6
Contextual Challenges	4	5	1	8	3	15	0	0	11
Plan	0	5	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Classroom Practice	10	2	5	7	0	0	0	0	0
Engagement / Thinking	0	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buy-in / Willingness	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alignment	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
Ownership	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	8	4
Confidence	0	0	0	8	12	3	4	3	7
Scrutiny / Surveillance	0	0	0	5	0	1	13	16	3
Prescriptive	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	4
Pedagogy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	0
Progressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0
Stringent	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0	0

Firstly, it is clear that some codes are more pertinent to participants from Partner School and some are more prominent to participants from Host School. This seems linked to the different roles and responsibilities participants had through the SIP.

#### 4.6 Codes prominent to participants from Partner School

Of immediate interest is the amount of green gathered around the following six codes from Partner participants: commitment, progress, developmental, vision, relationship, and sustainability / improvement. These are all interconnected and could collectively be considered as a theme of leadership. There was a clear vision and commitment by each of the three Partner School participants to fuel progress in Host School in a developmental way, considerate of relationships and sustainability / improvement. Whilst Partner Deputy Head and Partner Assistant Head also reference communication, change, engagement and plan, Partner Head does not. This is perhaps indicative of the roles held in terms of Partner Deputy Head and Partner Assistant Head working more often with colleagues in Host School, and Partner Head overseeing the partnership from more of a directorial distance. Partner Head mentions buy-in / willingness the most with fifteen counts, and classroom practice the second thereafter. Buy-in / willingness being heavily weighted suggests high importance placed upon the benefits of generating this with staff in Host School, to get them onboard to address classroom practice.

Evident within the Partner School codes is a high-profile vision for sustainable improvement. This links back to the idea of leadership and management and the dynamic is one whereby Partner School participants were leaders. Host School participants became managers of implementing the changes, or were managed in their implementation, depending upon their professional roles, position and power.

##### 4.6.1 Codes prominent to participants from Host School

Looking at the codes highlighted in green from Host colleagues, the three codes of: commitment, vision, and sustainability / improvement, mentioned by all

Partner participants are not referenced at all by Host participants. This may be attributed to the partnership not being a vision from Host School, rather it was a vision *for* Host School.

Ownership is mentioned by four out of six Host School participants. Ownership ranges from some participants expressing a lack of ownership as they were told to follow a teaching and learning model, to others who are grateful that they received time saving resources from Partner School, to some who got satisfaction from creating their own resources. Scrutiny and surveillance is mentioned by five Host School participants, yet not at all by participants from Partner School. Scrutiny and surveillance signifies that participants in Host School were the ones under scrutiny with their ways of working being watched and critiqued. Scrutiny and surveillance are not as one may assume coming from Partner School. The transcripts reveal that a sense of scrutiny and surveillance arose from within Host School, linked to perceived problematic monitoring processes from the past, as will be expanded upon in 5.5.3.

One remaining area shared by all participants within Host School is confidence. Confidence is mentioned by all six participants from Host School, and in a positive way in terms of their own confidence in the classroom or with regards to their own leadership having been impacted for the better through the partnership. Ownership, scrutiny and surveillance, and confidence, seem to belong at different points of a continuum, however these codes resonate with professional identity within performativity (Holloway and Brass, 2018; Ball, 2000; see 2.2.2) and could be considered under this theme.

#### 4.7 Findings recap

Within this chapter, the seven themes discussed by all nine participants within this research have been explored in detail and then summarised. Furthermore, some of the remaining codes were considered too. Granted, as with all data, analysis could continue, however for the purpose of this research an appropriate and necessary end to data analysis has been arrived at. This is with some confidence as the most substantial layer of the seven themes have been explored. Furthermore, areas of general significance to this study have been

included for further discussion also. Of course, this is based upon my interpretation of the transcripts, and although combined qualitative and quantitative methods applied aimed to address any bias, this I understand alleviates, rather than avoids any predispositions completely.

## CHAPTER 5 - Discussion

### 5.1 Overview

This chapter reflects on the whole of the study, thinking through the research process first, before focussing on the product of the research, through discussing the research findings. This chapter starts by discussing methodology and research design and the opportunities and challenges encountered through the research process as an inside-researcher. Thereafter, the reader is reminded of research questions before being presented with a conceptual framework for the discussion of findings which then leads onto the detailed discussion. Research questions are then returned to with consideration given to whether or not these were fully met.

The opening context for this research outlined the national picture and the problem of poverty and performativity in nonselective secondary schools across England. Within this educational landscape, my professional context of Host School, in the North East of England was situated as a school facing challenging circumstances, and as a school identified by the DfE (2019) as a “failing school” due to declining examination outcomes. Host School became supported by Partner School, through the DfE financially backed, ONE Vision (2019) SIP. Understanding the everyday realities for participants involved within the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and how mechanisms of support were enacted by Partner School and experienced by Host School, has been a main aim of this research. Comprehending these lived experiences as a catalyst to inform more ethically and practically orientated mechanisms of support in SIPs within high poverty schools, for future investment in school support to be “matched with practical outcomes” (Dowling, 2016, p.31), towards securing social justice, is crucial.

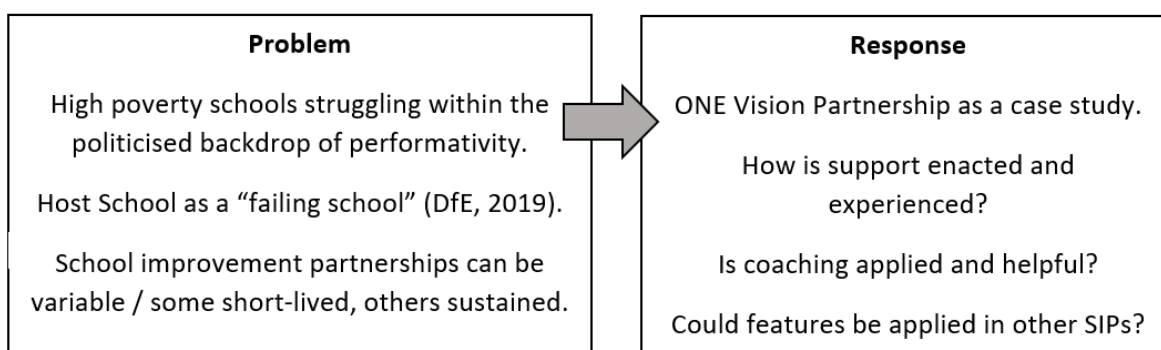


Figure 5.1: Overview of the research problem and response

## 5.2 Methodology and research design

A qualitatively led mixed methods, case study research design approached from the paradigmatic stance of pragmatism (Morgan, 2014), underpinned by social justice (Cresswell, 2015) was employed. My profession as a teacher and leader, combined with my research interest in coaching influences my belief that learning is continually constructed, informing my worldview and ontological position as constructivist, and my epistemological view as interpretivist. Fundamentally, rather than automatically adopting this research stance for this particular study, research design applied had to be responsive to research aims and questions, rather than aligning with my own methodological preferences.

### 5.2.1 Possibilities and problems

The opportunity of inside research does provide a privileged position from which to observe and get close to the research context and participants, as was the case in this study. Through this research, I had to really grapple with the “struggle between utilizing closeness to empirically rich situations and avoid the closure following from being (staying) native...” (Alvesson, 2003, p.167). Emotions are high profile within this research as some participants felt a full range of feelings, as has been reported in the findings and will be discussed later in 5.6. Emotions were also prominent owing to my “native” positionality within my own research and professional context. Advice from Thomas (2016) around case studies to “Doubt *everyone’s* findings, even your own.” (Thomas, 2016, p. 240) played a pivotal role in securing a productive amount of self-scepticism for the most part. Admittedly this was easy to achieve up until embarking on the empirical stage of the research. This became most acute when exploring and analysing research findings, as I experienced and presented a range of inside researcher issues. This included me consciously wanting participants from Partner School to be “pleased” with research findings, thus causing concern that I might be writing for a placatory effect, rather than presenting actual experiences and events as they were. “Organizational loyalty” (Alvesson, 2003, p.167) is expanded upon here, as the “loyalty” transcended beyond Host School as my professional context, extending to the partnership work between Partner School and Host School, as the case.

Some research-self paranoia was experienced around participants and what they may have said, may in part, or in full, be masked as not to offend me, or worse, have been hidden, out of “fear” (Ball, 2003). A major issue with the latter concern being that my professional role may inadvertently have further contributed to the negative effects of performativity this study aimed to alleviate! Creswell (2015) confirms that a social justice model of mixed methods research may be viewed via different lenses, however warns researchers that the lens used must not risk further marginalisation to the area of social justice, the researcher is aiming to address.

I admit that my professional position within Host School brought with it some risks. On reflection, and through this research I now recognise that there will have been times through the SIP, and via the research, whereby some Host School colleagues did encounter a range of positive and negative experiences. Some of which may have been impacted by me as a practitioner and a researcher owing to my position and power within Host School too. A range in experiences, particularly the negative ones occurred more within Host School, rather than due directly to the activities of Partner School. This could in part be due to the fact that Host School has been under performative pressure for several years and has been on the receiving end of a range of judgmental reviews, reports and gradings. Ball (2000), is explicit about the position and power held by those administering reports, reviews and judgments through political induced performativity, stating:

WE sit on peer reviews, WE write the accountability reports, WE assign grades to other departments, WE berate our colleagues for their 'poor' productivity, WE devise, run and feed departmental and institutional procedures for monitoring and improving 'output'. (Ball, 2000, p.4).

This sentiment presented by Ball (2000) can also be applied to the array of severe judgments and subsequent procedures and pressures placed on struggling schools. Those applying the accountability driven judgments will undoubtedly frame their involvement differently. Due to the vulnerable position that Host School has been in and was still in during the time of this study, some concern or discomfort from participants is understandable. Although my position in the research was not one of judgment, my professional position often is, so I have some culpability within this too. The fact remains that WE are conditioned to the performative cause. In doing so, WE undoubtedly evoke emotional concern in

colleagues, regardless of the perceived trust and transparency we have come to assume we have instilled around us. In this vein, Ball (2000) presents a paradox, observing that "... tactics of transparency produce a resistance of opacity, of elusivity--an escape from the gaze" (Ball, 2000, p.2). A relatable example is enforced school inspection, which claims transparency, however those who have been on the receiving end of previous difficult inspections, accompanied by damning judgments may want to hide and resist exposure, for fear of being publicly revealed through any poor judgment and report which arises. This also connects to the surveillance discussed by some participants within Host School owing to past problematic practices in this regard, rather than due the SIP with Partner School, as will be expanded upon in 5.5.3.

A profound awakening about my professional role and that of other senior colleagues in relation to Host School participants within this study was ascertained. Taking Host School's teacher participants as a small, yet significant representative sample, it is likely that issues of position, power, participation and agency impact many other Host School teachers too. Agency within this chapter is not a taken for granted ideal that all practitioners possess, it holds an ecological quality, linking individuals, their interactions, their environments and their actions together (Biesta, *et al*, 2017). How power and position impacted participation and agency for those working at teacher level, will be discussed later (5.7). I acknowledge that my own position and power will have had some effect within the research process. This, I recognise as being a risk, and as having led to new possibilities too. I hope that through the process of participating in this research and beyond, the voice of each participant will contribute to future fulfilment of schools becoming more openly caring and communicative spaces to achieve:

... an ethical imperative for inter and intra-professional dialogues in educational settings in order to promote and facilitate development and understanding. (Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.98).

Dewey (2022) asserts scepticism around authority and tradition encouraging questioning of our own views and those of others through a process of reflexive thought, particularly when linked to firmly held values and opinions. Whilst I experienced an extreme range of thoughts and consequent emotions between placatory, people pleasing needs and paranoia at times, this scepticism and overt

awareness of my own and other participants thinking, did provide increased objectivity and substance throughout this study. Florczak's (2014) advice to maintain objective criticality and reflexivity was consistently and consciously strived for, as it had to be. "Being native" (Alvesson, 2003) I could not change, however "staying native" (Alvesson, 2003), I could and did aim to achieve through fully committing to doing so. My research self and authorial voice was found through the process and struggle it took to do so.

Despite having been committed to achieving appropriate distance, I remain unable to fully confirm this as being accomplished throughout the research practice. In the belief and knowledge that we all possess blind spots, vigilant supervision received throughout the doctoral supervisory process helped me to be alert, expanding my vision and view so that blind spots could be responsibly and progressively addressed. Addressing closeness became a continually evolving work in practice. Beyond this, research methods and methodology employed, supported and strengthened research practice, adding validity and value to this study and to my research self.

### 5.2.2 Qualitatively led mixed methods

Fassinger and Morrow (2013), advise those undertaking social justice research to understand qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches to ensure that "reasoned choices" (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013, p.76) are made relating to the study at hand. They highlight benefits of mixed methods approaches as beneficial to address:

... foundational assumptions regarding research goals, ways of interacting with the community, care in analyzing and interpreting data, and communicating results publicly. (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013, p.75).

This study focussed upon qualitative data primarily to "gain a perspective that uncovers the meanings of individual experiences from within a cultural context." (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013, p.73). Once qualitative data was generated and analysed, quantitative data supported significantly thereafter.

Quantitatively analysing the qualitative interview transcripts from the three participants from Partner School and the six participants from Host School, did

also enhance objectivity and further reduce bias concerns. Beyond this, quantitative analysis brought some findings to the fore, unearthing insights which otherwise may not have been identified. Many examples could be provided, however conscious of wordcount, I will share only two. The first example relates to quantitative counts applied to the themes of negatives and positives. Host Union Lead made the most contributions to negatives (28) and positives (45). If the content of Host Union Lead's conversation was analysed without the quantified counts applied each time that they shared a new related thought about negatives or positives, I would have less of an understanding about the full range of extremes they experienced. Secondly, another example arose when looking at the theme of time. The counts revealed that apart from Partner Deputy Head who was the front facing figure for the partnership within Host School, both Host Core teacher and Host Non-Core teacher, who do not have any leadership responsibility had the most to say about time and were the most hindered by time. This was a profound revelation which would have been missed without quantifying the mentions made. This brought to the fore the realisation that for the teachers on the ground who taught the most lessons, when compared with leaders involved in the partnership, they were in a different position within this.

Teachers had less power in terms of informing change, and they received less face-to-face support when compared to Host School leaders, however they became most impacted by the time it took to execute enforced changes within their classrooms. Furthermore, this opened my practitioner and research eyes even wider to the impact of position, power and agency, catapulting me to comprehend a common misconception as outlined by Fassinger and Morrow (2013) who highlight that even when a researcher considers themselves as part of a community, their experiences will be vastly different to others. Regardless of time invested as a supposed cultural member, any notion of a shared experience between the researcher and other cultural members, must not be assumed as this will be detrimental to comprehending the actual truth and lived experiences of the participants (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013).

A purely traditional qualitative approach would have been less effective, as I perceive there would have been missed opportunities, which the quantitative analysis allowed. Quantitative elements enabled me to be extracted from my

professional bubble and be objectively interpretive to really reveal and realise the different lived experiences and how different these were, for each participant.

Despite best efforts to eradicate bias in advance of research, avoidance of all assumptions, I found to be an impossible task. Recognising beliefs I held about a particular situation or context and my own worldview only went some way to supporting this. Having worked in my professional context for almost two decades, assumptions had become embedded over time of “common experience” (Fassinger and Morrow, 2013, p.72) between colleagues and I. Changes which occurred over time in Host School, I had assumed we had all experienced together. On the contrary, the experiences across members of the community, I now realise are very different at different levels of the organisation and according to position, power and agency. Application of quantitative analysis went beyond protecting the research from being distorted or compromised and jolted me to accept:

... cultural insiders are not always recognized as "inside" the community by others, and their own self-definition may not reflect the perceptions of their potential research participants; ...

(Fassinger and Morrow, 2013, p.72).

Understandably, readers of this study may judge that this realisation should and could have been pre-empted and obvious. I too have found myself holding similar views when reading the research of others. The reality of truly knowing one's own position as a researcher is not so straightforward, hence consideration to how a researcher may be perceived by research participants is important to consider, as is acknowledging researcher positionality which cannot be assumed. This, I found could not be fully confirmed in advance of research, although at the time I thought it had been. Research positionality became an iterative process as I gained in and from research experience and insights. Drawing upon the strengths of the methodology and methods applied helped to make sense of the reality of the situation being studied.

To conclude this discussion of qualitatively led mixed methods, quantitative counts applied, following qualitative reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) of each transcript proved profound and priceless. This added a valued dimension from which to draw out the detail within the dialogue, to shine

a light on issues such as my own positionality and most importantly, that of the participants, which otherwise may have remained in the shadows.

### 5.2.3 Data saturation versus information power for validity

It was important to ensure that the interpretive stance was not influenced or compromised by other tensions in terms of what should be done to pacify others, as can sometimes occur when seeking data saturation to prove validity (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999), rather than data saturation was secured via a process of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019) assert that in reflexive thematic analysis "... data saturation is not a particularly useful, or indeed theoretically coherent, concept." (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.212). Braun and Clarke's proposal of alternative concepts such as "information power" (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.212) align much better with my methodology and with reflexive thematic analysis altogether.

Arguably contradictory to their own cause, Braun and Clarke (2019) still apply the term "data saturation." Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2019) acknowledge that aspiring researchers may be inclined to do so also and to seek data saturation within thematic analysis in a neo-positivist way, to appease the gatekeepers to their studies. Seemingly, the imposition and pressure of neo-positivist performativity appears at play within the practice of research too, and of that which relates to a model of statistical data saturation to prove validity. The methodological approach I took and the methods applied were not compromised. Research was conducted in the right way to ensure the best outcome according to research aims, considerate of teleological ethics (Punch, 2016), following the best course of action at all times for all concerned. Rather than succumbing to deliver on data saturation, I can enhance validity through theoretical satisfaction, or "information power" (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.212).

### 5.2.4 Confirmability versus conformability

Confirmability was sought from each of the nine participants, once I had the findings ready to present and share. This was accomplished by sending the

findings in full to each participant along with their individual transcript experts I had collated, pertaining to each theme. Participants only received their own transcript, however they were all sent the same set of findings. It was important that they each had the full picture so that confirmability was based on full disclosure, with no risk of deception (Diener and Crandall, in Bryman, 2016). Ethically, it was vital to avoid any aspect being problematic or “causing harm” to participants (Diener and Crandall, in Bryman, 2016, p. 125). No edits, retractions or additions were requested by any of the nine participants which was both reassuring and affirming. Nonetheless, I remain aware that participants may be inclined to agree and respond out of conformability, rather than genuine confirmability. The open and invitational approach taken to secure confirmability, provided participants with the right climate, opportunity and timeframe to be able to retract or alter any aspect that they may have wanted to. I trust that participants applied their own professional and personal judgement in the process of choosing not to do so.

### 5.3 Research questions

The conceptual framework for this study presented in 3.2 provided a visual illustration of the conceptual framework; a bridge between paradigms, the research issue and the research approach taken to investigate this (Leshem and Trafford, 2007). This thesis submission sought to explore and address the overarching research question:

**How is support enacted and experienced within the Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision (2019) school improvement partnership strategy?**

Research questions were:

**RQ1** How do leaders from Partner School enact support within Host School?

**RQ2** How do leaders and teachers at different levels in Host School experience involvement from Partner School?

**RQ3** Does support within this SIP align with coaching principles and practices and if so, what comes of this?

Throughout the upcoming discussion, these questions will be addressed via a process of synthesis, integrating with existing literature and research findings. Thereafter, each research question will be returned to, one at a time, to summarise and memorialise salient highlights.

#### 5.4 Conceptual framework for the discussion of findings

Jarbeen (2009) establishes that a conceptual framework provides "... a plane of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena" (Jarbeen, 2009, p.51). Key concepts pertinent to the research questions, predicated from the preceding research process are brought together as presented within the conceptual framework in figure 5.2.

The layout of the conceptual framework captures how the phenomena have been understood by me as a researcher, whilst also providing a map for the upcoming discussion. Explicit concepts and connections exist between the research literature and research findings and these will be drawn upon within this discussion first. Central, bigger ideas are presented as text within the double ended arrows. These thread around and throughout the existing literature and research findings. Each of these high-profile ideas come up a lot and as such will be referred to, wherever relevant, however given their prominence, each will also be discussed in detail thereafter.

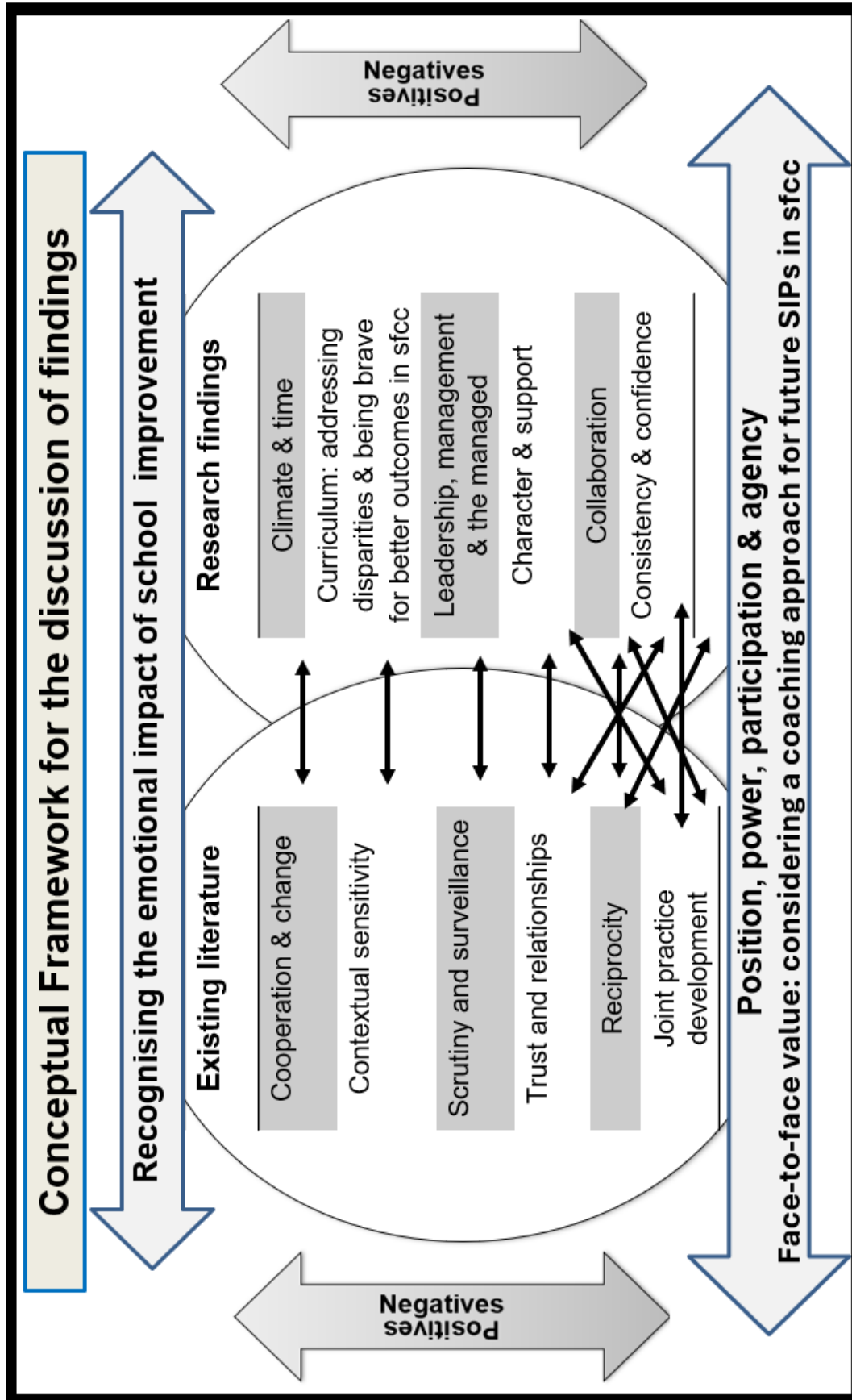


Figure 5.2: Conceptual framework for the discussion of findings

## 5.5 Experiences of the partnership

Change was clearly enacted through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. How change was experienced by participants will be explored within this section. Ingman (2023) explains that when experience is explored via the lens of pragmatic educational research, it is viewed as:

... encompassing of emotion, environment, cognition, sensation, and action. It is not separate from any of these features despite our abilities to disaggregate and discuss distinct aspects therein.

(Ingman, 2023, p.3).

Sub-sections which follow aim to expand and deepen dialogue and understanding of experience, rather than separate and subdue any influential features which are inherent and therefore an important part of lived experience. Emotion, environment, sensation and action (Ingman, 2023, p.3) are accepted as attributes of experience.

### 5.5.1 Cooperation and change and the impact of, and on, climate and time

Vast and varied political and sociological change incessantly impacts education and schools, and the practitioners and pupils within. Competing demands and deadlines inherent in educational institutions tend to work in tension, rather than in tandem with one another, and whilst change clearly occurs; sustained change is harder to confirm (Fullan, 2016; Hubers, 2020). Similarly, the sustainability of teachers and their wellbeing during the change process is complex and contentious, and if not well managed, can lead to practitioner “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020). Early stages of the partnership between Partner School and Host School confirmed some concerns from participants in Host School, owing to this being “*yet another initiative*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). Time is significant here, as each Host participant had taught in Host School for over a decade. Some shared reticence stemmed from time having already been invested in previous changes over the years. A shared worry ensued that time devoted to upcoming partnership work may also become part of the past too. In terms of cooperation, there is a sentiment captured within the statement of “*yet*

*another initiative*” that indicates *“here we go again”* and within this, a subservient compliance, disguised as cooperation.

With the march of time, participants who had worked in Host School the longest had been exposed to a whole range of school improvement initiatives. A sense of “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020) ensued for some. Anxieties arose out of having to invest more time again in “yet another” (Host Non-Core Teacher) school improvement endeavour via the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. Initial concerns about the ONE Vision (2019) SIP as another *“daunting”* change in Host School were shared by Host Union Lead. This relates to concerns about time in terms of linking back to hardships experienced with historical change efforts in Host School and unease about what time demands will be placed upon Host practitioners during the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. It is clear that climate is also compromised here, as an atmosphere of apprehension accompanies this.

Adler and Seligman (2016) identify that, on balance, teachers experiencing change will often be prepared to forgo some elements of wellbeing early on, with the payoff of a future return. On the contrary, McCrickerd (2012) asserts:

... an environment should minimize the potential of these psychic costs if improvement in teaching is a realistic goal. (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62).

Practitioners from Partner School and Host School demonstrated some pragmatic alliance with Adler and Seligman (2016) during the partnership, as leaders from Partner School frontloaded their support of practitioners within Host School, considering that over time there would be a *“sliding scale of support”* (Partner Deputy Head). Host School participants appeared to demonstrate cooperation, or compliance, early on, even when timescales were tight to adapt all schemes of work to meet the expectations of the new teaching and learning model. The consensus being that once resources were adapted, they would only require tweaks rather than any further major transformations thereafter. Host Core Teacher reflects on the initial intensity *“We ... ramped it up by coming in tight... I think it had to come in tight.”* (Host Core Teacher).

Striking the right balance between tight and loose resonates with Chapman and Fullan (2007) and their research about collaboration and partnership for equitable improvement. Chapman and Fullan, (2007) consider networked learning communities as having the:

...potential to incorporate tight/loose qualities within an organic system in which the processes serve to provide built-in checks and balances from straying too far toward limiting tightness or its opposite, diffuse looseness.

(Chapman and Fullan 2007, pp. 208-209).

Walking the fine and right line between tight and loose directives is described well by Chapman and Fullan (2007), who highlight how tightness can reduce the risk of an overly loose approach towards equitable improvement. Although writing about change efforts on a much larger scale than the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, the advocacy of tightness from Chapman and Fullan (2007), resonates well with what was expressed by some Partner and Host participants, as being necessary during the early stages of the change process. Host Core Teacher confirmed that the “*tight*” approach at first, despite being demanding, was the right approach. The “*need*” they saw for this may have been a contributory factor to their cooperation and that of others. This also suggests that the working environment may have seemed, too loose beforehand, hence an element of “*ramped*” up activity via the partnership was not posing an immediate threat to climate, it may even have been considered something which could improve climate, as something which “*had to*” (Host Non-Core Teacher) happen.

Whilst the wider climate did not appear threatened, emotional “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020) was experienced by some individuals owing to aforementioned time related demands. Host Non-Core Lead provides a strong example when instructed to adapt to a new exam course, they explained “... *it's put us quite clearly on the backfoot and we are behind, which has added a level of stress.*” (Host Non-Core Lead). “Psychic costs” are communicated here (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62) as indicated by being put on the “*backfoot*” with increased “*stress*”. Regardless, Host Non-Core Lead cooperated, or complied with the change, despite having limited time to do so.

A strong sense of responsibility and care was demonstrated by Host Non-Core Lead towards their subject team to maintain the climate within, via their ‘will do’ attitude. To what extent the ‘will do’ approach transpired from the ‘must do’ directive is uncertain. These scenarios illustrate how cooperation and change, climate and time worked in tension with one another during a range of participant experiences within the partnership. Also highlighted here is how short-term “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020) was a sacrifice for longer term gains. Motivations

to do so stem from a sense of duty to protect both the working climate and the team from “psychic costs” (McCrickerd 2012, p.62). It is somewhat contentious that through the process of short-term “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020) and sacrifice, team members are also exposed to additional costs via reduced autonomy and agency. They suppress emotions rooted from undesirable aspects of the change process, in the hope that longer term gains will not be in vein, and that they will work out, or at least become, the lesser of two evils.

Cooperating with disagreeable change arising from pressure to preserve the working environment and wellbeing of the team, like Host Non-Core Lead did, communicates a dutybound ethos to “do things right” (Bennis and Nanus, 2007; Drucker, 2011). On the one hand, this illustrates respect for authority and an appreciation of one’s management responsibilities to follow through on instructions. On the other hand, this limits one’s leadership capabilities and risks resentment building over time too, as the cooperative workforce become compliant commodities as oppose to valued stakeholders who are empowered to “do the right thing” (Bennis and Nanus, 2007; Drucker, 2011). Furthermore, this communicates something about culture, and resonates with Alvesson’s (2012) case study on culture in a Swedish computer consultancy firm, whereby a strong sense of organisational loyalty and corporate culture:

... functioned as a resource for managers to make people do the job even in situations when it did not feel pleasant or stimulating.

(Alvesson, 2012, p. 5).

Rather, the workforce, whose work becomes forced, end up as “the managed”; even their managerial prospects erode, as they become engulfed as implementors of instructed, enforced change, dutybound to do the thing (enforced change) right. Thus, “parts of the culture then functioned as a blinder, reducing problem awareness.” (Alvesson, 2012, p. 6).

I am prompted to return to points raised within the literature review summary (2.6) around professional identity or mis-identity, as I see it. This is where practitioners have become unquestioningly compliant within the confines of performative culture (Ball, 2000, 2003; Holloway and Brass, 2018; Foucault, 1979). This provokes further thought about professionals, positionality, power and agency, and the extent to which those serving in challenging contexts may be more prone

to being “technicians of behaviour”, and in the process of doing so may have become “docile and capable” (Foucault, 1979, p.294) as a means to survive. Radical reclaiming of professional identity and pupil interests is required; however, this will take all of us waking from our conditioned, docile states to stake our claim in much needed educational reform.

Continuing with the idea of culture, Alvesson (2012), recognises the relationship between management and culture which can be fused yet fragile, functional, yet fragmented. Alvesson (2012) asserts that:

Dealing with cultural issues in a way that contributes to corporate results calls for an ongoing struggle in which culture as a tool and as a trap is carefully considered with frequent intervals. (Alvesson, 2012 p. 8).

Drucker (2011) aligns “doing things right” with efficiency and management and “doing the right thing” with effectiveness and leadership. Bennis and Nanus (2007) and Drucker (2011) advocate doing the right things right and at the right time in leadership and management. True alignment with these principles in practice, combined with a care for culture will provide a better platform and climate for leading and enacting change. Therefore, placing value on the views and voices of those involved in an inclusive way, and not as “the managed”, or as “human resources”, rather as “resourceful humans” (Peler *et al*, 1989, p.4) may provide a more profitable path. The views and voices of participants from Host School relating to their worries around climate and time were only heard through this research opportunity and would have otherwise remained unknown. Cultural issues, deserve careful consideration with regularity and rigour as Alvesson (2012) declares. Doing so however, should not just be to enhance “corporate results” (Alvesson, 2012 p. 8), but to enhance wellbeing too.

Lots of ideas have been raised within this section around cooperation and change and the impact of, and on, climate and time. At surface level, practitioners from Host School appeared cooperative in terms of going along with the change process through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP. At a deeper, internal level however, emotional strain linked with previous changes, as well as with time demands relating to the ONE Vision (2019) SIP accompanied this. So, what appears to have been cooperation may align more with compliance, or survival. Considering climate within this and Alvesson’s (2012) assertion around culture, it may be more helpful to tap into culture as a “tool”, rather than a “trap” (Alvesson, 2012, p.8).

One way of accomplishing this may be through regular climate checks to invite and support school staff to speak up and share any buried or arising burdens throughout any change process. Schools may then be better informed and equipped to overcome challenges and move forward more wholesomely, with a workforce whose wellbeing and professional identity remains intact.

### 5.5.2 Contextual sensitivity and the curriculum: addressing disparities and being brave for better outcomes in schools facing challenging circumstances

Writing over two decades ago, Biesta and Miron (2002) identified:

...educational leaders in school settings are nowadays confronted with problems that are far more complex and disturbing than what would be the case several decades ago. (Biesta and Miron, 2002, p. 101).

Since then, societal challenges have heightened, particularly within high poverty schools as pressure is placed upon schools to improve pupil performance in examination outcomes, amidst poverty induced inequalities. Goldstein and Leckie (2019) provide a compelling case for making adjustments to value added scores, such as to Progress 8 measures. When they did so for secondary schools within the North East of England, outcomes increased “substantially after adjustments due to the disproportionately high proportions of poor pupils taught in this region.” (Goldstein and Leckie, 2019, p.532). Goldstein and Leckie (2019) confirm:

... that the higher the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in a school, the more it will effectively be punished for the national underperformance of these pupil groups. (Goldstein and Leckie, 2019, p.533).

They advise published Progress 8 data, to feature alongside adjusted scores in a fully informative way. Despite this and related research findings, (Parameshwaran and Thomson, 2015; Gorard, 2022), public reporting of examination results remain predominantly punitive for high poverty secondary schools across England.

Host Non-Core Teacher shares their experience of teaching in a high poverty school, expressing, “*we do our best... as public servants to deliver. These are increasingly more and more challenging times.*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). Host

Non-Core Teacher communicates a commitment to continue to do their best to “serve” despite it being “*more and more*” demanding to do so. Three teachers from Host School contributed the most to negatives as a theme. One common experience within this, was the challenges they face when trying to meet the demands of a prescribed curriculum, whilst working in a sfcc. The lived experience of practitioners aiming to counteract contextual challenges, is expanded upon further by Host Non-Core Teacher who finds it an hourly struggle “... *to fit all of that content into one hour.*” (Host Non-Core Teacher).

Writing about poverty and education in England, Thompson (2020) concedes that:

... in reality, all of the initiatives concentrate on performance rather than wellbeing... The consequent pressures on teachers and schools in England are likely to have very negative consequences for disadvantaged pupils. (Thompson, 2020, p.130).

The climate of ill-being (Hargreaves, *et al*, 2020) arising from the performative regime resonates here too. Socioeconomic disparities are not differentiated for, within performance measures, or considered within the enforced and narrowed national curriculum. A one size fits all model of education for “... *public servants to deliver*” (Host Non-Core Teacher) is problematic, as the impetus is on input and output, rather than on careful, contextual construction of the curriculum.

Whilst appreciative of a range of support from Partner School, Host Non-Core Teacher communicates a disconnect between support provided and support needed, stating “*The support that... we need or want and the behaviour doesn't seem to change much.*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). Considerate of high poverty contexts, Thrupp and Lupton (2006) identify that “... the unpredictability of the school day in some schools is, in a sense, entirely predictable given their contexts.” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p.317). Host Non-Core Teacher illustrates “predictable” poverty-based instability which recurs, as does the related rhetoric from political policy enforcers, without the necessary support teachers and pupils need to tackle predictabilities, or in other words, inequalities.

Contextually responsive curriculum design is needed to address global and local challenges in a way which supports teachers to help all youngsters to embrace our ever changing and complex world with awe and wonder, rather than with deficit and dread. Establishing the former prospect as a predictable part of each

school day, rather than the latter would be a welcome change, to enhance wellbeing for all in education and beyond.

Considering curriculum making as social practice, Priestley and Philippou (2018) identify a challenge within the:

... 'levels' metaphor – supra/international; macro/national; meso/regional or school; micro/school or classroom – that often underpins curriculum policy, and which rests on modernist assumptions of linearity, predictability and clear-cut containment of each level from the rest.

(Priestley and Philippou, 2018, p.156).

Priestley and Philippou (2018) argue for a multi-faceted and refined model of curriculum, focussing on the effects of the curriculum on social practices in schools. Furthermore, they advocate careful thought about how practice should best be enacted, as to avoid dictation by political and institutional binds. Host Core Teacher made a contextual observation between Partner School and Host School, claiming “... *staff are quite untrusting if I'm honest... they're telling us to do different, in different circumstances.*” (Host Core Teacher). Indeed, some staff from Host School did doubt whether practitioners from Partner School could really understand how the demands and challenges of the national curriculum, and of Progress 8 in Host School impact improvement efforts. Prior low attainment, concerning reading ages and weak literacy levels faced by pupils from Host School on entry, contrast with the Partner School cohort. Linking back to Priestley and Philippou (2018), the same macro level expectations and demands are imposed in both contexts, however each school faces very different meso and micro level challenges and opportunities, much of which stems from socioeconomic status, or a lack of.

Whilst I considered change to have been “supported” by Partner School, some practitioners from Host School suggest an enforced experience for them. Pulling this thread further, we can also relate Host Core Teacher’s critique of contextual differences between the two schools, to the politicians who prescribe what all pupils will be taught and how they will all be tested. Priestley and Philippou (2018) encourage constructive sense making and pedagogy, considerate of context and the actual people involved in working in schools, to inform differentiated curriculum development. In doing so, Priestley and Philippou (2018) perceive this will prompt “social actors” to engage with more profitable, pedagogical, pupil

centred practices, rather than succumbing to conflicting pressures, whereby education becomes... “a means to an end, a performance to be delivered, and an ongoing game of performativity.” (Priestley and Philippou, 2018, p.157). Writing two years later, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Priestley and Philippou (2020) highlight the importance of investing time to think through curriculum decisions, advocating “agentive social actors” to become enriched by “... ‘curriculum’ as a certainty at times of uncertainty.” (Priestley and Philippou, 2020, p.581).

Priestley and Philippou’s (2020) research title “Curriculum as a certainty in uncertain times” (Priestley and Philippou, 2020, p.581), evokes an image of the curriculum providing an anchor for pedagogical purpose, amidst adversity and performative pressures. Addressing disparities and being brave for better outcomes in schools facing challenging contexts is needed, if Priestley and Philippou’s (2018, 2020) vision for curriculum making as social practice is to be fulfilled. Arguably, an assumption arises here, as all practitioners are considered as “agentive social actors” (Priestley and Philippou, 2020, p.581). Host Core Lead, however, depicts those practitioners devoid of agency by context and circumstance. Host Core Lead shared frustrations around being unable to inform curriculum decisions through the SIP, explaining “... so ... *if I don't necessarily think that's the right decision for our pupils. You don't really have much option.*” (Host Core Lead).

Biesta, *et al* (2017) acknowledge the varying degrees through which agency may be achieved by teachers “... in the always concrete and unique settings in which they work”, (Biesta, *et al* 2017, p.40). Biesta, *et al* (2017), indicate hope that all may become “agentive social actors”, should conditions facilitate “teachers’ talk for teacher agency.” (Biesta, *et al*, 2017, p.37). In the example provided by Host Core Lead though, a lack of teacher agency is relayed through their recognition, that even as a middle leader they “*don't really have much option*” (Host Core Lead). Had Host Core Lead been afforded the dialogic opportunities and space, as Host School senior leaders had been, to influence some of the changes enacted through the partnership, their ability to be an “agentive social actor” will have added value to their own lived experience within the change process. Furthermore, this is likely to have also led to a better experience for Host pupils

too. A poignant reminder of the “ethical imperative for inter and intra-professional dialogues” (Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.98) to form as part of habitual practice in school settings reemerges here.

Noteworthy, two out of the three Host School practitioners cited in this subsection have since left Host School. As a practitioner and school leader, I now wonder whether this would still have been the case if concerns raised through this research had also been voiced and heard professionally. “Affective containment” (Dale and James, 2015) would have allowed parties concerned to express and channel feelings productively and may have enabled Host School to retain and sustain these staff for longer.

Addressing socially unjust shortcomings across secondary education is needed, however this relies upon those in power being brave enough to acknowledge the issues that researchers and practitioners have raised too. A national response to recommendations within the abundance of research relating to high poverty school settings would provide a good start towards co-constructing a contextually sensitive curriculum, specific to meeting the needs of the cohorts that they serve, so that all pupils, regardless of household income may thrive. Context cannot be used as an excuse, nor should it be a determiner of life chances. Having safeguards in place to prevent any future reform from being “antithetical to social justice” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006 p.318) is desirable. Adjustments to national reporting of secondary school outcomes (Goldstein and Leckie, 2019) is a needed nudge to narrow the deprivation gap.

### 5.5.3 Scrutiny and surveillance in relation to leadership, management and the managed

Setting out to improve involves agreeing to the inevitable stumbles of learning and, thus, the alteration of our own and others' perceptions of us. The belief that these perceptions may be unfavourably altered, even if this belief is erroneous, can be debilitating; ... (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62).

The emotive impact of improvement initiatives, even when entered into willingly, are well described by McCrickerd (2012) as “debilitating” (McCrickerd 2012, p.62). The “psychic cost” (McCrickerd 2012, p.62) of accompanying scrutiny and surveillance inherent within improvement agendas is alluded to again here.

Reference to how debilitating “others’ perceptions...” (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62) can be, relating to the improvement of “us” (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62) is telling, as this establishes improvement leaders as holding the power to perceive how the practice of others should be improved. Furthermore, those being identified, and managed for improvement within this scenario, even under an agreed improvement venture, remain under instruction, or scrutiny and surveillance of the improvers, awaiting potentially, unfavourable alterations. A clear divide between the improvers as leaders and those awaiting improvement, not even as managers, but as the managed in this scenario, is communicate here. The ensuing emotional impact for the managed practitioners, sitting in wait of how an improvement leader may survey their current practice and instruct subsequent change, is stifling. Ideas raised here, further affirm the dynamics identified within the One Vision (2019) SIP as considered in 4.4.1, whereby Partner School are asserted as leaders within the partnership, the leaders within Host School function as managers, and the teachers as the managed. Admittedly, each Host School participant is to varying degrees managed within the One Vision (2019) SIP, however middle and senior leaders also get to manage the management of their Host peers during the partnership too.

Illuminatingly, all Host School participants referenced scrutiny and surveillance, yet no one from Partner School did. This suggests that Host School participants saw themselves as under scrutiny with their ways of working being watched and critiqued. This aligns with Ball (2000) and what he refers to as a “recipe for ontological insecurity” (Ball, 2000, p.3). This is where educational practitioners are impacted by the performativities and fabrications in education so much so, that they become suppressed by self-doubt, and double guess themselves, questioning “Are we doing enough? Are we doing the right thing? How will we measure up?” (Ball, 2000, p.3). Evidently, ontological insecurity is at play for Host School participants, who all made references to scrutiny and surveillance. Even the practitioners from Host School who are part of middle or senior leadership, are not leaders within the scenario of school improvement amidst socioeconomic adversity. All are scrutinised, surveyed and managed in the scenario of underperformance, in a performative regime.

Scrutiny and surveillance does not, as one may assume, all come from Partner School. Transcripts reveal that scrutiny and surveillance are derived from within Host School, connected to problematic monitoring processes from Host School's past. Host Core Teacher conveys "*it's quite a big deal that ... the whole world of the bullshit that we used to have to go through in lesson observations is gone.*" (Host Core Teacher). Streamlined systems of monitoring from Partner School were a well-received improvement, as this was more acceptable than what existed before. This is one example of several, where people from Host School have felt scrutinised, but not directly by Partner School. Rather, the support received from Partner School, at times improved problematic past practices and pressures, such as the "*bullshit ... in lesson observations*" (Host Core Teacher) that came before. A stark critique of past monitoring practices from Host Core Teacher, which seemed to favour style over substance prior to the partnership, is shared. A striking account of a more sensible and streamlined lesson observation approach, introduced via the partnership is communicated by Host Core Teacher. They note that this is "*quite a big deal,*" and this is accompanied by a great sense of relief for them also, as "*the whole world of the bullshit that we used to have to go through*" (Host Core Teacher) has become part of the past. The memory, stress and emotion of past scrutiny and surveillance, and "ontological insecurity" (Ball, 2000, p.3), clearly remain raw to Host Core Teacher and undoubtedly, to the lived experiences of others also.

As all Host School participants had scrutiny and surveillance appearing as a code within their transcripts and no one from Partner School did, it is remarkable therefore, that no apparent resistance to change was seen. Emotively reinforced reticence was (5.6), and it may be that internal hidden resistance featured. It is of further interest that scrutiny and surveillance linked to the partnership was at times, even viewed as a strength. Host Core Lead provides their perspective of the new methods of monitoring and the much-needed clarity this provided:

*... I think the clarity ... it makes, you know, I feel confident going into a lesson observation or a book review. And being able to give some feedback and staff to have that conversation ... if it's not there. Whereas, in the past, I think not that it was unfair, but I think ... staff were unclear of what was necessarily expected because it wasn't the same across all the subjects.*

Host Core Lead

The benefits of the practical approaches and changes to the new ways of working in the partnership, are highlighted here. I too found practical value in the revised lesson observation and book review processes, however was surprised at how positively colleagues adapted to these also. Again, this in part reflects how the new offer surpasses past practices and how “... *the whole thing it's crafted so well together...*”. Host Non-Core Lead.

There is also some alignment here with clarity and consistency and how this instils confidence in colleagues. Host Core Lead's confirmation of newfound confidence concurs as they express: “*I feel confident going into a lesson observation or a book review.*” The relationship between scrutiny and surveillance and identity is implied here too, as practitioners are feeling more proficient, aided by precise systems of how to navigate the now normative, performative playing field through secure structures from which “... to know and monitor themselves, improve themselves, and fashion themselves as professionals.” (Holloway and Brass, 2018, p.380). Linking back to Ball's (2000) ideas from 5.5.3, the increased confidence does in part suggest that some of the “ontological insecurity” (Ball, 2000, p.3) predicated on performativity, is in part being counteracted by clearer lines from which to judge performance. Whilst on the one hand, this could be considered as progress, on another, it could be seen as regressing into a more polished mode of scrutiny and surveillance, towards performative appeasement.

Given that even agreed improvement endeavours between schools can be contentious, it is worth considering the importance placed on buy-in and willingness by Partner Head and Partner Deputy Head further. In terms of agreeing to lead the partnership work with Host School, Partner Head explained:

*... the most important thing was ... a desire from Host School to be involved, and there wasn't ... any sort of resistance, if you like to get involved.*

Partner Head.

Buy-in and willingness are given high weight by Partner Head here. This was also valued by Partner Deputy Head who confirmed:

*...bringing people with you willingly ... that's something that's very much been a kind of consideration all the way through, ...*

Partner Deputy Head

Getting practitioners from Host School to buy into something they did not choose, despite their acting Headteacher having opted in, does pose a potential problem. Hence, attention to “*bringing people... willingly*” (Partner Deputy Head), goes beyond taking staff buy-in for granted and seems wise. Apprehension as to whether or not staff would buy into the new teaching and learning model, and the desire to get people onboard, aligns with the earlier discussion in 4.6 about negatives relating to limited choice and agency. Ultimately, there was limited choice and agency for many practitioners from Host School, as Host Core Lead shared “*I guess one of the downsides, I found is just the limited options when making decisions. ...*”. Nonetheless, the approach adopted by participants and practitioners from Partner School of wanting to bring Host School staff along willingly, did to some degree reconcile some reservations from practitioners from Host School. It is questionable how willingly people really can be brought along in a high poverty school, identified for improvement, when working under an imposed intervention within education, which has seemingly created the inequitable system which has suppressed them (Burton and Weiner, 1990; Thompson, 2020). In regrettable reality, staff and students struggling in high poverty settings, may not even be the managed, but *the surviving*, which is a far cry from Hutchinson *et al's*, (2019) vision for all to “... experience the joy of learning,...” (Hutchinson *et al*, 2019, p.164).

Smith (2016) critiques the work of Fullan (2007) and Hargreaves (2000), amongst others for over emphasising the intrinsic rewards in embracing educational change, as Smith (2016) concedes that this overlooks the fact that “... some changes are entirely bad.” (Smith, 2016, p.13). Smith (2016) expands further, proclaiming “... some changes deserve to fail and should be resisted.” (Smith, 2016, p.15). The success of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, according to how well Host School recipients responded to it, may in part, be linked to former “entirely bad” (Smith, 2016, p.13) past reforms, establishing the barometer and parameters from which participants now base their willingness and buy-in on. The ONE Vision, (2019) SIP surpasses previous school improvement endeavours and former scrutiny and surveillance. There seems to have been some intentionality around this, with forethought from Partner School.

#### 5.5.4 Trust and relationships established through character and support

Trust and relationships take time and Partner Deputy Head portrays their own views around this well, as they placed importance, early on to take “*time to begin to develop a positive working relationship.*” (Partner Deputy Head). Partner Deputy Head wanted to avoid any “*sense that this was Partner School doing something to another school*” (Partner Deputy Head). A parallel with Allen’s (2007) study is seen “We don’t want it to come over as “*we know everything, and you know nothing*” (Allen, 2007, p.306). Schools and SIPs are unavoidably and problematically hierarchical (Evans *et al*, 2005). Foresight and taking time to build relationships based on mutual respect, despite the partnership depicting the deficit model was demonstrated in thought and practice, by Partner Deputy Head. This proved pivotal for trust and an effective working relationship between them and I, with whom they worked the most closely with. Respect forms the foundations of trust, and if the approach conflicted with this, trust would not be created, as is often the case “... through the coercive power of the performativity regime,...” (Hatcher, 2014, p.367), full of harmful hierarchy and devoid of trust.

Robertson (2009), as an advocate of parity may disagree with hierarchical relationships, even if well intended. Returning to the Māori term: “...ako” (Robertson, 2009, p.42), Robertson (2009) places the teacher as the learner and vice versa, and in doing so dilutes power differentials, so that each party is seen as having value to add to, and gain from the other. One can see how this presents a powerful picture of mutual trust too. Whilst the partnership clearly was led by Partner School and did not align with parity as promoted in “ako” (Robertson, 2009, p.42), it did offer a welcome alternative to harmful hierarchy and “coercive power” (Hatcher, 2014, p.367). This connects to the discussion about genuine partnership and how this was realised in aspects of practice, as will be discussed in more detail in 5.5.5.

The opportunities afforded to senior leaders in the partnership veer towards the uplifting end of the trust and relationships continuum. Comprehending that these experiences differed to those of other colleagues, the rest of this subsection will cover trust and relationships, and character and support at different levels across Host School.

Host Core Teacher's reflection of feeling "untrusting" towards the partnership based on socioeconomic differences between the two school contexts, denotes how such differentials communicate power indifference and how this then influences perception and openness towards the partnership work. Trusting relationships, whilst desirable between the supporting and the supported school, may appear unattainable to some, if those leading the SIP are viewed as "outsiders" (Jones *et al*, 1990), owing to their socioeconomically and culturally different school experiences. An alternative hierarchy is posed here by Host Core Teacher, who places judgment on the "outsiders" due to contextual differences. Regardless of how well one's character may come across, or how supportive they may be, trust and relationships may be blocked before work even begins. Referring back to the four typologies of partnerships presented by Anderson (2007) in 2.4.3 is useful here. The "striving partnership" (Anderson, 2007, p.182) with mutual trust across the two schools, does seem to have been enacted and experienced between leaders at senior level across Partner School and Host School. At middle leader level however, there is more alignment with the "swaying" (Anderson, 2007, p.182) typology, with respectful relationships which are more cordial than collegiate. At teacher level however, there is a real range with contributions from Host Core Teacher at the lowest end suggesting a "sunk" (Anderson, 2007, p.183) partnership for them at times, feeling forced into it and remaining mistrusting. This contrasts with Host Union Lead who appears to have experienced more of the "striving" partnership (Anderson, 2007, p.182), as will be discussed next.

Host Union Lead as a lone teacher in their subject had a tough start in the partnership (4.3.5). Their thoughts about Partner Deputy Head's character and support are insightful "... *having someone who's so knowledgeable and passionate, just as passionate as some staff here are... definitely rubs off on you.*" (Host Union Lead). Respect from Host Union Lead is expressed, referring to Partner Deputy Head as "*knowledgeable,*" communicates credibility, which contributes to trust. The way Partner Deputy Head is described as being "*just as passionate as some staff here are*" (Host Union Lead) is as though they are being accepted into the fold by Host Union Lead for this. Furthermore, Host Union Lead emphasises how Partner Deputy Head knows there are contextual differences between Host School and their own, as "*they appreciate it's not the same, they*

*come to my lessons ... and sees how maybe we do things slightly differently... they appreciated that.*" (Host Union Lead). Reference to Partner Deputy Head going into Host Union Lead's lessons here, reveals this has been a repeated process, yet one not steeped in surveillance and scrutiny (5.5.3), rather it feels supportive to them, as they have been "*appreciated*". The emphasis on confirming efficacy here by valuing the work of others comes through as having had a powerful impact on Host Union Lead and situates them as having experienced more of the "striving" (Anderson, 2007, p.182) partnership.

Reflecting upon the differences in the partnership experience between Host Core Teacher and Host Union Lead does seem to suggest that one's response during the SIP process is very personal. Furthermore, this seems dependent on the particular people involved and their approach. Host Union Lead as an Advocate got to spend a lot more time with Partner Deputy Head compared to Host Core Teacher. This seems to have had a significant benefit on Host Union Lead. Findings from 4.4.1 did assert that recipients of face-to-face time did have a better experience of the SIP. Face-to-face time does not however guarantee a good experience. Targeted support underpinned by good character as Partner Deputy Head demonstrated, builds trust and relationships. Making this wider spread so that the SIP may be a "striving" (Anderson, 2007, p.182) partnership for everyone is likely to be lucrative. This will rely on capacity being built into SIPs to afford more practitioners access and opportunity to the best support. Developing leaders who can build trust and relationships across organisations, underpinned by great character and support will be a good step forward.

Non-Core Lead demonstrated how they cultivated trusting spaces within Host School to transcend difficulties by having a "*complete circle of trust*", whenever their subject team was "*troubled*." Providing time and a safe psychological space helped to address and reduce "psychic costs" (McCrickerd 2012, p.62). This experience of teachers having space to offload was not commonplace within Host School and relied upon the leadership instincts of Host Non-Core Lead. Even if trusting relationships appear to be blocked between the supporting school and the supported school, it is psychologically prudent to invest time to strengthen trust and relationships, by creating safe psychological spaces from within.

Partner School leaders provided plenty of face-to-face time to Host senior staff on a one-to-one basis. This facilitated a supportive climate from which trust and relationships could be built. Despite Host senior staff having benefited from this approach, time and space was not offered by senior staff at Host School to Host School middle leaders, or to teaching staff in the same way. Thrupp's (1997) study comparing a high and low socioeconomic school setting and how pupil demographics influence the allocation of time and tasks across the organisation, is relatable here. Time related tensions took over in Host School, most of which resonate with Thrupp (1997), whereby senior staff as reactionary managers, became distracted by other managerial type duties, rather than investing time in high value, high return activities, such as one-to-one constructive conversations.

If time and space had been provided for practitioners across all levels of Host School to speak freely, this would have supported psychological wellbeing for the better, as part of the change process. This could have informed and improved the change process too, as conversations between practitioners may have helped to shape the partnership work further. Sustaining dialogical spaces cannot be taken for granted as Gibbs *et al*, (2023) affirm:

... such spaces cannot be opened and closed with flick of a switch, there are entry conditions resting on developing of relational aspects underpinned by a respect for and trust in the "other," indeed many "others." Such relationships are easily frayed by the misuse and abuse of power.

(Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.106).

Earlier, in 2.4.2, I questioned whether or not, in the accountability arena and the deficit model of school improvement, authentic and trusting relationships may be formed or forged and hoped this research may provide some answers. Where time and space was provided for conversation, offloading and appreciation; trusting relationships prevailed, even when staff were "troubled" (Host Non-Core Lead). This correlates with Klassen and Anderson (2009), Moore and Johnson *et al*, (2012) who highlight the power of positive relationships reinforced by trust, respect and an open school culture.

Different practitioners within Host School did experience change, trust and relationships differently. This was in part hierarchical, with senior leaders from Host School having benefitted more so than other practitioners in Host School. Host Union Lead, however having worked with Partner Deputy Head, did

establish a trusting relationship with them and gained from this. The approach taken connects with best practice cited by Chapman *et al* (2013, 2014) and Armstrong (2015) whereby school support is sustained over time. Making time and space to consider how experiences may be varying at different levels of organisational change is a useful way from which to question:

*Are all getting the same experiences of change, or are some suffering?*

The significance of this cannot be taken for granted, neither can the culture that needs to be created to support and sustain safe spaces in schools, for trust and relationships to grow. An implication for practice is capacity building so that conditions to cultivate credible relationships to enact positive change from and for the people within, may flourish.

#### 5.5.5 Reciprocity through collaboration

Hargreaves (2014) provides a challenging counter view to the deficit dilemma, observing that high performing schools who provide support “get more out of the exercise ... presumably because the sharing boosts both their self-image and their reflectiveness.” (Hargreaves, 2014 p.702). Partner Deputy Head concurs with the latter part of Hargreaves’s assertion “... *working with another school has actually supported myself and others here to reflect on our own practice on numerous occasions.*” (Partner Deputy Head). In terms of a self-serving “self-image”, suggested by Hargreaves (2014) this was not their way. Instead, there was regard for reciprocity and collaboration, as noted when talking about relying on their counterparts in Host School, to move things forward “... *the expertise elsewhere, we would benefit from working with those people... to... piggyback onto their credibility.*” (Partner Deputy Head). Collaborating to boost credibility, rather than self-image shows recognition of “*expertise*” (Partner Deputy Head) across Host School as a benefit to them, and self-awareness from Partner School that they do not possess the contextual expertise within Host School. Collaboration was sought by Partner School from their Host School colleagues, to bolster the credibility of the partnership and those leading it. Trust and relationships (5.5.4) supported this process.

Another angle in terms of reciprocity and collaboration was seen as Host Non-Core Teacher recalled their worries about having “*to plan all of this from scratch*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). This was a shared sentiment for many at the start. Consequently, collaboration was spurred on between teachers and leaders in Host School, whose workload increased at the initial stages of the partnership. This encouraged “formally constructed workplace groups” (Horn and Little, 2010, p.184), brought together under initially intense times of heightened, unwelcome stress. A positive by-product was more open communication, collaboration and sharing between staff, thus coinciding with collaborative learning where colleagues developed a progressive “capacity for talk that centres on dilemmas and problems of practice” (Horn and Little, 2010, p.184). This was aided by a sense of connectedness that was created through everyone having to adapt to new ways of being, and a dependency on one another to do so, as it could not be achieved alone.

Reciprocity is not a guaranteed outcome of collaboration, and collaboration is not assured in a SIP, despite professional pride from beneficiaries willing it to be. After praising high levels of support received from Partner Assistant Head, Host Senior Lead closed with “... *hopefully into the future it can be a little bit more reciprocal*” (Host Senior Lead). A plea towards greater shared ownership and increased professional pride, even “*a little bit*” is invited here. This also coincides with the deficit model whereby the low performing school is being supported or supposedly ‘saved’ and by default, practitioners within become branded as in need too, despite having plenty to offer others. Here, there is more of a sense of hoping for reciprocity than achieving it, however hopes are reciprocated, from both sides.

Collaboration and reciprocity did occur at different levels with genuine partnership seen, as both Partner and Host staff experienced professional growth. Host School’s desire for consistency in teaching and learning seems to have driven the imposition of the teaching and learning model as much as Partner School’s liking of it. Collaboration was seen internally, between teachers across Host School working together to meet the demands of many changes. Support from Partner School was generous and generally well received, however being placed in a partnership due to being considered as a failing school, remains controversial

and contrary to collaboration. Not owing to the partnership, but to the deficit dilemma, the educational elephant remains in situ, silently representing the performative policies which put it, and many failing schools there. Reciprocity and collaboration based on parity, remain out of reach, under inequitable circumstances.

## 5.6 Recognising the emotional impact of school improvement when facing challenging circumstances

Wellbeing support for teachers has become increasingly high profile within teacher recruitment and retention drives and related policy. Updated in 2023, the DfE publication titled “Reducing school workload” (GOV.UK, DfE, 2023) added a subsection titled “Exploring school collaboration and workload reduction.” It is well known that workload increases when schools enter into collaboration (Cucchiara *et al*, 2015), and that wellbeing can be oppressed by “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020), as the ideology underpinning collaboration can be compromised. The reality is that many teachers are left feeling bad, particularly during ongoing processes of educational change, as is often the case within schools facing challenging circumstances.

The emotional impact of educational change on practitioners within schools is well documented by Ball (2003), Hargreaves (2004), Kiefer (2005), Dale and James (2015), Taxer and Frenzel (2015). Despite this, “... teachers' genuine, faked, and hidden emotions” (Taxer and Frenzel, 2015, p.78), can remain either overlooked, or forever unknown by school leaders and as such remain unaddressed, or at worst fester into disaster (Dale and James, 2015). Indeed, had I not interviewed six participants within my professional context of Host School, and the three participants from Partner School through this case study, I would have remained ignorant to otherwise hidden emotive experiences from some of the Host School participants, one of whom experienced “fear, ... struggle, ... worry, ... stressor, ... alone.” (Host Union Lead). Hence, the importance of taking objective temperature checks, is essential to really understand how different people are feeling across the organisation and how wellbeing may be improved. Granted, those working on the frontline of school improvement may not be undertaking research which would allow for this, so an

implication for practice is to pre-empt a range of concerns which may arise by staying contextually sensitive, and thereafter, taking time to examine the emotional impact of change on practitioners within.

Position and power are pertinent when considering the emotional impact of change. More often than not, decisions around what needs to be changed come from those higher up in an organisation, or even outside and above this, as in the case of the deficit model of SIPs. Those who are expected to change the most however, are often those lower down in the hierarchy, the teachers on the ground with most at stake, as was seen in this SIP. Three teachers from Host School are strong examples of this, as collectively, Host Non-Core Teacher, Host Core Teacher, and Host Union Lead contributed the most to negatives, most of which were emotionally underpinned and linked to either time restraints, lack of autonomy, or problematic practices from the past.

“Skin in the game” (Taleb, 2018) a book title and premise posed by Taleb (2018) for social justice in finance springs to mind here. Taleb (2018) sees financial advisors placed safely away from the risks that they recommend, with no skin in the game themselves, having little to lose, unlike their clients. For social justice, Taleb (2018) asserts that advisors should be made to have as much skin in the game as those they advise, and be made to face penalties for negative outcomes too. Relating this analogy to education, it would be interesting to apply this to performative policymakers so that the consequences of low performance in high poverty schools may be felt by them too. This might even provoke a prompt response from policymakers towards more equitable, educational reform.

Given the contrast in contexts between Host and Partner School, it is in some ways surprising that Host School still appeared to cooperate so swiftly with the changes brought in through the partnership. Of course, this perceived “cooperation” may be forged, a front, concealing the “terrors of performativity” (Ball, 2003), or “contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990, p. 227). Host Core Teacher’s observation of subject leaders having appeared “*scared*” to deviate from the prescribed model is illuminating in this regard and raises another interesting angle around power, scrutiny and surveillance, as leaders and their behaviours during change are also being observed and judged by the teachers

below them, albeit incognito. Ball (2003) draws attention to the push and pull of performativity, whereby practitioners face a range of quandaries:

Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? It will make us look good! (Ball, 2003, p.220).

Ball (2003), like Host Core teacher identifies that there is an emotional dimension and status to this too. Taking the example provided by Host Core Teacher about leaders appearing “scared” to deviate suggests a climate that appears positive on the surface, to “make us look good” (Ball, 2003, p.220). Leaders forging ahead to secure consistency with the teaching and learning model may indeed be constructive on the one hand, however on the other this may also be destructive, if they are withholding their own fears in the process of doing so. This links back to *operational* as a super theme from 4.4.8, with leaders striving for consistency in practice, whilst also feeling constrained and suppressing their own emotions and concerns in the process of doing so. This resonates with Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) who acknowledge inherent controversy and conflict within some models of collaborative practice as they confirm that although these may be boldly branded as “empowering and emancipatory” (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990, p.230), in reality, they sharply contrast with this.

Some approaches to professional development through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, do affiliate with empowerment, such as those encompassed within the super theme of *transformational* presented in 4.4.8. The two super themes of *operational* and *transformational* could however be representative of empowering and disempowering practices which co-exist as part of the change process. At times they complement one another, for example, when staff collaborated to secure consistency as part of a common goal, as was discussed in 5.5.5. At other times, however, *transformational* and *operational* collide such as when there was limited time, support or choice related to imposed change, as reflected in 5.5.2.

Climate is a key indicator of success in school improvement efforts (Guo and Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2011). Linking back to time, some of the seemingly cooperative climate which was confirmed in the partnership may be attributed to the fact that Host participants being time served for over a decade, and some for over two, have developed a depth of loyalty as experienced by the “veteran teachers” explored in McIntyre’s (2010) study whereby they become:

... bound by ties of loyalty and professionalism to a particular community; their emotional commitment to teaching as a vocation is foregrounded...

(McIntyre, 2010 p.611).

McIntyre's (2010) paper explores teachers who have remained working in high poverty schools for twenty years or more and in doing so, confronts deficit dialogue around these practitioners who may otherwise be perceived negatively as passively "sitting still in their career" (TDA, 2007). McIntyre (2010) challenges and readdresses power imbalances too, asserting the veteran teacher more powerfully, as loyal and fulfilling a vocation in a particular context where they have become part of the local community. The "emotional commitment to teaching as a vocation" (McIntyre, 2010 p.611) resonates with a social justice and moral call to practice in their contexts.

Cohen (2009) supports observations made by McIntyre (2010), recognising that some teachers "persist and thrive," remaining "fresh" and "engaged" in their "difficult" inner city school contexts (Cohen, 2009, p.471). This provides a more uplifting emotional experience and is, as Cohen confirms "unusual" (Cohen, 2009, p.471). This provides an interesting basis from which to conduct future research, looking at veteran practitioners in difficult school contexts and those that "stick it out" (Cohen, 2009, p.471) through many different changes. Given that three out of the six Host School participants have since left, and the recurring recruitment crisis in teaching, further research in this field could provide valuable insights.

The emotional experience of change for practitioners in education and more prominently within high poverty contexts, has been unearthed throughout the literature review and through the local voices of the participants within this research. When this study started, I had assumed that what I write would all be about the experiences of practitioners within the ONE Vision SIP (2019). I now realise that the emotional impact and lived experiences of change are accumulative and psychologically rooted in all past experiences of change, both positive and negative. Change needs kind and careful navigation and space for affective containment (Dale and James (2015) and ethical dialogue (Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.83) when negotiating the next change, as change is inevitable.

## 5.7 Position, power, participation and agency

Across different levels within Host School, agency was not always easy to assert during the partnership by participants from Host School. This was not due to the partnership work, rather this stemmed from a hierarchical subculture within Host School whereby senior leaders 'direct', middle leaders 'manage' and teachers are 'managed'. This resonates with findings from (Gibbs *et al*, 2023) who reference the work of Lumby (2009), identifying a range in patterns of behaviour within meetings between senior staff who have agency as active participants, in open discussions involving ethical discourse. Middle leadership meetings on the other hand, led by senior leaders defined the role of middle leaders as there to provide low-level managerial updates. This resonates with Host Core Lead's experience (5.5.2) where they felt restrained with limited status from which to become an "agentive social actor" (Priestley and Philippou, 2020, p.581) and unable to inform, let alone make changes based upon what they regarded as being in the best interest for the children. Looking at power from outside of the partnership, at a government level, Thompson (2020) critiques performative agendas imposed by affluent politicians onto practitioners and pupils in high poverty schools, as this deepens deprivation. With this real risk, there is a real need to ensure that work at a local level within partnerships does not fall foul of this either. Engaging with discourse around what will be best for the particular pupil cohorts concerned, in any school improvement context, from those who know the situation and the school pupils best, would be most helpful.

To consider position, power, participation and agency alongside school improvement in high poverty contexts, and with regards to the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, some parallels can be seen with Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. Arnstein's ladder (1969) as a typology for citizen participation will be used to understand the positioning of the participants within the One Vision (2019) SIP, to better garner their experience and so that future SIP work may also be considered alongside Arnstein's (1969) ladder too. Arnstein (1969) presents power differentials between "the haves" and "the have-nots" (Arnstein, 1969, p.216), and the ladder highlights the hierarchy that exists according to the "haves" (Arnstein, 1969, p.216), with the greatest degree of citizen power in the upper rungs and the "have-nots" (Arnstein, 1969, p.216), with the least amount

at the lowest level on the ladder. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969, p.217) is pertinently presented as figure 5.3 below.

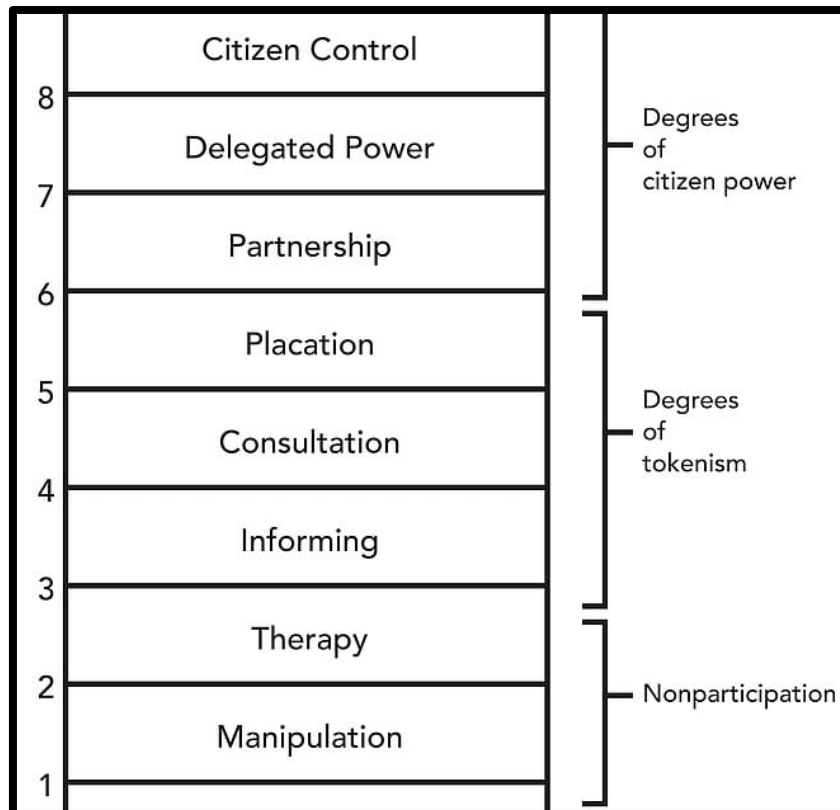


Figure 5.3: Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969, p.217)

Looking at the ladder, one can start to consider each of the nine participants in this research and where they may be placed within each rung and question:

*Why, what places them there?*

Here, I am interested in where both Partner and Host School participants are originally placed by virtue of being in the SIP, and where those in Host School have ended up, through their lived experiences within the SIP.

Firstly, to consider participants from Partner School. Towards the upper end, Partner Deputy Head and Partner Assistant Head appear in the position of participation, as this rung involves shared decision making, alongside some allocated powers from which to take action. Partner Head is higher than this, not quite at the top with citizen control, as this involves handling the entire job of planning and policy making. This seat is held by policy makers, fuelling the education system in England and the ONE Vision (2019) SIP within this, from

behind the scenes. Partner Head is however fulfilling requests from policy makers, providing a pivotal bridge between them and their Partner and Host School colleagues, entrusted with delegated power.

Now, to focus on positionality for participants from Host School. Host Core Teacher as an example, who seemed closed off and *“untrusting”* (Host Core Teacher), owing to contextual differences, may have been on the first rung of manipulation. They were non-participatory at this point and suspicious, as expressed through *“they are telling us to do different, in different circumstances.”* (Host Core Teacher). Host Non-Core Teacher, appreciative of partnership support *“it’s been very helpful”* remains unsupported with contextual challenges, as the help they *“need”* with behaviour and concentration in the classroom, is not provided. This experience may position them low-level, in therapy which is a non-participatory state, as they are succumbing to school issues and interventions instead of being actively involved or informing these. Host Core Lead benefitted from new found confidence and clarity with monitoring processes and increased collaboration across their team, however may have had these successes offset, by no face-to-face time on-site in Host School with their counterpart from Partner School. This combined with being denied decision making, despite their contextual intelligence, may then place Host Core Lead at the lower mid-level, as informing as this involves a one way flow of communication. If I, or another researcher were to create a new ladder based upon position, power, participation and agency during a SIP, informing could be rebranded as conforming here. Host Non-Core Lead who had to make a specification change in a tight timeline, yet sustained a trusting communicative culture with their team through cultivating *“circles of trust,”* (Host Non-Core Lead) is likely to have been at the top end of the middle, in the territory of consultation. This is a legitimate step towards citizen participation, yet still regarded as more of a window dressing ritual (Arnstein, 1969). Host Senior Lead is positioned slightly below due to the frequent face-to-face, direct support received. Even though Host Senior Lead’s experiences within the ONE Vision (2019) SIP were really positive, they never became a power holder within this, hence experiencing placation at best. This phase allows citizens to advise or plan, but power holders maintain the autonomy to reject this.

Lastly, and of intrigue is Host Union Lead, who despite having experienced the most intense emotions early on, grew in enjoyment and confidence, even coaching others as an Advocate in the end. Through this transformational experience of change, Host Union Lead seems to have demonstrated significant participation mobility. Initially, they were buried with stress and time related burdens at the bottom section, as their workload as a lone teacher in their subject was all on them. However, this also afforded Host Union Lead more autonomy, and in time, this translated to agency as through their experiences of adapting, they were able to support others to do so also. Thus, they ascended towards the top of Arnstein's (1969) ladder, to secure the stage of partnership, reasserting their professional identity as a teaching and learning Advocate and reclaiming some citizen control in the process of doing so. Of course, there was some mobility for others too, such as Host Non-Core lead who ended up as informing, yet prior to the partnership had more autonomy and as such has descended to this. For others, movement seems to have been more restricted within a close range to the rungs from which they started.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) is helpful in understanding the lived experiences and journey of Host School participants and how this coincides with position, power, participation and agency. Arnstein's typology through the eight rungs on the ladder of citizenship (1969) provides a useful framework from which to consider SIPs, the ideology of partnership and how citizen control may be realised. Understanding that everyone's experiences of the same initiative will not be the same, and for some, this may be wildly different is helpful when reviewing the change process. Comprehending this has been a profound learning curve for me as an educator, and may provide a strong starting point for others too.

Some decades after Arnstein (1969) initially shared the typology and observations around power and control, this ladder and the ideas it represents remain uncomfortably relevant today:

Since those who have power normally want to hold onto it, historically it has had to be wrestled by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful. (Arnstein, 1969, p.220).

Addressing power imbalances by allowing avenues for everyone to be "agentive social actors" (Priestley, 2020, p.581) may reduce "psychic costs" (McCrickerd,

2012, p.62) and contribute to a more empowering existence for all. An implication for practice would be to take time to see where people are at and why according to Arnstein's ladder (1969) during the change process, in order to acknowledge and address power differences. Firstly, understanding starting points or positions on the ladder and envisaging what the ideal state or position may be for all practitioners, may be helpful and could enable more upward mobility. It might be beneficial for adaptations to be made to Arnstein's (1969) ladder if used in this way, so that it becomes bespoke to the context concerned. Prior to, or early on in SIP work, it could be useful to devise a ladder which accurately captures the true picture of position, power, participation and agency as it is, before the change process begins, informed by those who feature within it. This could then serve as a springboard from which to map out and move towards the ideal state, according to those the SIP is aimed at supporting. SIP work could then be attuned to achieving this, through actions which align with progress towards upwards mobility for the stakeholders involved. Stakeholders would however need to be involved, rather than instructed, empowered, as oppose to disempowered, if these processes are to have any real value and impact.

## 5.8 Cultivating confidence through joint practice development

Some suggestions were made in the preceding section as to how position, power, participation and agency may be addressed in an attempt to prevent practitioners from being stuck low down on Arnstein's (1969) ladder. Joint practice development which was explored in 2.5, is returned to again here as there is potential in employing this approach in school improvement efforts too. Joint practice development may even prevent practitioners from becoming stuck low down on the ladder. Originating from Fielding *et al*, (2004), joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) is an element of professional development which could address power imbalances and cultivate better conditions for school improvement. This is not via enforced implementation models of improvement, but through a school system which is better equipped to serve itself and its community as an outcome of jointly developing practice with another, or other schools who have chosen to learn and progress together. Central to joint practice development is "a joint commitment by all the parties to get better at the practice

than they now are.” (Hargreaves, 2014, p.702). This definition can be connected to instances of shared experience and practice I picked up in the ONE Vision (2019) SIP too. One example being, Partner Deputy head benefiting from reflecting on the teaching and learning model at Partner School and refinements that they would make, based upon their work with Host School. Another example being the linking up between Partner School and Host School to launch online learning platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic. The online learning offer for both schools was undoubtedly strengthened through the joint need, desire and endeavour to establish an enriching provision. Joint practice development communicates a mutual mindset of all parties making themselves open to develop, doing so as a collective, coming together to be better. No one is hierarchically above another, or ‘the best’ within this scenario, even though, as Hargreaves (2014) identifies, some will invariably be more proficient than others.

Confidence was a code found within each transcript from Host School participants. Confidence was referred to positively and related to confidence in one’s own classroom, or leadership practice. Whilst this links to Host School participants having been impacted for the better through the partnership, there are a couple of elements to consider here, relating to coaching and to joint practice development. Firstly, a major benefit in coaching is that the coach, acting as a critical friend can be a mirror for the coachee, and can affirm their efficacy. The partnership, did facilitate mechanisms, albeit some through coaching and others through mentoring, for practitioners to ascertain more of a positive self-image than what they might have otherwise had. This is significant as years of experience in the deficit dilemma can lead to feeling devalued.

Secondly, confidence arose from everyone being thrown into planning together, as seen in the start of the partnership. Camaraderie and collaboration gained momentum through an interdependence on one another, through trying to cope. Although not an ideal scenario, this does demonstrate what can come through joint endeavour, even in adversity. In this situation, the adversity is unfairly distributed between staff from Partner and Host School and ideally, this would not be the case, yet is often so in SIPs. Joint practice development does pose a more balanced opportunity. Returning to the confidence related outcomes, whilst positive, they were not consciously facilitated. This aligns with Coleman (2012)

who recognises developments through collaborations are often not the result of “explicit intent but instead are often clumsy solutions, ...” (Coleman, 2012, p.79). Considering that confidence was achieved through a “clumsy solution” (Coleman, 2012, p.79) and response to address increased workload, it is promising to consider what could come of joint practice development, as “explicit intent” (Coleman, 2012, p.79).

Through joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014), the ethos is one of encouragement from each party, and for each party. This conveys a totally contrasting climate to those thrust onto practitioners through performative interventions. Joint practice development is attuned more to “ako” (Robertson, 2009, p.42) and peer coaching (Lofthouse and Leat, 2013) where equitable relationships are revered. A more mutual approach to becoming better, overthrows the technical type of “implementation rather than development, education rather than training, contrived collegiality rather than collaborative culture” (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990, p. 227). Instead, joint practice development could, if facilitated well, by being inclusive to those involved, transcend “contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990, p.227), replacing oppressive practices with a more optimistically orientated, development, training and collaborative culture.

In joint practice development, practice and development fuse together and relationships between “teachers and/or the schools is one of reciprocity, not deficit.” (Hargreaves, 2014, p.703). Also appealing in this idea of joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) is that even the best can invest in becoming better, learning with others along the way, just as participants from Partner School grew through the SIP too. Healthy ambition as opposed to competitive marketisation is activated in this approach with everyone being able to learn and grow from and with another, as advocated through joint practice development. There does seem to be potential, through joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) for a more motivational model of practitioner and school advancement, devoid of hierarchy.

## 5.9 Returning to research questions

*How is support enacted and experienced within the ONE Vision (2019) school improvement partnership strategy?*

Through this study and this chapter, it has become apparent that support was enacted and experienced in a range of ways. At times, support was more fitting with the super theme of *transformational*, when face-to-face support was activated, this was most positively received. Much of the in-person support aligned with coaching principles and practice and benefitted both the participants from Partner School and those from Host School who experienced this. At other times, support was more aligned with the super theme of *operational*, whereby pressures relating to time and lack of agency in decision making caused emotional concerns when aiming to secure consistency, with new ways of working. Despite participants within Host School having experienced support differently to one another through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, there was a general consensus of gratitude and professional growth. This ranged from Host Senior Lead at the upper end, who held the highest regard for Partner Assistant Head and the time and training they and their subject team received from them. At the lower end, Host Non-Core Teacher, although impressed with the subject related professional development from Partner School, admitted that it was not the help they needed as they still found pupil behaviour a challenge.

**RQ1** *How do leaders from Partner School enact support within Host School?*

In response to research question one, leaders from Partner School enacted support within Host School by having regular direct contact and coaching conversations with senior leaders from Host School. Furthermore, CPD was provided in Host School which was considered credible and of high quality from the perspective of Host School practitioners. Building buy-in and coaching were intentional as part of the approach. Support was linked to practical outcomes, as leaders from Partner school enacted school wide change via the implementation of a new teaching and learning model with all its varying features (4.1). Leaders from Partner school formally shared resources with Host School staff, including lesson planning presentations as exemplars of effective practice and also to support the transition over to the new ways of working. The financial backing made available by the DfE for the ONE Vision (2019) SIP enabled Partner Deputy

Head and Partner Assistant Head as two key leaders from Partner School, to be frequently on site in Host School for catch-ups, coaching sessions, middle leader and subject team meetings, Advocate training and CPD. Support provided was seen as helpful and credible by participants from Host School, although there was some distrust and disconnect owing to the differences in socioeconomic school contexts. A recommendation for SIPs would be to allocate enough funding so that there is capacity for those involved to work together in person, in ways which do not jeopardise other areas of professional responsibility.

**RQ2** *How do leaders and teachers at different levels in Host School experience involvement from Partner School?*

Addressing research question two, staff stakeholders at different levels within Host School experienced involvement from Partner School differently, at different levels as confirmed throughout this chapter, yet mainly in 5.7. Selected Host senior leaders received the most intensive, in person support and dialogue and development was aligned in 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' at this level. High level, regular involvement contributed to the building of trust and relationships between senior leaders across the two schools.

Workload dominated in the early stages, for teachers in Host School as they had to adapt and produce many new resources, fitting with what was initially a straitjacketed model. Unlike Host School senior leaders, teaching staff had less face-to-face time and limited opportunity for "ethical dialogue" (Gibbs *et al*, 2023) or "affective containment" (Dale and James, 2015), however had the most lessons to adapt, the biggest change to workload and a more intensive emotional response too. Whilst many emotions were attributed to adapting to change, many were historically embedded and unearthed. Initial "fear" about the partnership, expressed by two out of the three teacher participants arose from worries associated with past school improvement endeavours in Host School. Fear came from teachers thinking they would have lots of work to do, for "*yet another initiative*", which they would have to abandon all over again, then move onto the next imposed one. A real sense of helplessness is communicated here, as emerged through the findings. One teacher considered middle leaders as also being frightened to deviate from what was prescribed through the partnership.

Middle leaders valued the clarity of the new teaching and learning model and of the mechanisms of monitoring linked to this. They resented having no manoeuvre to change aspects in their own subject areas, even when their understanding of Host School's context and their pupil cohort, called them to want to do so.

As time evolved through the partnership, involvement from Partner School became part of everyday school life, as did the new teaching and learning model. Each Host School participant shared how their confidence in their own practice had grown through their involvement with the ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) SIP. Staff at different levels in Host School did experience involvement differently. Host School participants felt appreciative of and appreciated by Partner School.

**RQ3** *Does support within this SIP align with coaching principles and practices and if so, what comes of this?*

Coaching was confirmed by all three Partner School participants as being part of their approach. Partner Head and Partner Deputy Head confirmed coaching as a deliberate part of their support in Host School, whereas Partner Assistant Head, initiated coaching implicitly. Regardless of the particular approach applied, effective coaching relies upon some fundamental features, particularly those principles and practices which constitute to "ethical coaching" (Iordanou *et al*, 2017). When consciously activated, ethical coaching enables a coach to be non-judgmental, credible, facilitate open dialogue, listen, question well, provide space and time within which they remain present and establish and maintain trust. Each of the Partner School participants presented elements of ethical coaching in their interactions with professionals from Host School, as mainly captured through Host School transcripts within the theme of character and support. Again, this links back to the success of face-to-face support being a key feature from each Partner School participant and their approach to supporting staff in Host School. This enabled participants from Partner School to become accepted and integrated over time into Host School, even despite initial resentment from some. It is worth remembering that some participants from Host school were partnered up with practitioners from Partner School who were not participants in this research, as they spent little, or no time in Host School. In hindsight, it may have been interesting if some of these rarely or unseen participants from Partner

School had been included in the study too, for comparison. It is less likely that they would be thought of as having demonstrated coaching practices and they may have been able to make some valuable contributions around their capacity, or lack of to support others.

The humanistic quality that each participant from Partner School employed, seemed an innate part of their character and their everyday practice too. This enhanced the climate around the partnership and enabled change to be implemented in return. Partner School participants were each praised by participants from Host School for a range of aspects. Granted, some areas of the partnership were subject to some criticism too, owing to the different school contexts. Initial fear around what the SIP might entail and where the work invested might end up, was expressed from Host School participants. However, to the best of my knowledge, no criticism of any participant from Partner School was voiced and vice versa. Mutual professional respect was realised and whilst I cannot confirm this was due to principles and practices relating to ethical coaching (Iordanou *et al*, 2017), there is some connectedness. As the partnership fits the deficit model, this brings a contradictory tension to the fore which places coaching in this sense on a continuum between developmental collaborative practice and dictatorial contrived collegiality, not owing to the people involved, however as a by-product of the circumstance of the deficit situation of support.

Having addressed each research questions, the chapter which follows provides a final summary of this research before concluding and making recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

## CHAPTER 6 - Summary, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter looks to the future by pulling together the main outcomes of the discussion into a conclusion of the study. Thereafter, key contributions to knowledge are also confirmed before implications and recommendations for policy and practice are established. A model for school advancement and future research is provided as a platform from which to inform future research, policy and practice.

### 6.1 Conclusions and contributions to knowledge

To conclude, I return to earlier points from the introduction. The education system in England may seem as though it has improved since the tripartite system “... *it must have been awful...*” (Host Non-Core Teacher). However, are we better off? Or, are things just not as bad as they once were? UNESCO (2016) commit to:

Inclusion and equity in and through education ... addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization... (UNESCO, 2016, p.7).

This is the right vision, yet remains still only a vision, unless fulfilled in practice for every child as:

No education target should be considered met unless met by all. (UNESCO, 2016, p.7).

Following a report which confirmed the lowest levels of satisfaction from children across England, when compared to children across Europe. Hutchinson *et al*, (2019) identified disadvantage as a contributory factor to their dissatisfaction. To counteract this, Hutchinson *et al*, (2019) concede that children:

... need to experience the joy of learning, get a sense of achievement from acquiring and using new skills, and learn to live with others, communicating, negotiating, cooperating and collaborating.

(Hutchinson *et al*, 2019, p.164).

Many school settings do aim to meet these visions (UNESCO, 2016; Hutchinson *et al*, 2019), however these are not met, unless met by ALL. Unfortunately, we are far from fulfilling this vision for all pupils who live in poverty. Too many remain academically penalised by a system which favours the financially fortunate and

things do not seem to be improving. Taking Host School as an example, the contextual data presented in 3.4.1 for the pupil population of Host School from 2020, continues to change in a way which communicates deteriorating levels of deprivation. For the academic year 2022-2023, those eligible for FSM increased by 15% to 69% and two years later, during the academic year 2024-2025, this escalated further to 75%. More pupils within Host School are now facing deprivation than ever before and this is also the case for many high poverty schools across England. Reflecting back to 1.1 and Gorard's (2022) findings that between-school segregation reduced since the introduction of pupil premium funding as presented in figure 1.1, it seems that this trajectory is starting to once again turn in the wrong direction. Gorard (2022) recognises that issues from 2014, which relate to increased demands to end of secondary school external examinations, appeared to have "... undid all of the previous progress and more, making the system far more polarised by disadvantage than it had ever been." (Gorard, 2022, p. 459). Host School is illustrative of this scenario and no doubt representative of many similar schools and the situations they find themselves in too, struggling to do their best, despite increasing deprivation, and amplified associated difficulties.

Despite an increase in contextual challenges, performative pressures do not dissipate. Justly, schools must continue to do their best for the pupils they serve to support them spiritually, morally, emotionally, mentally, and to achieve academically. The big question remains: *How?* As much as I would like to claim that this research has the answers, I can at best provide some partial answers here. In sharing the upcoming outcomes and ideas generated through this research, via my contribution to knowledge, I hope that other practitioners and researchers may build upon this and be able to contribute to addressing this question too.

### 6.1.1 Contributing to wider knowledge

School improvement efforts, which value ethical face-to-face support, underpinned by trust, credibility and respectful relationships with practically orientated outcomes, as experienced through the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, can

help. An ethical coaching approach can also support struggling schools to re-establish their own professional identities through external confirmation of efficacy. Making space for ethical coaching (Iordanou *et al*, 2017), joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014), and “ethical dialogue” (Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.83), across all levels may boost professional pride through empowerment and equitable reciprocity. This may help to re-establish professional identity and confidence too. Face-to-face value, which is a common thread here and has been a central discussion point throughout, is considered further now as I extend my contribution to knowledge, by making a case for future SIP work in challenging contexts to adopt an ethical and credible coaching approach (Iordanou *et al*, 2017).

### 6.1.2 Face-to-face value: considering an ethical coaching approach for future SIPs in sfcc

Considering coaching in relation to other elements raised through this study, such as the need to create safe spaces for open communication in schools and the need to address power imbalances, ethical coaching practices (Iordanou *et al*, 2017), may offer more of a profitable opportunity for all parties involved in SIPs. This does not disregard the dilemma inherent in the idea of applying coaching in a school improvement situation as covered in 1.5, rather it is in recognition that schools facing difficulties need a combination of impactful and emotionally intelligent support. Credible and ethical coaching (Iordanou *et al*, 2017) can provide this, by facilitating a more progressive experience of professional growth for practitioners. This may even be welcomed by practitioners whose value and professional worth is being overshadowed as part of the deficit dialogue around deprivation, alongside judgments which brand them as part of a failing school.

Strong examples were seen in Host School, of coaching from Partner School having been of benefit, predominantly by those who had the most face-to-face exposure to this. Ultimately, where coaching practices and principles were employed ethically, good came from this. As seen in this case study, a credible coaching approach can support struggling schools, and the staff within to re-establish their own professional identities and confidence through the external confirmation of efficacy this brings. Considering an ethical coaching approach is

therefore a recommendation for future SIP policy and practice. Advancing this idea even further, ethical coaching as part of joint practice development would present a much more promising picture still, as this addresses some of the deficit dilemma towards more equitable professional development. These ideas are pulled together alongside other big ideas from chapter 5 now, as contributions to wider understanding are presented. Thereafter, recommendations and implications for future policy, research and practice are shared.

### 6.1.3 Developing practitioner understanding

My research findings have made a further contribution to my knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of practitioners within a SIP. A key area of knowledge which has been contributed to, is the emotional impact of change. This was clearly significant for participants from Host School, and this research enabled me to get up close, and for participants to confide the extent of their emotional strain to me. By doing so, they have enriched readers of this research by sharing their emotive experiences, which otherwise would have remained hidden. This contribution to knowledge is important for a range of audiences to be alerted to, including policy makers, school leaders and those involved in SIP work. All those involved in school improvement at policy level or in practice, will do well to stay aware of emotional “ill-being” (Hargreaves *et al*, 2020) and to know that this will be an issue for recipients, even when what is seen and heard from practitioners involved in SIPs, indicates otherwise. Enactment of SIPs need careful consideration, for the emotional safety and wellbeing of staff to be secure.

## 6.2 Recommendations and implications for future policy, practice and research

The importance of doing the right things right and at the right time (Bennis and Nanus, 2007; Drucker, 2011) in education have been highlighted. Alongside this, so has the importance of cultivating a caring culture to support and sustain educational change. Valuing views and voices of those involved in an inclusive way during the change process, is of benefit to both the change process and to the practitioners within. The emotional impact of change has been emphasised

as being intensely and extremely felt by those most impacted, who tend to be those lower down in the organisational hierarchy.

Creating time and space to understand how experiences may be differing at different levels of organisational change, has been asserted as a useful springboard to critically assess:

*Are all getting the same experiences of change, or are some suffering?*

Affective containment (Dale and James, 2015), and involving practitioners across all levels of the organisation in ethical dialogue (Gibbs *et al*, 2023, p.83) is considered prudent when negotiating any change. Reciprocity and collaboration based on parity was confirmed as being out of reach, under inequitable circumstances of deficit change models. Addressing power imbalances by allowing avenues for everyone to be “agentive social actors” (Priestley and Philippou, 2020, p.581), has been promoted to reduce “psychic costs” (McCrickerd, 2012, p.62) and to contribute to a more empowering educational experience for all.

Returning to the idea of doing the right things right and at the right time, this communicates integrity and there is a need, right now to respond with integrity, to readdress inequality in education, through educational reform. Having safeguards in place to prevent any future reform from being “antithetical to social justice” (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006 p.318) is an essentially needed safeguard within this. Adjusting national reporting of secondary school outcomes (Goldstein and Leckie, 2019), considerate of socioeconomic context would be an easy to implement, and welcome start.

Considering future research and practice, ethical coaching (Iordanou *et al*, 2017) within joint practice development (Hargreaves, 2014) could provide a more motivational model for practitioner and school advancement, devoid of hierarchy. I am intentionally replacing ‘improvement’ with ‘advancement’ here as ‘improvement’ deepens the deficit dialogue, implying schools involved in SIP efforts are not good enough. ‘Advancement’ poses a preferable alternative aligned with being a moving school (Fleming and Kleinhenz, 2007). Joint practice development, whilst discussed in some detail and observed in some instances within the ONE Vision (2019) SIP, is worthy of much deeper exploration.

Hargreaves (2014) found limited examples of joint practice development within schools. This may communicate as much about the limited research and knowledge in this field, as it might about schools and the situation they are in. Joint practice development could make a really positive contribution to genuine collaborative practice. Future research in this area is therefore recommended.

More equitable face-to-face mechanisms of support, underpinned by trusting relationships via an ethically orientated coaching approach in school improvement situations are more beneficial when compared with more distant and dogmatic approaches. Future school improvement policy and practice will do well therefore, to consider how the former may be achieved. Further research in this field, focussed on how best practice may look, feel and evolve, will be most welcome. Although many school leaders are beneficiaries of coaching, this does not tend to cascade to all colleagues in a SIP situation. Therefore, further research into employing a credible, ethical coaching approach across all levels of an organisation and how this may work in the context of school improvement in high poverty, low performing contexts, will also be of value.

Funding was a key feature of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP and at policy level, funding needs to be carefully considered in the context of SIPs, as capacity is needed and costly. The aforementioned recommendations and implications will now be condensed into one last conceptual framework which I have created, titled: *A model for school advancement and future research*.

### 6.2.1 A model for school advancement and future research

I will now draw upon one final conceptual framework as:

... a way of discourse analysis, using the functional diagrams for key concepts and relationship lines for mental visualization, ... enacting critical thinking ... (Khamung, *et al*, 2019, p.76).

Having enacted critical thinking throughout this study, I am now able to present one final conceptual framework, as figure 6.1.

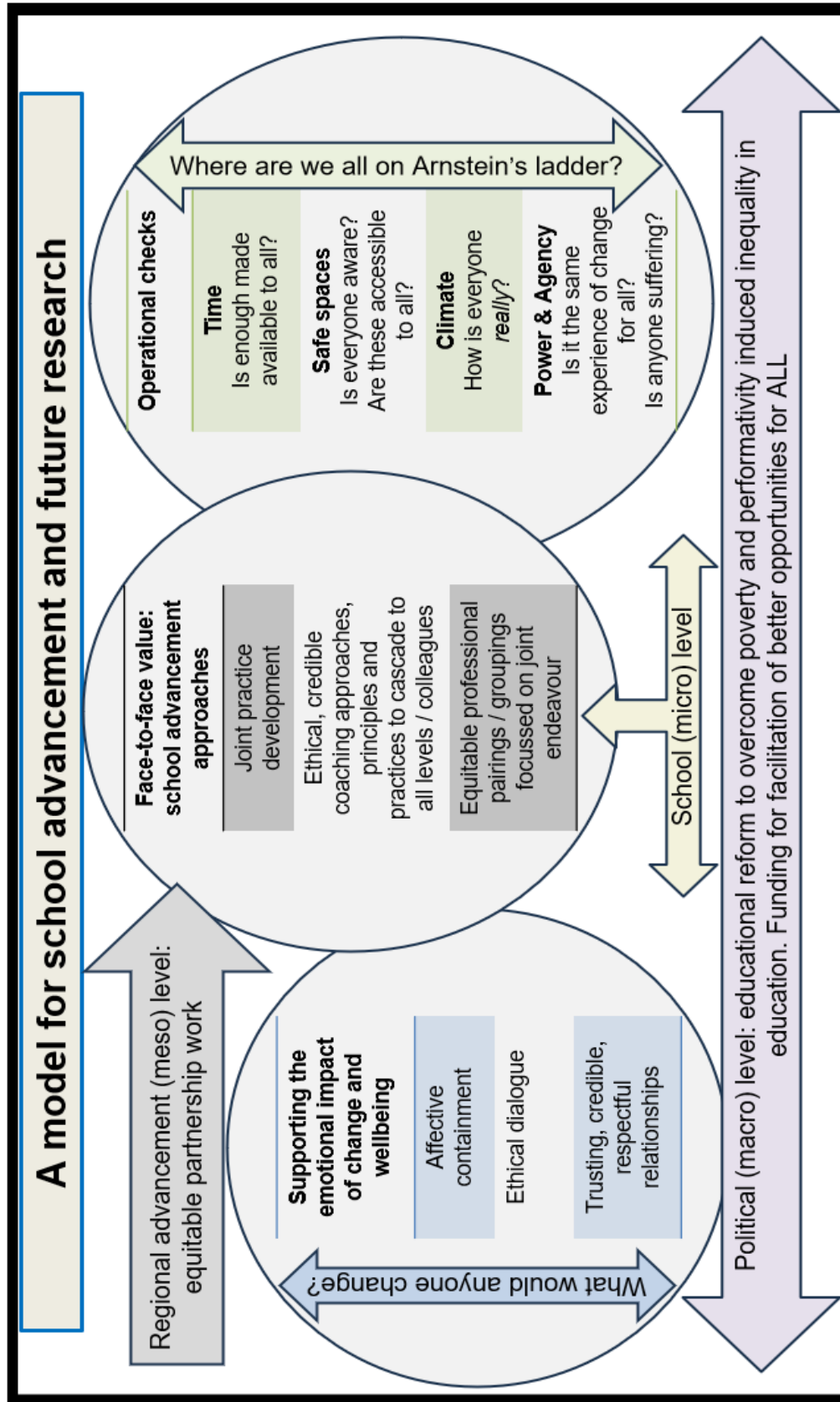


Figure 6.1 A model for school advancement and future research

Figure 6.1 proposes a model for school advancement and future research, based upon key outcomes of the discussion and key conclusions from this study. Figure 6.1 may be used in a number of ways by policymakers, leaders and practitioners across all levels, as will be explained next. At policy level, as represented in the political (macro) level arrow running across the bottom of the diagram, the need for political reform in education in England is asserted, so that pupils living in poverty are not marginalised further by the effects of performative policies. Funding for school advancement work in high poverty contexts is asked to be properly fulfilled at this level too. At regional (meso) level, face-to-face partnership work through joint practice development between and within schools is advocated. Furthermore, a credible coaching approach which cascades to all colleagues in school advancement work is promoted, as is equitable matching up of practitioners to participate in mutual development to achieve this.

At school (micro) level, it is recommended that three core advancement areas take effect, these are *supporting the emotional impact of change and wellbeing*, *face-to-face value school advancement approaches*, and *operational checks*. Each focus area is essential within the bigger picture of sustained school advancement and should not be seen as separate entities. Nor should this be regarded as a must do checklist. Rather, these may work as reflective prompts or a planning scaffold for policy makers, leaders and practitioners to draw upon in school advancement endeavours. Aiming for cohesion within and across each focus area is advocated.

The two key questions running vertically at either side are to provoke both thought and action. The first question associated with wellbeing will be discussed first:

*What would anyone change?*

This is a powerful question that goes beyond what is working well and what needs to improve by encouraging genuine, ethical dialogue and contributions from cultural insiders to inform change. Schools do however need to have time, spaces and opportunity to communicate. This dovetails onto the focus area of operational checks and the remaining question of:

*Where are we all on Arnstein's (1969) ladder?*

This is a valuable consideration throughout any change process. If the positionality, power and agency of people involved is reflected upon, alongside the accompanying operational checks, this could support more upwards mobility for those involved. Utilising the model for school advancement could help schools to tune into the voices and talents of their teachers, to foster a more open and communicative culture from which to better inform and impact change through involvement of all stakeholders in the process. The model for school advancement and further research as presented as figure 6.1, may help other practitioners in education, or support a fellow aspirant researcher to find their way through research in this field too. The model could be adapted or developed further by anyone wishing to build upon this to inform future policy, practice and research. In doing so, I hope that greater strides towards sustainable support and advancement for schools situated in high poverty contexts may be made.

### 6.3 Epilogue of final reflections

When I first embarked upon this research, I was optimistic and hoped that my positive experience of the ONE Vision (2019) SIP coincided with that of others, and that this research might provide a possible blueprint for future SIPs to follow. As a practitioner in education, I was blinkered and naïve. As a researcher however, I have grown to understand that school improvement is far more complex than this and that practitioners enact and experience SIPs very differently. Furthermore, with regards to performativity, SIPs do not appear to provide a panacea for falling examination outcomes, as Host School's results remain below government expectations.

I have however come to be reconciled over time, through this research that although, a lot of the time in school we are constrained, we are here to support one another and a SIP can be a positive thing to do. Context is incredibly difficult and we cannot change the world through lots of SIPs, however we can develop through these. There is something positive about schools working together and getting into each context, however it should not really be relying on the deficit model.

Now, to return to the educational elephant in the room as I raise the issue of poverty and performativity for the last time in this study. The most credible SIP, or well facilitated joint practice development endeavour, or the best enacted ethical coaching approach, will only ever dint the deprivation gap, rather than disintegrate it, unless poverty is properly responded to. Addressing the effects of deprivation in education and through education, requires educational reform. Doing the right things right and at the right time is a moral calling for ALL our children. Now is the time.

## Bibliography

- Action for Children. (2022) Going without: Almost one in five children growing up deprived of the basics. Retrieved from: [Our policy reports | Action For Children](#)
- Adler, A. & Seligman, M. E. (2016) Using wellbeing for public policy: Theory, measurement, and recommendations. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 6(1).
- Allen, T. (2007) Building successful partnerships: lessons from the Specialist Schools Achievement Programme (SSAP). *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 301-312.
- Alston, P. (2019) Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. *UN Special*.
- Alvesson, M. (2003) Methodology for Close up Studies: Struggling with Closeness and Closure. *Higher Education*, 46(2), 167-193.
- Alvesson, M. (2012) Positive and Less Positive Outcomes of Corporate Culture. London: *SAGE Publications Ltd*.
- Anderson, D.A. (2007) Partnership between schools 'causing concern' and 'effective' schools as a strategy for improvement: an investigation of six partnerships. *University of London: Institute of Education*.
- Arkin, R.M. & Lake, E.A. (1983) Plumbing the depths of the bogus pipeline: A reprise. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 17(1), 81-88.
- Armstrong, P. (2015) Effective school partnerships and collaboration for school improvement: a review of the evidence. Research report October 2015. *Department for Education*. Reference: DFE-RR466 ISBN: 978-1-78105-520-5.
- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.
- Arsel, Z. (2017). Asking questions with reflexive focus: A tutorial on designing and conducting interviews. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(4), 939-948.
- Arthur, L., & Bradley, S. (2023). Teacher retention in challenging schools: please don't say goodbye! *Teachers and Teaching*, 29(7-8), 753-771.

- Azevedo, J. P., Gutierrez, M., de Hoyos, R., & Saavedra, J. (2022). The unequal impacts of COVID-19 on student learning. *Primary and secondary education during Covid-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic*, 421-459.
- Bachkirova, T., Cox, E. & Clutterbuck, D. (2014) Introduction, in Cox, E., Bachkirova, T. and Clutterbuck, D. (Eds), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching, 2nd ed.*, SAGE, London.
- Bair, M. (2017) Faculty Development Through Cognitive Coaching. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, 31(3) (2017), 79-85.
- Ball, S. J. (2000) Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative society? *Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(2), 1-23.
- Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Ball, S. J. (2018). The tragedy of state education in England: Reluctance, compromise and muddle—a system in disarray. *Journal of the British Academy*, 6(1), 207-238.
- Barth, R. S. (2006). Improving relationships within the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8.
- Becker, H. S. (1998). *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bennis, W. G., & Nanus, B. (2007). *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- BERA (British Educational Research Association) (2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition. [Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition \(2018\) | BERA](#)
- BERA (British Educational Research Association) (2024) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fifth edition. BERA.

Biedenbach, T., & Jacobsson, M. (2016) The Open Secret of Values: The Roles of Values and Axiology in Project Research. *Project Management Journal*, 47(3), 139-155.

Biesta, G. J. J., & Mirón, L. F. (2002) The new discourses in educational leadership: An introduction. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21(1), 101-107.

Biesta, G., Priestely, M., & Robinson, S. (2017) Talking about education: Exploring the significance of teachers talk for teacher agency. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 49(1), 38–54.

Bono, J.E., Purvanova, R.K., Towler, A.J. & Peterson, D.B., (2009). A survey of executive coaching practices. *Personnel Psychology*, 62(2), 361-404.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2021) To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(2), 201-216.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), 1–6.

Bridges, D. (1999) Educational Research: pursuit of truth or flight into fancy? *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(5), 1999.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Burn, K. & Childs, A. (2016) Responding to poverty through education and teacher education initiatives: a critical evaluation of key trends in government policy in England 1997–2015. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 42(4), 387-403.

Burton, L., & Weiner, G. (1990). Social justice and the National Curriculum. *Research Papers in Education*, 5(3), 203-227.

Burwood, L. R. (1992). Can the National Curriculum Help Reduce Working-class Under-achievement?. *Educational Studies*, 18(3), 311-321.

- Chapman, C, & Fullan, M. (2007) Collaboration and Partnership for Equitable Improvement: Towards a Networked Learning System? *School Leadership & Management*, 27(3), 207-11.
- Chapman, C. & Harris, A. (2004) Improving schools in difficult and challenging contexts: strategies for improvement. *Educational Research*, 46(3), 219-228.
- Chapman, C, & Muijs, D. (2013) Collaborative School Turnaround: A Study of the Impact of School Federations on Student Outcomes. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 12(3) (2013), 200-26.
- Chapman, C. & Muijs, D. (2014) Does school-to-school collaboration promote school improvement? *A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes*, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25(3), 351–393.
- Cockerill, M., Grieveson, T., Bingham, S., & Higgins, S. (2021). High achievement for socio-economically disadvantaged students: Example of an equitable education model in schools across five English districts. *International Journal of Educational Research*, Open (2) 100043.
- Cohen, R.M. (2009) What it takes to stick it out: Two veteran inner-city teachers after 25 years. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15(4), 471-491.
- Coleman, A. (2012) The significance of trust in school-based collaborative leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 15(1), 79-106.
- Costa, A., & Marzano, R. (1987) Teaching the language of thinking. *Educational Leadership*, 44, 29-33.
- Costa, A., & Garmston, R. (2016) Cognitive coaching: Developing self-directed leaders and learners. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield.
- Costa, A. & Kallick, B.(1993) Through the Lens of a Critical Friend. *Educational Leadership*, 51(2) 49-51.
- Costa, L, A. & Kallick, B. (2008) Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Cox E, Bachkirova T, & Clutterbuck D. (2014) Theoretical Traditions and Coaching Genres: Mapping the Territory. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 2014; 16(2), 139-160.

- Creswell, J. W. (2015) *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Crocco M.S. & Costigan A.T. (2007) The Narrowing of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Age of Accountability. *Urban Educators Speak Out. Urban Education*, 42(6), 512-535.
- Cucchiara, M.B., Rooney, E. & Robertson-Kraft, C. (2015) "I've Never Seen People Work So Hard!" Teachers' Working Conditions in the Early Stages of School Turnaround.' *Urban Education* (Beverly Hills, Calif.), 50(3), 259–287.
- CUREE (2005) *National Framework for Coaching and Mentoring*. Commissioned by the Department for Educational Standards (DfES).
- Dale, D. & James, C. (2015) The importance of affective containment during unwelcome educational change: The curious incident of the deer hut fire. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 43(1), 92–106.
- Daniels, H., Thompson, I., & Tawell, A. (2019, April). After Warnock: The effects of perverse incentives in policies in England for students with special educational needs. *In Frontiers in Education* (4) 36. Frontiers Media SA.
- Day, C., & Leithwood, K. (Eds.). (2007) *Successful school principalship in times of change: An International Perspective*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Denscombe, M. (2008). *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.
- Denton, C. A., & Hasbrouck, J. A. N. (2009). A description of instructional coaching and its relationship to consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 19(2), 150-175.
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) *A New Specialist System: Transforming Secondary Education*. London: HMSO. <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/makingadiff/>
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) *A New Relationship with Schools*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.
- Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) *A New Relationship with Schools: Next steps*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills. 74 *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(1) 74

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2006) A New Relationship with Schools: The School Improvement Partner's Brief. 2nd edition. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Department for Education (DfE) (2010) White Paper: The importance of teaching. London: HMSO

Department for Education (DfE) (2019a) Key Stage 4 performance, 2019 (revised).

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/863815/2019\\_KS4\\_revised\\_text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/863815/2019_KS4_revised_text.pdf)

Department for Education (DfE) (2019b) National Curriculum assessments at Key Stage 2 in England, 2019 (revised).

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/851798/KS2\\_Revised\\_publication\\_text\\_2019\\_v3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851798/KS2_Revised_publication_text_2019_v3.pdf)

Department for Education (DfE) (2019) Guidance – English Baccalaureate. London: Department for Education. [English Baccalaureate \(EBacc\) - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

Department of Education and Science (1988) Education Reform Act. London: HMSO.

Department for Education DfE (2023) Pupil premium: overview - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium).

Dewey, J., (2022). The collected works of John Dewey. DigiCat.

Dey, I. (1999) Grounding Grounded Theory. San Francisco, CA: Academic Press.

Dilley, P. (2004). Interviews and the philosophy of qualitative research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(1), 127-132.

Domina, T., Penner, A., & Penner, E. (2017). Categorical inequality: Schools as sorting machines. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43(1), 311-330.

Douglas, J.D. (1986) Creative Interviewing // Review. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 11(4), 493.

- Dowling, S. (2016) Professional development and the Teaching Schools experiment in England: Leadership challenges in an alliance's first year. *Management in Education*, 30(1), 29-34.
- Drucker, P.F., (2011) Efficiency is Doing the Thing Right. Effectiveness is Doing the Right Thing. Retrieved from Efficiency: Think to Exist Website: <http://thinkexist.com>.
- Ellinger, A.D., Hamlin, R.G. & Beattie, R.S. (2008) Behavioural indicators of ineffective managerial coaching: *A cross-national study*, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 32(4), 240-257.
- Ellison, D. W., Kern, B. D., & Killian, C. M. (2022). Why they remain: factors influencing teaching sustainability in high-poverty schools. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 27(6), 654-668.
- Elmore, R. (2003) Knowing the right Thing to Do: School Improvement and Performance- Based Accountability. Harvard, Best Practices Center, NGA, Harvard University.
- Engle, P.L. & Black, M.M. (2008) The Effect of Poverty on Child Development and Educational Outcomes. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1136(1), 243-256.
- Evans, J. & Benefield, P. (2001) Systematic reviews of educational research: Does the medical model fit? *British Educational Research Journal*, 27(5), 527-541.
- Evans, J., Castle, F., Cooper, D., Glatter, R., & Woods, P. A. (2005) Collaboration: The Big New Idea for School Improvement? *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(2), 223-36.
- Evans, R; Bell, S; Brockman, R; Campbell, R, Copeland, L; Fisher, H; Ford, T; Harding, S; Powell, J; Turner, N., & Kidger, J. (2022) Wellbeing in Secondary Education (WISE) Study to Improve the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Teachers: A Complex System Approach to Understanding Intervention Acceptability. *Prevention Science* 23(6), 922-933.

- Fassinger, R. & Morrow, S.L. (2013) Toward Best Practices in Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed- Method Research: A Social Justice Perspective. *Journal for Social Action in Counselling and Psychology*, 5(2), 69–83.
- Fielding, M., Bragg, S., Craig, J., Cunningham, I., Eraut, M., Gillinson, S., Horne, M., Robinson, C., & Thorn, J. (2004) Factors influencing the transfer of good practice. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Fleming, J., & Kleinhenz, E. (2007). Towards a moving school: Developing a professional learning and performance culture. No. 1. Aust Council for Ed Research.
- Fletcher, S. & C. A. Mullen. (2012) The SAGE Handbook of Mentoring and Coaching in Education. Los Angeles; London: Sage.
- Florczak, K.L. (2014) Purists Need Not Apply: The Case for Pragmatism in Mixed Methods Research. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 27(4), 278-282.
- Flores, M. A. (2012) Teachers' work and lives: A European perspective. In C. Day (Ed.), In *The Routledge international handbook of teacher and school development* 94-107. London: Routledge.
- Foddy, W. (1993) Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires : Theory and Practice in Social Research. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Foucault, M. (1979) Discipline and Punishment. The Birth of the Prison, A. Sheridan, trans. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fullan, M. (1982) The meaning of educational change. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Fullan, M. (Ed.). (2003). The moral imperative of school leadership. Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M. (2004). Leading in a Culture of Change: Personal Action Guide and Workbook. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2007) The New Meaning of Educational Change (3rd edition). New York: Teachers College Press.

- Fullan, M. (2015) *The new meaning of educational change*. Teachers College Press.
- Fulmer, R.M. & Vicere, A.,A. (1995). *Executive education and leadership development: The state of the practice*. Smeal College of Business Administration, Penn State University: Penn State Institute for the Study of Organizational Effectiveness.
- Galletta, A., & Cross, W. E. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication (Vol. 18)*. NYU press.
- Gibbs, S., Leat, D., & Barrow, W. (2022). *Transforming Professional Practice in Education: Psychology, Dialogue, and the Practice of Becoming Human*. Routledge.
- Gillham, B., & Ebooks Corporation. (2000) *The Research Interview*. London: Continuum, 2000. Real World Research.
- Girardet, C. (2018) *Why Do Some Teachers Change and Others Don't? A Review of Studies about Factors Influencing In-service and Pre-service Teachers' Change in Classroom Management*. *Oxford Review of Education* 6(1), 3-36.
- Goldacre, B. (2013). *Building evidence into education (p. 31)*. London: Department for Education.
- Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N., & See, B. H. (2019). The difficulties of judging what difference the Pupil Premium has made to school intakes and outcomes in England. *Research Papers in Education*, 36(3), 355-379.
- Gorard, S. (2022). What is the evidence on the impact of Pupil Premium funding on school intakes and attainment by age 16 in England? *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 446-468.
- Gorrell, P., & Hoover, J. (2009) *The Coaching Connection: A Manager's Guide to Developing Individual Potential in the Context of the Organization*. Amacom.
- Green, B. N., Johnson, C. D., & Adams, A. (2006). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: secrets of the trade. *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, 5(3), 101-117.

Greene, S. M., & Hill, M. (2005). Researching children's experiences: Methods and methodological issues. In *Researching children's experiences: approaches and methods*, 1-21.

Groundwater-Smith, S., & Mockler, N. (2007) Ethics in Practitioner Research: An Issue of Quality. *Research Papers in Education* 22(2), 199-211.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 105-117. Sage.

Guo, P., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2011) The place of teachers 'views of teaching in promoting positive school culture and student prosocial and academic outcomes. Paper presented at the Association for Moral Education annual conference, Nanjing, China.

Hallinger P. (2018) Bringing context out of the shadows of Leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 2018; 46(1), 5-24.

Halsey, K., Gulliver, C., Johnson, A., Martin, K.M. & Kinder, K. (2005) Evaluation of Behaviour and Education Support Teams. Research Report RR706. Slough, Berkshire: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Hammersley, M. (2001) On systematic reviews of research literatures: a 'narrative' response to Evans and Benefield. *British Educational Research Journal*, 27(5), 543-554.

Hammersley, M. (2003) Can and Should Educational Research Be Educative? *Oxford Review of Education*, 29(1), 3-25.

Hanley, T., Winter, L.A. & Burrell, K. (2020) Supporting emotional well-being in schools in the context of austerity: An ecologically informed humanistic perspective, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(1), 1-18.

Hargreaves, A. (1994) *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hargreaves, A. (2000) Editor-in-Chief's Introduction: Representing Educational Change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1(1), 1.

- Hargreaves, A., (2001). *Sustainable Professional Communities*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Hargreaves, A., (2003). *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (2004) Inclusive and exclusive educational change: emotional responses of teachers and implications for leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 24(3), 287-309.
- Hargreaves, A., & Dawe, R. (1990) Paths of Professional Development: Contrived Collegiality, Collaborative Culture, and the Case of Peer Coaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 6(3), 227-41.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital. Transforming teaching in every school*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, A. & Goodson, I. (2006) Educational Change Over Time? The Sustainability and Non-sustainability of Three Decades of Secondary School Change and Continuity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(1), 3-41.
- Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D., & Washington-Wangia, S. (2020). The sustainability and unsustainability of teachers' and leaders' well-being. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 92(1), 1-12.
- Hargreaves, D. (2014) A self-improving school system and its potential for reducing inequality. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(6), 696-714.
- Hasbrouck, J. & Denton, C. (2005). *The reading coach: A how-to manual for success*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Hasbrouck, J., & Denton, C. A. (2007). Student-focused coaching: A model for reading coaches. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(7), 690-693.
- Hatcher, R. (2014) Local Authorities and the School System. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 42(3), 355-71.
- Heineke, S. F. (2013) Coaching Discourse. *The Elementary School Journal*, 113(3), 409-433.
- Heller, H. (1988) The Advisory Service and Consultancy. In Gray, H. (Ed) *Management Consultancy in Schools*, London: Cassel.

- Heller, R. & Johnson, S.M. (2020) Organizing Schools So Teachers Can Succeed: A conversation with Susan Moore Johnson. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 101(6), 35-39.
- HM Government (2022) White Paper - Levelling Up the United Kingdom: Executive Summary (publishing.service.gov.uk) Levelling Up the United Kingdom: Executive Summary (publishing.service.gov.uk) Accessed May 2023.
- Hodkinson, P. & Macleod, F. (2010). Contrasting concepts of learning and contrasting research methodologies: affinities and bias. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(2), 173-189.
- Holloway, J. & Brass, J. (2018) Making accountable teachers: the terrors and pleasures of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(3), 361-382.
- Hollweck, T. & Lofthouse, R. (2021) Contextual Coaching: Levering and Leading School Improvement through Collaborative Professionalism. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 10(4), 399-417.
- Horn, I. S., & Little, J. W. (2010) Attending to problems of practice: Routines and resources for professional learning in teachers' workplace interactions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(1), 181-217.
- House of Commons (2022) Constituency Data: Child Poverty. Constituency data: Child poverty (parliament.uk).
- Hubers, M. D. (2020). Paving the way for sustainable educational change: Reconceptualizing what it means to make educational changes that last. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 1(93), 103083.
- Hutchings, M. (2021). Inequality, social mobility and the 'glass floor': How more affluent parents secure educational advantage for their children. In: Ross, A. (eds) *Educational Research for Social Justice. Education Science, Evidence, and the Public Good*, vol 1. Cham: Springer.
- Hutchinson, J., Robinson, D., Carr, D., Hunt, E., Crenna-Jennings, W., & Akhal, A. (2018). *Education in England: Annual Report 2018*. Education Policy Institute. Research area: Vulnerable Learners and Social Mobility.

- Hutchinson, J & Bonetti, S & Crenna-Jennings, W. & Akhal, A. (2019). Education in England: Annual report 2019. Education Policy Institute. Fair Education Alliance, corp creators.
- Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2003) Researching organizational practice through action research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 6(3), 383-403
- Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2012). The tangled web: Unravelling the principle of common goals in collaborations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(4), 731-760.
- Ingman, B.C. (2023) Experiential criticism: a methodology for researching experience in education. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 47(3), 201-221.
- Iordanou, I., Hawley, R. & Iordanou, C. (2017) Values and Ethics in Coaching. 1st edition. London: SAGE Publications, Limited.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004) Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Johnson, S. M., Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2012) How Context Matters in High-Need Schools: The Effects of Teachers' Working Conditions on Their Professional Satisfaction and Their Students' Achievement. *Teachers College Record*, 114(10), 1-39.
- Jones, B. L., Clark, R. J., Maloy, R. W., & Fischetti, J. C. (1990) Sustaining interactive partnerships for school improvement. *Contemporary Education*, 61(3), 119-124.
- Jones, E. E., & Sigall, H. (1971) The bogus pipeline: A new paradigm for measuring affect and attitude. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(5), 349-364.
- Jones, M. (2015) Mentoring and Coaching in Education - Practitioners' Professional Learning. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 4(4), 293-302.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1981) Transfer of training: The contribution of "coaching". *The Journal of Education*, 163(2), 163-172.

Kagan, S. (1989) *The Structural Approach to Cooperative Learning*. Resources for Teachers. Association for supervision and curriculum development. San Juan, Capistrano, CA.

Khamung, R., Holmes, M.V. & Hsu, P.S., (2019). Conceptual Framework–Graphic Thinking–Writing Structure: A Process Empowering Instructors to Think Proactively about Research. *The International Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, 26(1), 69.

Kickbusch, S, & Kelly, N. (2021) Representing Teacher Coaching Sessions: Understanding Coaching That Develops Teachers' Capability to Design for Learning. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 10(4), 418-34.

Kiefer, T. (2005) Feeling bad: antecedents and consequences of negative emotions in ongoing change. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(8), 875-897.

King, M. B. & Bouchard, K. (2011) The capacity to build organizational capacity in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(6), 653-669.

Klassen, R. M., & Anderson, C. J. (2009). How times change: secondary teachers' job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in 1962 and 2007. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(5), 745-759.

Klassen, R. M. (2020). The benefits of collaboration between teachers and headteachers in addressing educational challenges. *Journal of Educational Leadership*, 15(2), 123-145.

Knight, J & Nieuwerburgh, C. (2012) Instructional coaching: a focus on practice, *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 5(2), 100-112.

Kostin, M., & Haeger, J. (2006) Coaching schools to sustain improvement. *The Education Digest*, 71(9), 29-33.

Kuh, P, L. (2016) Teachers talking about teaching and school: collaboration and reflective practice via Critical Friends Groups. *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(3), 293-314.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage Publications.
- Kvale, S. (2007) *Doing Interviews*. Los Angeles, Calif. London: Sage Publications, 2007. Print. Sage Qualitative Research Kit; 2
- Larsson (2009) A pluralistic view of generalization in qualitative research. *International journal of Research & Method in Education*, 32(1), 25-38.
- Leckie, G. & Goldstein, H., (2019) The importance of adjusting for pupil background in school value-added models: A study of Progress 8 and school accountability in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 518-537.
- Leshem, S., & Trafford, V. (2007) Overlooking the conceptual framework: Journal of the association for programmed learning. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(1), 93-105.
- Lindsay, G., (2007). Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(1), 1-24.
- Lochmiller, C. R. (2021). Guest editorial: Coaching for improvement in education: New insights and enduring questions. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 10(4), 393-398.
- Lockwood, P., Jordan, C.H. & Kunda, Z. (2002) Motivation by positive or negative role models: regulatory focus determines who will best inspire us. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 854-64.
- Lofthouse, R. & Leat, D. (2013) An Activity Theory Perspective on Peer Coaching. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 2(1), 8-20.
- Lofthouse, R. (2019) Coaching in education: a professional development process in formation. *Professional Development in Education*, 45(1), 33-45.
- Lumby, J. (2009) Performativity and identity: mechanisms of exclusion. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(3), 353-369.

MacPhail, A., Tannehill, D., & Ataman, R. (2021) The role of the critical friend in supporting and enhancing professional learning and development. *Professional Development in Education*, 50(4), 597-610.

Marshall, D. T., Pressley, T., Neugebauer, N. M., & Shannon, D. M. (2022) Why teachers are leaving and what we can do about it. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 104(1), 6-11.

Mason, J. (2001). *Qualitative Researching* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

McCrickerd, J. (2012) Understanding and Reducing Faculty Reluctance to Improve Teaching. *College Teaching*, 60(2), 56-64.

McIntyre, J. (2010) Why they sat still: the ideas and values of long-serving teachers in challenging inner-city schools in England. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 16(5), 595-614.

McKinney, S. (2014) The Relationship of Child Poverty to School Education. *Improving Schools*, 17(3) (2014), 203-16.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. & Saldaña, J. (2020) *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook*. Fourth edition. California: SAGE Publications.

Miliband, D. (2004) Personalised learning: building a new relationship with schools. Speech given at the North of England Education Conference, Belfast, 8 January.

Morgan, D. L. (2014). Pragmatism as a paradigm for social research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), 1045-1053.

Morris, J. A., Brotheridge, C. M., & Urbanski, J. C. (2005). Bringing humility to leadership: Antecedents and consequences of leader humility. *Human relations*, 58(10), 1323-1350.

Muijs, D., (2015). Improving schools through collaboration: a mixed methods study of school-to-school partnerships in the primary sector. *Oxford Review of Education*, 41(5), 563-586.

Mulford, B., Kendall, D., Ewington, J., Edmunds, B., Kendall, L. & Silins, H. (2008) Successful principalship of high-performance schools in high-poverty communities. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(4), 461-480.

- Mulford, B., & Silins, H. (2011) Revised models and conceptualisation of successful school principalship for improved student outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 25(1), 61-82.
- Myers, K. & Goldstein, H. (1998) Who's Failing? in L. Stoll and K. Myers (eds.) No Quick Fixes. (1998) London, The Falmer Press.
- Nelson, E. & Hogan, R. (2009) Coaching on the dark side. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 4(1), 9-21.
- Nelson, J. (2016) Using Conceptual Depth Criteria: Addressing the Challenge of Reaching Saturation in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Research*, 17 (5), 554-570.
- OECD. (2019) What school life means for students' lives. PISA 2018 Results (Volume III). Paris: OECD.
- Ofsted (2021) Education inspection framework (EIF) - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
- Parameshwaran, M. & Thomson, D., (2015) The impact of accountability reforms on the Key Stage 4 curriculum: How have changes to school and college Performance Tables affected pupil access to qualifications and subjects in secondary schools in England? *London Review of Education*, 13(2), 157-173.
- Peler, M., Boydell, T., & Burgoyne, J. (1989) Towards the Learning Company. *Management Education and Development*, 20(1), 1-8.
- Priestley, M., & Philippou, S. (2018). Curriculum making as social practice: Complex webs of enactment. *The Curriculum Journal*, 29(2), 151-158.
- Priestley, M. & Philippou, S. (2020) Curriculum as a certainty in uncertain times. *Curriculum Journal*, 31(4), 581-586.
- Punch, K. F. (2016). Developing Effective Research Proposals (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Putnam, R. (Ed.). (2002) Democracies in flux: The evolution of social capital in contemporary society. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Reay, D. (2017) Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes. Bristol: Policy Press.

Robertson, J., (2009) Coaching leadership learning through partnership. *School Leadership and Management*, 29(1), 39-49.

Ross, P. T., & Bibler Zaidi, N. L. (2019). Limited by our limitations. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8, 261-264.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Sandelowski, M. (1995) Sample size in qualitative research. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 18(2), 179-183.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Shipman, M.D. (1998) *The Limitations of Social Research* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.

Showers, B. (1984) School improvement through staff development: the coaching of teachers, in *Making our schools more effective: Proceedings of three state conferences*, San Francisco, CA: Far West Laboratories, 251-261

Simmons R. & Smyth J. (2018) Education and Social Class: How Did We Get to This and What Needs to Change?, in R. Simmons and J. Smyth (Eds) *Education and Working-Class Youth*. Cham, CH: Springer, 233-259.

Sipe, L. R., & Ghiso, M. P. (2004). Developing Conceptual Categories in Classroom Descriptive Research: Some Problems and Possibilities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 472-485.

Slavin, R. E. (1995). Best evidence synthesis: an intelligent alternative to meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 48(1), 9-18.

Smith, R., 2016. Metamorphosis and the management of change. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 50(1), 8-19.

Steyn, F. & Sewchurran, K. (2021) Towards a Grainier Understanding of How to Encourage Morally Responsible Leadership Through the Development of Phronesis: A Typology of Managerial Phronesis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 170(4), 673-695.

Stoll, L. & Fink, D. (1996) *Changing our Schools. Linking school effectiveness and school improvement*. London: The Falmer Press.

Sutton Trust (2021) Press release. [Parents pressure teachers over grades - Sutton Trust](#). London: The Sutton Trust.

Swaffield, S. (2002) Contextualising the work of the critical friend, paper presented at the 15th International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement, Copenhagen, Denmark, January.

Swaffield S. (2015) Support and challenge for school leaders: Headteachers' perceptions of school improvement partners. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(1), 61-76.

Taleb, N. (2018) *Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life*. New York: Penguin Random House.

Taxer, J. L., & Frenzel, A. C. (2015). Facets of teachers' emotional lives: A quantitative investigation of teachers' genuine, faked, and hidden emotions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 49, 78-88.

TDA (Training and Development Agency). (2007) *Professional standards for teachers: Why sit still in your career?* London: TDA.

Thomas, G. (2016) *How To Do Your Case Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: London: SAGE.

Thomas, G. (2017) *How To Do Your Research Project, A Guide for Students*. London: SAGE.

Thompson, I. (2020). Poverty and education in England: a school system in crisis, in Thompson, I. and Ivinson, G. (Eds.). *Poverty in education across the UK: A comparative analysis of policy and place*, Bristol: Policy Press, 115-140.

Thrupp, M. (1997) *The Art of the Possible: Organising and Managing High and Low Socio-Economic Schools*. New Zealand: Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC).

Thrupp, M. (1999) *Schools Making a Difference: Let's be Realistic! School Mix, School Effectiveness and the Social Limits of Reform*. Buckingham: Open University press.

- Thrupp, M., & Lupton, R. (2006). Taking School Contexts More Seriously: The Social Justice Challenge. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(3), 308–328.
- Thrupp, M. (2007). Education's 'inconvenient truth': Persistent middle class advantage. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 13.
- Thrupp, M. (2023). Education's 'Inconvenient Truth': Part Two – The Middle Classes Have Too Many Friends in Education. *Teachers' Work*, 20(1), 117-125.
- Thrupp, M., & Wilmott, R. (2003). Education management in managerial times: Beyond the textual apologists. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Torrance, H. (2012) Triangulation, Respondent Validation, and Democratic Participation in Mixed Methods Research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 6(2), 111-123.
- Towell, M. (2013). How can coaching improve effectiveness of performance management conversations? (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oxford, UK: Oxford Brookes University.
- UNESCO (2016) Education 2030: The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheonframework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en\\_2.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheonframework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf).
- UNICEF (2022) UNICEF's Commitment to Ending Child Poverty and Achieving the SDGs: Measurement, Advocacy and Evidence Based Policies. United Nations Plaza New York, NY, 10017, USA.
- United Nations (2019) Visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, New York: United Nations General Assembly.
- United States Department of Education (2009) Obama Administration Announces Historic Opportunity to Turn Around Nation's Lowest-Achieving Public Schools. U.S. Department of Education (26 Aug 2009).
- Valentine, M. (2019). Philosophy of Coaching: *An International Journal*, 4(1) 93-106.

- van Nieuwerburgh, C., & Barr, M. (2017). Coaching in education. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence & D. Drake (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Coaching*. London: SAGE. 505-520.
- van Rijnsoever, F. J. (2017). (I Can't Get No) Saturation: A simulation and guidelines for sample sizes in qualitative research. *PloS one*, 12(7).
- van Woerkom, M. (2010). The relationship between coach and coachee: A crucial factor for coaching effectiveness. In S. Billett, H. Gruber and C. Harteis (Eds.) *Learning through practice: Models, traditions, orientations and approaches* Dordrecht: Springer, 256-267.
- West, M. (2010) School-to-school Cooperation as a Strategy for Improving Student Outcomes in Challenging Contexts. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(1), 93-112.
- Wilkins, C., Gobby, B. & Keddie, A. (2021) The Neoperformative Teacher: School Reform, Entrepreneurialism and the pursuit of educational equity. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 69(1), 27-45.
- Woods, G.J. & Woods, P.A. (2005). At the hard edge of change: views from secondary head teachers on a public-private partnership. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(1), 23-38.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Participant information sheet and invitation to participate .....	232
Appendix B: Declaration of informed consent.....	236
Appendix C: Partner School - senior leader interview schedule .....	237
Appendix D: Host School – senior and middle leader interview schedule.....	238
Appendix E: Host School – teacher interview schedule .....	239
Appendix F: Coded transcript extract .....	240
Appendix G: Costa’s (2008) Three Storey Intellect - lesson objective trigger words	241
Appendix H: Example series of lessons slides .....	242
Appendix I: Keywords and definitions - Y9 Drama, autumn 2 <sup>nd</sup> half-term.....	244
Appendix J: Definition slide.....	245
Appendix K: Revised marking approach – one page overview .....	246
Appendix L: Questioning strategies .....	247
Appendix M: Character and support interview extracts .....	248

## Appendix A: Participant information sheet and invitation to participate

My name is Saarah Abu-Nijaila and I am studying towards the qualification of Doctorate in Education at Newcastle University within the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences. I can be contacted at: [S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk) and you are welcome to communicate at any time about any aspect of the research.

### Research aims

For my thesis, I plan to carry out research based upon the school partnership between the professional contexts of Partner School (pseudonym of 'Partner School' will be applied) and Host School (pseudonym of 'Host School' will be used).

This research originates from my hypothesis that coaching is playing a profitable role within the school improvement partnership. As yet, school improvement partnership has not been explored via a coaching lens and this research aims to do so. I intend to extend on current school improvement partnership and coaching studies by providing a valid mixed methods case study which seeks to question:

### Overarching research question:

What role is coaching playing within the 'Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision' (GOV.UK, 2019) school improvement partnership strategy?

### Sub questions:

1. How do leaders in Partner School perceive, plan, and facilitate the support of leaders in Host School via ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) and do coaching practices and principles feature within this?
2. How do key stakeholders within Host School experience support from Partner School?
3. a) What characteristics within this SIP align with coaching practices and principles?  
b) Where coaching practices and principles are identified, what comes of this?
4. Are there wider implications for the use of coaching practices and principles within school partnership work?

This will be conducted as a mixed methods case study. Participant perspective and experience will be sought from selected senior leaders within Partner School and from selected senior and middle leaders and teachers within Host School. By doing so, I aim to capture the reality of school improvement partnership at the various levels across both school contexts, as experienced and communicated from each participant's perspective.

### Who is being invited to participate?

I am seeking voluntary involvement from key stakeholders including:

- Partner School and Host School senior leaders - 3 from Partner School. 2-3 from Host School
- Host School middle leaders x 2
- Host School teaching staff x 2

## **Why have I been invited to be involved in the research?**

You have been invited as you have a significant role within the partnership and as such are considered as a valuable source who will be able to provide rich data to help with addressing research aims to inform research outcomes.

## **What will my involvement entail?**

- Participation in 1-2 semi-structured interview/s  
Each interview will be transcribed in full and coded analysis will be applied. You will have the opportunity to review and verify the coded analysis / findings relating to your transcript.
- Completion of one survey.
- Where deemed appropriate, to provide naturally occurring qualitative and quantitative data. This may include and not be limited to professional reflections, internal and external data, and extracts from reports distinct to Partner School and Host School which you consider relevant and appropriate to share.
- Estimated time investment will not exceed 6 hours per participant which includes time to read and agree or challenge and edit any data which has been generated through your involvement.
- All interviews for Partner School participants may be located in either venue of Partner School or Host School or conducted remotely according to participant preference.
- All interviews for Host School participants will be located in a suitable venue within Host School or conducted remotely according to participant preference.

## **Data management and protection**

All interview and survey questions will be made available to participants at least one week in advance of the interview or questionnaire taking place. Participants may opt out of certain questions if/when needed and may also suggest replacement questions better suited to their perspective / reality / experience of the situation should they require.

Once the data is no longer needed, this will be disposed of safely. I anticipate that data will be disposed of no later than one year after research submission. Any data used to inform research findings and any aspect of the write up which links directly back to participant data, will be shared with participants so that they may take the opportunity to confirm, edit, or retract aspects.

## **Anonymity**

All responses will be retained in full and stored securely. Anonymity will be aimed for, however cannot be totally guaranteed. Anyone determined to find out the schools and participants involved could potentially do so via a search of my name as the author of the thesis as an example. The professional position or role you hold may be shared albeit under a more generalised title. For example, a 'Subject Development Leader of History', may be referred to as 'Middle Leader response'.

All responses provided and other data collected will be kept anonymous and confidential as far as possible. The records of this study will be kept secure and private, with hard copies of anything being locked in a metal cabinet to which only I have the access key for within the within Host School. All files containing any information you provide will be password protected and/or locked in the same location until these are no longer needed and securely disposed of. In any research report that may be published, no information

will be printed that names you directly.

Pseudonyms will continue to protect the school contexts and the exact geographical location of both will be withheld. Any distinguishing features bespoke to the research context and participants, such as terminology assigned to roles, for example: 'Subject Development Leaders' will be replaced with widely used generic terms such as 'Middle Leader'. All necessary steps will be taken to protect the identity and the reputation of the school contexts, stakeholders, and all participants. I ask that all invitees and participants follow the confidentiality agreement also to further protect the identity of the research location and those within it.

### **Withdrawal**

Participants may withdraw all or part of their involvement up until the latest stage as possible in the research process without questions being asked and their decision will be supported. Please note, there will be a latest date to withdraw participation and/or data date which will be explicitly provided and whilst I do not know the exact date of this yet, it is likely to be a date within 2022.

### **Recruitment of participants / partners**

Selecting Partner School leaders who are most involved in the ONE Vision SIP has informed the selection via a purposive sample. Consequently, three senior leaders Partner School have been selected as participants according to their prominent role within the SIP and their subsequent relationship with Host School. They are the ones best placed to contribute to this research and to glean insights from relating to their chosen and actual approach within the ONE Vision SIP.

Six participants from Host School, including two senior leaders, two middle leaders, and 2 teachers will be recruited for this research. Mindful of sample selection bias, each holds a different, yet prominent position within Host School and the SIP. As such, each participant provides a different lens from which to view the ONE Vision SIP through. Participants from Host School including practitioners with major involvement in the SIP, and those with less involvement will enable different perspectives to be explored in order to ascertain insights and conclusions relating to the role coaching is or is not playing within the SIP.

This information sheet is being shared with each invited participant, after which I hope to receive a yes/no decision from potential participants within 2 weeks. A follow up one-to-one meeting is available to participants at their request should anyone need to ask any further questions. The confidentiality agreement will be signed by both parties. These aspects may also be conducted remotely via email exchanges, Microsoft teams, Google meet or similar to better accommodate participants.

### **Personal Data**

I will require access to your school email address to contact you and to arrange two interviews during the research. Personal data will be kept for the duration of the research so that I can debrief participants.

## Debriefing arrangements

I will be informing each participant about the main findings of research once it is complete. This will take the form of a short communication by email summarising the main findings of the project. I anticipate that debriefing will occur in late 2022 / early 2023.

## Participation is optional and voluntary

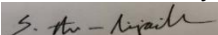
You are free to decide whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at a later date.

If you have any questions, requests or concerns regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk)

## Additional information

I do hope this information has been useful, I have provided a summary of points below and welcome you to email me at my university or school email address, should you require any further information.

Current research title	What role is coaching playing within the 'Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision' (GOV.UK, 2019) school improvement partnership strategy?
Research questions	<p><b>Overarching research question:</b></p> <p>What role is coaching playing within the 'Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision' (GOV.UK, 2019) school improvement partnership strategy?</p> <p><b>Sub questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How do leaders in Partner School perceive, plan and facilitate the support of leaders in Host School via ONE Vision (GOV.UK, 2019) and do coaching practices and principles feature within this?</li><li>2. How do key stakeholders within Host School experience support from Partner School?</li><li>3. a) What characteristics within this SIP align with coaching practices and principles?  b) Where coaching practices and principles are identified, what comes of this?</li><li>4. Are there wider implications for the use of coaching practices and principles within school partnership work?</li></ol>
Research audience	The completed thesis will be shared with Newcastle University and be made available for others to access post assessment via the online facility to access theses. I will also share an e-copy with one main contact within the research contexts of Partner School and Host School.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University. Date approved 16.08.2020. Faithfully yours, Saarah Abu-Nijaila 

## Appendix B: Declaration of informed consent

### Newcastle University

### School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

#### Declaration of Informed Consent

I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore school improvement partnership via the theoretical lens of coaching. The current research title is:

What role is coaching playing within the 'Opportunity North East (ONE) Vision' (GOV.UK, 2019) school improvement partnership strategy?

I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.

- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed about the types of data, including personal data, that the researcher will elicit from me and for which purposes these data will be used. The lawful basis for processing my personal data is consent.
- I have been informed that data collection will involve the use of recording devices.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be directly identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the investigator will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. The investigator's email is [S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:S.Abu-Nijaila@newcastle.ac.uk) and they can be contacted via email.
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences Ethics Committee, Newcastle University via email to: [ecls.researchteam@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:ecls.researchteam@newcastle.ac.uk)

---

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

---

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Investigator / Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Partner School - senior leader interview schedule

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and for your willingness to be interviewed. The aim of the interview is to garner insights into the different perspectives and experiences as lived by key practitioners within the ONE Vision School Improvement Partnership.

All interviews will be recorded using voice recording technology and will be transcribed. Coded data analysis will be applied afterwards. You will have the opportunity to check, confirm or retract extracts which I will share with you when I am at the point of knowing what I would like to select to include in the research write-up.

Please find below the interview questions which have been provided to you in advance so that you may familiarise yourself with them. You are invited to omit, edit, or add any further questions. You may prepare notes in advance should you wish to do so. Blocking out one hour for the interview is recommended.

1. What is your vision regarding your role in relation to working with Host School?
2. How did you approach the early planning stages in terms of deciding what to address and offer support within Host School, and how you would go about this?
3. How is the support of leaders *and or* staff *and or* students in the context of Host School going?
4. How effective has the support of leaders and/or staff and/or students at Host School been during the school improvement project?
5. Have there been any challenges that have presented obstacles to leaders and/or staff and/or students supporting the school improvement project?
6. What approaches or mechanisms for facilitating change are you pursuing / prioritising and why?
7. How is the *ONE Vision* strategy influencing the type of support you are able to provide?
8. Have you encountered any challenges during the implementation stage? Have these been resolved? How?
9. Have you experienced any opportunities during the implementation stage? Have these been optimised? How?
10. How aligned is your vision for this SIP with the daily reality/practice?
11. What leadership style or characteristics do you apply in your work with Host School and why? Is this the same style / characteristics you apply in Partner School? Why? Why not?
12. How would you describe your overall experience and involvement in this SIP so far?
13. Would you like to expand upon any earlier points or to add anything else?

**Thank you for your participation**

## Appendix D: Host School – senior and middle leader interview schedule

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and for your willingness to be interviewed. The aim of the interview is to garner insights into the different perspectives and experiences as lived by key practitioners within the ONE Vision School Improvement Partnership.

All interviews will be recorded using voice recording technology and will be transcribed. Coded data analysis will be applied afterwards. You will have the opportunity to check, confirm or retract extracts which I will share with you when I am at the point of knowing what I would like to select to include in the research write-up.

Please find below the interview questions which have been provided to you in advance so that you may familiarise yourself with them. You are invited to omit, edit, or add any further questions. You may prepare notes in advance should you wish to do so. Blocking out one hour for the interview is recommended.

1. Tell me about your role / involvement with Partner School / IP approach.
2. How would you describe your experience so far?
3. What have been the highlights / opportunities within this so far?
4. Is the SIP influencing the way you fulfil your leadership role? If so, how?
5. Are you learning anything new, or changing as a leader? If so, how?
6. Are you learning anything new or changing as a classroom practitioner? If so, how?
7. Based upon your experience, what would you say are the distinguishing characteristics which give strength to the SIP?
8. Have any aspects been difficult? Have / Are these being overcome? How?
9. Have you witnessed any wider changes within the school as an outcome of the SIP?
10. Reflect upon the support you have received as part of the SIP. Talk through this...
11. Reflect upon the support you are able to provide to others as part of the SIP. Talk through this...
12. Would you like to expand upon any earlier points or to add anything else?

**Thank you for your participation**

## Appendix E: Host School – teacher interview schedule

### Host School Teacher Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and for your willingness to be interviewed. The aim of the interview is to garner insights into the different perspectives and experiences as lived by key practitioners within the ONE Vision School Improvement Partnership.

All interviews will be recorded using voice recording technology and will be transcribed. Coded data analysis will be applied afterwards. You will have the opportunity to check, confirm or retract extracts which I will share with you when I am at the point of knowing what I would like to select to include in the research write-up.

Please find below the interview questions which have been provided to you in advance so that you may familiarise yourself with them. You are invited to omit, edit, or add any further questions. You may prepare notes in advance should you wish to do so. Blocking out one hour for the interview is recommended.

1. Tell me about your role / involvement with the SIP / the Model approach.
2. How would you describe the experience of working with Partner School so far?
3. What have been the highlights / opportunities within this so far?
4. Is the SIP influencing the way you fulfil your teaching role? If so, how?
5. Are you learning anything new or changing as a classroom practitioner? If so, how?
6. Based upon your experience, what would you say are the distinguishing characteristics which give strength to the SIP?
7. Have any aspects been difficult? Have / Are these being overcome? How?
8. Have you witnessed any wider changes within the school as an outcome of the SIP?
9. Reflect upon the support you have received as part of the SIP. Talk through this...
10. Reflect upon the support you are able to provide to others as part of the SIP. Talk through this...
11. Would you like to expand upon any earlier points or to add anything else?

**Thank you for your participation**

## Appendix F: Coded transcript extract

Codes & Counts found within Host Core Lead's transcript				
<b>Red</b> Negatives 8	<b>Purple</b> Positives 6	<b>Green</b> Character Support 16	<b>Orange</b> Ownership 0	<b>Pink</b> Climate 1
<b>Brown</b> Scrutiny / Surveillance 0	<b>Grey</b> Communication 4	<b>Yellow</b> Relationships 2	<b>Sea blue</b> Collaboration 6	
<b>Blue</b> Confidence 12	<b>Dark Yellow</b> Consistency 6	<b>Burgundy</b> Time 9	<b>Pale Pink</b> Progress 6	
<b>Navy</b> Change 6	<b>Lime</b> Stringent 4	<b>Pale blue</b> Contextual challenges 3	<b>Emerald</b> Developmental 8	
neutral tone: *		negative tone: -	positive tone: +	

### INTERVIEWER

Hi, ... thank you so much for agreeing to meet the interview. I will ask you some questions. If there's anything you need me to revisit at any point, you just say so. It might end up being more of a discussion. Ready?

First of all, please me, tell me about your role or your involvement with Partner school.

2

### INTERVIEWEE

\*So okay, so, since we've started this, I've been doing the head of core role at the school, which means I've been working with ....who's the head of ... over at Partner School. To Well, firstly, here, we've been embedding Model1 at .., so taken on the whole model, and that \*was shared 2 with the school. And yeah, encouraging staff development staff into building this mindset into their lessons.+ And then what I've been doing with my partner is just having a look at what they've been doing, and how we can bring all that rather than just the TSI structured like a specific maps and things, and bringing them over here and adapting them for \*our pupils and making them right for us. And then, I guess what, what we've been doing over the past two years, what I've been doing with the team is just sort of trialling and some reflecting on it, and improving on what we've done.\* We've really, we've got a full bank of resources now which we quality assured 3 as well through lockdowns that came in. Well, you know, lockdown was handy for doing that.+ Not that you would want another lockdown,- but it was useful for quality assuring as we then got support to develop and make more consistent what we've got \* 4. And, and then I guess, just making sure the staff understand what's going on and delivering CPD around everything that we've been doing with Partner School.

1

### INTERVIEWER

So you know, when you talk about your work with Partner, and what has been achieved, what form does that take?

2

### INTERVIEWEE

We were initially me, and .... went over and met .... So that was good. + And... but then since then, it's either been email, which is quite difficult, actually.- through emails, so we're trying- to get meetings done online. But everybody's very busy. So it can be difficult. -

Appendix G: Costa's (2008) Three Storey Intellect - lesson objective trigger words

APPLYING STOREY			
3	Judge	Predict	Evaluate
	Apply	If / then	Estimate
	Imagine	Speculate	Forecast
	Design	Create	Perform
	Assess	Justify	Compose
Apply			
PROCESSING STOREY			
2	Explain	Analyse	Contrast
	Reason	Infer	Compare
	Link	Classify	Experiment
	Solve	Sort	Distinguish
	Explore	Refine	Practise
	Rehearse	Improvise	Suggest
Process			
GATHERING STOREY			
1	Match	Select	Research
	Recite	Describe	Discuss
	Tell	Count	Outline
	Recall	Name	Observe
Gather			

**What is the theme in *Noughts and Crosses* and who are the two main characters?**

Observe main characters  
X Sephy & O Callum




→


Explore a nought and a cross monologue

→



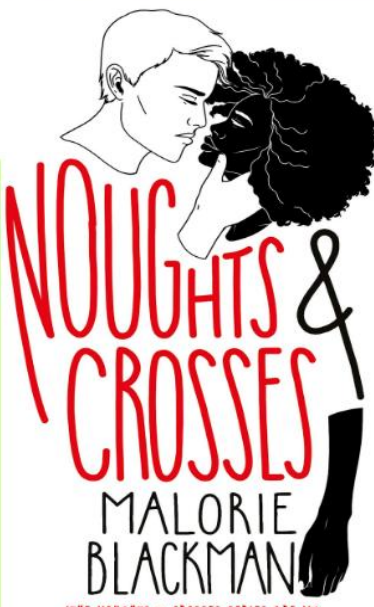
Apply interpretation to a Nought or a Cross monologue

**What will outstanding progress look like today?**


	characters	interpretation
	genre	monologue

**Observe main characters X Sephy & O Callum**

Watch Act 1, scene 4 and answer:

**Facts**



1. What genre do you think this play will be?
2. What do you think will be the dominant theme?

'THE NOUGHTS & CROSSES SERIES ARE MY FAVOURITE BOOKS OF ALL TIME' STORMZY

### Explore a X monologue - Sephy

Act one, scene one

SEPHY (to audience). My family's private beach. This was my favourite place in the whole world. Kilometres of coastline that was all ours, with just a couple of signs saying 'Private Property' and some rickety old wood fencing at each end, through which Callum and I had made a gap. This was the one place in the world where nobody else would find us. Since Callum's mum stopped working for my mum, we'd been meeting here every day. That was three years ago now. And we'd meet here everyday forever. No one could stop us.

SEPHY and Callum sit together. The sound of waves.



Consider **emotions**, **facts** and **problems**.

We process information to help us to understand it more effectively.



### Apply interpretation to a Nought or a Cross monologue...

SEPHY (to audience). My family's private beach. This was my favourite place in the whole world. Kilometres of coastline that was all ours, with just a couple of signs saying 'Private Property' and some rickety old wood fencing at each end, through which Callum and I had made a gap. This was the one place in the world where nobody else would find us. Since Callum's mum stopped working for my mum, we'd been meeting here every day. That was three years ago now. And we'd meet here everyday forever. No one could stop us.

SEPHY and Callum sit together. The sound of waves.



We apply our learning to demonstrate understanding and then reflect on this.

<b><u>Inevitable Progress Plan – Year 9 Drama</u></b>			
<p><b>Exploring Plays: Beautiful Things / Social Realism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social &amp; Historical context</li> <li>- Themes</li> <li>- Directing / Blocking</li> </ul>		<p><b>Key questions:</b>                      What is the social and historical context of the play? How are the themes conveyed? What skills do you require to direct others successfully?</p>	
<b>Autumn Half Term 2</b>			
	<p><b>Social Realism</b>                      Explores real problems people face.</p>	<p><b>Realisation</b>                      Becoming fully aware.</p>	<p><b>Expressive</b>                      Acting out the thought or feeling of the character.</p>
			
	<p><b>Empathy</b>                      Standing in someone else's shoes. Imagine what they must be going through.</p>	<p><b>Contextual Features</b>                      Social, historical and cultural background to the play.</p>	<p><b>Emotional Realism</b>                      A narrative/story that is 'true to life'.</p>
			
	<p><b>Blocking</b>                      The movement and positioning of actors on a stage.</p>	<p><b>Artistic Choices</b>                      Showing imaginative skill in creating performance.</p>	<p><b>Directing</b>                      Leading the actors to make the best choices for the performance.</p>

Gather key subject specific vocabulary...

# protagonist

The leading character, hero, or heroine.





Harry Potter is the lead **protagonist**.

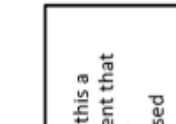
Can you name any other **protagonists**?

## Marking @ Host School

The whole school marking policy at Host School is based around the concept of the yellow and green Thinking Hats. Using a yellow highlighter, teachers are asked to highlight a strength of a student's work, being as specific as they can about what it is that makes this a strength. Using a green highlighter, teachers then identify an element of the work that could be developed or improved. A comment that links to each of the highlighted sections of the work will then be written when appropriate. Whilst each subject marks in a manner appropriate to the specific demands of their subject, this approach to identifying strengths and areas for development should be used whenever possible.







### When is a written teacher comment needed?

Where written teacher comments are not necessary to support the student in engaging effectively with feedback, these will not be provided. Teachers can employ a range of approaches that include:

- The use of marking codes that are linked to more detailed comments that students can transfer to their own work.
- 'Response lessons' where teachers will teach content / skills identified as being necessary through their marking of student work and which will then enable students to improve the quality of their initial piece of work.

### The Green Response Box

There is no benefit in teachers marking student work if the student does not engage with the marking. With this in mind, we operate a 'green response box' process across the school. After marking a piece of work, students are required to respond to whatever 'green idea' for development they have been given. When this is being done in student books, the teacher should draw the response box themselves, with the size of the box being an obvious indication to the student of the level of detail required in the response.

Best practice with the response box will see teachers taking the time to go back to student responses and then check they demonstrate the level of understanding required.

### Presentation of Student Work

- Always use a pen when writing.
- Always use a pencil + ruler to label any diagrams and tables.
- Always have a date and a title and ensure they are underlined.
- Always underline all headings and subheadings.
- Always draw any straight lines with a ruler.
- When you make a mistake, remember to draw one line through it.
- Do not graffiti your work, books or folders at all.

Crucially, poor presentation needs to be challenged effectively to ensure that high standards are maintained.

### Writing Effective Green Ideas

An effective teacher comment is one that the student is able to respond to effectively. As all students aren't the same, there is no 'one size fits all' approach to writing comments. The level of detail in the comment needs to be sufficient to enable the student to engage with it, but not so much that all of the student's thinking has already been done. As a general rule, students will respond better to a comment where there is a clear task for them to engage with and that is why a question often works well.

### Literacy Marking


All teachers in the school have a responsibility to support students to develop their literacy skills. Errors should be indicated using the five literacy marking symbols above.

- Spelling errors need to be acted upon – written in spelling walls.
- The first paragraph should generally be marked in detail.
- Every error in a piece of work does not need to be identified – prioritise key spellings and basic errors.


### Structuring the Response

To help students respond you might:


- Model the completion of a response box to establish the standard you expect from students.
- Show examples of past response boxes completed by students.
- Provide sentence openings – possibly even in the box itself.
- Provide the information students need to respond.




To make the different elements of AFL in student books clear, the pen colours below need to be used when feedback is being provided:



Teacher feedback in purple



Literacy errors identified / corrected in pink

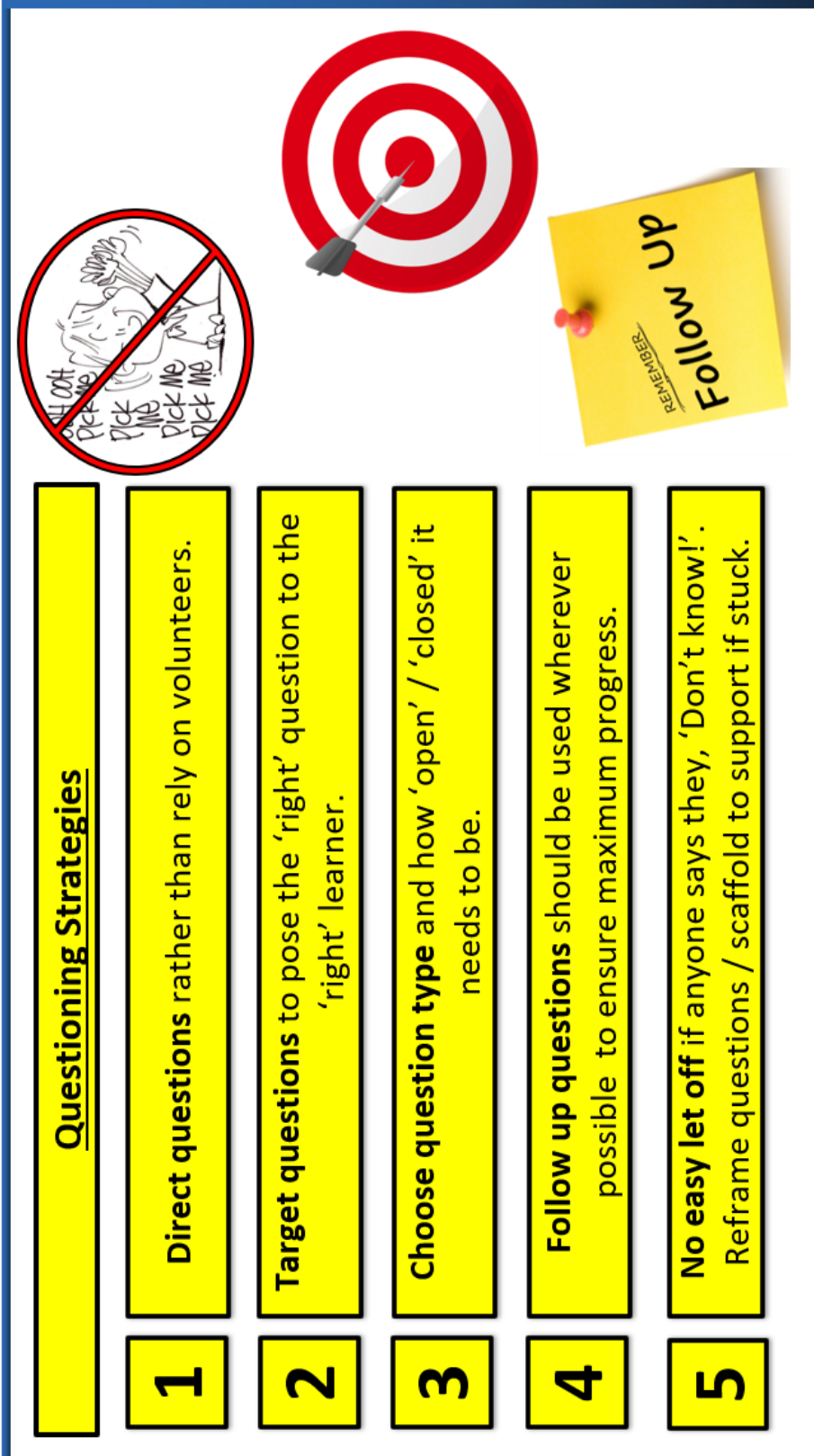


Self / peer assessment in green

246




Student Number 038000016

Saarah Abu-Nijaila



**Questioning Strategies**

- 1** Direct questions rather than rely on volunteers.
- 2** Target questions to pose the 'right' question to the 'right' learner.
- 3** Choose question type and how 'open' / 'closed' it needs to be.
- 4** Follow up questions should be used wherever possible to ensure maximum progress.
- 5** No easy let off if anyone says they, 'Don't know!'. Reframe questions / scaffold to support if stuck.



## Appendix M: Character and support interview extracts

### **Partner Head - 'character / support' (5/16)**

*...part of the mechanisms were put in place with support between Partner School and Host School. It's about people, coaching others.*

### **Partner Deputy Head - 'character / support' (9/16)**

*At points I certainly questioned myself... Am I doing as much in this supportive role as I should be, you know? Is there more that could be done?*

*I think I'd like to think there's been kind of an element of the democratic, the coaching style, and that, that's been kind of a deliberate choice.*

*... I think what's interesting though, is kind of through the ONE Vision project and then the way it's developed, we do have kind of greater opportunities for mutual support there over time.*

*...I think the dynamic in the main right now is kind of, some of the kind of, the development perhaps comes initially from Partner going elsewhere. As time goes on, that relationship will shift and it needs to become you know far more of a, you know it, it's a back and forth and I think that's been there already.*

### **Partner Assistant Head - 'character / support' (13/16)**

*You know it's very much about trying to work very directly with staff at all levels to make sure that everybody understands what we're trying to achieve.*

*... we don't necessarily use the term coaching, but if we were to boil down what coaching is, is that happening? Yes it is.*

*You know, by making sure that people do feel supported and that their opinions are valued, but also in being able to demonstrate that I'm doing it myself...*

*...we would never want it to feel like you have to, just do as we're saying there's an element, there's an element certainly in the support where at times, I think that message is a bit clearer that this is how it is, but that message isn't coming from us.*

#### **Host Senior Lead - 'character / support' (16/16)**

*It's very supportive, ... it's also incredibly supportive.*

*...So there has been no dip in the support, despite the fact that we've had two lockdowns, ...*

*It must be quite hard for somebody like external to come in to support, to come in and support a whole subject team, that they've never been part of. ...was quickly accepted. ...and that's why ... accepted because .... given us shortcuts to make our practice so much better...But ... accepted from the fact that, just the quality.*

*There isn't anything that we've ever thrown at ... to help us with that, ... hasn't given help back with.*

*Well, the support really it's we've had consistent coaching. We've had consistent mentoring as well, and we've had a lot of support.*

#### **Host Core Lead - 'character / support' (3/16)**

*...and the support given there. Like I say, it wasn't overwhelming, it wasn't too much.*

*... having somebody at Partner School to go to has helped. Like I said, they've got everything every question, or query or grumble, they've answered already. So, I'll be looking at something thinking, "Well, this isn't going to work in my subject, this is from another subjects point of view", and then boom, the example for my subject comes up like this is how it can be used. So that was really supportive, I think the examples and seeing it work in practice is really helpful.*

*I would just say from this year with the pandemic, the partnership has really helped me with the TAGs process. I think if I'd been on my own, like a school without, you know, a partnership school, ... I would have been, quite lost personally, ...*

#### **Host Non-Core Lead - 'character / support' (2/16)**

*The experience has been very smooth so far and they've...tried to make it easy... Everything that that we've asked for from them, they've had.*

*Normally, if you've got a question they've got something that they can show you. So although it might have to be done in a slightly different way, it's not been a difficult process to implement from a technical side, so I've enjoyed that.*

#### **Host Union Lead - 'character / support' (11/16)**

*... I think, as I say, having someone who's so knowledgeable and ... passionate, just as passionate as some staff here are about it, so it definitely rubs off on you.*

*They appreciate it's not the same, ... come to my lessons and things and sees how maybe we do things slightly differently and you think ... appreciated that.*

*it's given me the opportunity then to not only embed it with myself, but then try to help other people. ...And maybe you don't get those kind of opportunities before, you're just always chopping and changing and concentrating on your own thing. But when everyone's ... trying to implement the same thing, you can help each other. So, I definitely felt that maybe allowed me to sort of branch out more to support others.*

#### **Host Core Teacher - 'character / support' (1/16)**

*They're very passionate and pragmatic, whatever process that's been undertook to develop their approach was ...they found what works on a consistent progress eight score of point 3.5, is not a fluke, all praise to them. I've seen their resources. Very, very good stuff.*

## Host Non-Core Teacher - 'character / support' (12/16)

*...we're getting some very good support from the partner school as well.*

*...But, I mean to,... looking back at the question and my experience of working with Partner, I, I mean they're, they're very professional and they're very supportive.*

*Partner's CPD sessions, ...you know he's a good speaker. He obviously you know, puts a lot of hard work into his presentations, and, and he's engaging and I think you know, it looks, it's just high quality, it's all just been high quality.*

*So yeah, I've had it had a lot of a lot of training, a lot of support and, and I think you know going back to coaching work it is feeling that you have got the support vehicle using that; you're not on your own...*

