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Appendix 2: Interview transcripts
from
**HEADTEACHERS' RESPONSES
TO GOVERNMENT POLICY ON
PRIMARY EDUCATION 1988 TO 2005**
by
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Preliminary interview with Annette (nb3055a)

DW I have some more details for you – what I am actually doing is a longitudinal survey – so I am looking at twenty years of your professional trajectory.

Annette So we are going back to eighty-five.

DW Yes, Back to eighty-five – which is just before the ERA so we can see how things have changed. There are a few details I need to establish first; length of career? – I know how long your career is [34 years] so we can move on, how many years have you been a head?

Annette Since eighty-nine.

DW Eighty-nine that's fine, because that's ...

Annette Before that I was acting head in eighty-five – eighty-five to eighty-six; and then I left there in eighty-nine, summer eighty-nine.

DW Before that you were a deputy head, obviously?

Annette Yes – I was a deputy head from – oh crikey – um – eighty-one.

DW Eighty-one, so you have been senior management since eighty-one, which is well over the twenty years, which is fine.

Annette Right, good, I'm in the right category, then.

DW Yes. How many schools as a head?

Annette Two.

DW Two, this one and the previous one?

Annette This one and Cross Gate, yes.

DW Good. Now I need to show you this. This is quite complex but it's what I am using to analyse people's careers. I've got some more information on it here but I'll go through it on this big diagram. It works like this; - this is you (*pointing to subject*) and this is what you are trying to achieve (*pointing to object*) your object ...

Annette As a headteacher?

DW ...as a headteacher. Your object will lead to certain outcomes, though your object may not be the same as the actual outcomes. For instance, if your object was to leave by four o' clock each day – for some heads it might be but I know yours isn't – the outcomes won't be everybody going home at four o' clock each day, they might be some people working longer hours. So the outcomes are not the same as the object – the object is also not the same as an objective – the object is what drives the whole system...

Annette Right?

DW ...there was a wonderful fellow called Leont'ev who described it as – um – if there was a caveman who was beating, to chase the deer so the others could catch it. His objective is to get the deer to move, his object, if you get right down to it, is to feed and clothe his family. So the object is much deeper than the objective. When you try and achieve your object...

Annette Is that the same as an aim?

DW No, not really, aims can be short-term as well, the object....I was going to explain later but it might as well be now. When I ask "What is the object of what you do in the school I may be a real pain, because I will keep asking "why?" Take, for instance a classroom teacher:-

"What's the object of your lesson?"

"To get the children to write a good story"

"Why"

"Because then, they will have the principles to help them write a good story next time."

"Why"

"Well if we do that..... Interrupted by telephone call.... they will write a good story in their SATs"

"Why do you want them to do that?"

"That way we will have a good position in the league tables and the school be cast in a better light"

That would be the root object, so the school (and thus the teacher) will **look good in comparison to others**.

I'm not saying that's the case for everybody but the example shows how it is possible to work down to the real object by judicious probing.

Annette It may not be the case for everybody but **that is what we are all pressurised to do more and more. Philosophically nobody wants to do that but everyone is being pressurised.**

DW Yes, that's what it can feel like.

In order to achieve your object you use all sorts of tools – strategies, language, working with the National Curriculum, changing the literacy hour, they are all tools.

In order to do that you may have support from the community – who could be called the stakeholders, pupils, parents, governors, teachers, LEA, to the DfES who are part of our local community.

You have to work within the historical rules of the school, that's not the school rules, you may find that historically the school is a very tight, structured system in which people don't have the flexibility to "do their own thing" or you might find it's the opposite a loosely knit system where people can do their own thing and try out and experiment. One is not necessarily right and the other wrong but they are examples of the rules of systems. Of course, when you're doing it, you could be doing it with other people, or you may be trying to work by yourself, or, indeed, work in spite of others.

I would like to look at an overview of the twenty years first, then pick three points, one just before the Education Reform Act, one about now and one in the middle, which could be a time of greater tension, greater stress, anything that might have made the school system at that time different from normal.

That way I can look at the path of your career over the past twenty years and highlight these points:

That is the second part of my thesis – the Activity Triangle represents social activity it represents the whole school was a system, your life in history is personal, it's individual and very few people have tried to analyse the latter using the former as they come from totally different paradigms.

Seeing how the two work together is part of my PhD. I am looking at how people are moulded by the systems to some extent interesting!

Annette Are you looking at both primary and secondary?

DW No, just primary.

Annette I think you would find a difference between primary teachers and secondary, quite a big one. I think that systems mould primary teachers far more than a system will mould a secondary teacher – from my observations of secondary, which is probably why primary is being used as the test-bed for changes.

DW You may be right, but the secondary school system is very different from a primary system, it is much more diverse.

Annette Yes, it may be that the system creates different characters but I think that individuality and – um – bombasticity is it – um are more characters of secondary school teachers, which is not denigrating them at all, it has been a major factor in the development of secondary schools because they won't accept things without questioning. It may be to do with the gender split in each sector, the historic nature of the systems and so on.

DW Yes, the historic nature of the systems, the rules within which we are working as I said. That (paper) is a longer treatise on the Activity triangle, which is part of one of my chapters; it is yours to look at if you wish. The other thing I am looking at is adaptive strategies – what people do to cope with the systems they might find difficult to work with, they might find tensions between them and the system – how do they adapt? What are their strategies? There are three classic adaptive strategies, the first is retreatism, that is retiring – and other similar strategies; the second is downshifting, where a Headteacher may say “I've had enough, I'm going to be a teacher in a school somewhere, or they may redefine their role, they may pass some aspects of their job onto other people; or they may move to a smaller school, which is role reduction in downshifting. The last is self-actualising which is a term covering a re-routing perhaps becoming an adviser writing books for children – doing something in the same sphere but completely different, or relocating., where they may say, “I cannot work with these governors anymore, I have to move to another school!”

We will look at these towards the end and investigate your ideas on adaptive strategies and their effectiveness.

Finally, there are three issues to be covered:-

First, I cannot pay

Second, If I do become a pain and say, “why, why, why?” it is just part of the interview process, as is using the tape, which makes life easier.

The last is ethical, although the interviews will be taped, put on a computer and transcribed they are completely confidential. All heads will be denoted by three letters only, which change but are only known to me. I will also give you a copy of what I have written so you can comment on them as appropriate.

Main interview with Annette (nb3055b)

DW For the first fifteen to twenty minutes could you run through your Professional Trajectory since around about 1985 or an important date for you round about then. Concentrate on major events and things that have had a significant effect on you and your work, and the systems within which you have been working; those things in particular. They might be school based or they may be external to the school but to do with education, perhaps a DfES or they could be personal things which you don't mind talking about.

Annette Yes Ok. I'm not sure trajectory quite describes my career, it's much too rocket powered, trajectory, for me I'm afraid. Really in 35 years I mean, really thinking about Mercia when I first came into senior management which was 1981, and I moved from the country school where I had first come into Mercia when they lifted the ring fence, and went as Deputy to Merrywhite School, which of course is just the other side of the road from us here. I went there and I found it actually very difficult to settle in Merrywhite because I went into actually a very well established team and into a team that, you know, when you talk to people and talk to the headteacher who was there was that it was one of those golden eras that was recognised that you have these times when you have a very settled, very creative staff who get on well with each other and then because they are successful they get promoted and move on and things change and become more unsettled. So I went there during, you know, when things were becoming unsettled and the team had broken up and so on. And I have to say that I found it very difficult to settle to start with because we are talking pre-job descriptions and we are talking where the role of the deputy wasn't clearly established. I mean I can remember at the interview you know, talking about being a sounding board for the staff and all these sort of things and what my curriculum role was I wasn't quite sure, in the school, except it was supposed to be pretty important and, er, what my relationship with the head was I wasn't quite sure because **it was a fairly autocratic system** in there and so really my relationship with him wasn't really very much different to his relationship with any of the staff. Where I have always tried to cultivate senior management when I have been a head myself and form a slightly different relationship with senior management to other staff. Um it was difficult. That really changed in 1985 when I got the opportunity to be acting head of the school when the head was actually seconded **to develop cross curricular work across Mercia to run courses, go and work in schools and so on. To do many of the things that are currently coming into vogue or back into vogue now.** I had been involved with him in developing that in the school with very much him leading that and looking at curriculum models with him particularly the spiral curriculum and the child centred curriculum because for Tony the child was always very much at the centre of the school, to be fair which was a problem sometimes because he was always very much on the children's side which is of course quite right because that's what the school is there for, its not there for the staff its for the children and he was very strong on that. But to accomplish that you need a staff who feel valued and who feel supported and that side of it wasn't always as it should be, I felt. So I learnt a lot and during 85 -86 I tried to – to be fair I was given a very free hand – not to make huge changes but actually clearly define boundaries, I felt I did that during that year and really got the discipline system up and running so people knew where they stood rather than as they had in the past but I don't feel that I dealt with the discipline system the way that we have done here at King Offa. It certainly wasn't what I would describe as an assertive discipline system. We tinkered around the edges I think and it didn't really become part of a basic review of school philosophy that it was here. I couldn't do that because I didn't have that amount of freedom to do it and to be honest it probably wasn't in my thoughts at that time even. So I was there at Merrywhite and after that actually my relationship with my head was very much different because he had full confidence in me

because the school, I think, had run well and I was very happy and very settled there and then because of the work on cross curricular issues that I had done at Merrywhite and because of the work I had done on discipline and because of work I'd done on computing then I got my first Headship at Cross Gate out in the country near Bassington. Because the Governors there were concerned about the introductions of LMS and wanted computer systems to support the secretarial staff there to help bring it in and I can remember going to lots of courses in Mercia that ran, that Mercia ran, sorry, all the courses were at Worcester in those days and it's been a big change for the better having Mercia, many things for the worse, but the fact that everything is locally based, what there is, has been a big help. I settled down at Cross Gate with lots to do, a very different school, from the present one, a good mixture of children but basically the Governors were very, very, very involved in the school on a daily basis, not as a critical friend but working in the school, they knew what happened down to the tiniest detail in the school and liked to be involved at that level which is probably excessive and they made a lot of demands on you and certainly kept you working very long hours. And parents were equally committed, a lot of them, I mean if you had a parents meeting of any sort you'd get at least half the parents there. Out of a school of about 130 you'd get probably half the parents there, or half the families anyway represented at any meeting. It was there that I experienced my first Ofsted and there that I experienced the introduction of the National curriculum in all its splendour, with all the changes that brought to the ethos and philosophy and the pressures to get rid of what we thought at that time was a creative delivery of the curriculum. The approach to child centred education became rather a dirty word and the sixties and Plowden and all these things were thrown out, which was very frustrating having spent the first few years at Cross Gate as part of a project pathways development where we looked at developing the curriculum, the child centred curriculum based on developing knowledge and skills and internalising those skills and values and attitudes through a cross curricular approach. I actually threw it away around the 2000 mark, project pathways, and I wish I hadn't now because I had a whole wad and a lot of the actual processes that we're being asked to do now we actually spent a great deal of time working through so that's a frustration because at that stage it didn't look like it was ever going to come back again in my teaching career anyway.

Anyway Cross Gate, my first Headship, a teaching headship, half a day a week out of class and I was lucky to have that at that stage so basically I had a year five and six class and tried to administer the school. It actually was ok because the – to start with – because pre-national curriculum folders and so on it actually worked and I could carry on teaching the way I had always done it was just easy stuff, the amount of assessment wasn't there and so on. As national curriculum came on board it started to get very, very difficult and particularly the requirements to implement it all so quickly because if it had been done a subject a year or something you could cope with that and teach and be a head and do all the other things you always wanted to do and LMS and so on. It actually got more and more difficult and I'm very grateful that at that time I was probably at my most productive, you know, sort of thirties. You are in your thirties you're probably at your best to be able to cope with that sort of pressure because the hours are extremely long. I used to be there until midnight quite often working and it was ok apart from the fact that there was all the family which is a strain and a stress but I was lucky from that point of view, but you had your foot on the accelerator the whole time. I certainly would not care to be doing that now and I actually don't know how people of a certain age actually deal with that. I think that would be very difficult, I think there's a lot of strains and stresses in a big school, very different strains and stresses; the amount you have to get through and the community involvement and everything else you're required to do in a small country school I think it's a job and a half and it's a young persons job. Having said that it was all new, if there wasn't initiative overdrive now, if they could just leave things alone for a while and let it

all bed down and settle down then its probably a job you could deal with, with the amount of release time because country heads are now getting a couple of days off [a week] to do all this other work and look at what other people are doing at the same time. It was during that time that things like the School Development Plan started being mooted, I can't remember the time span of that, it was certainly while I was at Cross Gate there were courses about this latest idea from America that you had to have a development plan and a mission statement, that was a new one we didn't know what that was (laughs) what our missionary position was I never quite knew. So I found out what a mission statement was and what a development plan was and started doing battle with all the different schemes. The assessment was a particular area of teaching and being a head that was very difficult to cope with. In particular the tick sheets that were brought in, in Mercia were difficult to cope with and they were pointless and took a great deal of time. So that was hard work. Then of course came the opportunity to be somewhere like King Offa, it was hard work being on the interview circuit, I mean I was interviewed for a lot of jobs before here and I was very pleased to get King Offa, it was actually the one I wanted probably more than any because having been at Merrywhite I would certainly not have wanted to go back to Merrywhite but it was like coming back to the area and it was also the most convenient. It was also the first job I ever had that actually had some financial reward which actually is very important with what is expected now and the whole attitude that was introduced in the 80 and 90's in terms of market forces and so on. It was actually quite important. So it was actually the first time I had a little bit more money because moving out to a country school you've got a lot more expenses.

The other great strain and stress I had in a small country school was the Governors who were very involved in school life and would regularly be in school and regularly questioning what was happening all the time and were quite difficult to handle in governing body meetings. It was difficult to make them understand the pressures of the job it was difficult to make some of them understand the salary levels that teachers are paid at, which I don't find in this school at all and they certainly were very critical friends if you put it like that on occasions, one or two members and they also would not acknowledge quite reasonable requests like holding governing body meetings fairly early in the evening. [second mention] I don't think governing body meetings going on for several hours until the eleven or twelve o'clock mark are conducive to good decisions by governing bodies, or a good work output from anybody involved in the governing body meeting the next morning so that was very difficult. So I learnt all sorts at Cross Gate. And made all sorts of decisions, you know made certain decisions about what I wanted to apply here, you know like Governing body meetings are very short and sharp as are staff meetings I hope. What I was encouraged about here was in fact a lot of things to do with for example with the current workforce reform act were all in practice here in a very professional run school in lots of ways. It was actually quite a long way ahead of its time and big city schools like this with a certain catchment have certain reputations and King Offa has always had a reputation for being a difficult school but in many ways it is not, yes we have difficult families and difficult children but it has a superb governing body and has always had a superb teaching staff and has had a lot of administrative back up and very professional personnel and staffing practices that are now only been acknowledged really on a national level – not King Offa being acknowledged – but as good practice on a national level which is where workforce reform, up until PPA time, has been very easy here at King Offa which means there is less stress here then I would imagine there has been in many other schools. Then of course at King Offa, a big school, impossible to know every pupil's name very different kettle of fish, lots to do lots that the LEA wanted me to do in terms of looking at special needs practice in the school looking at results in the school and really pushing the school forward and I think to a certain extent I've pushed the school forward as far as I'm going to now, it does need – this is why I am so pleased – I think the next steps,

amalgamating the schools and the building of a new school, the excellence and enjoyment agenda, I think actually I've got a lot to contribute in that which I hope we're going to start on in the next year will push these children through the glass ceiling that we've hit now as far as pure numbers results are concerned. The big achievements at this school are to do with attitude and behaviour. I think basically it's a very happy school, it was a happy school when I came but with very, um, there has been ups and downs with staff I think all schools go through that and that's one of the strains and stresses that heads get the golden periods of time and I think before I came the school had had a golden period I think after I came there were lots of changes and so on and I think we are in another very happy period at the moment in fact you know which I find very satisfying because I think the staff are settled the children are settled the results are on the up and are good I feel quite relaxed about the school and some of that is to do with all the things we've introduced to do with curriculum and discipline and attendance and everything else. A lot of it's to do with falling pupil numbers which is a strain in itself managing it and that sort of thing but it's a blessing in terms of its more conducive to children – these children need space and they need people to know them and now we do know them much better, so, there I've lost track now that must be fifteen minutes. There are all sorts of things there. Oh, but, I mean, the biggest change since I've been at King Offa is when basically through trying to keep too many balls spinning at once in 2000 when I had, what, four weeks off work and then a term of part time back in school because basically of a nervous breakdown caused by stress, the majority of which was work, not all but the majority of which was work related and that is to do with not being good at multi-tasking as it is now called and it's coping with multi tasking is the biggest, I think, the biggest challenge that headteachers have deciding what's important and what's urgent and maintaining the balance between those things and I didn't do that, and I do now and I don't have any troubles now, I'm even off the medication and have been for some months now because I will do what I can do and then I'll say no, I'm not doing any more and that's it, and that won't do any more because there's nothing more important, as you discover when you think you're going round the bend, there is nothing more important than keeping on an even keel, and I find in the time I do have I think much more clearly and I'm much more content with things than I was then. So that was a huge watershed in my headship but its not what is needed in the new school now because who ever comes into this situation has got a huge, huge job and its going to be someone with more capacity to work than I've got now to really push this school forward.

DW It needs someone to be in their thirties?

Annette Yes, yes it is it's a young man or woman's job, so yes, no more than forty this one, no more than forty ought to be put on the job spec or whatever (laughs) although that's probably ageist there's a lot to be said for that.

DW Right, lets get on to our three specific areas. Having gone through the last twenty years...

Annette Potted anecdotes

DW ... I'd look to look at three times, one pre ERA and the system that went with it

Annette That's pre 88

DW Pre 88 but how far pre 88 is up to you; lets say pre national curriculum, one very up to date and one somewhere in the middle which has special meaning for you because of tensions

that occurred or the fact that there were no tensions occurring or just somewhere in the middle that you really need to bring out. So what might those points be.

Annette Pre 88, in a senior management position we're talking about now

DW Yes

Annette Pre 88 I would have said that the most satisfying was the year I spent as acting head at Merrywhite was an extremely satisfying year because it was the year when I tested if I could do the job of being head which was nice. It was also frustrating in terms of you couldn't make fundamental change because it wouldn't be fair. What I enjoyed about the year was that I actually was given a free hand, there wasn't big brother looking over my shoulder. In other words the seconded head did give me a free hand, obviously I kept him informed of what was going on but he really gave me free rein to do what I wanted which meant that I could address things which I perceived as weaknesses of the school, the first being the discipline structure of the school which we actually, in terms of what we've achieved here at King Offa, did not address in a fundamental way. My idea of that stage of addressing, let's say discipline problems at a school was achieving consistency which is hugely important, making staff realise there was support for them, they felt very isolated before. You know, organisational changes like an extra body in the playground so people didn't feel I slept on duty and that's important. But we didn't make the fundamental changes that we've made here at King Offa to do with assertive discipline and negotiated rules and paired teachers and have a general ethos in the school that leads to good behaviour and attitude. I didn't do that, but that's the stage I was at then and it did achieve a lot with people who were very happy because of that and it was also very satisfying because a lot of the cross curricular work that started, that we were implementing in the school so we had lots of events in the school. It was a happy time with a settled staff and a creative staff, obviously a staff that I hadn't created, that Tony had created but there were two or three people there that went on to be Inspectors and so on, not locally but in other parts of the country, very creative people who I found very difficult at the start when I was deputy because they changed all the time and quite rightly made me think more deeply than I had before. You wouldn't approve but I think I told you before that we had, we did things like the second world war, we created London and we set fire to London of large cardboard boxes, you know, a whole street of houses were set light to literally in the playground you know, and a big bonfire with the siren going and everything. The children never forgot it and it was those events we had that I look back on and it was a really good time.

DW What would you say that the school system was like at that time? You said it was a fairly rigid system so far as historical rules were concerned.

Annette In terms of curriculum?

DW Well, if you look at the system in terms of the triangle and the bits on it what was the school system like then? The rules were fairly rigid, the community the stakeholders, how supportive were the governors, the parents?

Annette Now I have to say the Governors there were supportive, they were not very questioning which is why it was such a shock going to Cross Gate [third mention] in fact, em, they were probably the least involved, they were supportive but not very involved in the school. It was really in the days when the Councillors ruled the roost on the Governing body so they were not that involved. Parents were, they were invited a lot. I think it's

actually a tradition at Merrywhite more than King Offa I have to say and more a strength at Merrywhite, and still is, that the community is involved directly in the school more. They were always very involved in class assemblies, there were quite a lot of parents there who would come in and help with reading; they seemed more prepared to do it and I think it's a strength of a primary school rather than a junior school, which is why I think it will hopefully be addressed here when the two schools merge.

DW And the LEA as part of the system, because that was pre-education reform act and pre diminution of LEA powers.

Annette Yes, well the LEA ruled the roost. If you wanted anything you had to go cap in hand to the LEA, if you wanted any extra resources, any extra anything! Its difficult actually to remember what a different world it was you know, anything to do with employing people or responsibilities the governors really did not have the power they do now, since, em, the LEA were omnipotent if you wanted an extra teacher you had to make a case to the LEA, if pupils numbers went up or down it didn't really affect you in the same way as it does now, it was just a completely different ball game. As I say the staff were absolutely – there were a lot of very good ideas on the staff and a lot of people with unfashionable rules at the time who became fashionable. For example the year we are talking about there, we are talking about very different reading strategies were being promulgated you know going away from phonics and so on and I can remember getting a lecture from our reception class teacher before I went to Cross Gate because that was a big issue at Cross Gate, about introducing new fashionable reading strategies at the time. They said “don't! certainly the children at Merrywhite need a phonic approach and so on don't go away from that you need an element of that in your teaching” and of course that has been built into the Literacy strategy now.

At that time of course LEA advisors who were all powerful at the time were very much pushing and then completely changed their mind which I found very interesting actually. Why did they change their minds? Presumably they were forced to, they were going along with the fashion the same as everybody else. So it was interesting but the LEA ruled the roost, and you did what the LEA said and you rarely saw anybody from the LEA in school, not that you do now (laughs) there was a time when that actually changed, during the Cross Gate era when the LEA were in school a lot more and doing – they set up the LEA review system at the time but that was after the reform act.

DW You said that the Head was in charge...

Annette Very much in charge, he would delegate but you did as you were told.

DWbut you preferred a collegiate approach, so how did the division of labour in the school change during that year that you were acting head?

Annette Oh a great deal, from the very first staff meeting. The first staff meeting I had was the usual get-the-year-started but it actually revolved around discipline and I wanted an open discussion on it and from that discussion we decided what was appropriate for the school. What was allowable and what wasn't allowable and what support staff could expect and what my attitude would be because they weren't quite sure, there didn't seem to be consistency from the staff and so we got the whole thing sorted. So that's what I mean by a collegiate approach, we had thorough discussions and we would come to a conclusion at the end of it, it doesn't mean to say that I'm going to take everybody's views and synthesise them and produce something because I think you need more leadership than that.

DW Right, let's get down to probably what's the most important part. What was the object of your approach during that year? What were you focusing on what was driving your work as a headteacher that year?

Annette What was driving my approach as headteacher? Um, I actually wanted to have a school that I wanted to come to work in actually that was my mission and that everybody else wanted to come to because they felt that the school was run for um well. The headteacher was very much child centred don't get me wrong, the school was there for the children, and that's quite right too because that's why a school is there, that is the whole purpose of its existence. Now that is fine, that's exactly why the school is there, but the development of the children is done through the teaching staff and the teaching staff were never quite sure where they fitted into this equation, so there was – um, um, if it came to disciplinary matters for example, if there was a complaint from a parent, or from a child, then staff would always feel that the child's side was taken rather than theirs, inappropriately. Now I don't always subscribe to that, I am always here for the children and I'm always looking at incidents as they arise, but I always support my staff because I think the most difficult times I had at school is when I feel as a senior member of staff, it's always been when I've felt that colleagues aren't with me. That is the most difficult and stressful thing in the whole of teaching, in senior management, far more than if children are being difficult or parents are being difficult, staff being difficult, and sometimes staff I would expect not to be difficult being difficult is the most difficult thing to handle, because you know the school will not run properly in that situation, it will not function and the children will not get what they are entitled to and should expect, which is the best; especially these children here. So my object in that year was to do the best I could for the children and to achieve the best for the children by getting balance and getting rigour and by developing a cross curricular approach to it and as I say giving – developing attitudes and values from all the stakeholders in the school, all of them, not just the children.

DW So it was to have a staff who wanted to come to school which meant that you got the best for the children. I know all children should have the best but for those particularly children, why did you want the best for them in particular?

Annette Because those children, like the children who come to this school, don't have the best in their lives because they lead such haphazard disorganised lives, they do not have families to support them on many occasions. Most of it is not cruelty it is just emotional neglect. A lot of them have material things but not all. Some are very deprived materially here so they get a double whammy but it is basically white middle class neglect and apathy and the only way to make a difference to those children's lives is to give them the best in terms of what the place looks like when they come to school and the attitude of the people they meet when they come through the door, the consistency, the opportunities they are given to develop emotionally intellectually, that's what my primary school is all about. It was at Merrywhite, it never changes, that's what I went into teaching to do, having drifted into it to start with I have to say as I think a lot of people do at the beginning there are not that many people – it's interesting actually the people I knew who were actually dedicated teachers at age 19 or whatever it was at college. I don't know any of them who are still teaching and the ones who've actually developed a career over the best part of 40 years... [interruption by secretary]

DW If we look at now first, as the difficult one is choosing somewhere in the middle and we'll leave that till last as everything feeds into that. So what is the difference between the system now and the system as it was then, pre ERA? The basic differences.

Annette The basic difference is prescription and accountability I think. Obviously we have a national curriculum to follow and programmes of study that have to be delivered and we are accountable for the delivery of those which is tested and inspected and that was not the case before. Mercia had a testing system where you did CAT tests and so on, everybody did CAT tests and that was an introduction actually while I was at Merrywhite and that was hugely controversial at the time – if only we could go back to that it would be delightful (laughs) it would be very simple. They are the main differences and independence the role of the LEA has diminished hugely really, apart from having to come in and sample schools and so on they are very much in the background. I mean you never see anybody in this school, they only come if you ask them to come and they come once a year to sort out targets, you can ask them for an input if you want it. They are really there to monitor and evaluate, they are supposed to provide you with vision which I don't find this LEA does very much at all. Yes, they are the main differences I think.

DW How about the DfES?

Annette Well, the DfES, they have risen, they have come to the fore of course as the LEA has receded and a lot of that is to do with the ability to communicate information quickly. Its basically the computer that has enabled them to have a place in every school because they can require information and get information quickly, compare the information between schools and then they can directly influence what schools do because they can do it financially by directing grants into schools – more and more, I would think its not long before money comes direct to schools not through LEAs and the LEA would be there – well, how much monitoring they will do I do not know but they will be there to provide special needs, school transport and those sort of things and not much more the ways its going at the moment, and the school will become far more autonomous, far more self evaluating than ever they have been before and the DfES through Ofsted will make sure that is being done rigorously. Some of those things are good and some of them aren't, I mean the big difference is now that we control our own budget and that is hugely, a huge advance. I mean, at the time I resisted it, I think the teaching profession could honestly say this was not our job and I think that's probably still right to a certain extent but it does mean that schools can decide their own priorities. If only a little more assistance had been provided to make sure that teachers did not have to administer it and spend time doing budgets and so on and teachers and headteachers and governors could decide priorities and this is how we want to allocate our budget and so on and somebody else does it and the teacher evaluates, that's what should happen. So many headteachers dip in but we are lucky at this school we've got the size and the system where I don't have to spend too much time doing that but most schools don't still. I don't see that being in the workforce reforms for headteachers, where do I see in the workforce reforms that headteachers should not be handling the budget, because they shouldn't be really.

DW You've hit upon a point there which isn't in my questions but I'm going to ask it anyway, and that is, the workforce reforms are to make things easier for teachers and a lot of these things that have been brought in have been directed at guidance for teachers, making things easier for teachers, but has that decreased the headteachers workload?

Annette Well, not initially, I mean, it has added enormously to the stresses and strains of this year in school. As I said it hasn't been a strain and stress here because I inherited a system that had put a lot of workforce reforms in place and did aim at valuing all staff not just teaching staff because I think that's important, and I've just built on that, um, sometimes um, like putting a hot water boiler in the staffroom so people can get their tea

and coffee quickly at break without spending time boiling a kettle or being no hot water left or whatever. Those sort of things are important and valuing staff and paying staff appropriately, you know, staff are paid during holidays, not on term time only contracts, this sort of thing, we've always done that, we've always done everything we can for staff to provide sympathetic management, um, but as far as the next step in workforce reform, things like providing 10% time, that has meant an enormous amount of soul searching, of working on the budget this year to make sure we have some funds available to put measures in place because philosophically still think that classes should be taught by teachers and so next year we are actually developing a system where we are basically teacher driven without having to resort to higher level teaching assistants and that to me actually is a step backwards. I can remember going on strike when I was a young teacher about having qualified teachers only in front of children and now we are going back on that. I am afraid that is the way that it is going to be and I cannot see any way round that because which ever government comes to power on May 5th I think its going to go through.

DW How about the system now as compared with the system before. Obviously you are in a different school, the historical rules are different, but you are still working towards an object; an object is driving you scheme forward, is it the same object now as it was pre ERA?

Annette Yes, I think, I think I have thought through things a lot deeper than I did before ERA. All the developments that have taken place in education have forced me to do that and I've always glibly said that we are in education to produce educated people and it's a question of defining then what an educated person is and my definition of an educated person has probably shifted a bit. Actually philosophically I think that life is all about fulfilment and at the end of day it doesn't really matter much, in traditional terms, how educated a person is providing they are fulfilled and not frustrated with their life. I know there's all the things about what the country needs in terms of skills and everything else that education has to work towards but I always think that providing self-fulfilment and a decent set of values for people is actually the top priority. Having said that I think that the thought that went into the National curriculum and the coming of – because we haven't talked about the literacy and numeracy hours and the strains and stresses that caused – these sort of things because that's after national curriculum – that they have actually done a great deal of good because I think they've brought a rigour and accountability in the system that wasn't there before and I think my perceptions of what a child can achieve academically at the primary stage have expanded, I think they can do more than I thought they could so my expectations would be far higher. Having said that, the material we receive in schools, speaking in a factory way, the quality of that material is probably decreasing. Having said that, the boundaries are increasing what it is possible to do, it depends upon the level that the children are coming in at – how far along that spectrum you can go.

DW But your actual object, is that focussed on the child, is it focussed on the community is it focused on the national curriculum, on Ofsted?

Annette No it is focused on the child.

DW It's still on the child?

Annette Yes absolutely, all those other things are there to serve to child and the trouble is that all these people have got different agendas about what the child needs and what the country needs and everything else, and balanced; you know education is for life and um if

you can produce young adults who are balanced who have got, who can think and are fulfilled in what they are doing then that's what I aim to do.

DW How about this time in the middle then some where between ERA and now? Something that sticks out in your memory, some particular time.

Annette Its funny that – can I just step back for a minute because, you know, we're talking about these three periods, I always feel, I feel very privileged about the time that I grew up because I think that our generation is actually the luckiest generation that's ever lived. I don't envy people younger than us and I don't actually envy people who are older than us. Maybe its something that every generation feels like that that they've had the best but I think we had the best because – well I think I had the best because I grew up in a secure happy home, um I grew up in the middle of bomb sites and everything else but I grew up with freedom, I could go out and do what I wanted I could play – I can remember my own education, with the sun shining going on nature walks really that's my primary education and my first day at school and things I can remember that, but I was happy. I enjoyed my education I enjoyed the people I was with and I liked the teachers and everything else, I didn't enjoy grammar school but I've always had this rosy glow about primary, life and what my family life was like at that time and I want these young people to experience that. That's why, I mean we've just dealt with a fight now between those two boys, I never had feelings that got to that state and I always had the control, if I did have those feelings, and I want those boys to genuinely know that we are here for them and those rough types that have just knocked nine bells out of each other, we're here for them to do their best and I think they genuinely feel that and I feel that's why I am so proud of this school. We've got children like that who genuinely know that the adults in this school are here for them and will do their best, whatever happens, whatever they do they will always get another chance and we will always be there for them, whatever's happening out in the world we will do our best here in the school, and that's all we can influence directly really, although obviously we've got a wider agenda in the community that we can directly influence here and that's what this school is all about and that's the most important thing of anything for these children because they will do nothing. That's what my worry is about the future, with teaching and learning points and management structures and the way schools are being asked to go in the future is that the pastoral side of it is going to be neglected and if that happens that is a huge, huge backwards step for the school if the pastoral side of the school gets devalued because of the changing management structure and I think it's a grave, grave danger at the moment.

DW I think that's a backward step in any school, but particularly those where children are under-privileged to start with. Now we were just going on to a time between ERA and now, which particularly bears upon your memory.

Annette Between ERA and now, so we're talking about – um, I've gone blank.

DW Well, you mentioned the introduction of literacy and numeracy as a time of great tension, so it could be then, but...

Annette Well, its actually inspection, the introduction of Ofsted. I think that has probably had the biggest effect on teachers workload, teachers stress, headteachers stress and so on because of the way the system was introduced. Again, not thought through, as national curriculum wasn't thought through and its going back to something that is acceptable and its actually going back, in a way to the old LEA system where they could drop in and say "Oh we've come to spend a day with you" or whatever and I know there is far more rigour

about it but again its coming full circle where that's what used to happen. But the whole introduction of the Ofsted process and the way that the first teams came into school and completely wiped the floor with people, and the public accountability and the publishing of that, um I can't think of any other profession that is inspected in the same way as teaching, which puzzles me why teaching is singled out in this way, health is going the same way, um yes, um, I suppose so but I don't think that individuals in institutions are identified in the same way and I don't, I mean a school like this probably identifies with something like a GP practice or something and I don't see the GP's being harangued in the press over cures of diseases or whatever it may be – its that sort of level. The amount of work in the preparation for Ofsted inspection really has an effect and in a way that's one reason why I want to leave, I don't want to go through another full Ofsted inspection, I've done three and I don't want to do a fourth.

DW Think about the school system then, let's say just pre-Ofsted, when you got the letter and you were building up to the Ofsted inspection and its in a week or two...

Annette The old system you mean.

DW Yes the old system, your first Ofsted, the one caused the greatest tension. Did that make any difference to the system and the way the system ran and how you looked at what your object was. In that short term did it affect your object?

Annette Yes hugely, because the object, from centring on what you want the children to be like, became a short term object of having a good inspection and being praised in the press and whatever. So everything long term went out of the window because it didn't matter how much money you spent out of your budget or whatever because the school had to look good and the resources had to be there and everything else so you spent money. I mean you know all these stories about where all the plants have appeared in the entrance halls of schools – everything is suddenly subsumed into having an inspection whereas the inspection should just sample what school life is like every day. It distorts what's happening in schools, but I think that the new system is designed not to distort it in the same way but then because of that they may have to realise that they will come into schools and see them as they are which could quite likely be, if its going to be school as it that the headteacher isn't there because they are away on a school trip or they won't see the lessons they want because they are not being taught then or – you know its going to be a very small sampling of what's happening.

DW You will get this small sampling. So you had this intense focus at the old Ofsted where everything got pulled into that focus and that brings me onto another point. Did you feel that at that point there was a contradiction between what you wanted for the school and the way in which – because your professional development, the person you are as a headteacher and a professional has been shaped by all the things you have done since you started teaching or even before, shaped by the people you have met by the people you have worked with and worked for, and you have this identity as a headteacher. What sort of contradictions where there between that intense focus and your identity, what you wanted to be and what you knew you were and what the Ofsted inspection was – the road that was forcing you down?

Annette The trouble with Ofsted inspections is that you find out how people perceive you and that can be a great shock because your perception of yourself and how you are perceived are two very different things and it preys on insecurities and that is why you know you find perfectly good teachers and perfectly good headteachers who are found

crying in the coal shed the day after or the day before an inspection who are actually very well thought of because they have a very different perception to everybody else of – I've lost track of what you wanted.

DW The alignment between your identity as a headteacher and for that short term goal the identity that Ofsted inspection is forcing you into, that different identity that different focus and the alignment or misalignments the contradictions in those.

Annette Because schools are all about measured steps and you do things on a time scale and so on suddenly that is all pushed into a very short time. It's the same with Ofsted, I mean, on the old system you had whatever it is three or four months notice probably more than that with some of the first ones and in those few months everything's got to be right, paperwork, in the first instance. The paperwork, all the policies and everything else and you have to go round pressurising people in a completely different way to the way you would normally. So you're saying to people you've got to do this because of Ofsted not because it's a rational measured thing to do in the school, long term, to make progress its an important thing because we've got to have a good inspection because if we don't we'll be pilloried and we'll lose children and we'll lose money and get in a downward spiral because of it. So you have to do things in this 'rabbit in a headlight' sort of way that you would never do so you talk to people in a way you'd never do normally. Having said that its probably a good thing because it actually in some ways makes you behave in a – it makes you realise that you, yourself should have been doing things – it brings you up short and makes you realise you should have been doing certain things all the time not just for Ofsted it makes you think of course, like I should have observed more lessons, or I should have – whatever it may be and that actually has a benefit – that's the benefit of inspection in that way, but the actual chasing people around and making their lives a misery and saying "I'll unlock the door on Sunday". That, it, it – I was saying about how the process has changed in the three Ofsteds I have had from being very judgemental, very – well not negative – it really just gave you a snapshot of where you were in those few days of the Ofsted inspection and that was it and you were left to pick up the pieces, um, whereas the um – that was at Cross Gate the first inspection here which I felt relaxed about, because it really did an audit of the school for me and where the school was at, it was much the same process really with very much a focus on teaching probably more than learning - the standard of teaching in the school – and it did an audit for us and gave us some ideas of what or how we should develop as a school. The last one though really was far more of a development process, far more pointers to where we should be thinking, and really led into the new inspections system and the new emphasis on school self evaluation and gave us a lot of ideas to do with, you know, things like that looking at our curriculum which was described as traditional and thinking how we could use staff expertise which really linked straight into the Primary Strategy and the ways that we should be thinking of the curriculum for the new school when the two schools amalgamate in two years time. So that's where we are at.

DW Fine. Now at those three points when you were acting head and during the Ofsteds and now, how did your objects, the objects of the systems you were working in coincide with your perceived objects – I'll rephrase that – the objects that you had, where you wanted the school to go, how did they coincide with the objects of the government initiatives at those particular points?

Annette Um, yes I think when I was acting head I always describe my object as being the child, you know, the development of the child and it still is now, but that has been hugely influenced by government directives. I mean the first school we were looking at the child

at the centre of the curriculum and either having the ripples of a sort of pool away from the child representing the curriculum or a spiral was the model in vogue at the time, and still perfectly valid, and we're coming back to, but in the middle with the introduction of national curriculum the desire to look at subjects rather than children and the development of subjects really got in the way of that sort of vision, that object, and not just me but probably the whole profession, we grasped at straws of how to deliver that and started looking at QCA schemes of work um because you needed something to have a handle on ready for your next inspection and you'd got schemes of work there. And we shouldn't have let it happen so quickly! We should have held onto, if we thought our object was right, how can we use these schemes, how can we use these national curriculum documents to help us achieve our vision and if it had been done over the course of four or five years we could probably have done that, um and that is of course where we are at now because the encouraging thing is that the push now really is to get the child back at the centre, I think, they don't actually say that directly but I think it is a chance to get back to that agenda; obviously with rigour, um, and re-introduce the creativity and the personal input or teaching staff and schools and local areas and local communities back into education.

DW Right, ok, at those three points to what extent do you consider that you were able to influence the systems within which you were working?

Annette Yes, well I mean, in the first school enormously because you could develop the curriculum as you wanted, more or less,

DW Even though you said it was a rigid system?

Annette Well, the management structure was rigid, the curriculum within that wasn't and really you had a lot of freedom to develop projects, as they were, or topics, as they were, at the time, and bring in as much English or maths or whatever into those topics as you could. So people like me who were supposed to be in charge of, you know, developing the curriculum in the school could directly influence everything that was going on in the school, in the classrooms. Although how much you could actually monitor that was very limited because you didn't get time to go and actually see what was going on in the school, you just knew what was happening in theory. You knew that some classes were doing it more than others but you weren't sure about that because the monitoring was not as it is now.

Um, in the middle then the push came from the centre, from the government, and the ring binders and everyone was desperate to know how to interpret those ring binders and grasped onto QCA and so the whole system became very rigid and regimented and not very much influenced by teachers, it was influenced by subject specialists really. Now there is far more opportunity, and we are actively being encouraged to do it with the primary strategy, to interpret those subjects in as creative a way as possible. So we are back to a cross curricular approach hopefully.

DW Which was where you were at the beginning with Plowden?

Annette Yes, but I think we've come a long way from Plowden, a long way because I think there is far more, I certainly know far more, for example, about the English language than, I mean, having been to a grammar school and done English A level and this sort of thing I learnt a lot, and am still learning from the literacy hour, and numeracy hour as well, certainly in terms of teaching methods and learning which should be going on, it's taught me an awful lot and I am sure it has staff as well. So there's been a lot of advances that can all now be put into the pot to create – it's a golden opportunity I think for schools at the

moment and this school in particular with the merger of the two schools – and everything can be thrown up in the air and come back to earth, hopefully, in a very stimulating way for these children.

DW So that's how you were able to influence, and are able to influence the system. How did the system influence your objects and actions at those times?

Annette My objects?

DW Where you wanted to take the school, how did the school system and the education system at those times, how did it influence where you wanted to go and where you were able to go?

Annette Well, the world was your oyster in 19 – at the first school um there was nothing in the way apart from LEA Inspectors now and again coming in to watch you, you could really take it as you will. But it was the reverse in the mid nineties and we're back to where we – well not back to where we were, but we are heading again into a situation where you can influence, and I encouraged influence, what was happening.

DW So in the mid nineties were you directed down a particular line or pushed or...

Annette Ah, well yes pushed because of the national curriculum, you don't have to follow national curriculum but you would be rather unwise not to follow national curriculum, was the decision that most people came to and is still correct, I would say. I wouldn't encourage anyone not to do that, they would have to have a lot of originally thinking and rigour about an alternative approach and confidence in themselves and their staff's ability not to do it, I think. Considering that most private schools now are following it and so on. I find that quite interesting you don't actually have to, I find that the most interesting thing of all, that private education has really copied state education and latched onto it.

DW But you were saying that all the text books that you get now direct you to the national curriculum anyway.

Annette Everything is linked to it yes its very difficult to actually stand out against it if you wanted to, but it is very frustrating, I mean, because of things like, you know, the periods of history you have to study and so on are not always what you consider appropriate for the particular children you've got yet the resources you can buy are very limited because its all focussed on the national curriculum areas of study, so its Aztecs whether you like it or not basically.

DW The influence upon your actions at those particular periods, was that compatible with your ambitions for yourself and the school and the community? So how did the two marry up?

Annette Um, wanting a child centred approach did not marry up at all with the mid nineties and a lot of it was very inappropriate for children at a school like King Offa where they need to develop a sense of identity with the community the area they live in, they need to do a lot of work, it would have been nice to spend much longer periods of time with things like History, geography, music art because they are forms of communication that are important to children like these here in the school and um people were so constrained by the need to get so many hours of PE done and so many hours English done that they didn't feel there was time for those things, you know, to go and walk round Mercia or whatever, you couldn't get enough maths done or whatever and that was to the detriment of the needs

of this school and the object of having a child centred curriculum as well and that is the thing we can now actually introduce back into the curriculum and have confidence, block subjects and so on to try and achieve those ends and I don't think we'll have problems with Ofsted telling us, if you don't do English, if you don't do history or something for six weeks how are they going to remember what you did? I think if you do something that is valid and creative linked to performance and expression, special events, those children won't just remember it for a test at the end of the half term or term or year they'll remember it all their lives, and that's what education is all about, its equipping your for life not for an exam at the end of key stage two. Of course we haven't mentioned those tests and so on and the part they play in influencing what schools do because they do, they affect the way that resources are directed they affect the sort of teaching that is going on where basically children are taught to the test I'm afraid it's the truth; at stages, I'm not saying right through the school but when they get to, say, this period now leading up to SATs next week those children in those rooms are being taught to pass the test and that is happening in every school in the country.

DW So the object at that particular point, the object of the system for them has changed. Their object is to get through the tests, to get the maximum number of children through the test and get a good position in the league tables.

Annette Yes, and if we're truthful about it the object is for the school, not the children and for the government to show that their policies are working and you have to do that to be able to access the resources, that's why we've got excellence in cities to get more money to spend on things like getting children into school regularly and to support problems with discipline or whatever, the whole thing is focussed towards actually achieving better levels in English and maths. That is not child centred at all, that is a central government, a purely central government agenda, it's not a school agenda its one we are compelled by law to follow.

DW So how does the misalignment between your, hoped for, wanted, child centred approach and the government centred approach affect your satisfaction with what you are doing?

Annette Well you have a sort of crude satisfaction when mark sheets appear, "oh, we've got 2% more than last year," or "oh my goodness we've got 5% less than last year" and I am anxious like anyone else adding up the fours and fives but its still revealing that when you get the sheets you look for the fours and fives before anything else. Then you start working out how children have actually progressed in the test, whatever that's showing, you know, how many level threes you've got and to look for value added and so on. But its value added in such a limited way and linked to such a narrow test its still nothing – it – its not a deep satisfaction at all. It's a satisfaction that I can actually report to the governing body, we have achieved this and we've got the best results in South Mercia aren't we doing well. Which probably means we are probably drilling them better than anyone else, mainly or maybe we are using our booster money more effectively or we've got staff who are a bit better at whatever, I don't know what it actually shows. Having said that well probably do worse than anyone else this year, but its not showing if we are doing better for children in any significant ways its not measuring that, its not measuring whether they are happy its not measuring whether they'll grow up as healthier more educated adults who've got compassion and a concern for others and who've got skills that can lead them into the workplace and I don't think its particularly constructive for secondary schools because actually, when it comes down to it, they are still not interested in the national curriculum results because they don't see that they give a true reflection of the children they receive, that's why they insist on doing a whole batch of testing that's nothing to do

with national curriculum, because they think it gives a more accurate result so um, I'm not quite sure what it is achieving apart from showing that government is concerned with education, education, education and this is the measurement to show that the money we are putting in is having an effect.

DW Ok, now, the next question overall would you consider yourself a resister or complier with government initiatives?

Annette Well, I'd like to be a resister, I'd like to be a resister at the moment, being old and crabby but in actual fact the reforms that are going through at the moment in the primary strategy I am all in support of because I think its going to produce a far more satisfactory education for the pupils of King Offa School, basically um, and I mean I am a resister about things like tests and so on as you've just heard because I don't think they have anything to do with child centred education at all and they don't even actually do what they are supposed to do which is give you an indication of how well a child is doing. Um, I should have been a resister when I was in my first headship which is when all these reports and national curriculum came in but I wasn't along with the vast majority of the primary profession, secondary schools did resist and because of that the changes to their curriculum at that stage were far slower and far less and we should have stood up and said "yes we need, probably, a national curriculum but it needs to be phased in with proper staff developments, phased in, in a way that" – well I don't think you were allowed to use the words child centred in those days it was a dirty word in early Tory circles because of the connotations it has with sort of nothingness going on in schools and children being given free rein to do what they want, which is not my idea of child centred education at all. Um, but um, so, yes, I'm a - I'd like to be a resister but I'm not, (laughs) is the answer to that.

DW What features of the school systems worked for or against your compliance at those particular points? Were there things in the school system which, when you were trying to comply with the wishes of the government, were trying to stop you or where there things, when you said I'd rather resist tests, were there things in the system which were forcing you to do it?

Annette Well, I mean, the law for a start, a fairly basic thing, I don't break the law and I don't encourage anyone to do it, so I go along with it. The big change has been accountability, I think, in schools and inspection is one part of that, um, accountability, and I think its actually a computer age, which is why such huge amounts of money have been put into computer systems, because we are now -the centre control schools now in a way that they could never do before; and it really started with local management of schools and being able to, you know, devolving budgets to schools which was a good thing and a lot of IT was brought in to support that, gradually, and its fed on that so that now, you know, there are all sorts of returns that are required over the net that central government and the inspection system has a whole raft of means that they can measure what schools are doing. So um, the fact that schools are gradually become more accountable has made it more and more difficult in some ways to resist, because they've got you! In terms of facts and figures, but facts and figures are just one small part of school.

DW Looking at accountability and what you have to do, and what you want to do what contradictions and conflicts emerge there and how do they impact upon how you want to move the school forward or the community forward?

Annette Um, don't know I'm lost on that one. Tell me again.

DW So, you're talking about being accountable and because you are accountable there are things you have to do. How does that contradict what you want to do or conflict with what you *want* to do?

Annette Well more and more time I spend sitting in here having to do things that are required, instantly! For a start, whether its attendance returns or whatever statistics are needed or those sort of things which get in the way of what school is all about and basically – for example in the new school the head's going to have sit down and think very carefully about the structure and management structure of the school and what they want their role to be and they can create what they want. I would have thought that that is going to be a serious issue. Um, having to deliver test results is a huge stress on staff and on me and gets in the way of developing the curriculum creatively, it undoubtedly does with the top children and what you have to do, you have to plug on with the basic skills and then you have to have interludes of creative activity. I am thinking of the last year in primary school. The actual long term solution is for the majority of the children's time in school to be having a far more creative approach which will actually fundamentally raise standards in English and maths in a way that you can't do by teaching to the test.

DW So, particularly, the tests are conflicting with what you really want, they are having a negative impact on it?

Annette In the short term yes, but I think that the answer is to get away from putting fixes in place through school that are going to raise standards, of putting boosters in, I think you're still going to have to do that, and certainly for individual children you are going to need it and so on, but the bulk of the time the only way to raise standards is going to be to look creatively at the whole curriculum and raise standards in a cross curricular way, so that the frustration of teachers saying, well, we did that last year and the year before and they still don't remember it – hopefully they will remember it because of the way, the shift in the way that its being done.

DW So really its moving more or less back to what it was when we were at school which is creative, creative, creative, creative and then 11+, big push and then creative, creative again.

Annette Hmm, but hopefully there won't need to be so much of a big push. This seems to be, from the examples that we are told about and can read about in the primary strategy document and so on that schools that have this creative approach seem to get the results, even in deprived areas, they get results without the need for so much of the push towards exams because it should be going back – I can remember when national curriculum tests first came in which was when I was at Cross Gate we just did them and didn't do any preparation whatsoever, they just came in one day and did the tests, and that was it, no preparation, never seen a paper liked it before, they just did it, and my attitude was it will show what they are actually capable of. Now that is how tests should be done, but tests don't work like that, I mean, if you go to university and don't work towards the test you are going to sit at the end of your year, you're pretty stupid really because you're not going to get the best results, um and so you will sort of peak at that day to get your 2:1 or whatever it may be and you'll never probably approach that again and you'll forget most of the stuff that you learnt for it and so on, and that's surely the same with children. But education is actually about genuinely internalising concepts knowledge and attitudes and values, which is the child centred approach, its not about – this is where the difference is.

DW Do you consider that in any of the things that have happened you may have been a pre-empter?

Annette Yes, yes the school, many things but certainly in terms of child protection at this school, pastoral care at this school, workforce reform and genuine valuing of all staff, teaching and otherwise I think that this school has been ahead of the pack for a long time, that started from before I came, its always been the case here and we've just continued with the process. Also things like involving the wider community which of course is the latest music initiative, having artists come into school, because trying to – with children in this school who have such a limited code of language and often can't communicate in words but can do through sport and music and that sort of thing – and this school has always tried to do that. I think there is going to be a much bigger push though now towards developing this because of the primary strategy and workforce reform and school amalgamation and there's probably something else that I don't know (laughs).

DW So overall how have the decisions that you have had to make and the way you've been pushed into some decisions and the government initiatives, affected your stress level?

Annette Um, well ok, I had a breakdown in 2000 which was more or less entirely caused by work and really it was a work life balance thing at that time because it really came from a long period of working hugely long hours at Cross Gate, I worked much longer hours at Cross Gate than ever I did at King Offa I have to say, um, ridiculous hours which some heads still work, you know, you are working until 11 or 12 o'clock at night just at the school let alone going home and doing it and then going home when you've worked until that time, you can't sleep, so you sit up half the night watching obscure black and white films to try and relax then you'd go to sleep for a couple of hours. And then coming into a new headship with all the strains and stresses of that and so on, and inspection, and everything else, so that was my reaction to it. So since then I have had a very different outlook because you suddenly realise that nothing is worth it, when you do actually have genuine mental illness for a while you realise that nothing – its like when you realise that when somebody dies you realise that its probably the most important thing, life – and you realise that when that happens there is nothing worse than losing our marbles and the only way to change it is to change your working practices and I think its partly to do – whether it's a male thing to do with multi tasking and so on because it is so much part of a headship is multi tasking – and I find that quite difficult so I have to limit the tasks that I do because if I don't I become like a headless chicken after a while, if too many issues are coming my way, so I say no I'm not doing that, or that's going to be tomorrow or whatever and I stop work at that time and that is it! [Comparison of two schools]

DW How did you deal with the stress at that point? How was it overcome?

Annette It was overcome by having a supportive school it was a hugely rewarding experience because I realised that the school was supporting me and would support other people in the same situation, which it does, we have a network of support in the school, I mean how many schools have a teacher who is responsible for other teachers pastoral care, for example? Not many, in primary schools I would say, it might be vaguely part of the head's job or something but its not there, and support staff have the same counselling available and so on. So that was a major factor that made it very easy.








DW And finally, coming down to Troman and Woods and their ways of dealing with stress; which of those would you consider to be the most effective way of dealing with stress, or is there another more effective way?

Annette It depends what stage of your career you are at, basically if you are somebody who needs to go places because you are committed in terms of teaching then you've got to look at self development and it might be re-locating or re-routing or whatever as it says there at that point. Personally I am at the down shifting stage now, I am retreating into down shifting, or down shifting in retreating at the moment I think which is actually very relaxing and can actually make you think about things in a far more reflective way than you have done for a long time because you feel out of the sort of frantic hurly-burly of needing to improve and get places and so on and its actually very calming.

DW Does that, however, cause an adrenalin drop which might be bad for health?

Annette Well it could be, it could be but any day in school is quite full enough of adrenalin, for many reasons (laughs) more I don't want!

14788 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Barbara (em2545a)

DW What I'm doing is I'm looking at the government initiatives since the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Barbara There have been plenty of them.

DW - Yes a lot! And I'm looking at how that's changed the, school as a system, and that's what that triangle is -that's the school system and all the things that interact.

There's just a few things I need to go through first:

- I can't pay you anything - it's a pity but I am a poor student really
- And another important thing is that there will be no names in my thesis everything is completely confidential. I am interviewing eight heads and each one will be denoted by a series of three letters which mean something to me and something to my supervisor but nobody else.
- Also, since than dealing with heads who may have suffered from the effects of stress I'm expecting that if I touch a raw nerve all the interview becomes difficult in any way they will have the right, and the sense to say " I would rather not continue with this line of questioning " so that no further stress is caused.

What I want to look at his headteachers' professional histories since 1988 but I want to pick out three particular points - I want to pick out just prior to the Education Reform Act, what was the school like then or, what was it like in-school then? Now? And any point in the middle which has some major significance for you particularly; so, whether it's the arrival of all those folders immediately after the Act or any point which to have found particularly stressful or where something else has impinged such as where you have changed your job -some point at which you can say the system was different.

I need to ask you a few basic questions to start:

How many years had he been head?

Barbara I've been a head twelve years at this present school, eight years at my first school, that's twenty, and six years at a primary school in Birmingham -so that twenty-six years, well before the Education Reform Act. Probably long enough for anybody (laughing).

DW That's answered my second question as well since it was to be, " at how many schools have you been a head? "

There are a couple of things I need to show you, one is that; it's called 'adaptive strategies' - you can hang on to that - it's the courses that some people take in order to try and reduce the stress when they are trapped in a system that they don't like particularly – the obvious one is the first one, which is to retire...

Barbara Yes that's a familiar one.

DW ...but there are other things like some people get out into a similar job as an adviser or inspector, some people go into publishing. They are just the fancy names that are given to them. The other thing is this – the Activity Triangle – this is what I am actually using to try and break down the school systems at each point. One of the big things I am trying to do – activity theory comes out of a very socially based scheme and life histories come out of very individually based schemes, so you have these two theories, which I am using, from very different paradigms and part of my PhD is to see how well they work together. In each case the head is the subject, the instruments are anything you may use to achieve your object and the object is almost your aim, but it is a bit deeper than that. So the instruments might be language, the curriculum, anything you might use within the school to achieve your object. The rules aren't the school rules, they are historical rules, is the school a tight system? Has it always been a tight system? Is it a flexible system?

Barbara So it could be that one of the instruments could be that all of my headships have been in very deprived areas and there is a commitment to the whole child irrespective of government initiatives but using them where, professionally we deem them appropriate and using the professional development and professional expertise of staff to support and promote that.

DW That would be an instrument for achieving your object. The community is the entire community, so we are talking about the children, parents, staff; they are all part of the community...

Barbara And using agencies outside that which would support that basic principle.

DW ...and we are going as far as the DfES being a part of your community, because they have an effect on your system.

Barbara Via the letterbox – or sometimes through the front door! (laughing).

DW The division of labour, I think, is fairly obvious – some heads like to work alone while others use very team-based systems and that's what the division of labour is...

Barbara It's tricky trying to work alone in a school – and worryingly disastrous – but I could mention a few people who have tried. I think that would have been more in the past than now.

DW I think that is something that might come out of the longitudinal facet of this research, perhaps in 1988 there will have been more of those and there are a lot less now.

Barbara Yes, they wouldn't survive now.

DW The outcomes are what happens to the children, the school, the community, the parents or whichever the object is directed towards. The object is what actually drives the whole system – and this is where I will probably get a bit irritating because I will keep asking, 'why?' because what I am looking for is – if I ask you what the object of a system pre-the 1988 ERA is, you might have said the object was to get the children to learn their nouns in a particular lesson, and if I asked, 'why?' you might have given the answer, 'because I want them to speak well and I want them to be able to write stories well,' – 'why?' what I'm looking for is the base, or root, object – the very lowest denominator – after the ERA it might be, 'I want them to learn their nouns,' 'why?' 'because they need to know their nouns,' 'why?' because they have got their SATs to do,' 'why?'...

Barbara and if they don't they will get poor results and foul up your good score.

DW ...because of the league tables and that may be the root object.

Barbara It's never been mine but that conflicts with some people's ideas.

DW What I'm looking for is that deepest object – what drives the system. So that's where I'm coming from and what I'm doing.

My methods will be interview/chat about it – the entire interview, which will probably be about two hours, will take the same form, it will be a chat – I will ask you some questions for discussion and if I touch a raw nerve you can, of course, just say, 'I'm not going to tell you' since I do want to get down into how much stress it's caused people and I know that with some people more than others it will touch a raw nerve and at any time my interviewees can say, 'no, change the subject'.

One thing I will want to look at in particular is the identity you have built for yourself as a headteacher. So, going through your career there have been certain parts which have built your identity as a headteacher and if there is anything which has really affected it then I want to know that, because how the government initiatives affect you will have a lot to do with you as an individual and your professional identity.

Barbara Definitely

DW (presenting the Activity Triangle sheets) This starts off simply and works its way into more and more complex things and you will see that I have applied it to various systems and what people think – none of it is what I think, for example there is a point where I have said that pre-1988 the government appeared to think that the object of primary education was to be 'trendy' - that is *not* my opinion ...

Barbara No, quite! (laughing)

DW ...but an example of how people may look at the triangle and how it works.
So, that's where I'm coming from and I would be more than pleased to get as much help as possible.

Barbara Great, that seems pretty good. Yes, we'll do it, it sounds good fun.

DW What I will do in the end is try to pull everything together and say, people have *this* kind of background will experience *these* kinds of effects and people with that kind of background will have experienced *those* effects, but I cannot give you a clearer example as it might colour what you say. My approach will be to identify three categories, there are compliers ...

Barbara Yes, 'whatever comes it's our job to do it – we must!'

DW There are resisters ...

Barbara No! (laughing) I can't believe that.

DW ... and obviously some people will have complied with some things and said of others 'I'm not so sure about that' you are bound to get a mixture. There are also people who I have called pre-empters, people who have seen what has been coming and said 'that's going to be coming, let's try it out and then when it comes at least we will have had some experience of it.

Barbara Let's get ahead of the game and then at least we will know.

DW That's right. So I shall be looking at compliers, resisters and pre-empters and trying to see how that has affected people as well. So there it is.

Barbara Right, yes, ok, sounds good fun – so you want to fix a date for the longer interview, I'll get my diary.

Main interview with Barbara (em2545b)

DW – First I would like to remind you that everything you say is completely confidential and you will not be identified by name in any part of the research materials.

What I would like to consider is what I have called your ‘professional trajectory’ over the last twenty years, so, in the next fifteen to twenty minutes could you run through your professional trajectory since, say, nineteen eighty five?

Barbara – How many? That’s twenty years ago, isn’t it?

DW – Yes, twenty years, concentrate on the major events, things which have affected you, in particular – and on your work, and on the systems you have been working in – the schools – and the surrounding areas. They may be school based, or they may be external, and the external may be to do with the education system, for example DfES initiatives, or they may be personal ones – um, I know that, about twelve years ago, when my father died, that really affected the way I was working in school.

Barbara – Yes, yes of course, that’s a personal issue that would, obviously, seriously impact.

DW – It impinges.

Barbara – Yes.

DW – So it doesn’t really matter, it’s how you have gone through the past twenty years – the things that have affected your work and the systems you have worked in.

Barbara – Yes. Well, I think I would probably break it up into, um, sort of three bits really. The first bit is my professional development – at the three schools I was headteacher in during that period, and the kind of environments in which those schools were – and then have a look at the positive things that have come as initiatives from the government, LEA and professional development side of things and how those have impacted on the way my vision and work in schools has been in that context, and then look at, perhaps, the negative elements that are part of every persons life and have to be looked at, dealt with and balanced. Well, if we look at the – my own professional situation – 1985, you say?

DW – Yes, that was just before the ERA.

Barbara – That was coming towards the end of my first headship, at a place called St Jude’s in Birmingham, which was just about this size, about four hundred– just over four hundred pupils – um – again aged four to eleven and it was on a pretty tough Birmingham estate, and I’ve only worked in schools where there’s been pretty high levels of deprivation. That’s certainly been by choice, because my absolute determined vision for working in school and working as a teacher is to ensure that we have high expectations of children in deprived areas, and with those high expectations to actually help support pupils, parents and school develop so that pupils develop to their very highest – in the round – we’re not just talking totally academically but that is perhaps the highest priority always, that pupils will have their highest level of achievement. So from St Jude’s I moved to a school in the north called King Edwards, and in some senses it was a mistake because although it was a big school and in a sense it was a promotion because there were five hundred pupils there – um – being a first school the pupils left at the age of nine, and suddenly I found myself, for those six years, missing the ten and eleven year-olds who you could see them at the age nine they were just really ready to motor and really move on with their - their English and their maths and other areas and you could feel – whoosh – they’d gone. Yes and they went to a middle school system that – no-one is going to say that the middle school system failed them, of course not, but it was disappointing to see them leave at that age – it was – so professionally, in a sense, it was a mistake and then that made me more determined to do a good job of work there and I must have taught, at that time, for at least half of the curriculum time and when I saw a job come up in Mercia at Eastfield, and I knew the background to the school I thought, “I’m *really* going for that job, and I was very lucky and was appointed.

This is, now, coming up to twelve years I've been here, so that's a sort of potted history of jobs. At King Edwards First School there were elements of deprivation but it was nothing like the deprivation we experience here at Eastfield and nothing like the deprivation in other schools I've worked in. So I wasn't getting that level of professional – you know – buzz that I get here and in other places, yes.

So that's the way it's gone and while I was at King Edwards – um – you would as, everybody would in those days, your staffing was determined purely by pupil numbers and the only control of finance you had, really was over the allowance you had to buy resources. Everything else came via the LEA and was dealt with so it released huge amounts of time for me to be involved with the curriculum and I love developing literacy, I love developing pupils' opportunity to debate and to talk and to have ideas, and development in areas of art and craft, all those things were very much things I enjoyed working with pupils for and when financial budgets arrived, and delegation of that – at first it was quite a shock and I thought, "we could well do without this!" but the way the LEA handled it, by letting us appreciate bit by bit what was involved made it fairly painless, although it was consuming more time, and within eighteen months / two years of delegation of budgets I realised the power that they actually gave to schools; and that power was the opportunity of choice, of really putting in resources where professionally – um – one could really see that they were needed whereas an LEA approach to financing schools can really miss the target and the idea that if you are one pupil less you don't qualify for a teacher but if somebody joins your school – ooh! Yes a whole teacher! just made a nonsense of the way resourcing could work in it's worst instance. So to have control of the budget was a very big step forward – very big step forward, and gradually as time has gone on it has enabled schools to really plan their staffing, their resourcing, and providing the resources have been substantial enough – that's ok.

My first, when I was first appointed to Eastfield, which was twelve years ago, for the first couple of years – um – it was a Conservative government, and I don't want to be political in this but there is a reality behind this, for those first two years we had a one and a half percent cut in our school budget each year and that was quite a blow, because this was a big school, it needed resourcing, it needed a huge amount of work on the environment spending, there were outside toilet blocks, there was black tarmac along the corridors, which was horrible, the classrooms had no carpet and the roof was leaky in so many places because it was like a glass lean-to in the corridors I was – I mean the staff were lovely and we were just determined that we were going to improve the quality of our environment because, particularly in a deprived area, environment demonstrates, to the pupils and the community, how you value – them! So if children are coming in, having to walk across a playground into a dirty, smelly, horrible toilet it's saying, "well, we don't really care much about you, you can manage with this," whereas we know perfectly well that the other side of the river it would not be tolerated so we became determined to do something about it. So I wasn't very pleased when in the first two years we had two one and a half percent cuts in our budget. But since the present government came to power the level of funding that has come to our school, particularly the targeted funding, although it hasn't been immense it has been excellent, particularly in the capital money that has been coming in, the targeted resourcing for IT work, the increased amount of money per child now that has given a huge amount of flexibility, the initiatives like the Education Action Zone, which have been a great support, because they have been another level of funding that can be targeted and put into supporting our pupils...

DW – I see.

Barbara ... And suddenly it's not me working on my own at Eastfield driving forward with the environment every school in our area because we were working as a team in a sense and you could see we were all going in the same direction. Supported, you know, in a deprived area improving massively the environment for our pupils and the quality and provision of education provision. Because if we em, look at the two initiatives in numeracy and literacy, there's some huge, hugely good points in both of them. Because they have focused attention on the very key things that are going to enable our pupils to move on in their schooling without any doubt in their minds when they go to high school. So providing ones takes the right professional parts of those strategies and ensures that it doesn't become, and this is the drawback to something like the National curriculum, something like a numeracy strategy, if it doesn't become a delivering of the curriculum but we look at the reason why teachers are here and not just delivering then that is very positive but if we look at oh its something else we now know what it is, it's ever so easy to teach now because all we've got to do we've got to do is just deliver this curriculum, then that is quite

different. We really tried to ensure that our staff are motivated, are inspiring people, when the children come in they just love to be here, they want to find out more so the key thing isn't how they deliver that curriculum, in terms of its content, it's more the style in which they deliver that curriculum, are they motivating in the real balance of the lesson bearing in mind the ages of the pupil. In year 6 are they letting the children go out with less than wanting to find out more and feel, 'cor' this is a fantastic subject. God I'd love to know more about this and when I go to High School I can even do more, or are they driving it into the ground on adverbs and bits and nuts and bolts of the English language and make it so boring as if on a treadmill of work? And now the problem with teaching staff is that because you are working to a test, at key stage 2 that the Government are placing huge importance on, and it is huge importance - nobody can step aside from that and you ignore it at your peril. If you step aside from that it means that you really feel obliged to drive on and drive on to ensure that the pupils in their year 6 get those level fours and above. Now to become inspiring teachers one has to almost devalue that test. Because the only way you can really prepare them for the test is to have a mind-set that is test orientated.

DW Mmm

Barbara and so you need to do practice tests. You need to be aware of what the paper is going to demand you, what is the format of it? How does it work? And to succeed well you need an approach that does that, it's an extremely complex bit, into one's teaching programme to be motivating, exciting, picking up on children's ideas and taking those forward when there's a particularly prescribed set curriculum that's leading towards a crucial test.

DW It's bringing sixteen year-old ethics to eleven year-olds.

Barbara – It is! And for me, personally it is the most inappropriate way to ensure that children have a transition from their primary school to their high school – by insisting that we have this tight programme towards the tests. Disastrous! (laughs) We don't do brilliantly on the tests, and I'm proud of that fact – and there are lots of reasons why we don't do well in those tests, and another one – and this is probably more damning of this approach that's used – is that we had a special education centre in our school, which was set up by the LEA, where we had children with (pause) quite often extreme statements for their difficulty in learning – and often combined with behaviour as well – and they were taught in a class in our school, in a group of twelve, with a very experienced and very able teacher and a teaching assistant, and they were fully integrated into the life of our school. Just as if they were just a small class of twelve around the school. Nobody ever thought of them as – “gosh they are nothing to do with us” they are our children in everything we do, they are totally and utterly integrated, so when the LEA took away that funding on the basis that we shouldn't have SECs, that children should be integrated into mainstream classes, that totally devalued, a) the work the SEC was doing, but worse than that it threw huge burdens on year six and year five teachers in their preparation for the SATs because it meant that suddenly now we've got pupils that are extremely difficult to cope with, that were excluded from other schools because of it, and they couldn't cope and now suddenly we've got to! But now what was very worrying was that the LEA made no allowance for that fact when they look at our key stage two results – at all! – Whatsoever!

DW And each child is a little over one percent.

Barbara – Yes, so to follow the government route in this, which is to ensure you've got the highest standards in your school, the highest results, you've need to flush out the pupils who are not going to get you those results – that's what they are telling us really, so we should have stood very firm and said, “OK these pupils have been with us one year, two years, perhaps even three, they're not our catchment area, we can't cope with them, we must exclude them and if we had done that our SAT results would have been fine, but because we looked at the pupils' needs and enabled the pupils to go into our main stream – um – it gave the impression that we were a failing school regarding our SAT results and no credibility for that was given whatsoever. Now you might say, oh, that's just my interpretation of it but I can tell you that I actually went to a meeting that the LEA had, that had been called – um – by the DfES, where – it was called a stocktaking meeting – where someone comes and talks to the LEA about what they are doing about their schools that haven't reached the right scores, and I was invited along to that meeting to explain why

my school **hadn't reached the right scores**, and – um – I knew personally the person from the DfES because she was – um – at Mercia College, she was a trainer, one of the, you know, one of the lecturers, for - and she actually trained my daughter and two of the members of staff here, so we knew her, we knew what her values should be, but she came with a very, very different agenda and would not at all listen to – um – the mobility in our staff because of the SAS camp and the fact that in our year six we could have only thirty percent of our pupils that were in Eastfield in Key Stage one, all the others had arrived, come from all sorts of directions for all sorts of reasons and she wouldn't accept the fact either that we'd got pupils from the SEC integrated. The remark was, **"other schools cope with this, other schools manage that, what are you doing?"** so our strategy had been totally wrong, we should have said, "Right, those pupils need to go, we need to be far more selective with who we let in if we possibly can, and put people off and then we'd have been seen as a very successful school, and I would have felt, professionally, totally devalued by that approach but it would seem to be the one that would work in the current system." And it is utterly and totally pernicious that the government have got this power over the LEA. So, here we've got LEA officers who, we know, really do want pupils to come to school and be motivated, having to put into practice really a system that they don't really believe in either and that's pretty bad! So that's more-or-less the summary of it. So **there's some very big pluses, but there's also a very, very big negative – and it's a very current big negative – and perhaps I'm feeling that because I'm retiring at the end of this year, and it's, perhaps, the most poignant reason why, in the end, I'm not too unhappy about retiring from headship.**

DW – Right, so that's a quite balanced view because you have got some really good parts, but what it seemed to me, from what you have been saying, was that the *negative* parts have been centrally based and the more positive bits have been more local. Is that right?

Barbara – Yes, definitely! Because the local inspectorate have been extremely supportive, understand the situation, and anybody who – anybody who *knows* the school, knows the pupils, knows the people who work here, in whatever capacity – and I can say that because I know other colleagues who feel the same in other schools – understand what we are doing and know that we have got very hard-working staff, very dedicated people, and we want to educate the whole child. **Where I feel very angry is that more and more we are becoming accountable to people who don't know us and don't know the school. I've got no problem about being accountable, but I want to be accountable to people who have got an interest, part of the school, something that they actually do know about us from a perspective of reality whereas we are being accountable to people who have little idea about the reality of our intake, our pupils, our expectations, all those kind of things, and what we are trying to do about our vision – yes?**

DW – Yes, you used a really good word there, which I want to come on to. How do you feel the balance between responsibility and accountability has changed over the years?

Barbara – The balance has totally tipped! Because all teachers live with guilt, because it doesn't matter how hard you work, you are never going to achieve, *fully*, what you really want to achieve, which is the best level of support for each pupil, so there's always going to be that level of guilt in this profession and that can be overwhelmingly dealt with by being dedicated, being hard-working, being motivating, seeing pupils succeed, being happy and enjoying and moving on to other things, and meeting them later in their life and seeing what they have achieved, and, if you've got levels of support, because we all need to feel wanted, we all need to feel we are doing a good job, we all need praise from some direction, and when the local inspectors come in and talk to you and praise the school you feel, "Oh, that was good!" From talking to other colleagues they do feel very similar to that but, **when you are faced with a kind of sledgehammer, and this doesn't necessarily have just to be Ofsted, because the last Ofsted we had, the team were lovely and we had lots of praise and it was good fun. But there does seem to be this sledgehammer approach now to accountability in absolutely everything**, even in the, sort of, areas of extended schools so the people you employ, because you are always bidding for the money to keep these things going, there's no job security for them, and how are you going to get quality people running extended schools and doing all these things if you can't really say, "well there might not be a job next year" and again, why is that occurring, because nobody is totally trusting at the moment that this is going to be so successful that we can say, "right, for the next five years, have your breakfast club, for the next ten years have your after school club," it's, "well we've got the money for it this year and we will know, perhaps towards the end of April whether we have

got the money for it next year and you'll have to bid for it and these are very, very time-consuming things so I'd put that into the category of accountability and I think – you know – it's like – if you are looking at the see-saw the weight has gone rock-solidly down on accountability and responsibility is, in a way, up there somewhere, but not balancing the see-saw.

DW – I would like to come back to the activity triangle I showed you – have you read through it?

Barbara – Yes

DW – Oh, good! What I would like to do is look at three specific points in your twenty-year trajectory with that triangle in mind; the first point is before the ERA, the second is *now* and the third, I would like to be some point between where you feel there has been some form – it is very difficult to use the word stress without invoking a predetermined judgement – so if I say that stress is what is put upon you and strain is the reaction to it, it is the *stress* that I wish to look at, rather than the strain – in that twenty-year period and how the system dealt with it, the system being represented by the triangle.

Pre-ERA, just before 1988 you were in Birmingham, and, looking at the triangle, you were the subject ...

Barbara – that's me, there.

DW – ... and the object is your focus at the time, which I will concentrate on later, which leads to outcomes, the tools you may have used, the intrinsic rules, the community – the whole community including the LEA and DfES, governors and anybody else with an interest – and division of labour, how much help did you get?

Barbara – While I was head of St Jude's working for the Birmingham authority, which was a very big authority and a very supportive one, with some very able subject-based inspectors who would come in support you incredibly, you felt that there was an autonomy, as a head teacher, for your school to develop as St Jude's, not simply a primary school. Every school seemed to have its particular areas that it became noted for, and, looking back, you had that level of autonomy that enabled you to drive forward professionally in a way that perhaps didn't help the wider community necessarily because it may well have been that what you as a school were driving forward on was completely overlooking the fact that – say, for example you didn't have much emphasis on mathematics, there might have been some children who would have been great mathematicians and thought, "hang on! We're a bit lost out here" so if you look at it from the curriculum point of view, there was certainly a danger that although you felt you were driving forward and giving the best for the pupils that might not necessarily have been the case. So the objective of being the headteacher, really, is to ensure that the pupils coming in are given the *best* possible opportunity with the highest level of expectations so that they leave as highly motivated pupils to their high school and you were left, probably to your own devices too much to determine how that would come about; so would depend on your experience, your knowledge, your curriculum preferences, those of the staff; so that level of autonomy, um, I think, was a bit dodgy to say the least. Whilst it led to some great successes and the tools you had were your staff, and the community would support you and you could be deemed a really successful school, it certainly led to a lot of primary schools being very patchy in what they achieved and then whatever came in vogue it was almost as if some schools jumped on to a bandwagon. I went into primary school because French was a bit of a bandwagon at the time, it was thought we could really teach the pupils at a early age, and that was absolutely right, there was nothing wrong with that, though it wasn't very well resourced – the school I went to did resource it and it was the thing that started me off in teaching – so what you ended up with was some in primary schools with children who got lots of French, some they got none at all and some they got it but they did it rather badly. It didn't really give a cohesive picture and you could almost see that pattern across other curriculum areas; there were more crucial to the child's development than French might have been. So at that time, that level of autonomy, plenty of support from the LEA, plenty of DES courses you could go on – some of them residential on subjects and you would come back motivated from those and in a sense that was the professional pattern of the time. Looking at it now, and looking at what would be a stress factor, because one also has to put in one's mind as well, at the time, was although it was a very deprived area the parents were very supportive and the levels of - sort of – you'd use the word respect, in a way but – support for your professional work were

almost taken for granted and that if something occurred during the school day regarding a pupil, generally the parents would support the school in the decision they had made. I don't recall as a headteacher at the time that parents had come in complaining that their child had been told off whereas she knew perfectly well from what the child had said that somebody else had done the same and hadn't got told off and why hadn't that child got told off when their child had? It just didn't happen. I can only remember one incident in the eight years I was there when that actually occurred, whereas if we look now, at our current time, I wouldn't say this is the most, one of the biggest stresses, but it's certainly a factor in the job, that, um, most of my days start at the school gate, talking through to parents about incidents that they want to find out about that happened the previous day; sometimes very positively, there's no problem with that but parents are very quick to come in nowadays to point out if they think that something is slightly unfair or not quite right and that does consume a lot of time in investigation.

DW – Where do you think that's come from?

Barbara – I would say that over these years, um, governments have, by their willingness to say that education is so important to them, they have almost vilified the profession in, perhaps, a subconscious way. Um, perhaps not totally subconscious but you can see there's no politician would say anything other than, "Oh, we've got some marvellous schools," but all the time the message is, "we've also got some very poor ones. It's a public service, they need to pull their socks up and need to do this," and the pressure on is we need to put in control and accountability and all those things have devalued incredibly the role of the teacher and in fact it got to a point where, um, when I was head of a primary school at first, I was proud to say, when I was going for a game of squash and I was talking to my partner and they would say "what do you do then?"

"I'm head teacher of a primary school"

"Cor – fantastic!"

Currently you just wouldn't say anything really (laughs) they might think, "Oh, poor sod!" So that has certainly changed, I think that it's happening with the National Health Service, isn't it? You think that the way the papers are saying, at the moment, those dirty hospitals, you know, as if all the people that work there are a bit sort of, not doing their job properly really, and they are not very hard working and a bit unclean and you don't want to get ill because you don't want to go there – it's a bit like school, they're still failing aren't they and all these children who can't read when they go from their primary school and go to their high school and when they leave their high school they still can't read, you know, what's going on in our schools? Does anybody do a good job? You know there's that kind of downtrodden feeling in the image that the general public has got and because everybody has been to school, everybody is an expert in education and they'll tell you that, "Oh we had a terrible time," and "Oh, these teachers that throw things and oh dear!" and so there has been a sort of vilifying, if you like, of education.

DW – What one politician called "the scatter-gun approach to criticism."

Barbara – Yes – but I think that one can almost cope with that because if you are doing a good job in your own school and you've got a motivated staff and, in a sense, you feel that all the time there's a bigger stress out there than that, and that has to be Ofsted. Ofsted is the most pernicious way of inspecting schools and an unacceptable way. It's unacceptable for one very basic reason, because it is so potent and so public it picks on the conscientious and the more able, more than anybody else because if somebody doesn't really care they won't really care about Ofsted, but if you really care about your work and you really care about your profession and you are dedicated and you are very conscientious, even the slightest sort of criticism or downplaying of that role can be incredibly devastating and in the build-up to it the stress and the feeling that people go through just isn't fair. It's demoralising, it's de-energising, and it's just a very, very unfair way of demonstrating what you do as a school. Then the aftermath of it, and it's certainly been the case on both the Ofsteds here and they have both been good Ofsteds in the sense of the report, it's taken, for some people, almost two years to recover from that incredible pressure and stress. The exact word is exhaustion, and in some cases people have retired from it.

At the end of the last Ofsted there was one member of staff who had just overlooked the fact that on that one day there wasn't going to be an assembly and for twenty minutes she just created a bit of maths with the children for a bit of fun, just to keep them on their toes, keep it energetic, but the maths Inspector from

the team walked in and it just threw her completely so there were elements in what she was presenting to the pupils that certainly wouldn't have occurred if he hadn't been there because she was a very good teacher, very experienced, and good lessons, excellent lessons but that became an unsatisfactory lesson and it created a shock-wave in the school. The registered Inspector didn't want to record it because of the nature of it being part of assembly time and he stuck to his guns and said "That teacher is presenting wrong mathematical concepts to the children, that's unsatisfactory, it has to be recorded" and it was recorded, and it was recorded on her profile of performance and it just destroyed her. So we lost a really valuable teacher because of that one incident. It devastated her – because it was public, we all know who it was.

DW Yes, nothing like that, but just before our last Ofsted I had a routine blood pressure check and it was sky high. The doctor said to me, "what are you doing?" I said "we're got Ofsted next week" and he said "you stupid boy, come back in two weeks time", so the doctors know what it does.

Barbara Yes, I work hard, I enjoy my job, I am fairly pragmatic about things and I say I don't feel stress though it's probably wrong to say that – I don't generally demonstrate, or feel that I'm stressed in situations like that. I almost enjoy the challenge, the combat of situations and in our first Ofsted it was wonderful because one of those situations arose that I could really get my teeth into because under the NC you only have to teach key stage 1 in six terms. That's quite clear in all the guidance from the government and all their publications that's the case and so our reception weren't doing NC and when the Ofsted team came they picked that up and said you must teach NC in reception and they upset our reception staff by saying that because the first night they were here they told them that they were teaching an illegal curriculum. So the next day I got a fax to the DfES to say that we were allowed to follow those guidelines lawfully and they sent it back. So I was giving this to the reggie to say that we were definitely legal and the reggie said, "Ah, there's a very big dispute. If we went to law, Ofsted would claim that all children in your school are entitled to the NC, and, she said I feel that in a court of law they would come down on the side of the Ofsted and not the DfES in this matter" So that was quite an interesting little exchange. Sheila, who is also a head, said "you didn't seem particularly bothered about that and I said, "No I quite enjoyed that, it was nice to have that sort of conflict going on – you know – cop this mate" I almost enjoyed it and we got on quite well with the reggie in the end because she accepted that we weren't doing this our of – eh – we weren't doing it in any way other than quite legally. Now Sheila [another local headteacher and a good friend] is quite different she has a real guilt feeling about things she can't achieve or do with children – just like all of us do – and she's extremely hard working and runs a very good school, and she went through absolute traumas during Ofsted – she had a fantastic Ofsted, but she didn't go to bed for two nights running during Ofsted. Because she was a teaching head, in a small school, her lesson preparation just went through the night, she said "I can't – if I go to bed I'm not going to sleep" So for two nights in that week she had total sleep starvation and she was saying, "What if it goes wrong, they'll think I'm terrible" you know – because I can't teach" I said, "but you're a really good teacher, its going to be great" and it was, but the stress and strains and emotional devastation she went through was extremely unfair. Either government or Ofsted don't realise – or they do, and they don't care, which would be really worrying.

DW Can we go back to the object – What was your object at St Jude's again?

Barbara To ensure that each pupil coming in, goes out to high school with the highest expectations, motivated and still keen to learn and not feeling that education is about receiving lots of information that they have to process.

DW Why is that the object?

Barbara Because the most important thing we can give our pupils is a desire and excitement for learning. In a primary school, that is what they come in with and that's what they must leave with. That bit in between, when they are with us must always work to that aim. That curiosity, that inquisitive approach that all children have about finding out about their world, we need to move that on and sustain it so that when they leave they still have that thirst for knowledge and love of learning and love of investigating and it hasn't been clouded by the way we've educated them. It's not easy because anybody looking at what we do to pupils might ask what is the best way to educate a youngster who is thirsting for

knowledge. You wouldn't answer, put him a group of thirty pupils and put them in one room with one person would you? It would make it quite difficult.

DW So that is your object for the pupils.

Barbara Yes – that's the only reason a school exists.

DW Different heads obviously have different objects why is that yours – rather than something else?

Barbara Because I don't think that any person in a school should have any presumptions about hierarchy or their role other than supporting that absolutely main objective. Whether they are an NQT or a trainee, or the headteacher, whoever it is, that has to be the driving force of going into that building each day. So the role of the headteacher, in a sense, is to motivate the team he's working with and ensure that objective is kept uppermost, so the children matter most.

DW That takes us right down to the root object. Has that changed over the past twenty years? Is that still your root object?

Barbara It is the total purpose of turning up here each day.

DW How has the bottom line of the triangle, to do with how the intrinsic rules, the stakeholders, and how you as the headteacher work with others on this object changed over the years – if at all?

Barbara I haven't wanted it to change and I still believe that the way I operate my role will determine whether that objective about wall-to-wall working for pupils will be reached and so my practice in each school has been the same.

The conversation I want with the teaching staff is always going to be about "how can I help my pupils?" There will be other issues to discuss obviously – about their own professional development – a myriad of other issues that will come up – but all the time – let's push it back to our objective and I think that providing we do that – and I certainly have – though I might not have been totally successful it's been my real purpose in my conversation, my relationship with each member of staff – I would say that the rules have been developed around that. They may have been slightly different because of the historical development of the three schools I have been in. They have been slightly different – and also the fact that we now have far more teaching assistants playing an important role in our school. In the past they were just there to help the teacher – clean the paint pots, get the paper, sort things out – almost like a manual role and I became very determined, when we became part of the EAZ that we would enable our support staff to become joint educators with our teachers and to do that they would need training, so six of our current teaching staff are trained mentors in NVQ in child care. We connected with Evesham College because I held these in high esteem as I knew the person who was running the course there, and she actually came out and trained us for five days and the funding came from the EAZ. From that point a lot of our teaching assistants have taken courses and moved on – one now has a Bed. We've got NVQs at least three and we've got the Star course that the government ran with the LEA – it was run extremely well in this authority and a half-dozen of our teaching assistants went on that and two of them got distinctions. Now they've achieved that I meet all of our teaching assistants (TA) once a week – and the meeting is minuted – and it was agreed very early on, that, to ensure the teaching assistants had an element of the teaching role with the member of staff, each TA keeps a file, and in it they have their CV, so we can look at their professional development, and they keep examples of pupils work at the beginning of the school year and see how that child has progressed and the annotate each of the pieces of work with the work they have been doing with the teacher to show that improvement. They don't feel it's a pressure as they love doing it, and I take the opportunity to see them at work and give an appraisal once a year but, because it's my style, we're looking at the positive things they have achieved and they feel pleased that the opportunity is there. So that's quite a big development but not a change of its rules, though nothing that has come in has rocked the boat, its made perceptions people have of the school and education, but the actual objective has not changed at all.

DW How have the rules that have come from outside the school changed over the last twenty years?

Barbara Oh! They have changed immensely. To continue in the role that I feel I must, I had to be subversive, rule-bending, role twisting, financially twisting in so many ways and say well that money can't be targeted there because it needs to go to this, and I have made no bones about it – fallen out with people over it at times – even the guy who ran the EAZ picked up that I wasn't using the funding specifically for something that was set up, and I said, "No because I am doing it this way" and he thought I was swindling, and we had a bit of a row about it, but I'm sorry, that was the way it was. Yes, the rules that have come in are overwhelming in so many ways but I have made it my objective not to be rocked by them.

DW I would like to look at the community now, school and wider – how has that community worked with you at those times and how has that changed?

Barbara There have been some key transitions if you go back to when I was at St Jude's, the LEA played a key role, both as your guide, supporter, inspector, in all sorts of ways you were just embedded into that system and they had power – when I was appointed, the inspector was there, and, in a sense, had the biggest part in the decision. In areas of curriculum depending on the type of inspector their abilities, there was a huge part played in schools to guide they way the curriculum was going. Today, looking at it starkly, the LEA have been totally disempowered – we have a particular shortage of inspectors who even know what our job is, and, these are so few of them, and their role now has been directed by the DfES essentially, and although we've got some advantages in that funding is coming more and more directly to us the strength of any organisation has to be supported by its funding and so the government have been able because they insist on well over – between eighty and ninety percent of the money delegated to LEA's goes directly to schools. It's meant that all the time the LEA have been disempowered because they don't have the funds to get the people they need. Their salaries have been reduced in many ways because of job evaluation and the post of Director of Education had disappeared and has now become something quite different encompassing far more agencies than possibly could be managed through that system, so, yes, that part has changed immensely.

The governors have gained power as a body – incredibly- to the point that even individual governors feel that power and can act, sometimes without consulting the school. I have two examples, this year, of that due to my own situation personally – because of my illness I'm not here all the time, so they've taken that opportunity to do things that one would have certainly gone about in a different way. One, newly appointed governor, came in the summer holidays without my knowledge with one of the chief police guys to look at the environment and they gave us a very damning report on our school security. That has meant that we cannot now work with the LEA to fund security gradually – it all now needs to happen at once, and the money will have to come from funds put aside to support the school environment. It will wipe out our school capital funding for the next three years. Another (parent governor) whose daughter was in a group that misbehaved for one particular lunchtime supervisor caused a furore in the local area by canvassing other parents about lunchtime behaviour and insisting that action was taken when none was necessary. Neither of these would have happened seven years ago – the rest of the governing body would have insisted on joint decisions.

DW How about the division of labour, has that changed?

Barbara It has really, because when I first came to this school I did a lot of teaching, sixty percent of the timetable, going round classes, working with them, a set timetable so I could do something that could be shown to have an effect. There were all those opportunities but there is absolutely no way that I could have a teaching timetable now, because the demands are just immense – to do with parental concerns, staff concerns, all sorts of things are happening during the school day; there are so many things to deal with that to really give a teaching commitment in any respect whatsoever would just be a total disaster. The role has completely changed.

DW You have described your object. How has that object coincided with what you perceived the objects of the government initiatives to be? – Pre-ERA?

Barbara Because we were given so much autonomy, perhaps that level of support must have been there – though it is difficult to say whether that was rock-solidly the case – but you could certainly make a very strong case at the moment to say that if your objective is to make sure that pupils have the highest level of expectation, that the teaching staff are highly motivated and that they want the pupils when they leave this school to have a thirst for knowledge and that wonderful enquiry and investigation that they bring in has been sustained, then you can say that all the initiatives have done everything in their power to deter that, to stop that. Once you overload the curriculum of young pupils with content as if, without that content, they can't move forward then you are just overwhelming them with the idea that education is about getting all these facts getting all these particular skills and just on a treadmill of work that, if you like it, its great, if you don't – forget it!

I am absolutely convinced that the problem we have with boys' motivation particularly has been determined by this onslaught of tedium, of delivering a curriculum that has to be completed in a certain time and would match the tests and I think boys in particular, and there are many in the school that I know who feel that school life isn't about that, and we are doing our best to motivate them, not losing sight of that objective because I am certain that particularly boys, some girls as well, but particularly boys that the style of the moment, that's upon us doesn't suit them to be motivated at all.

DW Since that has changed, if you look at the system in which you have worked, now and – we've got a sort of nebulous point in the middle, haven't we? To what extent do you consider you were able to influence, and possibly change, those systems at each of the time times?

Barbara I think that if you've got great energy, character and determination you can achieve it successfully, because the majority of teachers, who think of coming into primary, have really got that at the head of their list as well.

Most primary teachers I've spoken to feel just the same – they just love to have that buzz from their job when they see children really loving to find out, love to learn, pester them with all sorts of things they've found out over the weekend – and that's the reason we do our job. The attitude just is – I'm glad I do what I do! Although we are saying that autonomy has been affected by the way that things have developed, there is still that level of autonomy – you expect that if you really take it by the scruff of the neck and you have got the energy, determination and skill to really impose it in school in a firm, energetic way, it is still going to work.

DW – As a rider to that, how do you feel that each system influenced your actions at those times, have you had to do something different as the initiatives have taken hold?

Barbara – Yes. I have had to ensure that I can work in this determinedly subversive way, to enable this to be the main objective I have had to withdraw from the classroom and front the school to LEA officers, parents, governors, initiatives, people – all those things have now taken over. Some of them are extremely manageable and some of them are a greater problem because some are very tedious and some don't really reflect what education is about at all.

DW – The influence upon your actions – that you have had to withdraw from the class – has that been compatible with your wishes or your ambitions for yourself and the school?

Barbara – No! Not at all, because I still feel that the role of a headteacher should be one of integrity, role model, motivator, all things that we strive to do, and to achieve that you really have to be in amongst the children, in amongst the staff, working and motivating and to do it effectively you need that constant contact with the pupils. Three assemblies a week is what I do now, with the odd bit of contact with some groups, and bits and pieces – it isn't enough.

DW – And how has that misalignment affected your satisfaction?

Barbara – Immensely!

DW – That's to what extent – How?

Barbara – The effect of it is that the level of job satisfaction, which I still get at very high levels in all sorts of ways, is a very different kind of satisfaction than I had when I first came here and taught, because I used to get really excited about what children had achieved, we'd talk about it, they would show me what they had done and we would really share it - we would get to really know them. If you imagine each child as an onion, I now know that onion on its surface and a little bit underneath, then, I knew them perhaps right to the very core of the onion – all the layers, right to the tiny seedy bit in the middle, now I would have to do a lot of research, find out those other layers, whereas in the past, in a school this size, there were a fair number of pupils I knew really well, what made them tick, how to motivate them and keep them going well.

DW – If you consider that a complier would accept the direction of the initiatives, saying, “I’ve got to do this, so I may need to change the way I work in order to accomplish it,” and a resister would look at each initiative and, for the main part, say, “if this is not compatible I won’t do it, I will find a way round it,” or, “there is no way this will change the way I work!” Accepting that there can probably be no such thing as a totally resistant or totally compliant head; would you consider yourself a complier or a resister?

Barbara – I think I am a resister, on balance, but there have been, throughout the years, very high levels of compliance as well, because there has been no choice. We are at the point now, where if you didn’t fully comply you might as well just leave because there are certain expectations around the job, you just have to do it. One of them is to – and you have been involved in this personally – where each child’s development in terms of their targets and achievements are recorded all the way through until they leave. We do that, I would like to say we are talking about how that can be in conflict with the main objective but I complied with that, and we do have booster classes for our KS2 SATs. I could spend an hour talking about how that could be in conflict with the main objective, but we complied because we had to and, in a sense, I feel that the resistance within me is still very powerful, in that I know, from the way staff are working, that they also resist and that the work that they are doing with the pupils is more motivating than not totally content-led, so that although they are complying in terms of what we have to do by law, statutorily, we certainly comply with that, we resist in terms of the message that the compliance sometimes brings. Complying can, of course, give you more control at times.

DW – The recording, I wouldn’t even have anything to do with that if it did not mean that we could help the children know where they are going and what they are doing. So sometimes we can comply, but make it serve our own ends by using it appropriately.

Barbara – Yes we are all doing that.

DW – What feature, or features, of the school system has worked for or against your compliance or your resistance? (Explaining, once again, the features of the triangle.)

Barbara – Perhaps because I am coming to the end of my career, my levels of determination and the purpose in what I am doing has been shrouded by the, almost, feeling that I have just got to comply; it just is too overwhelming – there will be a team of inspectors coming in to see how we are getting on, they will report back, they will make it public, we will have the tests, they will be public, you will be seen to be ... All that seems to be coming in at such a rate, so powerfully embedded that there is no way, at the moment that we are going to change that, but that has really obstructed and clouded the key purpose of what I think we do in our job. Young staff, and it’s interesting that talking to staff I think they have found the same, young teachers cope extremely well with this, and can be energetic, motivating, and you think, “how on earth can they do it?” whereas if you try and fill a post with an experienced teacher they are not coping as well – the one person who we appointed a while ago, who didn’t cope, was an experienced teacher. The NQTs are fantastically able [to manage].

DW – Might that be because the NQTs have actually had their training within this system?

Barbara – I am sure – absolutely, yes! Without any doubt, without any doubt – yes – and also the energy they have got, because I think that one thing we may have overlooked a little bit is that to do this job now you need twice as much energy as you did need way back. That is certainly my perception of it. As a head it always takes over your life but there were always coping strategies that worked, enabled you to teach and not feel overwhelmed, whereas now the pressure is immense in all directions and that pressure is on teaching staff as well [as the head] all the time. It's there because, in a sense, no teacher goes into their classroom, closes the door, and spends the day with their children as they did in the past. They've got a TA that they are working with, it might be a parent in the school, well you know perfectly well that if they are working alongside you, you have got to be good! To be good day in day out, hour after hour throughout the day is stressful. It is **tense** – you've hit the right word there – there's a tension about this work which is unfair. Someone described it as flying a fighter plane in action, what the pilot would feel, although he was very skilful, very able, got this wonderful machine he was flying, would feel incredibly tense – about what he was doing, even though he was in full control, and it's that level of tension, now, that exists in our teaching staff and in the profession and that's why so many are leaving after a short time.

DW Oh yes – right, here's a different sort of thing, I want to look at contradictions and conflicts. If you look at the school as a system, at the three points, what sort of contradictions and conflicts may have arisen between what you wanted to do and what you **had** to do?

Barbara There have been many of those, many, many, many of those. The biggest conflict here, as an occurrence was the non-funding of our SEC. It was a message from the LEA that they no longer valued something that was highly valued in our system and was working for our pupils. And by taking away the money from that, it was devastating. Devastating for the people concerned, and the teacher who was highly thought of by the LEA just took early retirement. We had to appoint someone quickly, just for the last year of the SEC, to see it through before it got integrated into the rest of the school – so that was quite a blow. We were very proud, in this school of the way we motivated pupils in literacy, where we would take a whole text and would say, "Well, if an author's written a book, you don't just take a chunk of it, you actually see the whole thing because that's what reading is about. The development of the avid reader comes because you enter the author's world at the end of it you think wow and then go onto something else. Analysing text and pieces of authors work at this age is very demotivating and is just not what literacy and learning to read and wanting to read and being an avid reader is about. That element in the literacy hour is just appalling. It shows that the people that were doing it were very top down with their work. Looked at it from the high School perspective and thought the more we can get children to analyse text when they come to us the better. It doesn't work like that, instead we are getting some very demotivated pupils if that's the way people work and it's not the way it should be done. So that was pretty nasty and I felt that personally because that's been an area that I consciously believe is crucial to pupils development to develop them as avid readers because if you are an avid reader mostly you are pretty good at spelling and you won't have much of a problem if you've got some skilful staff getting you to develop writing because writing will have a purpose and if that teacher can then develop the purposeful writing it's amazing what pupils will then be able to do. Just writing for writings sake for anybody is a difficult task and it can give the impression that you are not very good at writing when in fact you could be brilliant. But you need some motivation somewhere the number of High School Teachers who have spoken to me about pupils who you know who are excellent at writing and they say, "They are no good, they can't take notes they can't write anything down, well no, because they are bored stiff". For a child of that age you shouldn't have to be writing things down particularly you want something more motivating than that it might be a factor about the way the lesson has developed. So that has been quite a nasty one. In a way because of the way the literacy and numeracy hour have developed the pushing out of the curriculum of the creative subjects and PE and games that now just get sidelined to afternoons – we've got this wonderful hall, we've got two halls, with all its wonderful PE equipment lying fallow half the week. It doesn't seem right somehow, and the fact that the creative arts really have – ok there's been a move to re-instate – but that's been quite a blow. The pulling away of the funding for music for instrumental was a devastating one because in a deprived area where people are struggling to feed themselves if you've got to find money £50. a term to get their child to learn a musical instrument- imagine Mozart in that situation, you can't play the piano because we can't afford it, so there could be some real musicians there and it's the creative arts that

have got us out of the caves in evolution so to overlook them is fundamentally to be not accepting our evolutionary future really, which is rather a shame.

DW So you would say that the contradictions and conflicts now are greater than they were pre ERA?

Barbara Immensely. I went on a DES course when I was at St Jude's and the HMI there said that if you have children coming into your primary school and when they leave they haven't experienced clay they are a deprived child. I really believed that and I still believe it because there are some elemental things about working with clays and ceramics that's not difficult to actually get going. In that period all schools had a sawdust kiln if they hadn't got a kiln themselves and they put the children through that magical process of creating something from clay. It's so much part of our traditions, our history, our culture, the whole – of all civilisations that suddenly now have been marginalised because of Health and Safety possibly as one factor, "it's not important because it's not learning to read and write, it's not doing mathematics so it's not needed much, it's one of these airy fairy things that some schools have it looks nice it's like the children playing about with yoghurt pots and sticky and that making things it looks alright but it's a bit of waste of time" and in fact it's what children do it's how children really develop it's absolutely at the core of their development and we are sidelining it, any primary person you speak to feels the same.

DW Here's a thought, we've talked about compliers and resisters do you consider that at any point in the change process that's being going on over these years you have been a pre-empter in that you may have said "This is going to be coming we are going to have a go at it, get used to, and see what it's like before it hits us?"

Barbara Yes I think there have been a couple of examples of that really. The numeracy hour was certainly one of them because having had literacy we knew that the numeracy hour was definitely going to come and there were so many plus points about the numeracy hour that we were looking in those early stages at what a maths lesson was like from reception right the way through to the end of Key Stage 2 and a male member of staff, as it happened, in year 3 who actually said "Maths is something where you need to get your brain in action before you actually start getting into the crunch of it" and he always liked to do a quick sharp table whatever it is quick fire questions everybody gets involved and gets excited about to warm people up. This was discussed and it was interesting that when the numeracy hour came that was one of those things [that was included]. That was certainly, although it wasn't my pre-empting because it was maths it certainly isn't my area at all, but this particular teacher really felt that and we discussed it and it became something that people were trying and, "Oh yes" and there was interest and they took part. Another pre-empter has been this idea that pupils need to know what they are actually expected to be learning and a good way at the end of a lesson is get together and talk through what we have covered and how we have got on because it's a good refresher a good way of revising and can be a good motivator as children at the end then can discuss what they have achieved. In a sense that was a bit of a pre-emptive thing because it became a crucial part of the literacy hour that you had your bit at the end where you all got together and they had their say so that was quite interesting. Those are curriculum things that I've focussed on because, let's face it, that's what children come to school for. One that I pre-empted and haven't been able to do much about is the music one where now we have so few of our pupils learning musical instruments and I don't know how we can get round that because we did try using other funding streams to help, and it didn't seem to work somehow. The instruments became lost and it became a difficult area but I think that the problem now is that we don't have a musician as part of our teaching staff. I think you need somebody with those skills to motivate the children.

DW Last little bit. All the changes and the things that have happened having to resist things, having to comply with things, all the decisions that have gone on, that have been made for you and the ones you have had to make in the light of them. How has that affected your personal stress level?

Barbara As you know I was off because I had what was potentially a heart attack, but I never felt at any time that my job was a contributory factor at all, never ever felt it at all because I've got a very open involved – I wouldn't say aggressive because that isn't me, but I just love the buzz the moment I arrive I just love the assemblies, meeting parents, meeting people, discussions, going into classes, from 8 o'clock in

the morning until whenever it just goes on and on daily. The cardiologist when I described what my personal life was like said, “Adrenalin when its flowing is not healthy if you have it all the time at those sort of levels” He said “you might think you are enjoying it but it’s having its wear and tear impact in a way that you just don’t realise” You might come away from the day thinking oh that was fantastic, but you’ve maintained those adrenalin levels for too long and too many years and it’s time to say hang on a minute your body is not going to take it. I can certainly equate that because I’ve known people in the past who’ve – going back this teacher who had been at the school for twenty six years who was highly thought of, I’d modelled myself on his style, he was absolutely full of his job, motivating assemblies, wow, always available, people ringing him up going right to the end in that kind of energetic level, left at 65 and within eighteen months just dies of cancer. It took over his whole body and he just withered away to nothing and died. The National Association of Headteachers have published their research on this and if you go to 65 your life expectancy drops to less than three years, and proportionately as you approach it, so if you are going at 59 its seems sensible. You can’t argue with these statistics, because they are not things that people are manipulating, they are the fact of people leaving the job, staying alive or dying. They don’t know who these people are and they’ve recorded that statistic and it’s there for you to see. Nobody’s trying to say anything else but look at these facts they are statistical evidence to say look at what this is about.

DW They are not statistics put forward by teachers but by medical experts with no axe to grind.

Barbara Exactly.

DW How did you deal with the stress and its effects?

Barbara I went along with the total flow of it and still find myself in that situation when I come to school, I can’t get out of that role, nothing at all changes whatsoever, and I know that if I carried on until I was 65 I’d be the same all the way through and I know within certainty that I would be gone within two years because shutting it down suddenly like that would just be in appropriate. Both the occupation doctor, my own GP and the cardiologist said, “because of my condition do what you are doing for two days [each week] at the most and even if that gets too much don’t do it.” If your cardiologist is saying that you’ve got to listen, not say “oh what’s he talking about?”

DW Knowing what you know now would you still deal with it in the same way?

Barbara I don’t you can deal with it any other way because you can’t change your personality and to do this job successfully you have to do it in that style. You have to be 100% committed total integrity hardworking, conscientious, motivating, helping others. If that is not what you are doing then you might as well step off. Despite the health risks I don’t see that the job could ever be different. No.

DW I gave you a piece of paper with strategies on – retreatism, downshifting and so on ...

Barbara Knowing my personality they just would not there’s no way I couldn’t do a job share, I know they are the ways that a number of people have dealt with things successfully but not me. What I’m not trying to say is that the only way to deal with my job is they way I’ve dealt with it because that’s been a totally personal thing there are a hundred different ways of being a very successful headteacher. I’m saying that’s the way I’ve dealt with my role and in other situations it would be dealt with quite differently and very successfully. You could probably sustain the job for longer if you did have a different approach.

DW Looking at those different styles of stress reduction, in the long term if you were fifteen years back and you knew everything you know now in the long term, which of those would you perhaps consider to be the most effective for you dealing with stress?

Barbara You want to go right to the end and I think I would have, in the senior management side of things, just given over certain aspects of the school to people and let them get on with it, instead of trying to do everything and answer to everybody. You could almost put certain blocks in, say curriculum or








dealing with parents or whatever. It might even be budget and say that's your responsibility. Instead of trying to do everything and be answerable in every direction, fifteen years ago, if I'd seen this coming I could have created a situation where certain elements of the job became fully delegated.

DW That would be a sort of planned role reduction keeping the bits you like.

Barbara It is but the big difficulty is the moment you start talking about delegation it increases your responsibility because if you are doing it yourself you get on with it and do it the moment it becomes delegated you are then ensuring overseeing supporting the person who has then taken it on, and it can create more work. So it's a dilemma.

DW Thank you for your time and allowing me to interview you.

13987 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Chloe (mh7075b)

DW I need; first of all, to establish some career details, length of career, the time you have been a head and the number of headships you have had.

Chloe Yes, right, I have just completed forty years, actually next week. I started teaching in London – actually in a junior school – and was two years there, transferred to Mercia, and, like a lot of us, never left (laughs). My aim then was to teach in a village school setting, which I did – I taught in Eastley for six years. I was still in my twenties then and I often still refer to it as the arrogance of youth that even at that stage I was all fired up, I was already thinking, “yes I’d like to lead a small village school, because Eastley at that time, and I am sure now, had that small village feel, you have the school in the centre of the village and the community, I really liked that, I had a really good six years. It appals me now to think that at that stage I was already fired up and I actually did apply for the headship and they very politely told me to go away and do other things, to teach in another school and then come back another day. I took that message and I applied for three deputy headships and actually got the deputy headship at Barnfield – that was 1973. I was 29 at that point, and then after eight years the head retired and it is strange that it was at a time in the LEA when there were a lot of headships going and so I applied for Barnfield and a lot of others, I put them in a priority list as I obviously was keen at that stage to take on the headship of Barnfield. So I was interviewed for Barnfield and I got it – that was 1981 and I have been here ever since – so, that’s fairly straight forward (laughs)

DW Some heads like to move around in different areas.....?

Chloe Yes, it’s that, sort of, experience isn’t it. I suppose, in a sense, I locked myself into a commitment, I was drawn into the whole community and that was it.

DW We need to cover some ethical and methodological issues.

Chloe Yes,

DW One is that I would like to use the tape, the second is that I can’t afford to pay you. Nothing what you say in the interview goes past me, even my supervisor doesn’t get to hear the tapes, or see the transcripts. Though he may see parts of transcripts everything will be totally anonymised.....

Chloe Yes, yes

At this point a telephone call was received, which the Headteacher needed to take. The Headteacher returns.

DW Part of what I am trying to do is a longitudinal survey, so I will ask about the past twenty years, then I want to look in more detail at three specific points. I want to look at the school systems within which you were working at a time just before the Education Reform Act (ERA), I want to look at the system, now and I would like to think about the system at some point between, where there was some particular stress or tension between what you wanted and what the Government wanted, or a time where you felt things were particularly moving along well, because what you were being asked

to do was what you wanted to do anyway. I specifically want to look at the systems at these three points.

The final thing I shall be looking at is shown on this sheet. It concerns adaptive strategies. When people get into stressed situations there are certain adaptive strategies they can employ....

Chloe Yes – that's right.

DW... They could retire, or they could give up being a head and become a teacher, some may join the inspectorate and some people go into writing or publishing children's books because it is the same kind of area. These are actually Troman and Woods' ideas, of course, some people just carry on and roll through it so they're actually specific ideas. So you can see why I wanted two interview, to let you know and give you time to think about all these points, then one, which will take about two hours, to discuss them. These sheets should contain all the information you need and probably more than you need.

Chloe That's fine, I shall read through them. I can read-up which will be useful.

Thanks and fixing of date for second interview.

Chloe So how many people have you got in your survey?

DW Eight heads, because it's very individual, it's not one of those surveys where you can generalise and say, "this happens to all people," or, "all people react like that" I am looking at specific people and trying to categorise them – those who have suffered less stress, for various reasons or perhaps, those who suffered more stress, more tension, at the beginning when the pace of change was greater but they have taken to it more. I am trying to relate it to their developed professional identities and see where the commonalities and differences are.

Main interview with Chloe (mh7075b)

DW First of all I would like to remind you that everything you say is totally confidential. For about fifteen to twenty minutes could you just go through what I would call your Professional Trajectory, the course of your professional career, for about the last twenty years, from about 1985 which was just pre the Education Reform Act.

Chloe In terms of my position and my responsibilities?
I was appointed Head of this school in 1981 and that's it!

DW As you have been through this time; for instance, just after 1981 what was the school like, what kind of school was it? And then how have you moved forward with the school.

Chloe Right, gosh, that's - I suppose I was in the position of having been deputy head so therefore I wasn't straight into a situation that I was unfamiliar with. I had an idea of how it was actually structured and also I would like to think that during that time I had an influence on the practise and the structure because it was that situation where the head was obviously in his years of approaching retirement and so allowed me perhaps a greater freedom to actually introduce changes. Certainly when I came into the school as a deputy head I would describe it as a quite formal structure and in 1981 when I took over as Head that sort of almost, (what was the date) It coincided somewhere along the line with the introduction of the National Curriculum, that was very, very close. What was the date, I can't remember now, it was very close round and about that time wasn't it?

DW Um, no! 1988 was the Education Reform Act.

Chloe Right, right, so if I think back I think one of the things that I can reflect on is the discrimination, the unequal opportunities for example, when I came into the school there was an inequality in the provision of boys and girls. It's a bit unnerving to actually think that there was a culture of; for example its really difficult to imagine and say this, but it was deemed appropriate at some stage when I came into the school that the boys actually did Science and the girls did something else and that's really quite unnerving to actually ... so I'd actually begun to sort of change that and certainly in 1981 I was pre the National curriculum, able to influence that and sort of make statements of the equality of provision and sort of ensured that. Because obviously over the years that's developed in terms of not just science and practical subjects so there was a time when as a 'pre' to the design technology that there was an overlap of sort of the boys similarly being involved in needlecraft and the girls having access to the science. So basically the curriculum was opened to all regardless of... and so I think it's quite difficult to imagine that that was the case.

DW So in a way, you sort of pre-empted the National curriculum.

Chloe Yes, so I sort of recognised that was something that shouldn't be. That education and the provision that we offer cannot be determined by the gender or other influences it has to be across the board to all. So I opened that out. I opened it out in the sense that the structure in some way, which will probably lead onto some of your other questions, was for example, timetabled within subjects so there was sort of maths and literacy but there

was also in place what we now refer to as the foundation subjects, although the National curriculum obviously extended certain parts of that. For example, I suppose the best examples are the DT introduction and the strands of PE whereas PE was basically athletics and team games, with some gym but not a developed gym.

DW Pre-education Reform Act, one of the things that other people have said is that they were working more on a topic based basis and then the ERA came along and they moved to single subjects and now they are on their way back. If you were subject based before, how did that ...

Chloe Yes, right reading through the material here in some sense because there was a structure of subjects and I to a certain extent supported that, there was no conflict of interests, when the National curriculum was introduced in that sense and yes we are exploring the unwinding of that but I, now on reflection, I have a certain response to that but I am sure that will come out later on. So there wasn't... I continued but my sort of aim at the point was to actually extend experiences to all and extend certain aspects of that curriculum. We didn't strongly go into the topic based curriculum.

DW But you were moving away from a more restricted curriculum to a more open one.

Chloe Yes, Yes. That was in terms of the structure of the curriculum and I suppose its easier for me to reflect back rather than to take myself back to the situation I think the other thing that I sort of reflect on is how my management style over those years has actually evolved. So my management style when I took over the school was very, very different from my management style now and its not because it would satisfy the observations of others its because it has evolved to be a more effective management. So if I think of now, and I think of then, in terms of the management, then that has changed a lot.

DW In any specific ways?

Chloe I think: I think, I mean I don't know how, I mean I, it is very different now in terms of people who start their headships now, I think they start from a different basis, I think. Partly because of input and training, when I sort of had my first headship well, this headship, there was no training as such you actually adopted or took on board the model that I suppose you had worked under and that tended to be sort of very autocratic and the decision making and the responsibility was within you and sort of the style of management that I have now in terms of Senior Management involvement of Governors, delegation and responsibilities for subject co-ordinators is totally different. [Compare these comments with those of others]

DW So would you say it is more open now?

Chloe Yes, and there is greater ownership right across the staff spectrum. You know its one of those things that when you think back you think how did I sort of see that that was the best or the correct way but I think that is the nature of sort of evolving really.

DW I think that's a lot to do with one of the things I am looking at, which is the way you started your headship, was to do with the way that you had been developed as a teacher and the systems you had worked within and you tend to reflect those systems. And it is only after a while that you can breakdown those inbuilt tendencies and work towards...

Chloe Yes, yes, and I suppose its to do with confidence and in some awful way its to do with control as well because there is a point when you realise you are not losing control, that actually you are strengthening the management structure by having different layers of responsibility. I think um, yes.

DW I can see that and that's really helpful, because, as I said, one of the things I am looking at is Headteacher's identities and how they have been built up and how they have changed as new things have come along, and of course some people, like you have changed quite happily and taken new things on board and moved with them and picked out the good bits. Other people find that really stressful.

Chloe Yes, that's right, that's basically where I am at you've said it for me there

DW So if we think about three particular points in your headship. One near the beginning about 1985 or 1986 just prior to the ERA. What I really want to think about is: what at that point – it seems a funny question, but I'll try and explain – what at that point drove you as a head, what was your vision for the school, what was the object of your job, what did you want to do and who for?

Chloe Yes, that's a leading question really. I think its sort of what I now describe as – the Governors asked me about this the other day, the Governors were reading where Ofsted refer to the vision of the head, and one Governor said "well what is your vision, tell us about it" and I actually had a meeting and I thought well, I suppose what I felt then and what I feel now is that there are fundamental principles that I think you have to make a decision on and hold fast to. At the same time, I think you have then got to look at other ways of achieving those fundamentals, other avenues and sort of make decisions on whether you think that is good practice in terms of fitting into your core beliefs so I don't think that, you know, it is that balance: I feel that you can't actually hold onto firm beliefs and I think I believe fundamentally that this is – and those remain unchangeable, I think there are certain truths that do. But I think there has got to be the open, you know, the window of opportunity, where you are looking at everything that is coming on board and actually, as far as you possible can, making decisions on whether those will actually enhance and add to those core beliefs. So I am trying to think of examples, I think that at some point, pre that point, I'll sort of give you an example and I think it is sort of a reflection on how these things are actually presented. I can remember very, very clearly and it was quite a diving moment the time and I lose track of time I don't whether it is seventies or eighties, I think seventies, where I can remember clearly the maths advisers then employed by the authority coming into the school and supporting us in what we were doing in maths and making statements, and the two statements that stuck in my mind was that maths needs to be a more practical subject and I had no particular argument with that because yes it is and they made a statement that by that time there was no need for children for example, to learn tables and there was certainly no need therefore, because they didn't need to learn tables, because all children would have with them their calculator, so therefore all mental calculations were actually going to be done by the children carrying their calculators, and you're smiling because you know where we got to in the National Numeracy Hour and in some sense there was a professional satisfaction although it's happening increasingly quickly they are coming in cycles very quickly, and I was unhappy with that and what I was unhappy with was how they presented that in the sense that they dismissed any suggestion that children might

learn tables and that it would be useful for them and it was the way they actually almost ridiculed practice that you know. So there was the suggestion that we thought it important as a school, it didn't matter how they learnt their tables, I wanted them to become an integral part of what they could draw on, I suppose we do sort of finally draw on our own experiences and I know that my tables are an integral part of my mental calculations and I wanted that for the children. I think what sort of unnerved me and unsettled me was how they ridiculed that in their attempt to actually take it out of practise. Then (I am jumping around now) when the numeracy hour came in and suddenly we were told that children must learn tables and it was perfectly acceptable for children to rote chant their tables and I wouldn't have gone that far, that was further than I would go because I would say to the staff, I want them to know their tables I'm not really – there are five or six acceptable ways of doing that – it doesn't have to be, I'm not suggesting and not promoting chanting tables, but certainly that they are able to. Then one part of the numeracy strategy as you know was an encouragement, and also a statement that calculators would not be sort of, actually, basically, should be introduced in years five and six. So those two examples are, I think, for me support my feeling that you've got to sort of make certain decisions and they may prove to be right or wrong, but I think in that instance somewhere its come back into realising that children are not walking around with calculators to hand or in their pocket generally, they simply don't, and I think we can predict a future that isn't fulfilled in that sense and now when I do the booster classes with year six it's so, so rooted into children learning their tables and knowing their tables that the whole thing is there. I think that's one example and there were similar. A parallel example almost was the real books and I was slightly unnerved by the dismissive attitude of any suggestion of group readers in a sense and that was another example which was discredited and its those core beliefs that what ever changes or is introduced there are certain things that *are* still and would appear to be still and to the immediate future. They are the fixed values and I regard that as important and I think that goes for other expectations in behaviour and again with expectations of behaviour I think that it is also with the proviso that children are changing, the children that I was teaching and you were teaching in the seventies and eighties are not the same children that we are dealing with now. Attitude. I like the children and in some sense I have to say because I have been here a long time, people have an expectation I mean I am teaching the children of the children and parents come to me and say, I had one parent, when we were having difficulty with his little boy who was in year four and finally the father turned to me and said "When I was in your class you wouldn't have put up with it, you would have sorted it out" So I think it sort of places me and the school in a certain place of advantage that there is a recognised standard of what is acceptable in terms of behaviour, you know, Chloe won't like that and so you don't do that, and I think that sort of makes it easier, I think, to hold onto and for the whole thing about behaviour, how you treat other people, and the whole good manners thing.

DW I think, the whole ethos of the school, there is a recognised framework.

Chloe Yes that's right, it's a recognised part of, but at the same time, if you were to take two snapshots of children that I was dealing with say in the 1980's and the children I would deal with now, there would be a difference in terms of how children respond to us as adults. They are much more relaxed than standing back in a formal sense of teacher and pupil, aren't they, they are, you know, there is a difference.

DW Looking at those values, the things you want for the children, those core values; what is it that drives those in you? What do you want, if I went down and down and down what is the final thing that you want for the children?

Chloe Well I think again I am jumping backwards and forwards you see because one of the things that I am, again I don't know whether it's the children, but one of the things I am becoming frustrated with and I am sort of looking at whether this is an effect of the structure of the national curriculum, what I am increasingly saying to the children and I have said it this week, that sort of I think that when we start off we have to define what to us and what to the children education is, and so if we sort of say education is what we do at school and education is what we get out of what is being prescribed that's education in a limited sort of way. If we sort of say education is simply about enquiring and being inquisitive and finding out about everything and all things then I think that is a part of what I want to nurture in the children. I think at this point my concern is that the curriculum has – I think I had another defining moment which will stay with me, it was some years ago, and we have termly meetings with the high school and on this particular occasion a meeting we were having with the history department at QE one of the things we were talking about was well, lets share together where there are good places to visit and we were saying we go here and that's a really good visit and I said well we actually every year take a group of children to the Commanderie in Worcester because of the provision they have in terms of the civil war and there was a recently qualified teacher who looked at me in absolute horror and said "but you can't do that because the Civil war is not on the curriculum" And that really struck home and I didn't reply actually I didn't sort of go into well, its fourteen miles down the road and you avoid that experience because its not prescribed by somebody and that really worried me then and its really very much in the forefront of my thinking of what the curriculum in its very prescriptive form has done. I think it is sort of handed, and this isn't particularly to our generation but the younger teachers, my youngest teacher is now 30 so she has only ever taught through the vehicle of the national curriculum so increasingly I am sort of undoing that. I am saying today or at the beginning of term I was saying things like, "we must allow time to follow the process of the general election and the democratic process, it means that some part of what you are doing will not be done but that is of now and similarly what is the significance of the pope dying we have got to allow time for that" and its my way of saying , and I do say to the children, there are things outside that are happening, so this week we have talked about the Live 8 and the bid today because it worries me that the curriculum provides a narrow view of what is important to know or not and that's really quite worrying when you think of it, I think it is.

DW I think it is, I do try and say there is a lot more to learning than the curriculum...

Chloe Yes that's right.

DW ...and that's quite hard for younger people to pick up on.

Chloe Yes that's right, and I think it is because they can't – I think its difficult because they are driven by what needs to be covered, that whole thing and if I haven't gone and actually gone through the curriculum content, then in some sense I haven't fully achieved what I've set out to do. But if you've achieved something else, or had a different experience then I'm not um I think there's a good [argument for it]. So in some sense I think I was happy with the structure when it was introduced because in some ways it matched, it

was fairly close to my own practice, but now on reflection it causes me some concern, although they said, you know there was that time when they said the revised curriculum would give you 20% I'm not sure that's actually worked. Right I'm rambling now...

DW No, you're actually covering what I'm going to ask further down which is good.. I was going to ask you how your vision has changed but I think you have answered that and your vision has matured and hasn't been changed by anything.

Chloe Yes that's right, not in the core elements.

DW That's important. In which case if we could look at now and initially just before the National curriculum – how were you working with people at that time. Just before the National curriculum, if you said I want, this is how I want to move forward, I want to have the girls doing science and I want to change things, then you would need to let the staff know and the Governors and the parents presumably. How has the support from those groups for that sort of change, and if you wanted to do that sort of change now, or you were trying to do something like that now, how has that interaction with those groups changed?

Chloe I think it's what I sort of said at the beginning. I think my sort of style at that point – It makes me cringe a bit now – was to make the decisions and present, "I have decided and I would like you to do" and I was fortunate in the sense that for whatever reason I didn't sort of have any opposition. I can't think of any occasion where staff said, I think you've got that wrong, I'm not going to do that. So I think I was fortunate in that sense, but now for most of the time it would be through debate and discussion so that everybody had ownership of that change before a decision was made, so therefore the decision is a corporate decision. It is a far more collegiate decision.

DW Do you find that the support then and the support now are similar?

Chloe Yes

DW If you feel you are sure it's something you want to do?

Chloe I think, I can still – I mean I can't think of an example but I know there are occasions where I have said I think this is very important and I'm going to ask you to do it, and that is on rare occasions where I feel we could talk about it endlessly, but I'm just making a statement of intent that I want put into place. I can't think of an example but I know there have sort of been – but I think there is also that feature. – I think in most of our discussions we do arrive at an agreed approach, perhaps we are fortunate because in a sense we do arrive at that and there is that point where a decision has to be made – right we've talked about it and a decision has to be made and this is what we are going to do. In my thinking, when I look at myself I see that – I can see you know it's like looking at a different person, perhaps, I suppose, I've become more comfortable in the role. It is also personal I suppose to do with confidence.

DW It's also part of the leadership - management balance.

Chloe Yes I think that's right, because I think we very much – I think one of the difficulties that my colleagues have – I think it actually comes down almost to a personality type, if

you sort of categorise yourself, or sort of I would describe myself as very, very positive to the point that I think everything is going to turn out ok and sometimes I have to sort of consciously convince myself that it may not, whereas those that are sort of not like that they will always see that things are not going to work out and sort of be totally negative. So I think its sort of it sort of helps to have that because in a lot of the initiatives that we've talked about and are coming on at, as you know, are fast and furious still. The role of the Head, sort of however they feel finally has to be the person who will be enthusiastic and positive about that initiative and I think because normally my response is positive for most things, with reservations, and things that we would choose to do differently I can remember another example of when we – I mean I can put a timescale on this because it was when we first moved into this building which was fifteen years ago. I can remember going with a then secretary to training on introducing the computer into the office, difficult to imagine today, not having one, and spending the day and I can remember clearly it was one of those training courses where the person doing it said "well you press now then press this" and the Secretary was there she knew – I didn't have a clue by the end of the day, if anybody had said to me you're alright Chloe just go through and I wouldn't have had a clue because I was just simply nodding and saying "all right, oh yes" and then we had a get together, and it was heads and secretaries and sort of the plenary was to say well how do you feel about that then you know we are thinking about having computers in the office and what has stayed with me is how many Heads I don't know what the numbers were but the number of heads who were saying Oh I can't see that happening I'm going to have to hang onto my filing cabinet and some heads actually said, No. and I think that I find that quite difficult because even if at that time I was pretty clueless with what I was doing on the keyboard and what was sort of um – I think its that sort of other part of recognising the potential, so although I wasn't skilled at the computer it is that recognition that here was something that was going to change the way specifically in the office [things were done] It is interesting to reflect that it hasn't because once you've got your computer your filing cabinet will be unnecessary you won't need any paper copies and I thought no, you know, it doesn't quite work, it's a little bit like the mental calculation and the calculator, we haven't arrived at that because my office here we still have paper copies of some things although not all things. But somehow that sort of was a sort of snapshot or the range of responses to something that was going to change. Either that they could not see the potential and did not want to take it on board, or see the potential even if you felt I don't know much about it but its going to change what we do in the school office so that's a part of what I said about recognising what you, what is going to sort of actually enhance the practice or management or whatever.

DW If you could now think about 1988 to 90 Education Reform Act. National curriculum all those files, when they all came in things started to become very proscribed we were told this is what you doing and this is how you will do it and that continued with Literacy and Numeracy. You already had a school which was functioning well and you knew where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do, to some extent there was a balance between the two things but there must have been at that point some things to which you would have said, No I don't want that and some things you would have welcomed with open arms. To what extent do you think that you might have been able to change the school system to accommodate the good bits if necessary, or alternatively change what was coming in to fit the school system because you knew that it was working well?

Chloe Yes it did really match and confirm what was in place and it was in place and I was sort of comfortable with that, so the foundation subjects were the History and Geography, although I think that at some point I had sort of operated them as environmental studies, but generally it just confirmed so I can only imagine what sort of effect it had on schools where the curriculum was very loose and maybe it was topic based but in our case it was nice and easy in some sense. I can remember, actually I can remember, with some satisfaction and this refers to the responsibilities subject co-ordinators where not actually a feature at that time it's what I previously said so I can remember when I took over as the Head actually writing out a lot of the policies and it was interesting in the History Geography for example I can remember particularly that what I had written out in the History and Geography on the whole sort of actually matched the National Curriculum so there was – you've made me think now – there was that feeling that a lot of that is actually there and we need to perhaps tweak it around or move it around but actually it somehow confirmed that somebody out there had made decisions about what was important and we had also had that written into policies.

DW So there was very little to worry about. A lot of people worry about whether they should comply with one part or resist another because they didn't really think that that was appropriate but really you didn't need to resist or comply because you had pre-empted.

Chloe Yes that's right, that's basically it. I think, from what I remember, the greatest discussion about and the greatest change seemed to be in what sort of DT suggested to us and I can remember inviting some of the advisors to actually spend days with us on the design process as that was new because the practice had been, you know, I'm a year 4 teacher, this is what you are going to produce and its going to look as good as or better than this one and you are going to have that and suddenly we were presented with something that was sort of technically, you know the whole idea of children starting from a blank piece of paper with a particular brief and drawing up a designs that would all be completely different and individual and not necessarily as pleasing an outcome as maybe teacher led and even maybe not successful but to have the re-assurance that that was ok because that was part of the design process. I can remember that time there was quite a bit of struggling with that as that was a new – at the same time I could sort of see why that should be but I think I wasn't alone at that time, I think a lot of teachers felt uneasy and I don't think it entirely removed, you know, if you are going to produce this Christmas card then this is the one you are going to do and everybody will do the same and they are going to look really good and I'm going to be pleased with them rather than – that I can remember thinking took me and other people quite a while to accept that and accommodate so it was in that subject I think quite a different approach and certainly a different outcome.

DW So if we focus in on that, that sort of tension between what you have been used to and what you thought was the path people were going down and what had been presented to you, how did that tension manifest itself? Was it positive action or was in stepping back for a while and saying, "I've got to think about this?" By tension I don't mean tension within you, I mean tension between these two different aspects.

Chloe I think its sort of um it evidenced itself in needing every time it came to a discussion with an advisor or somebody who was – actually taking the opportunity to say "but" until there came that time when I think it was accepted. The only area I think there was

a sort of concern and there was that tension of being and having a different outcome and how comfortable we were with that really.

DW So its just that one small area.

Chloe Yes that I can really recall, yes.

DW This has been remarkably easy for me because its been a fairly smooth road for you. What I have been looking for is people who have different responses and I've not met anybody else yet who has had things in place and its been a fairly smooth ride so that has given me another outlook which has been excellent.

Chloe I think the other view I have – you see I lose track of time, it was quite some time ago – I had a very strong feeling because we had a guest speaker at a Headteachers conference in Worcester at the College – I can't remember the name of the gentleman, but his talk was called "The uncivil servant" and he started on his talk and suddenly he jumped off the stage in the hall and he walked up and down the aisle and all the Headteachers were gathered there and he said "Why are we so civil, why is it?" and it was his way of asking why do we accept without question everything that is given us and although you described the path I have taken as matching I think there have been times when I have felt, that just personally but as a profession and we are still doing it I think. You know we do tend to accept what we are asked to do but I'll always remember him saying "why, why, don't you say no" and I think that within the profession there should be a bit more of that.

DW But there have to be good reasons for it.

Chloe Yes, oh yes. But I must admit I have my professional concerns about PPA. The initial training course that I went on where the first detail was emerging about what we were going to have to do and the Inspector who was fronting it will remain nameless, but there were lots of questions from Headteachers and I don't think he fielded them particularly well, he was squashing them and I thought that was wrong because I think at the initial level Headteachers must always have to explore every aspect of what the snags and difficulties are before we come back to school and be enthusiastic or positive we have got to explore them and I don't think that at that initial we were given the opportunity to do that. I am not accepting that PPA should be done by classroom assistants I am uneasy with that and I said to my classroom assistants because we've got a really good team. I said to my classroom assistants this morning I was giving examples and they turned round and said, "we wouldn't want that responsibility" and I said I'm not actually saying that I don't think you could do it, but I am uneasy about that move because it changes so radically what I think the teaching profession is about, so I have actually employed two of our ex-members of staff and I think that is the most recent initiative that I feel really uncomfortable with.

DW That brings me onto another point: there are certain things which have been brought in, like PPA time which of course is supposed to be for the benefit of the teachers, and to give improved conditions but the work involved in setting it all up has certainly not provided improved conditions for Headteachers because its been very stressful and a very difficult task, not just finding people but also finding the money to do it. There was of course LFM when that came in right at the beginning with the ERA and it was said this is going to be better for schools, but there are so many heads who said "I've got

to do all of this on top of my teaching load and my management”, yes a lot of them have turned out for the best in the long run, but that short term stress that was put upon Headteachers at those points was excessive. I would like to know your views on that. I feel that whereas teachers have had quite a lot to adapt to Headteachers have had the stress of implementing it (I shouldn’t be telling you what I feel, because I don’t want to lead you, and I want to know what you feel) How have you felt at those particular times? Has it increased your load when you have had to deal with aspects other than the curriculum?

Chloe It’s a sort of two sided thing really, because in a sense at the initial training for PPA when it had been introduced and proposed a lot of heads first started to realise what was involved. At the end of that day or during that day I said that I felt I didn’t want to be placed in a position of compromising the education that we offer here and, with all due respect to the classroom assistants I felt and still feel and they agree with me that it would, I think be a retrograde step and it fills me with unease. I was in the fortunate position of a) having two members of staff that I could actually invite in b) having within the budget certainly for the coming school year, the monies to employ them and I suppose the worry that remains with me is that in subsequent years (at some point, it will become somebody else’s worry) what happens if the budget isn’t there to support? I feel that it is the most radical - it is a stepping back and there is something not right about it and I am very uneasy about it from the point of view of the provision that we offer the children. Obviously we all agree with the thought behind it, that it will alleviate the workload of the members of staff, though I’m actually convinced about that yet, either, I think the planning and the preparation and the post activity – I don’t know whether they can be self contained so that somebody comes in and does that and the class teacher is actually freed of that time and not having to put in extra time. There is no argument that I don’t think this is the right way to do it and that really does make me uneasy and I think that the profession is taking a step back. What worries me is that like a lot of things, what may we be saying in three or four years time? Somebody might say I think the behaviour in schools has deteriorated, I’ve got very good class teachers and classroom assistants, but they say to me, and said to me this morning, we work with the children every day we are equal in terms of being staff but the children can make that distinction that there is the teacher and the classroom assistant and I think that however hard we try to not make that distinction, so that we are colleagues together, the children will still. It’s a similar sort of thing to the difference that having a good student makes in our class, a good student will do a good job but there is still a difference in how the children are with that student and that difference will be there when a classroom assistant is taking that class for afternoons, and as I said, I think it was the realisation that we are not talking about isolated lessons, we are talking about afternoons right through the school year and I just think that I can see – here we don’t have a behaviour problem, but I can see that we are then going to have. I suppose of all the things that we’ve been talking about, in some ways that’s the one that fills me with most concern.

DW So that is something where there is a tension between what you want for the children and the things that you can see happening. How do you deal with that tension?

Chloe Well I suppose I deal with it by saying its not going to happen because I have it within my means because of the budget and because we have sufficient in the budge to actually plan and finance that for the coming school year but we are like a lot of schools, a part of the contingency that I have set aside is to protect us from falling rolls because our

numbers are going down like a lot of schools and we are going to take another drop next year when our present year five move because that's a group of 45 and we are likely to take in 30, so it may be more difficult this time next year, or the year after to actually continue. The subsequent training courses I have been on have – and listening to, I mean – we have been in the fortunate position of having two teachers who are known to us who will do it, other schools have had a lot of difficulty in terms of the uncooperativeness of staff; I went on one training course where there were two Heads one was fairly new and was obviously despairing and one Head who had been on the staff here I hadn't realised had actually broken down in tears and was thinking of actually not continuing in the job because of the difficulties of changing peoples attitudes and responses to certain initiatives. Perhaps I have been too lucky (laughs)

DW I think in a way you make your own luck by working out what's coming and finding ways around it.

Chloe To sort of twist that round I suppose, if there hadn't been the means within the budget then certainly the tension would be there now in terms of I would have perhaps to be putting in place something I was very, very unhappy with.

DW Would you resist as much as possible?

Chloe Yes, If I then was I would sort of make my feelings known and record it in a sense because I think – and certainly sort of passed on to the parents in terms of I am having to make this decision, I am not happy with it but that is what is required. That's the only way I could do it but I would not be happy with it.

DW How about when financial management did start?

Chloe I did find that quite stressful in the sense that it was – well what I am going to say is that when I took on this Headship you had no preparation for it in any sense in any aspect of the job I mean Mark who is the deputy now is doing the Leadership course and he has had a training day yesterday and he is having a lot of input and sort of preparing himself and being prepared in conjunction with what I am doing with him but in a sense in my generation then somehow well what was it, you sort of got into the role and learnt on the job I suppose. And yes, when financial delegation came I suppose that became a huge responsibility that actually did take me some time to adjust to because it was out of the teaching and working with teachers. You know, as the deputy and as class teachers, you have some sort of insight into it but here you had something which was completely new to everybody in the job at that time. It took quite a number of years to actually recognise the freedom that it gave us – well limited freedom but the freedom that it gave to be responsible for.

DW It gives a greater flexibility...

Chloe Yes that's right

DW ...but it's the burden that comes with that responsibility getting used to dealing with that, and that's what causes that tension or that stressful situation. How did you deal with that when it arose? Some people threw themselves into it, other people stood back and said give me a course, other people...








Chloe Yes, I always say that I think the support staff of the LEA have made that sort of easy and they still do. I think without that I might have floundered, so they have been particularly helpful.

DW Apart from the last bit which I don't need to ask you, because you've had such a – well, not a smooth ride, but a good path through the changes, you obviously haven't needed to consider any of the strategies for dealing with really stressful situations such as the ones on the sheet that I gave you.

Chloe No and I suppose in a sense I am of that generation I suppose where when I got the Headship of this [school] I was a deputy Head and I had committed myself and so there was a point early on I think where I just saw the commitment continuing and so there wasn't the element of sort of where do I go from here either. There have been elements of doing other things parallel to being a head but certainly not sort of – so I think in a way that sort of helped the ongoing ambition up to a certain point it was still, or I still had ownership of that vision to the point where – so I think that's sort of the path, there wasn't a point when I thought well, there's always the bigger school, or something else because the commitment was there in terms of the ongoing vision as it was.

DW So there are no other peripherals really which have impinged, so you've had a good route through which is really nice.
So it only remains for me to say thank you

7839 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Initial interview with Dianne (dl19105a)

DW I'll mention all the ethical bits first; first of all I can't pay you

Dianne That's the end of the interview then, goodbye!

DW Do you know, I don't think I've been to an interview where someone hasn't made a joke of that?

Dianne We would be flabbergasted if you did pay, it's not our profession that is it?

DW The second thing is that whatever is said is totally confidential, it will only go into my thesis and nothing else. Even my supervisor doesn't see the transcripts or interviews and I will at some point let you have a copy of what I'm writing so that you can check it. I would also like to tape the interviews and keep them on my computer. Also there will be two interviews, this short one and a longer one later.

I need a few details to start off with, how long have you been in teaching?

Dianne I knew you'd ask that, I always have to do a count back, let me see, since 1973.

DW So that's 32 years then

Dianne Thank you very much

DW How many years have you been a head?

Dianne I am in my sixteenth year – half the time I've been a head if you look at it like that.

DW And how many schools have you been a head in?

Dianne Just the one. Interestingly enough, it may or may not warrant a mention I was deputy head in a split site school of 700+ children in Buckinghamshire, massive, it would be somewhere in the region of 450 – 500 who were afro Caribbean or Asian, and a split site school meant that I was the head as much as anything else is concerned on the larger site. The old school had been closed and a new school built there was an influx of Ugandan Asians and others, they put them in there and it grew and grew and grew. So there was a head and a deputy and full admin staff; I was a full time teaching deputy with a telephone in my room for 400 kids, quite an interesting phenomenon.

DW What a busy time!

Dianne So I took up a headship for the easy life (laughs)

DW I moved into primary for similar reasons as I was senior teacher in an enormous school and I knew the school was closing when we decided to move to Hereford. I thought I would see what I could do and I moved into primary and I've never looked back.

What I'm doing is a longitudinal study I'm looking at the career paths, what I actually call the career trajectory, of heads from just before the Education Reform Act which was 1985-ish right through to now and my particular interest is the government's interventions. The most important thing as far as I'm concerned is tensions that have been caused, I'm looking at stress but my focus is on psychological tensions between what your aims are as a head and what the aims of the national curriculum are and all the other ramifications and the tension between the two, which way do you jump?

I've got lots of bits of paper for you, the first is my aims and objectives you can keep that. The tool I'm going to use to analyse everything is what is called the activity triangle.

Dianne OK

DW In which the headteachers are the subjects and they are trying to achieve outcomes by aiming at an object. Now the object is not the same as an objective, the object is an intrinsic part of what they are doing; there was an psychologist called Leont'ev who described it in this way, way back in the mists of time when Neanderthal man was chasing animals the beaters would scare the animals so that other people could kill them and then they could eat them. The beaters immediate objective was to scare the animals a longer objective was to make sure the animals were killed but the object was to feed and clothe his family. So you achieve your object by fulfilling several objectives but the object and the objectives are not actually the same thing.

Dianne So they are the outcome in a way, no, they're not really are they because you've no need to achieve the object. So the overriding thing is to feed and clothe your family but you may not actually achieve that, but to do that there are several steps or roles and each of those has to be directed towards the object.

DW I do tend to be a real nuisance when I'm talking about the object. An example would be if I say to a teacher, what's the object of this lesson? They may say "the children can learn to add up and take away, or multiply and divide..."

Dianne For what reason?

DW Exactly. I would ask why? And they may say its good for them, they need to do it and I would say "why?"

Dianne Like a two year old

DW Yes I'm just like that and you may get down in the end to them saying they've got to do well in their SATs. And I would say "why?" And the answer may be because it makes me look good – that's certainly not the case with an awful lot of teachers that I know but it's an example – but that would be the object.

Dianne Ok, I'll try and keep definition and the differentiation clear.

DW In your task, to achieve your outcomes which are whatever you want for the children or your philosophy of education you are going to use tools or instruments which could be educational strategies, the language you use, tasks you set the children, all sorts of things may be used as your tools. Tools and objects can change place since you may find that something which is your object initially, once you have achieved it then becomes a tool to achieve the next object.

Dianne Ok, yes

DW The rules are the historical rules of the school. Is the school traditionally a very rigid structure or is it a very open structure? That's the sort of rules we are talking about. The community is everybody involved, the children, the teachers, the governors, the parents, the LEA, even the DfES; and division of labour is how your working to achieve your objects. Are you doing it yourself, are you working in a collegiate fashion, are you working with others, but you are the leader of the group? The whole thing is called the system, so this is your school system.

Dianne I've got one question straight away, there is one point where all these interactions seem to cross and its not labelled what would that be then, because that looks like a very important point.

DW It does, but all these points with arrowheads are the important points and that is – what you're showing is that the community and the tools will interact.

Dianne Are you sure that this isn't God's intervention point?

DW It could well be.

These are just paths which link the nodes and sometimes we draw them like this: if for instance you wanted to have an open school with very topic based sessions and each member of staff being autonomous in their own room and traditionally you had a very rigid system and you're a new head then this line here would not function very well it would be

Dianne A weaker one

DW ... well more than a weaker one it would be a contradiction between those two and if you get that then we draw the arrow like a lightning flash and that shows that there is a contradiction between those two points. So you can see how we build up a picture of the system. You can keep that if you want.

Dianne Yes I like that, that's a good way of doing it. I was trying to think of perhaps having different intensities of lines. I would be very interested in some more detail as I am doing some Professional developments with teacher training for the Marches. I was looking for sessions to put in so I may be reading this and contacting you – and we pay!
Um, I like that it's a good theoretical base.

DW So that's where it is leading. What I will be asking you to do is tell me about a system that you were working in just before the Education Reform Act, and what that system was like, the system you are in now, and what its like, how those nodes interact, and then I want to look at one point in between, you can choose any point you like but that point should be a point at which there are some tensions, or a point where everything was going very well. It may be perhaps that it was in 1989 when all the folders for each subject arrived at the school and there was a great tension between what teachers wanted and what was thrust upon them. I have of course had people who haven't said that, people who have said that was a great time because it clarified everything and it showed that was I was doing at the time, which was curriculum based, was the way forward. Other people have looked at particular points of tension which have been personal, which is fine if you want to do that, there have been examples of headteachers who have had a very difficult time when relatives have died and they have used that as their point of tension, since they were trying to balance home-life and their Professional duties which caused personal and professional tensions at that point. It could be a personal tension or it could be a professional tension the choice is up to you.

What I shall do then is look at the three periods and I will say what were those three systems like, where are the contradictions, where are the tensions? I will do that for eight heads and I'm looking at the effects of government interventions on the heads and the way that they want to run the schools and their own personal educational philosophies because we all, each of us, have built up our own identities as teachers and we have built that up by interaction with other teachers particularly in the early part of our career. Things we have worked out for ourselves and things we have taken on board from others have forged that identity and I am looking at how that identity works with or conflicts with what we are being pushed into doing, and how that has changed over the years. Of course there are a lot of people who initially said "what on earth can I do about this financial management I have to do now, I just can't deal with it, I've never done finance before, the LEA have done it for me, all I've done is spend the money and then 10 years later they think how wonderful it is that they have the flexibility to spend the money on what they want, whereas before when the LEA...

Dianne A straitjacket, yes.

DW ...So I will be looking at the three periods on that continuum and seeing how things have changed and how those tensions move from one area to another – its really interesting stuff, well at least I think its interesting.
Finally I shall be looking at adaptive strategies

Dianne Yes

DW adaptive strategies are how teachers and headteachers who come under too much tension want to relieve that, they want to stop the problems and they can do it in three ways and those three ways are called retreatism, downshifting and self actualising.

Dianne One sounds quite easy to understand

DW Retreatism is, I've got them all here, is things like retirement, downshifting is fairly obvious, its people who say I can't take any more I'm going to teach instead, I should become a teacher, I should become a deputy head, that will relieve my burden – and I've known some people who have done that. It can also be a redefinition of their role, they may say I just can't manage any more in this particular environment I'm going to look for a headship somewhere else because I can't get on with the governors...

Dianne Or as one local head has done, bring a co-head in

DW Yes that would be a form of downshifting because that relieves some tensions particularly if they are tensions due to wanting to do the best you can and finding you've got too much to do so that you can't do the best you can in everything.
The last one is called self actualising and I've known a lot of people who have done that too. Its people who say at the moment this isn't the area for me to be in therefore I'm going to go off and write children's books because it's the same sort of thing, I'm still dealing with children, but I haven't got these pressures

Dianne I can't deal with these any more or whatever.

DW Yes that's right, particularly when the literacy and numeracy strategies first came out, lots of people in that position went to be advisors so they were still working with the children, they were doing what they wanted but they were out of that specific situation and they could stand back from it and say "yes I can agree with the literacy strategy it is good, or I can agree with the numeracy strategy it is good, I can tell people how to get them working but I haven't got the problem of being in a straitjacket and being told what to do. So that's self actualising.

Dianne It doesn't apply but one of my pet things is what ever happened to secondment? Which would that fit into?

DW Secondment would be ...

Dianne Difficult really because it could be a few because the idea might be that you want to come back.

DW Secondment I would think would be a short term retreatism. It's a bit like you going off and doing something totally different if you are seconded for a year. I know somebody who was seconded for two years to do a masters degree and he said I'm not worried about the pay just get me out there and he did his two years and he came back refreshed and went back into the job. He wasn't a head, he was a teacher.

Dianne Because I'm a great believer in that system which hasn't really got off the ground here at all but it has in other countries.

DW Yes, other countries have sabbaticals for teachers. So that's the last bit and all we need to do is arrange another day, thank you.

Dianne So there's no specific questions on those areas today?

DW No, what I shall come in with next time is asking you to tell me about the last twenty years of your professional trajectory.

DW For about 15 minutes or so could you just run through your Professional Trajectory since about 1985? I chose 1985 because it's just before the Education Reform Act.

Dianne Of course, Ok. I was working abroad for a couple of years in the Far East up until 79 I then came back into England and got a post in Buckinghamshire, which was the old scale 3 for environmental studies and so on. It was a fascinating school where I re-learned how to be a teacher and forgot everything we had ever done before because there was a very enigmatic headteacher called Alex Ferguson (nothing to do with Manchester United). He appeared every Friday night on Thames television as the education correspondent, he was a good friend with Professor Tim Brighouse and they had very similar kind of outlooks. When I went for interview I was met by this character who I thought was the caretaker, em, who actually was the headteacher. He had ploughed up football fields and dug in ponds and he had birds and animals of all varieties which the children were encouraged to look after, and in the same way that the children were encouraged to look after the animals in the community, the adults were encouraged to look after the children – as a 365 day job as it were. That was his approach so on Christmas Day we all met at the school planted a tree fed the animals and went home and the care side of things was absolutely phenomenal. So that was very much a re-learning, even when a child was injured or feeling sick in your class it was a case of, if it was your own child who do they need, they need the adult they know most, so the teacher should go out of the class with them and take care of them, leaving the support assistant with the other children. There were a lot of issues like this, you know, showing values. That was a fascinating time and it was an environmental study centre that was the whole school and we had two 37-seater coaches which I was in charge, going and collecting children from other schools and taking our own children out off out on visits. A lot of my education philosophy as it were now has come from that time. I was then, as far left wing if you like in those days that school was, I then was appointed politically, to the furthest right wing school in the county as deputy head. It was a split site school in the Home Counties it had the best results for going to grammar school because it still was – it was 12+ in fact because we had them until year 7 – it was very, very, it was a huge school on two sites they had built the new school lock stock and barrel but at that time they had an influx of Kenyan, and Ugandan Asians and Afro-Caribbeans and they opened up the old school, the Victorian building again and it grew and it grew and grew. So we had 800 and something children on the two sites and I was a deputy – it was massive – and I was a deputy of that school in the annexe which had more than the main school, right, and what happened was I had a secretary on Monday morning and Friday morning and a telephone in my classroom as I taught full time and I managed that building.

DW So you were effectively a teaching head?

Dianne I was effectively the teaching head, and we had to go off down to the other site to get to meetings and so on. Em I managed to bring people round to my way of thinking, and em, as it were from a point of view of, em, - it was a wonderful school, but it needed bringing up to the twenty-first century in so many ways. I mean yes it was a wonderful amalgam I mean I feel that my send off from there was really heartfelt em it was massive it was great, and there was a full commitment for my part and everybody else's part to it including the head who came with me. The head in actual fact, had been a pupil at the school, no I beg your pardon, had been a trainee teacher at the school, was appointed to the school, made progress through the school to deputy head and when the head was killed in a car crash was appointed head and she had only ever taught in the one school and so it did need some re-thinking, the materials and resources were well out of date with wide range readers, you know, plip plop, plippety plop and also the em – what was it? Sambo with a bone through his nose – and all this, as I say in a school with a huge population of Afro-Caribbeans and Asians and nobody was looking at that kind of stuff so I thought it was my responsibility to bring things up to date. To make it acceptable. There were several Section 11 teachers which – the lady, she reminded me of Margaret Thatcher, the head, she sort of ruled with an iron fist really and they didn't find it was in their place to say that. It was fascinating that one of the inspectors in the county is now brought into Mercia regularly for values

education by Barry King (a local inspector), and I knew him quite well down there as well, having said that, his name has suddenly gone out of my head, Neil Hawkes. So when he came in I said, "Oh hello, how are you?"

I stayed there for seven years and we made a lot of progress in fact I went back after I was appointed here because with the number of teachers who were accredited coaches and so were able to take on a football team, in year three and carry them up after three years and take them round, we ended up after three years sort of playing at Wembley in the National finals with the particular team that I had got at that time but I had already been appointed here as well so I had to go back and do that.

I've got a history of only teaching in large schools so I do feel blinkered, em, no not blinkered because I'd like to think that having chosen to live in Mercia, I do think about the issues of small schools, I think they are the experts the heads of small schools, em different issues, most of the issues I've got here are connected with big schools they are not connected with multi ethnicity they are connected with, I think, bigotry which I find in Mercia quite a lot and I can say that because my grandparents are Mercian but the outside world is coming at a heck of a pace into Mercia and we need to prepare the children, and the adults too, to co-exist happily.

I was appointed here in 85 [actually 89] at the start of the National curriculum, em, when I opened my drawer from my predecessor who had been here for 24 years so there has only been two heads at this school, because I've now been here 16 years and I opened the drawer and all the national curriculum documents were in a pile bound up with a bow and a post-it sticker on the top which said 'it makes interesting reading he gets killed in the end'. He obviously wanted nothing to do with the national curriculum, he was a bit like the school I'd come from, em, a very successful head in a very successful school well thought of but things needed to change and he wasn't able, prepared or whatever to do that so he left after 24 years and he started the school and so on, and he had a deputy head and a second mistress at that time – and my second mistress always used to say "and who is your first mistress?" but that's another story (laughs), bless them, both of them were elderly spinsters and both of them have subsequently either retired, or died unfortunately. The school was built as a two – no you want about me, not the school – I then brought with me everything I had learnt abroad and in the school that was an environment centre and in the very large multi ethnic primary school which was split site and which was also very, very rigid in its approaches initially. That helped me to temper, if you like, the very left wing feelings that I had from the other school and, you know there is more ways to skin a cat than those certainly and I think that I am very adaptable in a way. Interestingly when we went to the headteacher leadership courses you do diagnostic tests about your leadership and management styles and whereas you can get peaks and troughs on the seven different styles mine were all very similar strengths from the views of the staff and governors and parents of the school here so I do think that is an adaptable approach. It can be a strength if used properly rather than a weakness because, you know, you haven't – there is an argument is there not that if you've got one particular style you can drive things forward that way but I like to take people with me, anyway.

DW It's a matter of whether you are pushing people or pulling them along with you.

Dianne That's right. We've made a lot of changes in the school here but again my predecessor said "I don't care what you do, as long as you keep t'atmosphere good" {said with a Lancashire accent} [laughs], and that's what I've been trying to do and I'm very pleased that the recent parents surveys that is very much a feeling that the parents still feel it retains the feel – even though its 530 – we feel like a family primary school, so we do that through unit basis and this kind of thing. Em a lot of the push at the moment I think is to do with values education and making sure that children's interaction with each other and with adults in the school is as we would like it to be. I think its summed up, what I'd like it to be, in the fact that several years ago I stopped, well soon after I came I stopped discos for children because for me, they grow up soon enough, they should be children while they are still children and there's enough pressure on them to grow up so that's, sort of, my approach to anything and everything based on that really.

DW That's good, right em, in that period...

Dianne Oh, sorry Dave, can I just go back. I will also say that my predecessor didn't want anything to do with the national curriculum but also the school was one of the last three schools in the country running ITA, initial teaching alphabet, and so in actual fact I was just saying to one of my new teachers here that for two years the LEA were pulling their hair out with me, the first two years I was appointed, they thought I was a maverick because I refused to start the national curriculum in line with everybody else because we had to pace it, we had to pace the change of the children's reading, but also because it was written in their language their reading books and their literacy was all (English in those days) was all written in ITA which also meant that their maths was hand written by the school staff in ITA so the children could read it right the way through the school. So I thought we had enough on, changing that and bringing it into the twenty-first century in that respect and, you know, I was sufficiently naive, confident, maverick, call it what you will to simply say well if anything happens in this period of time I carry the can, let's go with it. The LEA used to keep on saying how come your staff are so happy when nobody else is around this place, and I'd say "Well we're not starting the national curriculum yet". Well it paid off, you know, it was one of those gambles in your life which paid off because when we started it two years later the children had been assimilated and those who had already started in the reception on ITA had already got to the normal transition at the end of year two onto the standard text those children who'd worked along, we'd been running two systems side by side for two years and I was always saying its going to be two years and then we start. After those two years the national curriculum was re-written and phase two came in and we just came in with phase two and it had all been ironed out, so we were very fortunate on that one.

DW Yes, you didn't have all the rush, pressure and huge folders.

Dianne That's right, I mean we looked at it obviously, sort of preparing to move that way but we weren't about to do too much too soon and it took the staff with me and I also had a very interesting thing inside the first six weeks, where I had to dismiss a member of staff and so they saw two sides straight away and it was a very interesting – you know, abuse of children basically – it got the LEA involved and all the rest of it. I wouldn't have chosen, I wouldn't have thought of choosing either of those things as things to do in your first term or two years as a headteacher but in actual fact it painted a very good picture for staff of the new head – oh blimey me you know. Also my predecessor had not – I don't wish to knock him at all because the school had a superb reputation and all I am trying to do is maintain it if at all possible and extend it – but he had always made all the decisions and everything else and I started to open up discussions in staff meetings which may sound strange now but they were very quiet and short meetings initially and there were lots of long periods of nobody talking until somebody started to talk, and now I can't shut them up of course, but, that's the norm. There are several places where I have noticed, in my own life, that big changes have had to be brought in and I feel that I am quite pleased with the effects of those changes.

DW You have actually – have you read through this, because you've gone through quite a lot of what I've been looking at which is first of all how the system has affected you and how its built up your identity as a teacher and a headteacher and how you have strived to change the system if you need to and you've pulled a lot of that together which is really nice. What I'd really like to look at in that trajectory are three particular points. The first just before – I was going to say just before the Education Reform Act and national curriculum but just before you brought the national curriculum into this school which was a little bit later, what the school system was like as in the triangle at that point; what do you feel its like now, and then some point in between of your own choosing, and the point in between should be a point where either things have moved forward really well and you've felt that perhaps – lots of people have said to me it's the time when literacy and numeracy came in, those strategies pulled the whole thing together and what they were trying to do really worked and they have pre-empted it a little because they were having plenaries at the end of lessons anyway and it just made things work – or a time that was just the opposite, in which something was brought in, an initiative and you thought how on earth am I going to do this, what's this all about and there was a tension between the identity you'd built up and the way you were being led; so either of those at a point in the middle.

Looking at the triangle I am going to concentrate on this first, the object, the object as far as I am concerned is what drives you, what drives you as a teacher and a headteacher, what is it, what do you do the job for, what is really at the root of it?

Dianne I suppose, em, that would come back to years ago, I didn't sort of drift into teaching but I made a choice about it a long time ago really. I don't know what made me have that choice whether it was innate or whatever but I feel that it was right and it was changed slightly, having gone to college because I went initially to be a secondary geography and PE teacher and I went to Canley which is now part of Warwick University and they ask you what you went on and I said I want to be a geography teacher in a secondary school and they said you will have a compulsory primary practice and I liked the open mind I liked the open eyes I liked the open mouth I liked the openness of the children and receptiveness and I thought wow I like that and then I had a secondary school practice and realised that at 50 I wouldn't be able to climb the ropes, hit them on the rugby field anywhere near as hard as a could in the PE section and all I could do in geography seemingly was to hold on to those who wanted to learn geography which was a small minority, through the geography and the others was because I could do things better than them as a male role model as a young twenty something year old but as a 50 year old I couldn't do that and I thought I don't want to do this for the rest of my life, it's a right battle so I made a choice at college to go into primary and I've never looked back. So I don't know what made me go into teaching in the first instance but I definitely know primary was for me in my college days, does that help?

DW It does. Unfortunately my college didn't send you on a compulsory primary practice, otherwise I would have done the same but I did 18 years in secondary first. So what's at the root of it? You've said why you prefer primary, but I'm not really looking at – let's call it your philosophy of education, in other words what do you want to do?

Dianne Well, if you like, I want to set children free. Give them the rules to be able to liberate them and have the self confidence to work within a structure where they feel confident and express themselves and even go outside the box as it were, but be very clear that they are comfortable in their own situation whether they have disabilities or whether they are gifted or whether they are run of the mill or whatever their situation to understand their self worth and to be able to go out and do something with their lives on a positive side. I work very hard I think with those children who find it very difficult to fit that, so I spend a lot of time with an open door policy with children, come and talk to me, come and see me I will find you, how are doing, you know, a lot of that kind of thing, try and get them into a self worth feeling that they matter. Then the children can go forward. I suppose you could call it nowadays in the SEF that we are doing for the Ofsted's, it's not just the standards and I deplore the fact that standard, standard, standards you know, yes standards of course and we can improve the standards for those who can achieve and some can achieve better than the standards, I suppose all can, but there the other things, it's giving them skills for life with our physically disabled children here, you know, they have a totally different life style and when they go out they are not going to have their parents with them all the time, they need to be able to be self sufficient in some way shape or form, and there are certain skills which need to be put in place for life now, through portage, through various things, so whatever, that's all I want for the children when they leave here, that they can go with confidence to the secondary school and with a love of learning in its own right. I don't know what it is, it could be music, it could be the core subjects, it could be anything, so we try to give a range of experiences wider than the national curriculum, maths and stuff, so I do still see the national curriculum as a straitjacket because the teachers want to go with me as wide as possible but they still feel they can't dump anything and I want them to dump stuff and you know. So that would be my philosophy.

DW It's trying to shoe horn it all in?

Dianne Yes. You can either change the timetable and work on a fortnightly one, or you can throw stuff out or you can make cross curricular links and just sort of say yes we've done that, but we've done it through this and you know, so if you like that's going back to my first school in Buckinghamshire thinking about the whole child, you know, that they actually feel this is their community, we've planted over,

over, nearly 2,000 trees at this school since I've been here, sort of every five years we have every child planting a tree and we're going to do that again on our, this is the 40th anniversary of the school and we're going to do that again so that when they grow up its still their conservation area its still their school and they are not going to damage it, it belongs to the community really, does that?

DW Yes that has focussed in on why you are doing what you are doing and how government initiatives are viewed which is one of the things that I wanted to look at. What I need to do now is look at those three points in time, what sort of system were you working in or were you trying to build just before the national curriculum was developed in this school?

Dianne I was looking at maintaining the work ethic and I always remember that just after I came they asked me whether I was going to continue doing coaching for the cathedral school entrance exam which my predecessor was doing and my philosophy was no, you tell me, or show me what the cathedral school need for children to get into the cathedral school and I will embed it in our curriculum here which is a different approach to the same stuff. If there is something which is intrinsically good or necessary as a skill we need to build that in rather than give it to a selected few, em, so I was looking at maintenance of the good things but I was also as I have indicated before changing definitely the vehicle of instruction, i.e. the ITA so that I was actually trying to create – and I also, some people call it deviousness, I wanted the staff to have ownership of where we were going and it was something that was definitely missing from my predecessor. I'd just finished a B.Ed. at Reading University prior to coming, well had I finished it then, or was I, yes, I'd finished, so Reading has the national reading centre which is always interesting, reading at Reading and I was talking there with the lecturers that I had just got this appointment at this school with ITA and they couldn't believe it but they were running around the place saying, We've found another school with ITA and I said what I want to do is bring the staff down for an inset day and I want them to choose the new reading scheme to take them forward, and what I want them to choose is Oxford reading tree, I don't care how you do it, but they're choosing it not me, and they said, fine "got you" [laughs] and that's what we did, we went down and I sat back, and I was confident that people were going to show them a whole range and go through materials with them. I probably didn't need to do that, I think at the time Oxford reading tree was head and shoulders above everything else at that stage and I'd been using it at a pilot school anyway in Buckinghamshire and I was very pleased with it and they chose it and brought it back. So I was looking at maintenance of standards ownership of what the staff were doing, the staff were owning what they doing and awareness of what, if you like, because I was new to the school of all of the paths you had to take in looking at managing in a new county as well because as a deputy even of a very large annexe there was always the head that I had to look to in the end I could ring up and ask for advice and so it was always the case, and different systems so I was looking at doing that in my point of view of the management, looking at ownership, getting to know the staff, getting to know the children and the families, changing the resources and the vehicle of instruction and taking on board the impending, if not, should have already been in place, requirements of the national curriculum and the Ofsted inspections that were going to go with them. So it was maintaining all of those things together. So that's where we were I think. The school had a very good reputation I think in the county, there was a lot of sport, a lot of music, I like to think the lowering of outcomes that we seek to have as standards is nothing to do with the fact that we have changed approaches or anything within the school but is actually significant of the intake that we are getting. I think that a lot of the children in my earlier years achieved higher than they do now, mainly because of a worth ethic that they almost come in with now. I am very concerned about this as a national trend, I talk to other people as well and children don't seem to have a focus, they don't have the support at home, it's a parenting thing. They don't seem to have family talks over meals, there's television, there's games and computers in their rooms, and conversation and learning in the wider context just doesn't take place anywhere near as much and when it does the children stand out, they are called gifted and talented, whereas before, they were probably, there were more of them and they were just real children. I mean, don't get me wrong, we used to run the 12+ and em you look at your scorings and they are 124 down to 119, 117 even 119 was definitely grammar school places and now we are pleased to get 117's. An ex-pupil of mine was just tested at the High School and came in to show me what - the university of Warwick is now doing a programme for gifted and talented children and the High School have signed up to this and they test

the children and he had 117 this child, he'd have been a border line discussion in those days and now you think well Ok.

Do prompt me if I'm going off target.

DW No that's fine. At that particular point how were you supported by the bottom line, the historical rules, you were changing the historical rules at that time, as far as I could see...

Dianne That's right. But the regulations, the national regulations were in and I was sort of ignoring them for two years. What it actually did with the stakeholders was very, very positive because we talk about pace of change and in actual fact as we were approaching 18 months I had several staff say can we not dump ITA and I said don't forget those children there and we looked at the families when they were ready it eased out, it moved on out and that was the end of it. The community as a whole came with me very well because we were expanding things, we weren't contracting them at all, so that more opportunities – I've already talked about opportunities for the children to do cathedral entrance examinations through coaching and I'd embedded some of that stuff into the curriculum. We also had the richer families being able to send their children off, on Easter holidays, to France, you know, on a trip, and I said well, no, that should be part and parcel of the right of everybody to broaden that, so I had the top three year groups going on residential field visits within twelve months and we had a programme of residential field visits going on and day visits for the others. So we broadened it and we took everybody with us in that respect. The rules and regulations were changing also, nationally of course at that time so just before hand – and I'd come from, I think, as I say, a very structured school in Buckinghamshire to an equally structured school here, no, not equally structured school, but one which was just following the headteacher's vision I think at that stage as good as it was but was right for change.

DW Which makes this system work really well, and division of labour?

Dianne Division of labour, people grabbing, eating out of my hand in that respect in those days. They just said yes, can I do this, I want to do that, great, that was the pace of it and we had a wonderful period, you know, immediately following if you like once we were into it. The national curriculum coming in was a regulation obviously in that respect and that came in just two years later than it should have done, but we approached it from the point of view that it was a softening of those regulations that had come in during the first phase and the staff hadn't had to undergo the first phase through my own maverick whatever they were lucky and I did have a lot of support in the county, I mean although they were sort of saying Oh Dianne all right if you can justify it because I always said, its says everywhere that you don't have to follow the national curriculum if you can prove that something else is working. It was always enshrined in it so I said that's the get out that I've got, but we've got to do is show that we are doing something equally well and I thought that that changed and that was my way out of it.

DW Right, well how about now?

Dianne Now? I find now and it could be to do with my age, and longevity in the job I find now the changes coming in are more demanding than they were then. That was curriculum and there's always more than one way to skin a cat so we can approach things in a different way but the curriculum still remains the curriculum. The kind of things coming in now are far more closer together many of them and going into every walk of school life, managing and teaching; through the PPA time, through the restructuring of staffing, through all the things that we are busy doing for inspections; nothing stays, you know, you're happy with your self evaluation at any one time but then they allow you to do that for a very short period of time before they change – now we want to do it this way and so everything now needs re-jigging to go in there, its stopped being self evaluation and you should never do that but it's the method for some bureaucratic reason. It's driven by bureaucrats and many of them seem to be twenty years old when you speak to them on the phone never been in a school and they don't understand school, I believe, and a lot of things are coming through from government initiatives being run by people who have no knowledge of schools. Why for instance did we have that salary re-structuring come through when we had all the UPS3's and performance management and all that kind

of thing coming in and now its only been in twelve months and they are asking us to look at re-structuring and putting in TLRs if we'd have done it when we had UPS3's and one and twos, and all that kind of stuff, we could have slotted them in before and had that so now we are re-structuring again, and not only are we doing that but we are also putting through job evaluations so its splitting the work force again. We have to talk to everybody and say, sorry, all you support staff have gone through job evaluation where we have been saying for years at schools we think that every school is unique and when it suits the government or the LEA, yes that's true, but from the point of view of salary you are all the same; teachers, no they are out of it, schools are unique, you can do your own structuring for staffing. So its divide and conquer you know, and one head I was talking to it sounds cynical now about the changes coming on board and when I was talking he said gracious me, its something new every week, or every month, he said, its designed that way Dianne because the education system is bankrupt and its designed to make heads leave before they retire because there's no cash in there to pay their salaries, to pay their pensions. Now that's rather cynical and I think it is a bit but it feels heavy like that at the moment and its things which matter, obviously salaries and things like that matter for the staff so it becomes emotive if you have to change all of those but at the end of the day it's the furthest away kind of things from the children. I don't see anything coming through at the moment which – no that's not fair – every child matters of course, is a good thing to look at, and yes every child does matter, but it's a bit like inclusion, you see I don't agree with the government's policy on inclusion, I agree with inclusion, but not the government's policy on it which is that every child should go to their local school and what that has actually done has isolated children and not included them because if you are including them and you have a series of units; if that's our county and you have one in one local town, one in another, one in Mercia for instance, children with particular difficulties like disabled, we've got a unit at the moment and we draw from all the county and that's too far for them to travel, they could be on the road for two hours before they get to school, but if there were local bases probably attached to a school, not bolt on extras across the playground, but an integral part of the school building, there are two or three, or five or six children with similar physical disabilities and their parents, now we set up opportunities for the parents to meet and talk and for the LEA staff to come and talk to them and for physiotherapists to come to one base and deal with everybody in one day rather than travelling around the county so the children get a better deal. Its lip service to inclusion, its not been thought through at all I think units are the way forward, not get rid of units, but increase the number so that they are there, so even the children, a child in a wheelchair, a child with hearing impairment, I don't know what it would be, they can be isolated if they are the only one in their village school, or community school with that particular need. If there's two or three of them, then something is usually put together for their benefit because you can't ignore two or three, so even if the will isn't there, something has to be done.

DW And as you said the parents, we were talking about parenting skills, and the parents are getting more...

Dianne...Isolated in that situation, yes. I mean pulling them together, you know, "Oh, so there is a disability fund, that one part doesn't know about, but you don't know to ask it if people don't get together; or how do you go through statementing and so on, and so forth. So anyway, am I off target again?

DW No, because you are looking at the issues which are here

Dianne Oh yes, the issues today. I find a lot of it pulling me into the office rather than out into the school and I don't like that. Funnily enough in the past few days, I think I'm getting myself through the worst of it and being able to get back into you know, and have relationships with teachers again from the point of view of 'sorry I'm too busy, go away'. Not that I use that very often, but what normally happens is I give the time to the teacher, or the child or the parent and I'm starting the week's work by Friday so I'm spending every other weekend in here as well and that's not good. PPA time has thrown up this as well, teachers are now out of the classroom, you know, every moment of the week sort of thing and they come and knock on my door which means protecting your own time to be able to do other things, it's become a difficult situation.

DW Yes, but I think it's the same for the teachers, because when they go back into the classroom, they have a host of things which they have to deal with and that takes up their time.

Dianne That's right, and I think we have to review the way we are doing it. We're improving the quality of education for the children, in the way that we are covering PPA specialist swimming instructor, specialist PE teachers, specialist singing teachers and so on, so those areas of the curriculum are better covered but it's a bit too bitty for the teachers. I know of a school, not here, and I haven't found it anywhere else particularly I think but I know of a girl who is employed by the school and she goes in one day to a class and that teacher has the whole day off school, so they have the whole day and that's their PPA for the fortnight rather than having a bit they have a whole day and get through a tranche of work and I think that sounds very 'very good, but having got this system in place I think we will have to run with it and review it later.

DW We have a half day system, with two specialist teachers one for ICT, and one for PE and they take a class each and swap halfway through the afternoon so that as we have two classes in each year group the teachers can plan together.

Dianne We do it with music, we have specialist musicians who come in and take a year group together, three classes, for choral work and that's absolutely super but that's not single classes I'm afraid because the numbers don't allow and we've got three classes per year group which doesn't work quite as sweetly, but, you know, year four, I've come back to a middle bit really which worked very well which was when it was really swinging and three year groups were actually picking up their specialisms and delivering to three classes and swapping and things just seemed to run so smoothly there was no more interference at that moment, less interference and things were just let run but you know what it's like a new education minister always wants to make their mark it does seem as if you get a new person at the DfES at the moment they want to make their mark on something, you know, just change, change, change, rather than maintenance and sustaining, ah [sigh]

DW Yes, I know just what you mean. It feels like everybody up there has got something they want to run with.

Dianne That's right, and the impact is on the community here which can be the children in particular, the staff in particular, as the staff aren't able to feel it's a lovely new day, here come the kids, because they are nagging us up there and its all, you know so much of our time we spend stopping stuff from coming down, and one ability to do that – pressure.

DW We've been through that and what I'd to look at now is just one sort of biggish question, and that is, when an initiative came through, choose your own initiative there will have been so many, something comes through and you either think how am I going to do this, or you think this pushing me in a direction I do not want to go. How do you deal with that tension? I'm not talking about stress type tension, we'll come onto that later, I'm talking about the tension between where you really want the school to go, where you know that you are working towards with the children and the staff, and where you feel its pushing you. How do you deal with that tension between the two things?

Dianne Yes, [long pause] its interesting one of the things that, two things came to mind, one doesn't really affect the children, in the same way, one was LMS, managing ones own budget, where there was a tension there on the management side, away from everybody else, it didn't affect them, they were happy that it didn't affect the children, but it was how was I going to deal with that.

DW That's the one that everybody has mentioned.

Dianne I believe there is an optimum size for a school, in many respects we are too big, you know, hello sonny, no, hello sonny, I never use that line at all, but I need to know I think that heads should know the name of every child in the school, in a primary in particular but there's definitely opportunities when you are a larger school to put things in place and LMS came in and I appointed a finance officer

and it was a new way to go but a full time finance officer is what I got and LMS is not a problem. It was a problem before, it was a huge problem sitting on the floor going through with my deputy all these print outs and all the rest of it so my solution to that was very easy and the size of the school meant that I had money which enabled me to appoint somebody to the school staff which was a key worker. My colleagues, I am fully aware, because my children went to a smaller school, they haven't got the opportunity and they've still got classroom teaching, still got management roles, and part of that was this new LMS so again, being so far away from government as we are in Mercia its not thought of, they think only of city schools, we fall into that kind of category so some of these things were easier and I do feel for some of my colleagues in that respect. I know another example of that was a small country school, the previous head there rang me up and said you're getting a family of mine in January, this was just before Christmas, they're coming to you, the Taylors, four children in the family, lovely family, and we carried on talking about things were, and he said, well I'm devastated really, I'm losing two families, and that means I'm losing a teacher. I said what and he said, well you have got four from the Taylors, and I've got this other family with three, and they're moving away as well, that's seven, so I cant afford to keep a teacher, because on form seven its going to show that I'm down below that number and that means I lose a teacher. So I said if you kept the Taylors, would that not keep you, opportunity to keep the teacher, and he said yes but they're coming to you, I said, they have no need to have they and he said yes, they are coming to me and I said, I know they are coming to me, but you keep them on your register until after form seven and then ostensibly they transfer to me the day after, then you get the money and I absorb four children. I've got all the staff in place, I've got all the books, the tables, the desks, the resources, I can absorb four children in a school this size but you can't afford to lose four without losing a teacher straight away so what we did was – its not going to the LEA this is it? [laughs] it was just one of those little things that I could do to help a colleague so that's another example of the optimum size of the school.

I was thinking of another initiative that came in because quite a few of them I suppose do create the stress as it were between whether I agree with it, but it has to be in by law and mandating teachers to get on and do things when I am not necessarily agreeing with what I am saying. That's the kind of tension you're looking for isn't it I think as well. There are things that, you know, I've had to say to the staff, well we'd rather not do this, I know that and I would certainly like to approach it in a different way but we have to do this, we have to run with this and there's no other way we are inspected by this; I think the second Ofsted inspection that we had in 2000 was one of those situations where we were sort of, we change the national curriculum around, we pulled activities out of the year groups and put them where we wanted because we were running residential field visits and if you want to study great fire of London, you may as well do when the children go to London, rather than two years in advance. When we look at, you know, I'm sorry they're not meeting, these children aren't covering the national curriculum and these are the reasons why; because they've got physical disabilities, and they are so many years behind, and so on and so forth, before you could actually properly pull them out we had a very sympathetic approach from the Ofsted inspector for the kind of things that we were doing which gave us the backing to go ahead but prior to that we were saying well the letter of the law says, but this is what we are doing and so the tension was there between what we wanted to do for the best for the child sometimes individually though not necessarily as a whole group and what the regulations said. The other thing that happened of course was that the previous, before the literacy hour and so on, with the national curriculum in that format, it was too straitjacketing, and that was always a tension point, I think in a funny way, the literacy was too strait jacketing, and when numeracy came in we were able to reflect and put practice back into the literacy but when the literacy hour came in that was quite a bit of tension in the school.

DW 15, 15, 20,10

Dianne Exactly. Oh sorry you can't do that class, come and sit down times up, exactly, and so there was always that tension, how we exactly interpreted that and then the feeling that somebody else might interpret it differently and say we are wrong but the straitjacketing that was reinforced at that time that the national curriculum was a straitjacket and that the numeracy hour actually started to liberate us from that. That was the crux so you can consider the literacy hour and the tensions or numeracy and the release of tensions to some extent.

DW They do help, but if we look at a policy that's coming out, not anyone in particular, an initiative. If an initiative came in and you thought this is not going to help our children at all, this is moving away from where I want to be. Literacy I found fine, it was a straitjacket, but it was for the children and it was directed that way but there are some things which you feel – in fact the thing I found liberating was excellence and enjoyment although I still feel that it should have been enjoyment and excellence; but if something came in that was diametrically opposed to where you want to go, how would you deal with that?

Dianne Well, I'll pick up on the foundation stage bench marking, what the hell does that do? Except cause stress and strains at the wrong end of the year when we've already missed the benchmark when they come in, we go back to doing the simple Mercia one or the portage one which is skills for life – it won't give us a benchmark because we've missed a year of development which isn't taken into account because it's done towards the end of the year it's far too much, a cumbersome document it takes time out of working with children for someone to be sitting assessing or it takes time out of family time because they are doing it in their own time. Its four hundred and something boxes they have to fill for every child...

DW ...Yes, it takes me back to the one which really got me, and that was form c.

Dianne ...Correct, that's right, they've gone back to the tick boxes and who the hell has introduced this? Where does it come from? What value does it have to the children? None whatsoever, so yes we have had many a conversation and my guidance to the teachers down there is quite simple, you're not going to be able to tick every box, what are the things that matter? Let's have a look at what we think matters in the development of children. How are their social skills? Are there any weaknesses within their medical, which is inhibitors to their learning, their speech, and so on, so you are looking at the physical aspects of the children as well, their social ability to interact, their social ability focus and get on with the work, so look at those because those are all important, that's what we work on to put those things in place and then you can't do all the other areas, so I don't ask them to. I ask them to actually look at setting the scene for starting to learn in the second term of keystage one for instance. If we can actually cover those it will show up those who are not ready to learn really by that time; so I'm afraid that we don't cover them all.

DW A more pragmatic approach

Dianne Yes, and that's what we have to do, but all the time at the end of it I'm turning round and saying to staff it's all right, I told you to do that, it won't reflect on you, it will reflect on me as head of the school, I'll carry the can and I have to run it that way. When there are so many of these initiatives a lot of them have ended up with decisions having to be made at individual levels of the school and the head saying, Yes I will, or no I won't, so I think there is a lot of tension out there amongst colleagues as to whether they have made the right decision over something and what will happen if they haven't and it's questioned at Ofsted, HMI, LEA, DfES level with all the PANDA stuff and all the information they've now got we may have to change our view. They may be starting at some stage to feed electronically the next level in which will be the foundation stage benchmarking, they're not doing it now but it's the way they've gone and they will tell us, and I would like that to change to a much simpler version. I mean, we're testing kids and they'll be bringing in testing at pre-school now, what is going on here? As an initiative coming in that a tension I find, where something has come in for some bloody data collection (I didn't say that) data collection, to prove to someone on the DfES a civil servant or politician to be able to use without moving schools forward and it means time constraints a tension in the other kind of tension and stress on staff, and or myself, and I object to that. The other kind of tension I think that is created in schools is a tension on school teachers and the school community to take on board all of the plethora of roles that previously had been covered by the minister, the doctor, the local policeman and everyone else. I like the idea of the community school, but I don't like the idea of the being the community everything. I don't mind being the community facilitator of everything but not actually doing everything, but more and more and more we're getting to the

position where we are so that's a tension that's created from outside, in society as a whole and set as a national agenda really.

DW When you decide something like, we're not going to fill in all these boxes, how are you supported by the community; the staff, the governors, the parents, in our school the parents don't become involved and effectively say you get on with it, you're doing the education, you've got a different set of parents, but we have a very supportive set of governors who say you're the experts we'll back you.

Dianne That's very similar to the approach we've always had, we've just got three new governors, and I'm a bit concerned about one of them who seems to be a little bit more difficult, but I'll work on her, but everybody else, is supportive and I've already had a word with her about the collective side of governorship rather than the individual hobby horse. A lot of support from the teaching staff, support staff, the parents as well, I'm thinking about the foundation stage thing in particular here. Like you say the parents want the children to come to school and be happy and want to learn and so on, so being happy is the first thing, from that they can learn and deal with every issue around that so I'm asking them to be hands on with the children, and then we need to pass on information about that as soon as possible if we find a problem so yes, we don't wait until the end of the year do we to fill in the document and then say this child's got this problem had it all year so there's the evidence now we can do something about it. We actually do things about it in that year when the child has the problem so by the time we get to that point a lot of the things have been put right, it can be put in through banding, you know the system don't you, and so it's what's happened in the intervening time that would be a good commentary to have if you like to go with that for a totally different format on that. So the parents are happy because it's not a case of nothing has happened and there's the report at the end of it, it's a case of what is happening and how we record that and that's what the governors and the parents and the teachers want to do. So we've got a lot of support on that.

DW There have been lots of tensions and you've dealt with different ones in different ways, how has that affected you as a person?

Dianne I don't know whether it's my age, or the thousands of initiatives or whatever, but I feel tired. I think I intimated to you before that this is the worst start to a year I have had, and I've never felt the pressure like it. I've given up the teaching training, which I felt absolutely motivated about maybe it's a little bit of that, I'm a little bit low because I'm not involved with that but I couldn't afford the time so I've come back to full time headship, you know, I love it, I love the relationship with the children and the staff and all that kind of thing but I am tired. I am feeling more aches and pains in the shoulders stomach complaints are more regular and this kind of thing, I am a little bit concerned about my own welfare at the moment to be honest and I would like the government to consider sort of exit strategies for senior staff for all staff. I have been shouting long and hard about, for years about secondments and I mentioned this to you last time, many countries give secondments to their teaching staff when you consider that's it more stressful, teaching is more stressful than flying an aircraft, you have people's lives in your hands when you're flying an aircraft every second you're up there, but you've got children's lives in your hands every hour of every day so I think – and as I said there was that very cynical approach from a head that I talked about before and I think that even younger heads than I initiating heads and I'm thinking about people like Peter, perhaps I shouldn't mention other people's names in this, but he is already, I said to him at the beginning of term how are you, and he said, looking for a villa in Spain in which to retire Dianne. And you think, wow, if you are, - and I think there's a great danger here that the profession will lose people, I know of three posts advertised for headship, one got two applications, one got one, and the other got a handful. If that's indicative of the situation then somebody needs to sit up and take notice.

DW I think that may be a combination of things, people can't apply for headship now without an NPQH, how many deputy heads aren't doing it because they don't have the time, how many headships aren't going to be filled?

Dianne I agree with you entirely. They've got all these other things like leadership from the middle, enjoyment and excellence course, primary leadership and management course, but when have we got the time? When have we got the inclination, when have we got the reward, no the reward isn't necessary because you get money for your reward, but I don't feel specifically able to do very much more, extra on top of, and that's the problem. The motivation, we're being de-motivated rather than motivated.

DW Speaking of which, did you look at this sheet? Exit strategies.

Dianne Oh yes

DW If you were thinking, if the tension was too great, which direction do you think you would probably go? I know which one of those I would choose, and a lot seems to depend on the age of the person I am talking to; which direction would you tend to move?

Dianne [long pause] I mean just by using the terminology that the strategies suggest, retreatism is in my mind, but in actual fact I think self actualising is why I got into the ITT business, you know, training teachers, in a way, I don't know I think maybe its fascinating to know which way I will end up taking it may just be the fourth one you haven't mentioned, death in the job, [laughs] its interesting that its admitting to the stress and anxiety and that's what I've felt this term and beginning to look at ways of leaving that but having said that there are other things which also lead to stress and anxiety which means that I can't afford to because of the mortgage and all the rest of it to accept that so maybe I need to look at and I know that twelve months ago my performance management from the external assessor, he was sufficiently impressed or whatever the word would be to suggest that I use his name to contact the national college for school leadership to look at me perhaps self actualising and doing something in that way and of course I know that Bob has done that you know a retired head and lots of people but there is also an interesting thing in me perhaps a tension of my own that sometimes I think that retired heads doing that are a little bit like; oh, couldn't you stick it then so why are you coming and telling me what to do, you know, so I don't know. I always want to retire when it's the right time in my age range to retire and be pleased to be retiring at that not to look for a reason to go. I want to try and work from within if you like, and change the government directives and be part and parcel of saying, whoa, steady and then maintain the – so I don't know. What do you think? Self actualising, probably that one, probably that one.

DW I wouldn't like to guess, if it was me, it would be self actualising, I would probably go and work for a voluntary group or a missionary society or VSO and do what I do best and do it somewhere where...

Dianne ...where its appreciated. I know, I've just been talking to someone who has come back from Chad and he was saying well you know, back to that basic thing I said about college, the open mind, the open mouths, he said the children were like that, they've got nothing, not even a roof over their heads but with somebody standing there talking to them, you know, we are missing that aren't we society at the moment, so I think I probably agree with you

DW I believe its due to the direction we have been pushed

Dianne I agree.








DW And we are forcing young children away from their energy and enthusiasm and we are pushing them into tests and exams and league tables and that's why I'm doing this

Dianne Well you've got a soul mate in me here mate. I think probably self actualising I would I don't want to downshift but at the same time I don't want to retreat from it altogether either so I probably think its about utilising the skills I've got. I went for a role in the authority I think did I tell you, I can't remember I went to an LEA inspectors job I'd rung the senior inspector when I saw it advertised and said can I just say from the heart what I want you to do is to appoint somebody from outside coming straight from classroom practice because with the best will in the world there is nobody in the LEA as

inspectors who have had responsibility in a school for national curriculum. I said just as I haven't in the classroom, none of you guys have in managing a school. So you want someone in that role and I think you also want somebody from outside of county rather than keeping it in. He said Dianne you've just talked yourself out of a job I was going to ask you to apply [laughs]. I said never mind that's still what the county means and he said will you still apply, and what I hadn't realised is that there were two jobs up for grabs so I did apply but I suppose I was going into it half heartedly thinking I was making up numbers and somebody else picked up that role at the time. I came back into school the next day and felt a little bit down; no I didn't go into it half heartedly, but I didn't think it clearly through really and the answers I gave, so I came back to school the next day and I was walking from there to there and by the time I got to there I thought I don't want to be anywhere else I don't want to be an inspector, that's what I do and that's what I do well and that's what I want to be doing. So here I am.

DW Thank you very much. It's been very useful.

13624 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Emily (db25115a)

DW I'll start with the small important things that I need to tell you, things like I can't pay you; anything you tell me only goes as far as me, even my supervisor at University doesn't know who I am interviewing and won't so that's the important two things. What I am actually doing is looking at heads and trying to discover how they've built up their identity as heads throughout their career, so I will be asking you to run me through your career, but not today. I then want to look at how that identity works with or against that is goes nicely with or conflicts with the national initiatives, of which there have been a few.

Emily Endless yes.

DW So what I'm looking at is heads' career paths since 1985ish just before the Education Reform Act, what sort of school were you working in, what was it like? Now, what sort of school are you working in and what's it like as a system, I'll talk about systems; and somewhere in the middle of your own choice which needs to be somewhere where either because of the government initiatives things were going really well or moving forward happily, or, because of the government initiatives there was some tension between what you wanted to do and what you had to do.

Emily I'm not sure about the middle bit but yes we'll go for it.

DW What I'm actually doing is typed up [handing her a piece of paper]

Emily I haven't got my glasses but I'll take it away.

DW The theory I'm using to analyse my data is called activity theory and it works using this triangle. [Handing her another piece of paper.] You are the subject and you're trying to achieve outcomes but you are aiming at an object. Your object is not an objective. For instance your objective might be, in a class, if you are teaching maths, to make sure they can all add up and take away, and if you told me that I would ask "why", if the reply was because I want them to do well at maths, I would ask "why"; because then they will do well in their SATs.

Emily So it's a grilling really?

DW Only a small part, because I want to get right down to what the root object is....Do well in their SATs, ok why? Well because if they do well in their SATs I look good and that could be the root object, or perhaps it could be I would do well in Ofsted or cover the curriculum or... and it's the root object we are looking for. The root object could also be because I want the very best for my pupils. So it is where you are aiming for, what you are about, what is driving you; that is your object, whereas your objective might be something completely different.

Emily Its kind of digging below the iceberg, if you've done your LPSH its looking below the iceberg, digging at those things that really drive you; some of those things you laughed at like because I want to be popular or because I want to be perceived as being good but often they are quite powerful driving forces.

DW So, in your aim to do that you will use certain instruments you have strategies you will use language you will use your resources. If we are talking about government initiatives you may be using whether you are complying or resisting them as a tool. Initially your object may have been to comply with them, but once you've got into the routine you will then use that as a tool to achieve the next object so things can move around as well.

Emily It depends upon the actual initiative doesn't it.

DW It depends what you are looking at, at a particular time. Helping you to do that are the historical rules in the school; is it an open school, is it rigid; historically what sort of school is it, is it a church school, is it a state school, all the historical things that come with the school. The community is everybody pupils, parents, staff, governors...

Emily People who live up the road

DW ... the LEA the DfES, they are part of the education community whether we like it or not. The division of labour is really how you like to work, do you work in a collegiate fashion, do you work with people, do you work on your own and then tell what to do? So that triangle is what I am using. And this is where it comes from [hand him another piece of paper].

Emily Its quite heavy really isn't it? There's a lot of digging.

DW Then, having dug all that information out from your career path, your trajectory through your career, what I will do is look at what were the points of tension. Tension isn't necessarily stress but I will come onto stress. Tension is where your identity says I am looking at children as the most important and the government initiative says we are looking at the curriculum as most important, and that is a tension. What have you done about the tension is what I will be asking, and if the tension is overbearing what would you do then, not necessarily what have you done, but if it got too much, what strategy would you use to reduce the tension? This piece of paper has some adaptive strategies such as retirement, moving out into another area of work...

Emily Head in the sand. Retreatism?

DW Retreatism is retirement or other ways of getting out it could be retirement but it could be becoming a bus driver instead. A lot of people who have worked with children all their lives may go and write children's books, that's retreatism as well. Three things I need to ask before we get onto the big interview, which we will need to agree a date and time for.

First of all, length of career

Emily I qualified in 72 so that's 33 years.

DW How many years as Head?

Emily Counting head or acting head?

DW Head

Emily This is my sixth year.

DW That's good, because I want some longer serving heads and some shorter. You can tell me about acting headships when you talk about your career path.

How many schools as a head?

Emily One

DW That's all I need to know, except for the next interview I've told people to leave two hours but most of them have taken about an hour and a quarter, so when is the best time for you?

Emily Do you want it as soon as possible.

DW Yes, I really want to get all my interviews finished before Christmas and start on the analysis.

Emily I would say half term but I'm putting in a new kitchen then. I've got someone coming to help me do it so I've booked up Monday as a free day but that's virtually all that week tied up. What sort of time are you looking at doing it, school time, evening?

DW Whatever is easiest for you.

Emily Monday I teach all day but Tuesday is good because I'm in the office all day. I have a staff meeting at the end of the day but if we could meet at 1pm then that sounds good.
Any Tuesday except the 22nd November.

DW I can't make the 8th

Emily How about the 15th? At 1pm?

DW Thank you very much

Main interview with Emily (db25115b)

DW Could you just go through your career trajectory over the past twenty years from about 1985 to 2005.

Emily In '85 I was deputy head of a school in Berkshire, two form entry Junior school. Em, 20 years I probably guess, I think I'd probably just been appointed a year or two there previously. I had responsibility for Maths it was a well structured school everything in its place and everything went by the second. The head there was -? - Very much one of routine and would plan things in meticulous detail

So I was deputy head there, in the middle eighties, he was diagnosed with cancer so he took time off initially for the initial treatment and then he came back shortly for a short period of time and then became ill again and then went for early retirement. He got early retirement in the October and died in the November. Because he got his resignation through in the October they decided then that they would go through and appoint from the following September. Because I'd been doing it before, and they felt that they didn't have to rush it, you know, they could take their time and we'd move on from that, which is what they did. I applied and got interviewed but didn't get the post which caused a certain amount of ill feeling between the staff and the new head and the parents and the new head - I mean whoever was in post I think there was like you know the one that was in post - they see the benefits of it, there's a bit of the devil you know. So then that situation arose whereby as I say a new head was appointed from September and there was a fair amount of conflict I must admit between us. I think she trusted me inasmuch as because I had this existing relationship with the staff and she found it quite difficult to build up relationships with the staff. To me she was quite devious in the way that she did it and was manipulative so there was this conflict. So I had been on holiday and I got back at the end of the summer and I didn't feel too well and I went to the doctors and I was in surgery within two hours and I had three operations, I think, within ten days and I went back - I was signed off until half term and I went back the week before half term just to get back into the swing of things and kind of ease my way back in and was greeted with, you know, what are you going to do about it, you've missed all this time, how are you going to make it up? To which I said, "I've started doing that, you know I've come back already, a week earlier than I should have done." So what we decided was that we would go away for the weekend and we came down to Mercia; so we came down to Mercia and we had a look at the area, simply because I once went on a course to Wales, from Berkshire and I came through Mercia and I don't know where I parked but I thought this looks a nice place to live and My husband's mum used to live in Mercia so we said, well lets go back to Mercia and we came down and to cut a long story short we had a look at houses put a bid in and it was accepted on the Sunday night and I went in on the Monday and handed in my resignation. It all went fairly well, we moved up here in the January, I didn't have a job, so I rattled a few doors on schools near home and was offered bits and pieces in various schools and then heads started ringing me up and saying I need somebody for a term can you come and do it and so I drifted into that and eventually got a one term post at King Offa which then kind of developed into a year post which was due to end at the end of that year. I had kind of looked at Headships because that was kind of where I was before because previously I had been applying for headships and been on the old carousel I'd got my masters degree in school management because it was just the time when the NPQH was coming out and I'd already got this under my belt so it was quite useful really because they'd say have you done a NPQH and I'd say I've already got my masters and it would normally shut them up. So I was looking for a headship and I applied for one or two and didn't get them. -? - and I didn't. This could have been the first headship I applied for I don't know because there were only two headships up for grabs that year and one was at Wareham and the other was at Lexham. So I went for it and I got the headship from September and I've been at Lexham now for the past, nearly six years, five and half years. '99 I started here.

DW When did you leave the school in Berkshire then?

Emily I was around for a couple of years, I did a year here, then I did another year, so when would that have been? '98, '97, January '97, I moved to Mercia.

DW So you were at that school quite some time.

Emily I was at that school for about – I'm trying to think how long was it, no perhaps I wasn't there that long, perhaps it was, I think I was there for about ten years. So that would be '87 so in '85 I was at a two-form entry Junior school in Woking team teaching in year three taking maths with both sets. I was there for two or three years, that's about right.

DW Yes that's fine, so there was a problem with the Head and communication with the staff in that school, so I presume you were used as a conduit?

Emily No, I – I'm not really – I'm trying to think how I was used, I was used as the bearer of doom, you know and – I'm not happy with so and so, you know, go and find out, tell me why she's not done this, why is this not happening? Um, I wasn't really taken into any degree of confidence because as I said there was this lack of trust and I'd like to think it was on her part, but it's like anything else, a person's behaviours often depend on your own behaviour so I'm sure there were things I was doing not consciously but sub-consciously that perhaps didn't help the situation. Um, yes, you see there's one example whereby, the year I left there were eight teachers, three of them were on long term illness because of depression, because of the work there was myself who had handed in my resignation, there was another who had got married and moved out of the area, and another one who'd taken a job in – not a failing school but a school that was about to close. Sad to relate that there were eight teachers and seven of them were leaving, a large proportion because of the head, so, the one who was my acting deputy when I was acting head, came in, he was on long term again, long term sickness through depression, and he came one lunchtime to hand in his sick note and I didn't know he was coming – he said "hello Emily" he said, yes, "have you got ten minutes to have a word" I said "of course I will". I said, "I've got a meeting planned for lunchtime, let me go and see that person, and check that it's all right to cancel it," which I did, I went to them and said "So and so's, come in, do you mind if we re-arrange it, you know, I can do anytime later this week, just let me know when you want to, she said "fine" so we went out and I said I was going out and when I got back I got slated, hauled over the carpet, dragged into the room, shouted at, yelled at, because I'd cancelled this meeting. That was part of the situation, so it was a case of get out, I had to get out.

DW I'd like you to think of three particular times during that twenty years, one prior to ERA, the Education Reform Act, one about now and one in the middle, which could be a time of particular tension, and I will explain tension when we get there, or stress, or it could be a particularly good time, a time when everything was going just nicely, and I'd like to look at the systems in the schools at those particular times. So just before the Education Reform Act, '85, '86 or perhaps '87 when you went into the school and you had the Head there who was, you know, had everything down to fine details; what was the system like, what was the school like? As a deputy head you will be the subject, and your object would be what you are aiming for, what your....

Emily Personal goals?

DW Not just personal goals, but everything that drives you as a teacher, deputy head, head, what are you *really* aiming at when you get really deep down to it? That may well be different from the outcomes, for instance, here's an example from a fellow called Leonte'ev. Neanderthal man goes out hunting, he is a beater, his job is to make a noise to frighten the animals so that the other people can kill them. So his immediate aim, his objective is to frighten the animals, his deeper aim would be to drive them towards the hunters so that they can be killed, but his actual object is to feed and clothe his family. So when you get to the root of it, what drives you?

Emily I think I have to say, you know, my basic drive is as a people pleaser, em, its not a be better or a help type person its to please people and that's my basic drive; and the other thing that I have is a try hard, you know, work hard, ethic. I think those are my two basic drives.

DW Where did it come from?

Emily To please people I don't know. I suppose all through my life it's been the easy quip, you know, the throw away remark you kind of thrive on that, you know, she's a fun person it's recognition through that I think. The try hard I don't know because when I was at school and when I was at college it wasn't a driver for me at all. I was the one at college who said this has got to be in by tomorrow I'd better start on it in a minute, Oh I've got two hours lets go and have a drink or have a game of something, it wasn't there but with teaching its always been there so perhaps there's something linked to it.

DW Somewhere way back perhaps. It may have come from...

Emily Mum would always say you work hard, mum would work from the moment she got up until the moment she went to bed really. Dad would get up and do his work and then potter about in the greenhouse. The sitting down and watching – well it wasn't an option because there wasn't a television, you could have a game of cards but it was – yes I suppose for Mum it was that drive for your working from when you get up until when you go to bed and that was what she would do. It probably comes from that.

DW A family trait, you get where you want to get through work.

Emily That's it. You work hard, you do your best dear, she always asked you to do your best. Yes, you get your homework and you do it as soon as you get it, then you can forget about it and you can relax. I wasn't like that at college.

DW Peer pressure (laugh)

Emily No it came naturally I'm sure it did, it came naturally.

DW So that's your object. So in that first system, 1987 you've got your headteacher so the rules, the historical rules of the school will have been everything in its place and a place for everything.

Emily That's right, exactly so inasmuch as you worked out what resources you needed for the next week and you wrote it in a book and that book had to be on my desk by 8.30 and I would give it out by lunchtime and if you missed that window you didn't get any resources, it was all in a locked away cupboard. So if you knew you'd only got one maths book left for the rest of the week you had to order six more because you wouldn't get any more until the following Monday. Now I must admit they were the rules I took on, it kind of eased a bit when I took over, but it was exactly that same sort of thing, by the end of it the door was left open but it was that sort of thing. In the stock cupboard – I inherited the heads stock cupboard because he taught in there for a while – as you opened the door there were markings on the shelves labelled blackboard rubber, register, and everything had its own place, you know, like you see on these tool boxes everything in a rack, hooks, it was exactly like that and his office was very much the same and if we had a performance it would be, you know, 11.33 enter hall, 11.40 headteacher introduces, 11.45 we shall sing, and it was that planned you know, to the nth degree but it worked well, everybody knew where they were.

DW Yes. So you were in this rather restricted system but you knew where you were, so things ran – what sort of tools did you use to further your aims, to get this, if you like, the pleasing people and the working hard and achieving your outcomes which may well have been for the children to do well, or whatever your aim was for that particular time? What tools did you use? and tools can be language, strategies, sense of humour, anything.

Emily I think part of it was the head was excellent but there was very much the head and the staff [demonstrated with hands] and yes there was a definite – he would never go in the staffroom, if he wanted to speak to a member of staff he would say, “look can you come into my office and speak to me,” so there was that divide. So – the tools – I sort of bridged that gap and so the tools I had was, I suppose this please, well I didn’t, I wasn’t the purveyor of good news or bad news, I refused to do that because I didn’t see that as my role. My role was fairly well defined, you know, it was open up at the beginning of the day, give out resources, be responsible for maths throughout the school, so it was a fairly well defined role, a very well defined role.

DW So you found that compliance to the rules was one of your tools, if you did that, then everything went smoothly.

Emily That’s right. The result is that its worth it and this work ethic as well that was very much seen as being important, you know, getting there as deputy head at the beginning of the day and being one of the last to leave, again, was being seen – perhaps it wasn’t perhaps it was just me seeing it that way, though I think it probably was.

DW Nevertheless that helped you to achieve your aims.

Emily That’s right, it did because it kind of got me the respectability with the head inasmuch as he said look Emily’s doing a good job, she’s putting the hours in and it bridged the gap with the staff as well who’d say, “Oh Emily’s making an effort in the class, or she’s doing this, and is always there, she’s not rushing off” so I suppose that – being available was a tool and being available for both. I’m not sure what other tools... em..

DW There will have been other things that you will have used in the classroom, for instance, but you’ve given me the main ones, the things you used to achieve your object were things like compliance with the rules, and...

Emily Definitely compliance with the rules because they were the gospel in the school and again compliance with that work ethic as well and the set ways that will do it.

DW So in the school if we look at this corner [of the triangle] division of labour it was quite hierarchical so there was the head who did his job and you and you did your job and the teachers. Did you help each other?

Emily No, no. It was pre national curriculum so everybody was in their own room and that’s very much how it worked, there wasn’t a lot of mixing, or cross fertilisation between staff, we went to the staff meetings, and the staff meetings were very much matter of fact, you know, on Thursday this is what we are going to be doing. Here’s the list, here’s the agenda, here’s the timetable, etc. So it was very well defined, as I say, that was my job as deputy, unlock the school, do the resources, take the netball team, be responsible for the school trip, so everybody knew what they had to do and they did it and they did it extremely well and the school worked very well on that. All the staff were there and they knew the rules and they could work within those rules.

DW Finally, this one at the bottom the community, that’s all the stakeholders in the school, the pupils, the parents, the governors, the LEA, the DfES if you like, everybody.

Emily Right, the governors, again it was very much seen as the head's job to deal with the governors, there were no staff reps in those days, so occasionally you got the notice on the board, governors meeting, and that was about as much contact as you had. They may pop their head in the staffroom and say "everything all right Emily?" etc. and you'd occasionally meet the chair of governors, she would come round and have a chat with the staff but there was very little contact between the governors and the staff, between Governors and head, yes, though probably not as much as there is now. They would come in for their termly meeting and they would have a glass of sherry prior to the Christmas Show, but it was at that sort of level – as far as I know it was at that sort of level. The parents again, em, it wasn't the case but the head had a fairly gaunt, severe looking expression and the parents would say "he scares the life out of me" but we had very little parental contact with the school, you know, they would be outside the school gates and for social events they were great and they were very supportive but there wasn't that much contact between the school, the school knew what it was doing, this is what we do, we've always done it, if you don't like it there's another school over there that's different.

DW But generally they were happy with what was going on?

Emily Yes, they were very happy, yes. We were seen as the traditional – you know, get the results, good education, send them there, they will deal with them, yes they're good at behaviour, that's right.

DW Ok, so, the school you're at now, the school of which you are head, is it the same sort of system?

Emily No, totally different. I think various legislation has changed, for instance, eh, do you want to go through the same things? What did we start with?

DW Well your object presumably is the same?

Emily I still have the same driving forces, you know, make people happy, try hard. So one of my key things is now to try and go beyond that and try and look at standards because I – its kind of – yes – if I'm looking at it now if I want to move anywhere its – I was explaining the someone yesterday my future is, you know, devil horns just being a bit harder you know being a bit more of a devil and measuring with rulers that sort of where I want to go because I'm very much aware that I am a please person and it worked to a certain extent but I need to be a little bit more task orientated person.

DW But that is really looking at your outcomes isn't it, you're focussing on outcomes now.

Emily No, I'm changing what drives me and so if a situation arises at school my tendency is to say never mind, come and tell me, let's talk it through and resolve it without any animosity, whereas really I need to be saying look I've got poor performance in that class. I don't need to be nice I need to be going in and working with them and saying look this is what you need to do, these are the areas you need to develop, your planning's not good enough I want you to look at this, but that I would find difficult with those basic drives. It comes in with the try hard, but the please people, so I have to be aware of what drives me and act accordingly and choose the leadership style that I think is appropriate.

DW But doesn't that then perhaps become a tool rather than your basic drive because your basic drive would be very difficult to change.

Emily Yes be aware of it.

DW Yes, if you're aware of it then you can use the antithesis as a tool so its not your drive that's changing, not your object, it's the tool that you are using to gain the outcomes that you want.

Emily Yes, Ok. I'll go with that.

DW Just tell me in basic general terms what sort of school is it, what sort of staff, how do the staff work together.

Emily OK, there's myself and five other teachers, with me teaching, say half the time with another part time teacher. We have a senior management team, which is myself, and the keystone 1 and the keystone 2 co-ordinator. They are both fairly new appointments, they're both people I can get on with and they will come and tell me and say Emily, "do you know you should be doing this, or do you know you haven't done that" and equally I can go to them and say, "look, this is what we need to look at and this is what we need to do about it" so there is a very open relationship, which going back to the one in Berkshire wasn't. You know, he would listen, but he developed this aura of I am God, I will tell you what to do, if you have any problems sort them out. So it's a much more open relationship, democratic relationship there really. All staff are generally involved, perhaps not in decision making but we each know what everybody else is doing because it's a small school. We know what's going on in all the other classes, all the classes feed off the hall so we can very much hear what's going on whereas back in Berkshire there were long corridors and if you were at the end of that one corridor or up above the entrance here you didn't see what was going on. You were apart from it. So the actual building contributes to the way we work as well. Eh, there is a far greater involvement of the governors inasmuch as we've got more parent governors, the governors feel more involved in the school, certainly the issues that we talk about at governors meetings I think are far more open than ever they were. If you just look at some of the issues we go through, you know, target setting where we are talking about individual children or talking about staffing issues; in the past the head would go and say, we're doing this, we're doing that, that's how it worked, so that's it, very much. You see I'm not the head and then there's the rest of the staff because part of the week I'm a teacher as well.

DW So there's a much greater team ethos?

Emily Yes there is, there is and it's a question of you know, I haven't got the one hat; teacher, head, caretaker, sweeping, you know because one of the toilets is leaking and we don't have a caretaker. Yes there's this shared responsibility. [More possible sources of stress]

DW Here's an interesting question. Would you say that all the teachers in your school know who the governors are? Because you didn't in the first school; how do you think they feel about the governors? Do you think they might feel the same as you did, or do they know the governors better – is it just because you're the head that you know the governors?

Emily It might well be but the thing is we've got three parent governors so all the staff will know those three anyway, the previous chair comes in and does football club, so he works with the children; the current chair of governors is also a parent governor, so there's a core that I would imagine all the staff know, there will still be the one or two that just turn up for meetings, there always are, so the staff will say, "oh yes, what does he look like? What does she look like?" but most of the governors are fairly well known, basically because you've got the staff governor you've got the non teaching governor, you've got myself, that's three, you've got the four parent governors, that's seven, now we've got a governing body of twelve, so that's over half anyway. Another governor does supply work, another governor comes in and walks around and has a chat and talks to staff another governor is a well known character in the area.

DW So it's a more open school...

Emily Very much so, yes.

DW ... because from what you were saying about the first school the governors probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to do that.

Emily No they wouldn't, they wouldn't. They came in, they were shepherded into the office or wherever, or wherever they had the meeting and they were shepherded out, they might have been taken on a guided tour occasionally but it happened very rarely. I'm not sure I can remember it happening at all.

DW So the rules in your school – the historical rules, not the school rules, but the historical rules. Whereas you had a very rigid environment in the first school, would you say this school is rigid, but to a lesser extent, or totally relaxed, or somewhere in between?

Emily Again, its people's perceptions, isn't it? Your see, I've just done my LPSH and there are questionnaires about you, and the staff fill out questionnaires about you and you look at your perceptions and their perceptions of the school and their perceptions of yourself, and its quite interesting and hopefully you get – I was lucky but it came up that their views of me were better than mine I have to admit. Now I think we have a set of rules, well they are fairly free, because we all know what we do and we all know each other and we all trust each other, so I don't need to send a note round saying, eh, eh, the school photographer's coming in tomorrow, we'll start with class 5 and then we are going to do class 4, and we'll do brothers and sisters because people know and we have a notice board in the staffroom and we write things up on that and that's largely how we communicate, in addition to the informal systems you know. It takes me two seconds to walk round to each classroom and say, look, can we do this. So the rules, I don't need to go through the rules because they are largely understood. The staff we have now, we've had a fair amount of stability for the last two or three years so I don't have to worry about NQTs or induction that's not an issue.

DW So whereas you would have been told in your first school this is how we operate it's inferred or it's just part of general knowledge.

Emily That's right and it's up for discussion, that's right.

DW That's good. Now we get to the difficult one. The bit in the middle. Considering what your object is has there at any point been a tension between your object, pleasing people, work, and what you have been told to do which has caused this tension.

Emily Yes I can, yes. If I'm starting with now, I suppose there's a degree of tension between me actually going into classes and saying – and grading them, because there I might have to say look that wasn't very good, that was satisfactory but it – so there's tension there, but its not a problem.

DW Going back, is there a specific point in your career where there is tension?

Emily Well yes, when I, well when the Head was appointed there was this tension inasmuch that I had this role of deputy and remember, I had been acting Head for eighteen months, so I knew very much what was going on, and yet the new Head came in and was – I was kind of being ignored, pushed out and not listened to, whether its true or not its certainly how I felt, and yet I was being criticised for everything that went wrong, as I say a classic example was this, it was something happened with a class three trip, in the organisation of the class three trip, and the Head came to me and said, "Emily, why did you let this happen?" you know its your job as deputy, I said "well I didn't know class three were going on a trip, nobody told me" its your job to ask, so I found it difficult because I wasn't given the information to do my job effectively, and then I was being criticised because I didn't do my job effectively, and largely because I hadn't got the information in the first place.

DW So there was the critical part, which means you weren't doing your job effectively which means that you weren't succeeding in what you wanted to do, no matter how hard you were working, and then there's the – I'm not pleasing somebody.

Emily That's right. The suggestion was that I wasn't working hard enough because I hadn't bothered to ask the question, and that grated because it wasn't anything to do with the hard work you just needed to know what question to ask. I couldn't see myself going round and saying "Is there something you need to tell me, are you going on a trip this week, are you going on a trip next week?" Yes, so there was that implication that I wasn't working hard enough, secondly I obviously wasn't pleasing the Head because this got through and again there was tension there.

DW Ok, how about 1989, National curriculum, any tensions there?

Emily The tension, the tension was there, eh, we had to be fulfilling the national curriculum, you had to be perfect. Eh the Head that came in was that everything had to be on paper and it had to be perfect, so it was a be-perfect person I was working for. Now the conflict was that you would be asked to do a job and be given very little eh you wouldn't be given a thorough outline of what you needed to do and what the requirements were, you'd just – you know – go and write a policy on that you'd write it and you'd hand it back and you'd get it back, well you haven't done this and you'd say ok, and you'd hand it back again and you'd get it back, you haven't done this and I'd say, well why didn't you tell me – it wasn't just me it was everybody and you'd get it back five or six times and still it wouldn't be perfect, still you'd be tinkering with it. So some of these policies would go on months and months and months and months so there was a conflict there – so there was a conflict you'd say "good heavens I've got it back again!" "I'm fed up with doing it, I've got other things to do" and similarly with the plans, it was her intention to have every single plan on paper, eh, so you'd put your maths plans on paper and then a couple of weeks later she'd say "well actually we've changed our planning sheet, this is the planning sheet we are going to do now, can you transfer them to these planning sheets" and then it would be well yes but we haven't got vocabulary on those planning sheets, can you now go and add that to it, so I think that was a tension it wasn't a major one, but it was a tension, brought around through the national curriculum. It was nothing to do with teaching it was just this attention to paperwork.

DW Was that a tension with the National curriculum or with the way it was being offered to you?

Emily Yes that was a personal one.

DW So once again it was a personal thing rather than national curriculum. So the national curriculum wasn't really per se a cause of tension.

Emily No I think the national curriculum was accepted reasonably well, I think the only problems that arose were whereby we didn't have the resources for it. You know perhaps in the past we got the resources for year three to do the Alps in geography and now also you're expected to do rivers and there weren't any resources available that was the only real issue that we had.

DW And how about the speed in which it was introduced? Because it was rapid fire wasn't it?

Emily It was, it was, but again, you didn't feel there was that pressure. There wasn't the pressure from the LEA there was the pressure to put it on paper but again that was a personal issue. I think generally because we saw the need of it, and again we were a fairly large staff. We had eight, we were able to spread the load, whereas now if you look at our school now we've two or three subjects each. I think if that came in now we'd all be rattling the cage and saying look, I can't do numeracy ICT and RE whereas in that situation it was a little easier.

DW So the actual structure of the school made it easier?

Emily The size of the school.

DW Initiatives are still coming through at a fair rate, I'm not going to assume anything but for the moment I'd like to think that there are no real tensions with the initiatives that are coming through. Literacy and numeracy, you know, they are things that are put into place and you get on with it and do it. If one came through that you disagreed with whole heartedly, something like do we really have to do bungee-jumping in PE or whatever. If you disagreed that much, what would you do about it and how would go about it?

Emily Going back to what I said, at the moment we have this fairly open relationship with the staff, so my first thing would be to sit down with my senior management express my concerns and get down involvement, and then my next stage would be to go to governors and say look "we've had this, I've really got serious issues about this, and this is why I have them. I think if we do this we're really going to have serious problems with" whatever and I think it's, you know, I want to know if they are able to support me. And if the bottom line was look Emily we need to do it then I'd do it. You know I'm not going to – I want – I don't want to dig my heels in, I'd like to make the point that I don't agree with it and I don't want to do it but I if the bottom line was you do it, then I do it. I'm a complier.

DW If it's statutory then...

Emily You'd do it. Yes.

DW Going back to when there were the personality issues. Were there any individuals or groups within the school apart from the Head who particularly supported you or opposed you in what you were trying to do at the time?

Emily The staff. Again, when I was acting Head I had an entirely different relationship with the staff than the Head did. You still need to be apart, but you can lessen that distance. I think you can trust more, and I had that, I appointed a deputy head and we worked quite well together and we had a good little team at the top of the school and a good team in the lower school and we were starting to work more as teams. In the top years we had two year five and two year six we had to vertically group years five and six because we needed to go from four classes to three and it made sense to vertically group because we didn't have SATS in those days or anything like that, and that worked quite well because it meant that all three were able to plan together and to work together and we had that team. So that changed so when I was acting Head I felt again there was more of a team and so when I was deputy head again they were very supportive, extremely supportive really.

DW So you had good back up from them. So in this triangle, they were part of the supportive community?

Emily Very much so, as were the parents. It wasn't at all straight forward I had a group of parents who would only communicate to school through me, however much I said you should be – no – we'll only write to you Emily. Its right and again its part of this mistrust that I said you know so they were very supportive. Eh there were certain elements of the LEA that were. We had one Inspector in particular who was very supportive, he was there at the actual appointment he left in the year but he would always make a point whenever he came in, I need to go and have a chat with Emily and it was done with a sort of quiet word so there was a certain amount of support from the LEA, although there was this, again as, should I say now, again its because I'm Head, there's a lot of strands that you have with the LEA, in those days there wasn't the advisor used to pop in sit and have a chat with the Head and that was probably it, and now there may be more in some schools

but there's probably not a lot in my case. I see him twice a year probably for about twenty minutes and he says "oh that's fine Emily, you know what you're doing, I'm off again" but then I am at the other end of the county. Even things like learning support and behaviour support, they come in a lot more now and – eh – the Ed psych we used to see in those days and we still see him I suppose its because I'm Head now that I see more of that than I did then.

DW Ok, now to the difficult one, oh no, before that, are there any of the government initiatives which you may have pre-empted in any way, for example, some people have said before literacy came in we were having plenary sessions, anyway, that sort of thing?

Emily Certainly in the maths as I say prior to that when I was at school one of my responsibilities was maths and certainly we were looking at getting more mental work into it. It was at the time people were yelling about – we'd gone through the time children were given calculators and now it was the kick back, you know, should we do more in the head they shouldn't be relying on them so we were looking at putting more mental work in to numeracy that was a key issue. Children should know their number bonds because that had gone out of the window again, so yes there was that. We had because it was a very traditional school we were very much subject based so here was our geography curriculum, here was our history curriculum, here was our RE curriculum which was probably why the national curriculum wasn't an issue for us because we were doing that before that whereas other schools had these webs and these topic chains.

DW So the school ethos was curriculum based anyway?

Emily Subject based, yes very much so.

DW its interesting that you say other schools had, the webs and the topic work and child centred as it was called, you know, Plowden – did you have any evidence of that?

Emily Well yes all the courses you'd go on you'd sit down and say "look, we are doing maths" maths, oh you should be doing a topic on spiders, you'll get maths in, and they'd come out with all these wonderful things like there's your web and you could look at nodes and you could do this." There seemed to be a lot of courses that were pushing this message and talking to teachers they were very much saying, this is how they did it. They'd sit down each term and have these rather tenuous links.

DW Now the difficult one. Some of the tensions that you've had, some of the personal tensions, the problems with the Headteacher. These psychological tensions, because you've built up professional identity which is based on the work ethic and pleasing people, which may well have had something to do with your initial teaching as well – your identity was at odds with what you were being told to do which is probably what caused the tension.

Emily Take me through that again, slowly. What are we talking about?

DW Your object was to please people and based on a work ethic, that's part of your Professional identity. When you first started teaching as a probationer, all those years ago, you were in a school where there was a particular system and things worked in a particular way and it may well have been that the work ethic and the pleasing people was part of what went on in that school which will have helped build your professional identity, it will have reinforced it. At the point where you were in conflicts with the Head your professional identity which was what you expect to do what you'd built up your ideas of what teaching was all about and being a Head or deputy was all about was in conflict, there was a tension between what she was saying you should do and your identity, that's what causes the tensions.

Emily That's right because whatever I did I couldn't please her and however hard I tried I still wasn't trying hard enough so I was failing on my two key issues.

DW Yes, so your identity was in conflict with the identity that she was trying to force on you, so what were the repercussions of that tension?

Emily Well ultimately I left, ultimately I left the school. Eh, I think secondly [long pause] I think you hide issues and going back to this try hard, eh, I used to do quite a bit of tennis coaching and one of the jobs I had was of an evening. It was late enough in the evening so I wasn't rushing off from school, I was at school until 5 or 6 o'clock but she would never come out and say "Emily, you've been coaching" she would say "well how's the tennis coaching going" and if I said to her, its going well, I knew for a fact that would come back to me as, you've got time to do that? But you haven't done this," so I had to hide it. I'd say, "Well actually I'm not doing any at the moment, I'm too busy getting these other things done" and you lied through your teeth to hide it, and I think you'd avoid, you'd avoid, you'd take avoidance tactics. And I said to her, I said, "the only time – and she did the same – the only time she called me into the room was to have a yell at me.

DW How about physically, medically?

Emily Medically, ah, yes, I now have high blood pressure, certainly other members [of staff] at that time were off with stress and I know the stress was quite considerable in those times, eh, eh, and going back to avoidance, nobody would sit in the staffroom, you'd go in the staffroom at the end of the day and there'd be nobody there, or the beginning of the day and there'd be nobody there because it was opposite the Head's room so people couldn't relax and as I say prior to that another person was off with stress, and he used to walk out by the swimming pool so he didn't have to walk past the Head's office. So the pressures of this meant that probably I didn't sleep that well because you'd lie in bed thinking "Oh dear," so your sleep patterns were disrupted. Eh, I just tried to work harder and harder, you know, this try hard again, trying to please people without actually getting anywhere and as I say eh, I don't know, I seemed to come down with a lot in those days, I was diagnosed in that particular spell with asthma and that started in those days, blood pressure although its only recently been confirmed but there were some signs that it was increasing then, and I put those things down to the pressure I was under. I think through that time I went through a divorce and again although it probably wasn't the primary reason it certainly contributed to it. Eh, do you want just me or other people as well.

DW No, no, no, no just you really your view on people is subjective really.

Emily Yes, and although I was probably quite irritable with my children they were at the stage where I suppose they were hormonal you know, teens with the boys and that, they wanted to get to be king of the roost. But I behaved in ways that were probably out of character for me so, heightened levels of aggression I suppose and lowered levels of tolerance, yes.

DW Right, yes, how did you deal with it? Well, we know how you dealt with it, you got out. In the interim part of dealing with it will have been trying to work harder and harder. Were there any other ways?

Emily Eh, basically get out, apply for other jobs, get a headship, and if there was a headship in the offing, then that was almost the clouds lifting for a little while because that was your way out. I think being a lot more insular, you know, this is what I'm going to do I'm going to do my teaching well I'm going to get that job done, I've done that job well but try not to deviate too far from that.

DW So it was a self satisfaction, you could feel that you had done a job well, so you were achieving your aims personally, but professionally....

Emily The two things she always said I did well, was teach, she said, whatever I say about you I've got to say you're a good teacher, and the other thing she always said was, that I was never a skiver,

- DW* [Work hard and please others] you know, I could be on – I was going to say death's door, but I could be really ill and I would still turn up so I carried on being a good teacher and turning up. Which may have been bad for your health in the long run?
- Emily* Oh, yes, I can remember standing at the front door being unable to breathe, of the school, eh, you know, and I'd think, yes I've got to be here, I've got to be here [fading]
- DW* Finally, you will remember the list of possible ways of getting out or – there we are – adaptive strategies. Of those adaptive strategies – obviously one of your adaptive strategies was moving somewhere else, in the short term it was actually downshifting because you moved from a Deputy Head's role to a supply teacher so you thought I'll downshift, I'll take this pressure away, I'll move somewhere else for the time being.
- Emily* Yeah, it yes, that was a result of moving out, not because I wanted to.
- DW* Oh, so it wasn't a planned downshift.
- Emily* No, it wasn't I'm going to take it easy I'm going to do supply, it was I want to get back into teaching and the initial way is perhaps to go on supply
- DW* So actually, the relocating was the primary....
- Emily* Yes, self actualising yes
- DW* So you were self actualising you were relocating and then you moved your way through because you knew that you had the wherewithal to become a Head and you did it. So initially that was your route. You could say I've relocated and at that point it was your best adaptive strategy. A few years have gone past since then, if you were in the same sort of situation now, a different age different systems, perhaps with a local Inspector who kept coming and telling you, you weren't doing the job properly, and the pressures started to build, what would be your adaptive strategy now?
- Emily* My strategy would now be, it would be a sharing one, a delegating one I think involving others, because I've got that supportive network which I felt I never had because as I say from that September as I left in the Christmas there was only one member of staff that was there from the previous year and we used to call her little Hitler because she was the one that would go back to the Head with all the telling tales.
- DW* Oh yes, we've actually got one for that as well because in downshifting its not necessarily planned demotion which is what I was thinking of but that is obviously wrong but you have role re-definition in which you say I'm going to do this part of the job you can do that part of the job and you can do that, and because you've built up this good team round you, you could now use role re-definition, so that would be your strategy for now.
- Emily* Yes, as I say leaving was an ultimate, reconsideration of job roles is something that I would do now as a matter of course. Does that make a difference?
- DW* Possibly a lot of people are, not pressed into, but guided into thinking about their roles and their jobs and role changing through performance management now, whereas that wasn't so evident before because there was no performance management.
- Emily* Yes, I wouldn't say Performance management has had that great an impact, I think its largely to do with that try hard do everything and eventually you realise hang on I can't do everything, so let me try hard and do the things I want to do and do them well. It means delegating things to others I think also this please people there's this oh I'm not going to give you too much because you've got enough on your plate, type of thing, but the team I've got they're saying to me, Emily look, we'd like to do more you've got too much on your plate. It's a combination of both those factors.

DW So at the moment if they are saying that, this part the division of labour, you've got a slight difference between you and your team haven't you? You're saying I'm doing a job and they are saying look you're doing a bit too much at the moment and by the way, we need the experience as well.

Emily I wouldn't say they're saying that. [laugh]

DW But if they want experience in that particular area they'll be happy to come and ask you for it which is a good thing, so that division of labour is flexible and you have made it flexible and its available for people if they want to gain experience but its also available for you if you feel that at the moment you couldn't manage that or for them if they look at you and say you can't manage that today. The other thing is that they actually feel that they have the right, well, perhaps not the right, but certainly the pathway to come to you and to say, "look, shall I do that?" Could you do that with your first Head?

Emily My first Head

DW Your first Head, the one who wanted everything in its place. A good Head but do you think you could have gone to him and said "you're doing a bit too much at the moment I'll take that on for you." A different style

Emily A very good Head. I had a lot of respect for him. It was a different style and a different workload too. In those days when I was acting Head I'd sit down in the morning and do the post, I'd do the post I'd probably walk round the school and make sure everything was alright, perhaps get a staff meeting ready. In the afternoon I'd sit down and do some reading for my masters degree and that was the level of the work. Occasionally you had incidents perhaps one of the parents would say "one of you dinner controllers has thumped my child!" and that would take up two or three days, or you'd have a report to make and that might take up a day, but it was a whole different ball game, particularly inasmuch as I was an acting Head so I didn't – you know part of my brief wasn't to change things radically just to keep things ticking over so I didn't have the pressures of expectation on me.

DW Part of the difference now is that you are a teaching Head. Is part of the difference now that the National curriculum has given you a greater load, with LMS and all the other facets of the National curriculum?

Emily Yes

DW So there's more there?
Expectations – there are two words I've got used to hearing when I've been talking to heads and they are, responsibility, and accountability, has the balance changed?








Emily It has changed inasmuch as in those days you weren't expected to get them to level 4 or to level 5 they came up and by the end of it they could read and they could write so you weren't assessed against any you know, pre arranged levels you think you did a good job but there weren't those targets to meet. Now you've got the responsibilities of targeting these children and then getting them there and each meeting we go to it's what are you doing to reach these children who aren't performing at the level they should do. We deal with those children that are to get them above the level they should be so all the time its just constant pressure to look at individuals to look at groups to look at the school and its all the data again that you need to assess and to work on in those days there was no data.

DW Is the data there because you are accountability? Whereas before you had as much responsibility, you were responsible for those children and their progress but now you have to prove it. It's the audit culture.

Emily That's right and I think that whatever a Head says the thing that hangs over their head more than anything is Ofsted. We can all look at Pandas, and we can say yes that's good but it could be better but it's the Ofsted that really worry Heads, that cause the greatest level of stress, because you don't know what standards your batting against. Its fear of the unknown, are you going to fail?

DW Thank you very much.

10907 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Frances (at2695a)

DW The first questions I need to ask are about basic details. How long have you been a Head?

Frances 4 years

DW How long were you a deputy before that?

Frances 6 years

DW How long have you been teaching?

Frances 29 years

DW Oh, nearly as long as me!

That's good because the period I am looking at is about the last twenty years from just before 1998 to the present day, to see how things have changed in that period.

What I am trying to do is interview people who have been Heads for a shorter time, who come into their Headship after the ERA and people who have been Heads for a long time and see what the differences are between them. It's only one school as a Head, I know that.

Frances Well actually that's not absolutely true, because I was Head of a special unit before I came into primary education. I started off in Secondary Education then I went into Special Ed. I worked in a children's home for 5 years and a remand centre for two years and then I became Head of a Special Unit for children expelled from school, which was Mercia Home Tuition Unit which would be a Pupil Referral Unit now. I was in charge of that and in 1998 I went to see a local Inspector and asked him if there was any chance of me moving from Special Ed because it's a very demanding job and I wanted to change the direction of my career and he arranged for me to go to College to do a Primary re-orientation course and my last teaching practice on that course was at Merrywhite Primary School and the then Head Teacher (you probably remember him) offered me a term's work at the school after I finished the course and that's how I started at Merrywhite Primary School. I was there for 12 years.

DW I worked in secondary for 18 years before I moved into primary in 1989.

Frances I never worked with primary aged children before I did that year.

It's interesting though that – don't you find that people who have got a diverse type of background in education – in a kind of way it's held against them. I always felt that very, very strongly. If I'd gone for Deputy Headships or Headships I've always thought that my background in Special Ed, when you say you've worked in a Remand Centre and things like that. They think, "Oh!", but they should be celebrating it, not criticising it. I do find it amazing.

DW Yes, it's greater experience, but that's the way of education isn't it.

So, ethical matters first. Whatever I record, whatever I write down, only goes as far as me. Nobody else gets to hear the recordings. Obviously she will see some of the transcript but it will be small parts in the analysis rather than a transcript of the whole interview. Nobody else will get to see it except you of course and you will get a copy back so that you can check the accuracy.

Financial, I can't afford to pay you.

Methodological, this first sheet has my aims and objectives and research questions for you to look at before the main interview.

What I will be doing is looking at the last twenty years so the first thing I will ask is "tell me about the last twenty years"

Frances I can remember those very easily.

DW When I analyse it I will be looking at three specific points, the first just before the education reform act, the last about now and one point between where you feel there is a particular....

Frances There is a little bit of a difficulty with that, because I was working in Special Ed. We didn't follow the National curriculum.

DW That's fine because it gives another viewpoint.

Frances It was from 1984 – 1988 I was in that unit so at that time I wasn't constrained by the National curriculum but was looking at GCSE curricula. I may have been CSEs they were doing, or they weren't because not many did them, it was more work experience orientated. I was more intent on making sure they got a job when they left because that was more important for them, particularly when they weren't interested in education before.

DW That will give me another facet to my analysis which is good. This triangle is the way in which I will analyse the interviews. You are the subject who will have an object to your work. The object is not the same as an objective. Your object at the moment might be to make sure that all the children are happy, they socialise well, or they get a level 4 when they leave. That is different from an objective that I would ask "why do you want that?" and then it eventually becomes the object because you are looking at the real basis of why you want it which has more to do with you than education.

Frances It's my own philosophy.

DW More or less
Obviously when you do your job you use a variety of tools, strategies, or instruments, which could be anything you use to work with the children. Then there is the community which would be different here from Merrywhite I should think, which is the parents and how they are involved, the governors, the local authority, anybody that is involved is part of the community. Even the DfES are part of your community, and then how you do your job, particularly Head ship, do you work alone, do you work with others as part of a team, that's all part of my analysis.
The rules are historical rules, not the school rules, such things as, is the school rigid in that people say we do it this way because we've always done it this way, or is it more flexible. More staff co-ordinated, where people discuss things, that's what I mean by rules.
All those things work together to give you your outcomes. I am interested in the outcomes, but not so much as the objects because the object is vital in my research, and whether your object coincides with the object put forward by the Government in their strategies.

Frances [laugh] Some of them will.

DW In some of my interviews people have said, yes, things like the plenary session in maths, I found that really helpful. My object coincides with that because the object of doing that is to remind the children of what we have covered.

Then I would be looking at the tension that causes. The tension may have something to do with stress, but it is not stress itself. It's the tension between the two things. Is there a lot of tension between the two, or are they going to be much closer. Would you say "what the Government wants, and what I am working towards in this case are fairly similar, so that's not much tension, or would it be the opposite?"

From that I am hoping to find how that's changed over the past twenty years for people.

Frances You're going to have trouble with people's memories aren't you

DW I haven't found that so far because people tend to remember key points and since I am looking at three key points at the three times I have mentioned. What were the tensions at those points?

Frances When the literacy and numeracy strategies came in I suppose there would have been major tensions for people.

DW That's a really interesting point you've made because you remember the literacy and numeracy strategies, whereas people who have been Head for a much longer period said, it was when all the National curriculum folders first came through, one for each subject.

Frances Yes they would have been uppermost in my mind that time, but now with literacy and numeracy strategies, countrywide had a massive impact on primary school teachers and probably are still having for some people who are not particularly willing or flexible. Having said that I think it has come full circle now and people feel flexible enough to be able to work within both of those strategies but still extend and widen their perspective. Perhaps its because the Government feel that they can release the reins a little bit and that gets down to the coordinators – the authority's co-ordinators, the advisors, then passed down to us and we will that feel we've a little bit more leeway.

DW Yes you get that and that's a good feeling. Then you get things like PPA time

Frances That's a major problem for me

DW The teachers feel 'I'm going to get some time' but for Heads ...

Frances ... It's a nightmare.

DW So you've got this difference between a teacher and a Head and that's another thing I want to look into.
So that's how the triangle works. And this is some basic information on the activity triangle. What we were talking about on the phone was because of the systems you've been in this triangular type system, you have built up an identity as a Head and your identity will colour the way you feel about things and the way you work on things. Once again you've got that identity, I know I've got one because of all the things I've done in all my years of teaching and sometimes Government's initiatives will clash with the identity and sometimes they will work with it.

Frances And then you bring your prejudices to the fore.

DW And finally after we've been through all that and looked at the 3 points in your basic history, what we will do is talk about adaptive strategies. These are things that some Headteachers have done or might do to try and relieve the tensions. They include things like retiring, but some Headteachers may stop being Headteachers and become teachers while others may become a Headteacher in another school, because they felt that the tensions were, perhaps, with the Governors or with the parents, that it was the school situation which was causing the problem so there are all these adaptive strategies and this sheet is a basic explanation of simple adaptive strategies. Obviously there are an awful lot more possibilities but these are the basic ones.

Frances I think this is right, this adaptive strategy thing, but it should be something that is built into the Headteachers – the last 5 years of their career there should be this involvement in down sizing in their minds and preparing for retirement. I always think it is very important to prepare for retirement and a number of these things would or should, fit into that preparation.

DW It could extend to writing books for children, becoming a children's author or an author of children's school books which gives an outlet in another direction its when people just stop, when they've got nothing to do the adrenaline drops and its very bad for you.

Frances Yes we don't realise how much adrenaline is being pumped through our bodies but I must admit that the difference between Merrywhite and St Thomas is a world apart and the stresses that I

was under at Merrywhite where extreme for a lot of different reasons and when I came here it took me a little bit of time, probably about 2 terms to adjust to the different world where you didn't have to raise your voice or even raise an eyebrow to most of the children and you got an instant effect.

DW But I assume you have stresses coming from a different direction, perhaps more parental pressure.

Frances There are more parental pressures but some of the parental pressures are silly, they are very silly but still they are pressures and some of the Governors are a bit awkward but the staff at the school are amazing and they are a jolly bunch of people and the children are so lovely as well and its taken away all the social antagonism that you get at a school like King Offa or Merrywhite. Also it's nice to be in a classroom where you've got few difficulties with children's behaviour. I don't say that it's not a 100% without difficulties but its not ten or eleven children in every class that you've got to be dealing with. That is a very different world and I thought it was the only world and that was the most dangerous thing of all. I thought that was how all primary schools were and it wasn't.

DW In a nutshell that's what we'll be doing and all we've got to do is to find a date when we can have time for the full interview which will take about two hours.

Main interview with Frances (at2695b)

DW For about the first 15-20 minutes could you just run me through your professional trajectory since 1985. How you've progressed through the profession.

Frances Right, I was Head of a unit in Mercia for excluded children from just before that time right up until 1988. These children were 14-16 year olds, there were twelve in my unit and it was me, and two other members of staff. I was Head of the unit. I suppose the aim of the unit was to number one, keep the children out of continuing trouble, and my intention was that they would leave school with a job, that wasn't the aim of the other unit that I worked in tandem with but I got the least academic children whereas the other unit got the academic children. So there was a pre-eminence in looking to get them a job when they left school. So I organised work experiences for them and I'm proud to say that although they didn't do very well at GCSE they all got jobs when they left school which I am very pleased about and when they did work placements they did really, really well at the work placements.

DW About that time I was Head of careers, and doing exactly the same thing..

Frances In Mercia?

DW No, in Romford, but I was trying to make sure they all either got into college, or got jobs.

Frances That was what I was about at the time. They were difficult children; very confrontational but my previous experience had prepared me for that type of child so I'd always felt very comfortable dealing with confrontation anyway, so that's what I did. Having been in Special Ed for about 13 years there was a point where I was basically burnt out in my opinion, so I went to one of the inspectorate at the time in Mercia who was coming up to retirement and I said, "Is there any way I can be seconded because I would like to train and go into primary education, I've had enough of the type of work I'm doing." I think I would probably have left education if he had said no. So he got me onto a full time course, and they are extremely rare now, obviously, and it was called "Primary re-orientation" and I did a year at that college with two teaching practice placements. One was at a village primary school which is school of about 80- odd children now, but then it would have been perhaps 50-60 and I also did a placement – funnily enough, my last placement was at Merrywhite Primary School, and I was there for about 8 weeks and a lady called Jane was my mentor at the school, who later married the future head. The head of the school at the time, after my placement there, offered me a term's supply at the school. Now I did have the option of going back in charge of this unit because it was only a secondment for a year, but to be quite honest with you I didn't see there was any point in going back to the unit because that would have been me going backwards, so I took this contract for a term not knowing if he would want me to stay on. I took year 5 at Merrywhite loved it really, taught all the subjects, which I hadn't obviously been doing as a secondary teacher and then after that he offered me a job at the school permanent. Then I was at Merrywhite as a class teacher until 1991 so I wasn't there very long. Merrywhite from 89 to Christmas 91 and I became acting deputy then I was given the deputy's job, and then I moved over to the new school and was there for twelve years. Then I got this job in 2001 (it must be 2001, yes 2001) and as they say the rest is history really.

I've got to admit I had a terrible time at Merrywhite, I (well this is confidential isn't it) I had a terrible time at Merrywhite, because of the people that were in charge of the school, basically. My first head was a little bully, or thought he could but he chose the wrong one, when he came in to try and bully me, but he made life very, very difficult. He was a bully and he was a bully to anybody that he could have power over really. The next head, well, what can you say, he wasn't interested in education basically and that was the bottom line. When that new school came along really he rubbed his hands in glee and went off and did his own thing basically and left the school. I don't think he ever, although the new school came I don't think he ever came back, in his mind, to be in charge of it. In fact I think I'd go so far as to say that he didn't ever want to be in charge of the education part of it, he liked being in charge of the building and the people but he didn't see his role as being the one, the one that everybody else would see.

DW So he saw his role as a business manager really?

Frances Yes. I think that's always what he was really. He wasn't interested in Education, and I think results began to reflect that after a while, but that's just my personal opinion.

DW That's fine. Having run through those points, I just want to refresh your memory about the triangle. The activity triangle. So what I'm looking at is you as the subject and the object is what you are working towards. It is not the objective it's almost like your philosophy and your object leads to outcomes. The tools are what you use in order to achieve your object or achieve the outcomes through your object. So they could be any strategies you have, or the language you use, perhaps like Tony Davies whether you bully people or not these are all the tools you use in order to achieve what you want. The rules are historical rules. What is the school historically like? So Merrywhite was obviously a totally different school historically to this school [St. Thomas]. The community is anybody who has anything to do with the school from the pupils right through to the Dfes who are a little more remote. And the division of labour is how the school works and how you prefer to work. Do you work in a team fashion or do you work individually? And that makes up the system, or, what makes up the system is how these interact and that's what I really want to look at. At three specific points the first would be your early years at Merrywhite just around the time of the Education Reform Act (ERA).

Frances Was that 1988.

DW 88 was the ERA and 89 was the introduction of the National curriculum, so it's just about that time. One would be now, what's the system like now, how have you changed it, or how has it changed.....

Frances The 89 one is going to be difficult to remember you'll have to prompt me on that a little bit. Can you remember it? [Laughs]

DW I can remember what I was doing in 89 but it's mainly to do with what the school was like at the particular time and you've already said something about the head and what he was like, so how did that influence the school. And how did you manage to work within that system? Was there a tension there, between you and the Head, or what you wanted to do and what the National curriculum coming in was guiding you to do, that's the sort of area I want to look at. Then in between those two ends somewhere, something that's different particularly if there was a tension, so just the three points, but first of all I want to look at the object and I could be a real pain here.

What drives you as a Headteacher. What is your object to do your job. What is your focus?

Frances When anybody asks me about that I always kind of refer to the fact that I've always played team sports and whenever I've been involved in team sports for whatever reason I've always been asked to captain the team because the people around me see that I have qualities that they need to move forward as far as the team is concerned and I suppose then we are talking about the way people manage other people and I like to try and get as many people as possible involved in the whole process which is consultative and collegiate.

DW So that's how your division of labour works.

Frances Yes, but really I like people to have a say in the wholeness of whatever we are doing and I feel as if I'm fairly successful in drawing in people to have a say without making feel as if they are saying something without me or that I value what they say and what they do, and they feel that and then they feel it's empowering because they don't feel as if they can't say anything and they might see something that I don't see which can help to make life more effective and efficient.

- DW* So the driving force is team building and team development?
- Frances* In my eyes anyway, and individuals and being drawn into more of a team role rather than seeing themselves as outside the situation.
- DW* And this is where I get really awkward. Why do you like working in a team? Why is a team ethos particularly important to you?
- Frances* Why do I like it? I suppose its about sharing ideas and accepting that as an individual I don't have all the answers and I feel more comfortable – some people are control freaks and want to move everything forward despite what other people think – I feel the opposite – I feel that, I suppose it that I feel more empowered by people providing more ideas because you can filter and sift ideas that other people have to move things forward, particularly in Primary education I don't think there is one individual that knows or has so much knowledge that they can dispense with every body else's ideas - definitely not. Its surprising that in Secondary, these people who are at the top in Secondary think that they – think very differently – that they do have it and that they can dispense with – I'm sure that the world is moving forward but I still think that there are people out there that say this is the way we are doing it. I don't care what you think, this is the way we are going, and I think that it might be all right for a little while but it will become a disaster eventually.
- DW* So you prefer team ethos because that empowers you and of course it empowers the other people in the team. Why do you need that empowerment? What you do want to do with it?
- Frances* I'm not interested in the individuals as such. I'm interested in the aim of providing as good an education for the children as I possible can so we are all elements within that process. I suppose that becomes the outcome.
- DW* No, that's actually your root object. All the other things that you have said come down to providing the best education for the children that's what you are really after and you're actually using team work as a tool to provide that object and then the outcome is how well your children do, how they enjoy their education, how they develop as people – that's the outcomes which is provided by that object, that you really want to the do the very best for the children and the team work is a tool. Can you see how that works? That's why I kept on asking and probing because lots of people think about the tools first.
- Frances* I'm not a logical person along those lines.
- DW* You'll go down to the root object in the end if you keep digging. You get there. So your root object is doing the very best for the children which is your ideal.
- Frances* Not everybody has got that aim. My previous boss did not have that aim that was the furthest away from his mind.
- DW* I've spoken to other Heads for whom the curriculum is the root object.
- Frances* I just see that as a means to an end myself.
- DW* Yes, so you see the curriculum as a tool which you can use but then we come back to the point when in 1989 the National curriculum comes in. Your object is do the very best for the children using whatever methods the National curriculum comes in all the folders arrive and you are told this is the curriculum. This is how you are going to teach it. How does that make you feel?

Frances I seem to recollect that starting out going on these different courses, for different things and just feeling as if somebody had gone barking mad, thinking that you, know, every area I seem to recollect they felt you had to be a specialist. in and we were primary school teachers and that every kind of section of the National Curriculum was put together by a specialist and was expected to be delivered in my opinion, as if you were a specialist, but you had so many different subjects you couldn't address that at all. So you just sit kind of buzzing, feeling thinking, 'no I can't do this', so what do good professionals do? They say I am prepared to do a little bit of it, I'll do my best to satisfy it but I will stick to my guns and I'll stick with what I know works, even though it flies in an opposite direction in many ways to what we are being told. Eventually they see sense and Sir Ron kind of puts it all back together again but it's still unwieldy even after that point. I just think that things started seeing a little bit of a semblance of people thinking hard when the Literacy and Numeracy came in and although I don't agree with the other subjects being marginalised I do think that the Literacy and Numeracy kind of put us back on track in a sense and after a little while of looking at that in my opinion we are starting looking at a broad and a balance curriculum again which we stopped doing with the Literacy and Numeracy strategies.

DW Do you think the National Primary Strategy is bringing us back to the previous curriculum?

Frances But there are still people very cautious about it and absolutely terrified to divert themselves from the Literacy and Numeracy angle and their mornings are still sacrosanct. Not in my school they aren't! Because there is a massive fear of being criticised but to be honest I've got to an age where I don't really care and I do know a little bit about the education that I'm trying to get for my children. They can prove me wrong and I'll just leave education.

DW The inspection is another feature of it.

Frances I've been fairly successful you see, I know that I am a very good teacher I don't need anybody to tell me that I am a very good teacher, I already know that. I know that whenever I come into contact with Year 6 or Yr 5 children I know that I can raise standards, it doesn't matter what anybody else is doing in the school I know that I can lift standards up quite high. In fact I met – do you know the new head at Merrywhite, Tracey Newhead? I was talking to her today, she'd kind of intimated about it before, and she said I've had an Ofsted you know a new Ofsted and she was saying they were talking about you and another woman who was a colleague of mine. We both taught there at the same time she was saying that the Ofsted team spotted a number of years when we had been the teachers in year 6 and how English Maths and Science at Key stage 2 was very high and they said what happened at that point? And Tracey Newhead said that teacher went to become a maths consultant and that teacher when on to become a Headteacher. And they said 'we can see it!'

DW Personalities make all the difference and once again it comes down to your object, because you want the very best for the children. That raises standards.

Frances But you've got to be determined and motivated and you've got to make all the people who work around you very determined and motivated as well, and it doesn't work with everybody. I accept that but most people you can get round and really get on your side if you work hard with them. I personally believe you've got to have a laugh, you've got to have a laugh with the kids and you've got to have a laugh with the staff, if you can't do either of those you are really seriously in trouble. To be honest I've worked out that I am not a meetings person, it's just not me I go to all these meetings and they bore me, they bore me terribly, it's not that I'm an intellectual, far from it but I feel that it wastes so much time from the prime objective that I am here for. I was talking with another colleague the other day who is in the Excellence in the Cities and do you know all this thing about networking with other schools, you might think I'm off my trolley here, but the only reason I am the Head of this school, isn't about those other schools my main directive is to make this school a good one. I understand that other people have got other kind of

issues but the only reason I am here is to make the children in this school as good as they possibly can be. I don't get paid for all those other things and we get diverted – this is a hobby-horse of mine – but we get diverted so much away from what our main directive is which is what we actually paid to do, with all the other issues that come up.

DW Is the reason you feel that because you are a hands on person?

Frances Yes, I couldn't stand it not to teach you see. So I don't like attending meetings I think.

DW So in 1989 there was this tension...

Frances It is a philosophical tension I would say.

DW and you overcame that by deciding in your own mind where you were going and what you wanted. What was the really important stuff.
So if we come to now with the National Primary Strategy. We've excellence and enjoyment, we've got all the things which are bringing back

Frances All the buzz words you mean

DW No, I'm just using the buzz words because that's what people understand but what we are actually doing is that the pendulum is swinging the other way. We're getting back to more child centred education which fifteen years ago was a filthy phrase, Child centred education was wrong and was something you didn't dare say in front of politicians. So how is that working now? Your object is still the same because it's a deep and fundamental thing, that certainly hasn't changed but how about the tools. Are you using the curriculum more to get into that?

Frances I use the curriculum as a tool obviously but its still not the directive that I have. I still want to provide a broad and balanced environment for them and there are elements obviously that we are directed by the curriculum to follow because obviously I want good key stage results, so I've got to follow it quite closely because obviously the tests are put together to respond to the Literacy and Numeracy strategies so I obviously have to follow that, but I've introduced French and French isn't due to come in until 2008. The children have French lessons which started off as a French club but my 7-11 year olds have a 45 minute session of French every week. Its something I believe in. I insist that everybody learns an instrument so they are learning recorders whether they like it or not and I've had this discussion with my Year 5 & 6 children because they were moaning about it and I said to them every child deserves an opportunity to learn an instrument and you might be moaning about it now but when you've mastered that instrument you will feel very pleased about it and your parents will be very pleased. It's a good springboard into playing other instruments and I said I am making that decision so don't moan about it to any of my other staff if you want to gripe about it come and talk to me. I've brought in a dance/drama specialist and when I say I've brought in a specialist, she is top notch. A very high quality teacher and I'm hoping that she will do great things on that front. So I want as wide – you see I'm getting a little bit fed up with this trying to get through these burning hoops about level 4's and things like that I'm really getting fed up with it and no matter how hard we try there are children that will never achieve a level 4 but I'd be chuffed to bits if they achieved a level 3. Nobody cares about that and that really makes me angry. If a child at key stage 1 has got a level 1 or are working towards level 1 and they get a level 3 by the time they are 11 people should be celebrating it not taking the mick out of it but they, no they don't take the mick out of it, they just ignore it. It doesn't mean anything to people. Value added is quite a good thing for this school. For some children an education is an utter waste of time there are boys in my class who should be working on the farms with their dads they are doing it because they have to do it they are not doing it because they want to do it. They are resistant to reading they are resistant to all sorts of things and they are doing it because they have to do it. They would be more useful if people were teaching them the aspects of the life that they will lead, not the one we hope they will lead because they will lead that life because that is where they are motivated. You and I, you're a bit

older than me I expect, but we've been through this system where we've come across children at a very young age or at Secondary school and they should have had the opportunity to go and do hands on work they are not going to get GCSE or O levels or whatever in those days, but they will get a vocational life that will benefit them. I remember the RoSLA kids used to do that all the time they would say why do you want us here? We could be earning a living. And that's what some of these kids need. They need to go into a trade at the age of eleven. It's an absolute waste of time because they are so resistant to the education that you are trying to give them. Our country doesn't value it so it will never be up there.

DW Do you think that's because they are trying to get 50% into University?

Frances Yes, but then it's just degraded University degrees. The first degree has just been degraded so anybody who has had a degree in the past will just think any Tom Dick or Harry could get that and its pushing up to masters really. Any Tom Dick or Harry could get it and you keep on going don't you. And then it just demeans all the hard work that people have put in, in the past.

DW So now we are on a similar – how about the people within the systems in '89 and in the system now?

Frances Well I would say that the people in the system now are far more skilled as actual teachers, the training – I don't know, wait a minute, I suppose I feel that back in those days there wasn't a lot of teaching going on. I think you could call it lots of other things, like instruction or whatever, but I don't think there was a lot of genuine teaching going on. I might be completely wrong there but I don't think there was a lot teaching going on. There was a lot of instruction going on, just like Secondary school, in a sense and that's what the National curriculum and particularly Literacy and Numeracy did, was they did guide teachers into teaching children how to do well, you know, phonic blending reading with understanding and writing sensibly at sentence and word levels. And I honestly think that the teachers who are teaching in primary school now are much better teachers than in those days. They are more motivated and I think as a result of that they are probably treated better. Because I think they are more skilled. I include support assistants in that as well to be honest, because one of the greatest benefits at St. Thomas has ever had was to be involved in the EAZ as far as learning support assistants, that element of it, the training they had, the support they were given and the range of responsibility I think took them up and its sad that their salaries didn't reflect that. Their skills are tremendous, there are at least two members of my support assistant team that could be excellent teachers, but they have reached that age where they turn round and say I don't want to become a higher level teaching assistant because you've got to go and do a foundation course at University, you've got to have GCSEs in English maths and science, and ICT or something like that I don't want any of that. So I say you're perfectly capable and I'll support you if you want to do it, but they say we are perfectly happy the way we are, let you teachers have all the hassle; they like what they do and they are very good at it as well.

DW How about the wider community, the LEA. The DfES, the differences then and now?

Frances Well, they are more remote I think probably back in about '89 I was just an ordinary teacher then so I didn't see many kind of representatives from either my boss, might see the senior inspector occasionally not to actually speak to just to say hello really but not beyond that so they were very remote people in those days. I guess that if I was an ordinary teacher now he would still be a very remote person.

I think that now the LEA Inspectors, skew what the DfES say to them in a certain way as well and I don't know how healthy that is but they do put a bit of a skew on it. I honestly think that things are a bit better in a way now there is more accountability and I hate the word I really do detest the word because it covers up a whole list of things that I don't necessarily agree with. There needed to be some accountability but how far you go down that road is questionable, because there are terrible dangers you are constantly watching yourself. I've got two young

members of staff, if I was watching them all the time, they couldn't actually learn the feeling of being in charge of a class on their own without somebody breathing down your neck. You learn a lot and you make a lot of mistakes but if somebody is breathing down your neck all the time you're not even prepared to make the most mistakes you've got to play safe all the time. I think that if you leave them a little bit they flourish because they had made some mistakes as long as they are re-correcting not continually making the same mistake and they are intelligent enough to correct their mistakes without me breathing down their neck all the time which just makes somebody play safe all the time and never go out and be innovative and the one thing I do like with all my staff is to be self possessed enough to make decisions without always referring back to me. Do you know what I mean? This is the kind of independent thought process that I really admire in people.

DW It's part of being a professional, a real professional.

Frances But that's hard to get across the people because they've never had a chance to be professional because there is always been somebody stifling their kind of innovativeness.

DW We're doing really well. How about some point in the middle, particularly if there was a tension somewhere in the system?

Frances Well. The first head went in 1991 and the next one stepped up to the mark really. My tension with him was that he had promised an awful lot and said that he would do things, that he would be collaborative and consultative with the staff which was what I wanted him to be and he said all the right words to me at the time but he didn't actually adhere to what he said. He very quickly changed his stance and was very accusatory of people. He was completely at odds with my philosophy and it became worse as time went by because he was just well, he wasn't in it for the right reasons and the staff soon got to know that he wasn't an educationalist, and that he was just a figurehead in many ways - figurehead that wanted to be empowered but didn't want to put anything back into the system as such. He wanted to be liked although he would disagree but he didn't have a vision for the education of the school, he had a vision for the school, but not for the education of the children in the school which I found very disappointing.

DW So there was this tension within the system between what you felt was the way the school was going...

Frances Yes, basically I was left to run the school that aspect of it but not given the credibility but the job and there were - he would go off for periods of time and just disappear go off to visit a school that was good because Merrywhite was going to inherit the high school site at one point and he went off to schools that were buildings of a similar ilk to kind of appraise the situation and then it changed and he went off to other new builds and invariably he was away for long periods of time and he started not coming to school during term time as such but then he would be there all holiday which was - and then he started trying to insist that I'd be there in the holiday as well which certainly created conflict and then started insisting that I should have a mobile phone so that I could be contactable on weekends as well and at one point, and I think this is much later on, he tried to change my contract so that I could be contracted to work in the evening as well as my teaching commitment. Don't forget I was teaching probably 80% of the time as well as his expectations so there was a lot of conflict. In fact I did take him to the authority at one point because he was trying to enforce so many targets on me when we were having our performance management meetings that I complained to my union and had to go and meet the senior inspector and a few other people with my Union representative and it got quite unpleasant. I tried to complain to the Governorship about the way he was, or he wasn't running the school and they just pooh-poohed me and just said that I was a trouble maker so we didn't have a very good relationship to be honest.

DW So how did that affect you as a person?

Frances Well, I nearly left teaching actually. It got to a stage where I thought I either get a headship or leave! And I felt as if I was being prevented from getting a headship, and one of the things that was happening and I am still recovering from it to be honest is that my self esteem was destroyed in all of this and I was applying for headships and I was getting less and less confident. I would have to do a presentation and my confidence would be at such a low ebb that I'd just walk off. The senior inspector used to keep on saying this to me but before I went to Merrywhite when I was head in Special Ed previously I was much more confident but all those run-ins with the management of the school had really had a big impression on me. I just couldn't get a headship anywhere I struggled, really struggled because my self esteem had been not so much but no, I was going to leave teaching I'm sure you've been through it, most people have been through the kind of, I'm going to leave teaching, sort of business.

It came pretty close because my partner and I had a five year plan at the time, my five year plan, not his, and he said, you've got to have a plan, you can't just up and leave.

DW So, at each of those points, those three points, how did you consider that you were able to influence the system in the school? How does that differ? Obviously as a head you've got much more influence now

Frances Well, I think that people can see genuineness in others and they can also see that somebody is doing it for the right reasons and I'd like to think not knowing how other people see me that they genuineness and kind of a belief. Sigh, oh dear, A belief and a desire to do the best for the children this seen by the professionals who work around you, it might not be seen in days it might not be seen in weeks, but it does get seen in months and years and I just think that I kept on going on that front, that was the thing that really kept me focused through all of those other things. I still kept on doing well with the children, that was the only thing that probably kept me going at those times.

Well, I influenced other people because expectations and standards that you achieve do quite rub off on colleagues that work quite closely with you, that's the way I kept it together really.

DW So, overall in those systems what would you do if you disagreed with the way that the system was going or the initiatives that were driving the system?

Frances Now or then?

DW In *each* system?

Frances Well, I'm quite outspoken, I'd say. (Laughs)

DW Yes that's fine. But what would you do, let's say that last one you've talked about with the absentee head, if you disagreed with the way the school was going how would you try and bring it round?

Frances Well the funny thing is he didn't really care about the education part of it so I had a massive influence on that side so really the school went the way I wanted it to go on that front which was I suppose a bonus in that sense but you didn't get the credit for what you were doing. Only one person was allowed to take the credit for it. So I was able to influence the systems to some extent and I suppose the first head, if I were to speak to him now, would say that because I was teaching at the top end of the school, obviously the way that I taught would influence our results anyway.

DW How about the Government initiatives?

Frances As I said before, they are only a tool for an end result aren't they.

DW So would your means of influence be to use them to further your ends rather than to resist them or simply comply with them?

Frances I think most teachers want to do their best in whatever situation is thrown at them and the Government have constantly done that and everybody has said, "Oh, I'll do this" and we've always been very amenable on that front – stupidly so I think – looking back in history, but we've always said I'll have a go at that then. We'll do our best.

DW Taking a fairly pragmatic approach.

Frances Yes, but I suppose teachers have to take that stance because they are buffeted by all sorts of influences.

DW If you wanted to use a part of the national curriculum to further your aims for the school, whether you're complying, resisting, what particular features might particularly help you in that?

Frances I'm not certain I understand the question

DW The system consists of people and rules and the tools that you use, you may well be trying to use the curriculum as a tool to further your aims but you've got these other parts of the system, you've got the governors you've got the parents you've got the LEA you've got the historical rules of the school and the way the labour is divided within the school and that's one of the tools that you use as well. How do each of those things, not necessarily going through them as a list, but are they any things, major things which either help you to move along in the right direction, or hold you back, resist the movement and by things I mean it could be people as well.

Frances Probably the biggest influence on not moving forward I suppose is people's recalcitrance and em I suppose power building. Some people even within their own classroom seem to try to build up some sort of power base which will stop a school moving forward and of course you get poor teachers and that will stop a school moving forward as well, very much. People trying to build up the areas that they have influence over to the detriment of other areas in the school. Special needs for instance, Merrywhite could have become a special needs school under the influence of a particular SENCo you know but people always try to veer away from that because it was a dead end.

DW That seems to be a very secondary orientated thing, you know, it used to be little departments, little kingdoms within the school and that seems to have dropped down into primaries a bit now

Frances Do you think its because of the size of certain schools, do you think its sort of sub-divided into that kind of hierarchy and then you become your on little world?

DW I think it's partly that but its also to do with the national curriculum and having specific subjects rather than working on more topic based areas with more spread and then people have to be co-ordinator of that subject area and they've got their own little point at which they can grow.

Frances I've always been of the opinion, and one head I know was an ideal candidate for this, people have co-ordinating roles in the school (both of us took on different coordinating roles over a period of time and probably covered all the coordinating roles) because it's a generic thing I think because as a primary school teacher you cannot be a specialist as such so if you're the coordinator of any subject you don't necessarily have to be highly skilled in that area to be a good coordinator of it because everything that you go through as far as the subject is concerned is generic. I thought that was quite a powerful thing as well, that certain people were able to see it like that and other people completely unable to see it like that, "no I'm this area, can't do that area". You try to explain it to them and they didn't understand I suppose it's a lack of interest not motivated towards that.

DW Partly lack of interest, partly lack of ability perhaps

Frances Well in my opinion because coordination is generic in primary schools you don't have to be a specialist you just have to be a good coordinator it doesn't matter what subject you're handed.

DW I agree, but some people may well say, music, I don't know the first thing about music and I'm tone deaf. You don't have to know anything about music to be a coordinator but it would make them feel that they didn't have the ability to do the job

Frances Well I suppose you'd come to a kind of management view of things then if that person sees their role as being more of a manager rather than a hands on specialist, that's fine. People don't see that because you've got to step back and you've got to see a wider point of view. Some people are really focussed they can't see anything besides what they're doing.

DW So that's specific focus may well be one of the things that holds you back?

Frances But the good will of people around you is the thing that takes you forward and that's why your performance management and your target setting have got to be quite sensitive because there's no point in setting targets if they're going to struggle to achieve and then they come and meet with you and you say you know I'm afraid you can't go onto the next incremental point because you didn't achieve all of your targets in every facet of each of the targets. I just think that the headteacher has got to run a sensible line because if you become dogmatic about things that the government have foisted upon us at the end of the day, if you get dogmatic about it I think you lose good will and once you've lost good will as a school you are finished. Sometimes you have to play very canny, very, very canny because every person in this school is an integral member. I learnt a lot coming here that you've got – well I call it the Pollyanna syndrome, did you ever see that film Pollyanna? You've got to see the good in everybody, you've got to play to everybody's strengths and if you come across a weakness you've got to shove it under the carpet and make the strength even more positive. I didn't, to be honest, I did not feel like that before I came here; I think I was damaged goods when I came here to St. Thomas but a year here and working with these people they've made me a far more positive person, I honestly think that, they've made me a far more positive person.

DW So they've helped you develop as well as you helping them develop?

Frances Yes it's a reciprocal thing, there's a lot of very kind people and they care about you as a person. I'm not saying they didn't at Merrywhite you know they were very caring people, but they have restored my energy and they've restored my faith in people around me. I don't know they might have a completely different opinion of me. (Laughs)

DW Right, some of the initiatives that came along.

Frances ... in those days?

DW Well right through, so we're talking national curriculum, and the financial side which you must have developed into.

Frances Even as a deputy head I don't think I was exposed that much to the finances of the school although I went through a kind of, the budget on a kind of model type basis with the head but really he had his hand in so many pies, finance was what he would consider was a whiz, but I just thought there was a lot of cons going on within it.

DW But those and literacy and numeracy as they've come through or as you've grown into them what contradictions or conflicts have there been

Frances Well I'm astonished, even now, that headteachers aren't put on some sort of financial management course because without a doubt I don't even know if I'm skilled enough yet and without a doubt people are becoming headteachers without any financial knowledge about running a school budget and I would say because lots of schools have had bursars and people who are very knowledgeable about running the finances of a school and usually they're the secretaries who get paid peanuts compared with, compared to us, em, I just still think that there is a great need for financial training for headteachers I've been at this school for four years but I would still turn round and say there's a hell of a lot more that I need to know and I don't think there's anybody in the authority like inspectors or sort of any of those people that could do it.

DW So that's a contradiction there isn't it? You're being required to do something but not being given the training to do it, that's a very good example. How about the other things that have come in, perhaps curricular things?

Frances Em, personnel is a real big issue for me, particularly when they did the job evaluations, em, I just felt that they left the headteachers completely out of the loop, I don't know if you spoke to your head about it or been involved in the job evaluations yourself but I felt that the headteachers were kind of left completely out of the loop, as far as what was going on and they would kind of send out to various personnel a questionnaire they would have to fill in but you know it kind of left everybody feeling as if they were unworthy and it takes a hell of a lot to build up peoples self esteem after they've been kicked by having their salary reduced or their hours reduced. So I feel that the heads with the personnel front they are lots of traps that they could fall into. It comes back to the budget again at the end of the day for that but I think there should be greater training as far as personnel working with your staff on a kind of contractual basis and understanding what the job description is all about. the hours that you give your support staff and particularly with this banded funding because I think that banded funding has become a real nightmare because obviously it can be taken away after a term you could lose a very good member of staff because, because they've chosen to go with a child because they like the child and you haven't got enough hours to pay them, you've got somebody else working with another group of children who isn't half as good but they're safe I just find that incredible that people don't warn you about all the pitfalls involved in lots of aspects of employment law because it is quite concerning.

DW Looking at the government initiatives do you feel at any time that you may have been able to pre-empt them? I spoke to some people who said they were introducing plenaries before literacy and numeracy came in they were looking at different ways of doing things and so because they had moved that direction already it was a smoother transition – is there anything that you may have pre-empted?

Frances I think I've pre-empted things to do with creative writing in recent times because that was one of the kind of sticking points of keystage 2 was that writing of both boys and girls had not improved at the rate that they expected it to and quite honestly – because that's what my masters research was about – was that there wasn't an allocation of time for the children to learn how to write properly because obviously to get a child writing you need to allocate quite a considerable amount of time to it and I think that's been a downfall of the literacy strategy. Having said that most of the literacy strategy has been a very, very good foundation for children to learn to write creatively but they don't give enough time for the children to develop their skills. So with the literacy strategy I set out with the premise that I was going to prove that the literacy strategy was a load of bunkum and I came round in my dissertation to say that it was very good at what it did but the only thing was that the teachers didn't give long enough to the writing aspect. It's our own fault at the end of the day that their writing is not moving as fast as it should be

DW Right, nearly at the end. Decisions you may have made in order to ...

Frances Professional decisions?

- DW* Professional decisions in order to move forward to make things work, tensions that have been caused with other people, or between you and the curriculum if you like. How have they affected you personally? Now we're getting onto the more personal bit I've had some people who have gone off with stress some people have ended up with bad hearts because their adrenalin has been so high all the time – how about you?
- Frances* Well, I've worked in two extremes of environment really because St. Thomas is very different as far as the kind of clientele that we've got although we do have a few awkward parents but not on the same scale as Merrywhite. My role at Merrywhite used to be that I would deal with the difficult children and also meet the parents of the difficult children and make contracts between the school and them as to how we would improve the child in the school and at home. The funny thing was that it was a hard school to work in because there was some very naughty children, some very difficult children and some parents but I did love working with those children and those parents. I suppose the only downside was my conflict with the head, that was the only downside, I felt that I got on very well with the teaching staff it was just the conflict and it was just a kind of complete em we were completely at different ends of a spectrum and there was no way that we could overlap because we had completely different values and completely different morals as well so that was a great conflict but if you take everything else away I loved teaching the kids at Merrywhite and its probably the same with you and the King Offa children with all the difficulties they present they are – you know you take them away on a day or you take them on a residential visit they are so pleased and they are so grateful that that gratitude, you can always live with that because its such a wonderful thing. I do actually miss the kids at Merrywhite, you know, no matter how they were. I might be seeing the world through rose coloured spectacles now but I really did enjoy that aspect of it and you felt as if you were doing something that was really, really valuable, getting some of them to do actually quite well out of education because they weren't going to do really well if their parents had anything to do with it.
- DW* So as a person?
- Frances* As a person I said to you earlier on I did consider leaving teaching.
- DW* And that was the effect that it had on you?
- Frances* Oh yes, a terrific effect and even now the repercussion of it have made me lose confidence, particularly when I go for interviews and I have to stand in front of people, em, I tend to lose confidence really quickly even after all the success I've had at this school I still lose it very quickly. Its something I can't seem to come back from in fact I'm probably getting worse.
[Contradiction with earlier – page 10]
- DW* So that is how it has affected you as a person, its knocked your confidence? And how did you deal with that?
- Frances* Well, you think you're getting on with your life but I don't know if you are so much because its always at the back of your mind but you just move on.
- DW* One of the ways that you've dealt with it is moving here?
- Frances* Yes and that's been a very positive part of it and I have applied for headships of other schools that are much bigger and I have applied down in Swansea so at one point I was considering obviously moving away from this area, I don't know so much now you see I'm torn between – I'm fifty now so I'm torn between going at 56 that it'll be another six years but this is a very comfortable existence at St. Thomas its hard work at times but its not hard work all the time and I know that if I went for a much bigger school with kind of social deprivation you know that its going to be hard work all the time and it would be easier for me at my stage with only six years

to go to say I'll get a nice little niche here and settle on that. Its never been my approach but I can see the draw to it

DW So its achieving a balance really isn't it, between ...

Frances I also think I know that I would, if I was a head of a much larger school I would be very careful about distribution of responsibility so that I would not feel that it was always down to me. That's quite a hard one to do that. Because you get to a stage where you become quite work orientated and even though I want everybody to be involved in the team process I tend to be a bit of a control freak in a sense that although you let people makes mistakes and let people develop you always want to say no you're not doing it right and I have to hold myself back on that. Being a bit of a control freak I would always want to have my fingers on the pulse and I can imagine that taking up a lot of time. [Contradiction with emphasis on teamwork]

DW Yes right, well you've answered the next question already because it was about – remember I gave you those sheets on adaptive strategies – I was going to ask what adaptive strategies you may have adopted or would you adopt in order to overcome any tensions or pressures but you've already said that your adaptive strategies may have been leaving the profession or moving to another headship, so moving to here was an adaptive strategy because it took you out of the stressful situation and it has given a chance to build up your self esteem again so you've already answered that question. When the national curriculum first came in the object became introducing the national curriculum and making sure that everybody covered it but now the focus has switched back to the children and the national curriculum or the curriculum itself is seen as a tool again so the focus...

Frances Well I don't know if everybody sees it that way – I still reckon not every head would see it like that

DW Not every head sees it that way but there are a number of heads who have

Frances I think it's a question of a bit of belief in what you stand for because at the end of the day if you don't believe in what you stand for you might just as well leave because that's questioning your philosophy of education. I think you've got to stick with your beliefs in the end as well.

DW Yes and those people who were more compliant in trying to introduce the curriculum were the people in whom the tension was actually greatest, those who started off very child centred and then said no I've got to do this because the government told me, they are the ones who really had suffered through stress and tension because they're doing what they're told but they're not doing what they want to do and those tensions come out in the end and that is very interesting and people who you would think get a lot of tension because they tend to be resisters and say no this is what I want for my school I may use that and I'll use all the bits of it that complement what I think but I'll resist any attempt to make me go a different way, you'd think there was a lot of tension there but they are some of the people who got on best and they are also some of the people who have suffered possibly health wise most because they are the people who work the hardest. Because the children come first and they are working on, you know, here's the national curriculum I've got to get it done but I'll use it in the way I want which means considerably more work than just trying to accept it or saying well I'm curriculum based anyway I'll go along with it so you've got the people who have suffered stress wise and people who have suffered health wise








Frances Well I have suffered stress wise over that period of time but I haven't missed work through it. I suppose the damage to me is not seen, the damage to me is my self esteem, I could have kept that to myself and you would never have known but the damage to me has been my self esteem which is quite a lot really.

- DW* It's a big thing but on the other hand it hasn't affected your health whereas – and I think that's because you're a team player and you've got people around you who work with you because you've developed a team and the people where they have had the stress and the tensions and more psychological stress and it's affected their health other people who have tried to do it themselves.
- Frances* Well you know if – I would not recommend somebody to go into education and I certainly wouldn't recommend them now that somebody becomes a headteacher because I think it's just too much of a job now much too much, of a job, I think it should be broken down into elements and you'd have a head of finance that purely deals with the financial aspects so the headteacher is purely a head teacher so the main thrust is to do with education of children not to do with the finances I really think somebody has got to think about that really hard because you will never raise standards if you expect the man at the top or the woman at the top to be all things to all people.
- DW* That's the difference between a teacher who becomes a manager and a manager who just happens to manage education.
- Frances* Yes you see to be honest with you I would always want to have a role as a teacher no matter how big the school was I would always want to have a role as a teacher because I think it is so, so easy for you to see yourself as a headteacher and never teach and lose touch not just with the pupils but lose touch with your staff so you really don't know what's going on in those classrooms because you've distanced yourself so much and there are so many of them out there you know, and they're trying to drive up standards not knowing the pressures that the people that they're trying to drive up standards have got to carry I think it's really important. I admire one local head actually because I know that he shares the headship of the school with somebody else I've got a lot of admiration for him because I think he's doing it the right way he's got a 60% teaching commitment now is it a 60%? Anyway he's got a split with him and his partner running the school between them and they teach between them as well, and I think it's a wonderful way. I think people in management have got to be able to walk away and say I've had enough I'm going early. [Adaptive / coping strategies] That's one of the things that bugs me about this job. There are people hanging around in schools waiting for a certain point they're doing sod all but they're just waiting to impress somebody about the time they are there. The staff at Merrywhite used to do it all the time I was up until three o'clock in the morning, doing this that or the other, well where's the benefit to the children? Where is it? Show me the benefit to the children they can't it's absolute nonsense.
- DW* Well if it's true they're doing the children a disservice because they're not in a condition to do the job.
- Frances* No, and all these other asides like PTA meetings, they really annoy me because the PTA think that they've got kind of a god-given right to keep my staff up until goodness knows what hour when I want them fresh the next day. I always go on about that I want my staff to be fresh tomorrow so they can teach your children, well and you're blathering on about stuff that's completely irrelevant but it's a night out for them look.
- DW* That's why I insist the PTA is at 3.45 pm and it's no more than an hour. If parents can't make it I'm sorry. Teachers have a long day.
- Frances* That's a very good idea. Did the PTA go with it?
- DW* Yes, there are a few less parents because there are some who can't come at that time.

Frances What I've said to them is you can have your meetings I will try and send along a teacher rep or a school representative but otherwise just go ahead without us. They do try a few little tricks that I don't like and in the past, they don't do it now, but in the past they – some of them have tried to use the PTA as a bit of a soap box and I soon kind of sorted that one out as well – if you've got something to say, come and see me in school time, no need to talk about it in front of all these people, they feel really brave when they are in front of people. It seems that one leaves, their child leaves in year 6 and another steps into the breach it's always the same doesn't matter what it is you get all sorts in the same place all the time. Nice to see you

DW Thank you.

12877 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Gillian (jm14125a)

Gillian Go on then hold a lamp over me and say right Gillian, right Gillian this is it.
Don't ask me too many difficult questions on a Tuesday morning will you Dave.

DW No today's questions are really easy.

Gillian So what's this for then? Tell me, this is for your PhD?

DW This is for the PhD, yes.

Gillian So you've got to interview how many?

DW Eight

Gillian Eight, oh right, and then you sort of correlate all the answers?

DW Yes, I put it all together. What I'm actually looking at is school systems and how they have changed over the past twenty years.

Gillian (laughs) oh, so how long is this essay about 500,000 words, the thesis?

DW Probably about 80,000, well that's the maximum

Gillian Is it really? 80,000, is it really 80,000 (whistles)
That's a Harry Potter length, that is. Go on, go for it.

DW First of all, just a few basic details – how long have you been in teaching

Gillian Em, let me think, I've been in teaching 28 years, I started in April 1977. Do you want a bit of my life history, do you?

DW That's for the next interview. And how many years have you been a head

Gillian Well in this school, I've been a head for nine years next April. Previously I was; I had two stints as acting head at St. Francis I also did a year as acting head at St. Mary's. So I've had a bit of experience of very small, slightly bigger and sort of in-betweeny schools as I call it.

DW Very small, St. Mary's.

Gillian Well, my wife always says it was the best year of my life, that because that was the happiest year, it was the most stressful year but it was very enjoyable because I had a fantastic team and we got along like a house on fire. To be honest if you hadn't got on there you would have sunk without a trace. It was a very, very difficult group of children, parents, a very strange governing body believe me, including the ex head. So it was very strange but very rewarding.

DW You've just about hit my next question, how many schools as a head?

Gillian Including that one, three

DW I'll tell you something about what I'm doing, so you have a bit more insight before my next question. This is actually my aims and objectives [hands over piece of paper] it's what I'm trying to do. I'm looking at school systems and how the systems have changed with the government initiatives and how that's affected heads, particularly over the past twenty years, since the Education Reform Act. Each head has been a teacher, obviously, and each teacher builds up their professional identity through their interactions as a teacher and before that and it's whether the professional identity and what they know

they want to do; where the basis of their education philosophy lies and where it competes with or goes along with the government initiatives and the effect that has on them and the systems they are in. The thing I am going to use to analyse it is called the activity triangle and that [hands over a piece of paper] is a system.
You've met that have you?

Gillian No I'm just thinking that I've been on a leadership course for serving headteachers and we did a lot of work about the iceberg. You know I can control that but I can't control that, what's above I can, but what's below is all about me, my motives, what drives me, how do people perceive *me*. So I'm a bit used to all of this because I came back and the first day after the course....

DW It's an awful lot to do with that

Gillian Yes

DW The head is the subject and then their motives, what actually drives them is the object and that's not the same as an objective, not the same as an aim

Gillian You're right it's very similar because on the Leadership course there are three aspects, you look at the professional characteristics you look at leadership styles and you look at the school climate. It's interesting how staff fill a questionnaire in and their perception of me and my leadership style is not how I perceive myself and when you get the results you hope that they are like that [parallel] but sometimes they are like that [diverging] and you think mm, that's interesting, I did not see myself as a pace setter, they do and then you look at the coercive and you look at the other and you think ah, have I been pushing too hard, is that why? So have I got a group of people who are a little bit sort of feeling, confused. This is why I've come back from the leadership course and the next thing I did was sit down with the staff and say, ok, where are we going and am I asking you to do things which really you think you don't need to be doing and are there things that we are doing that you're not sure about? Hopefully as a result of that the next time they fill the questionnaire in, in May, the gap won't have widened, if it's widened, you think I'm going wrong somewhere, you hope it will go like that [converged].

DW That's very similar to heads and the government, but of course the government don't ask they just impose.

Gillian Yes I think that's the biggest frustration. It's a bit like the teaching and learning responsibility points [TLRs] I mean why give us just three or four months to bring it in and then two years to implement it? Do you know what I mean? I mean, why do that?

DW Why insist that a school that is closing in July brings it in, in the first place?

Gillian Talking about schools that are closing, off the subject completely, I had a phone call yesterday from a gentleman from radio Mercia and he said to me can you make any comments about the meeting that's taking place tonight about the closure of your school? And I said, I beg your pardon, I said, I don't think they are closing my school. Yes he said, falling rolls, you've only got a few on roll now. And I said, I have 160 and he went, eh, and I said, have you got the right St. Mary's. And he said, St. Mary's. And I said, the school closed a year ago, your information takes a long time to get through. He went oh, there's a meeting, and I said maybe there is but St. Mary's closed down 12 months ago. I knew things were a bit slow in Mercia, but I didn't know they were that slow! Anyway, sorry I digress.

DW These are the specific factors I will be looking at, the tools and particularly the bottom line [of the triangle] which is...

Gillian Division of labour, yes

DW Do you do it all yourself

Gillian I tend to do a lot myself but that's historically because when I first came here, I was here April 16th, two weeks after I arrived I had the brown envelope from Ofsted, so consequently my summer holiday, and I make no excuses, was spent in here, doing, doing, doing, doing, doing and, not the present staff, but I did have some staff who had been here for some considerable time who found it difficult to come along and change and what have you so I ended up doing a lot myself. It's been difficult for me to actually delegate in a way, I've had to actually be quite strict with myself and say you don't have to do that (I'm not talking to myself, by the way, I'm thinking do I need to do that) because somebody else could do that because often my wife will say to me, why are you going in and doing it? Why are you opening up? Why are you doing this? Can't somebody else do it? My father always used to say, sometimes it's better for Son to do it yourself at least you know the job will get done but then you realise at what cost? Family! It came home to me a while back when my youngest daughter said to us on the Saturday morning, "Dad, are we going to school today, or to town?" and I thought poor child, is that all her life consists of school or town? So I really had to make, you know, every new year I think right what's the new year resolution? Spend more time with the family, spend less time in school. Having said that, now I've got settled teaching staff I'm beginning to delegate more, but when you've been used to – I mean not all the staff I had, I mean Sean was a very good deputy, very loyal and he took a lot off my shoulders but for example, the cleaners, I've had major problems with my cleaners, one in particular who I'm still going through... Three years ago we took the contract back over. What commercial services were charging was way over the top – having said that, when you end up cleaning the school yourself as I've had to in the last few weeks – and I said to my governors, look I've got a letter about work life balance from Ted and Ian said, I've got to look after your work-life balance and I said right I want the cleaning to go back out to contract because I just can't cope with this, this is ridiculous. Do you know what I mean? I'm constantly looking for ways of saving money but by doing that sometimes it rebounds on me.

DW You find yourself doing too much

Gillian Em, I don't have a caretaker, for example, so if you want these changed [point to the blinds], I do it, and I was doing little plumbing jobs and this and that and I said this is crazy so now we employ a part time handy man/gardener/anything and Barry is a godsend. It costs me about £2,500 - £3,000 a year and it's worth every penny because now what the staff do, they have a defects book as we call it, they write it in there and Barry picks it up and goes and does it. It's one less headache for me, but it's learning to do that – that has been the difficulty. I'm not a martyr and when I come into school I don't go around saying, "I was in school for four hours yesterday" as far as I'm concerned if I do go in, I do go in and I don't go around crowing about it. That's just not me. Wherever I've been I've given a 100% and I always say the day I come in here and think I don't want to be here I'll go.

DW That is a part of that professional identity that you've built up.

Gillian It is because as I said it's – it's like this morning I mean I don't know how it works at King Offa but, do you have a strict dress code at King Offa for staff?

DW Not too strict, but certain things are frowned upon

Gillian Well you see how would you feel about female members of staff who come dressed in tracksuits and stay in tracksuits all day?

DW There is one who does, but she does PPA PE

Gillian I just discussed this with my deputy you see and I said "look, I took the children swimming on Thursday (as you know) so I bring my tracksuit in and I change into it at lunchtime" Now sometimes I'll stay in it for the afternoon because I don't get back until three o'clock, I might come back and change, but the next day I've got a shirt and tie on and this particular member of staff is a young member of staff, she's only been with me for a year and I watched her come in this morning, now she's

got a club after school but that's after school. If I'm saying to children, you shouldn't be wearing trainers, then I had one parent say, what about your staff they wander around all day in trainers. It goes back to this business of, you know, your expectations and I think you're a role model at the end of the day but is very difficult because she is a young member of staff, so am I right to delegate that to my deputy? Who is a female and I said I think you could just as a – I mean she's been mentoring her anyway, she's finished her NQT year, her induction but I think just a word to say yes I know you've got a club, I mean ok, if she had PE first thing in the morning, fine, but the expectation would be, to be fair, Maisie changes she never stays in his tracksuit all day, therefore I expect the same from others. That's one of those little difficult areas if you know what I mean, I think just a quiet word – would you mind in future if, you know, by all means I know you've got a club but I think you ought to be changing.

DW You need to set an example for the children. I have been at the other end of it where it was done wrongly, thirty-odd years ago, when the Head said females will not wear trousers and it was a freezing winter and that was an edict from him, from on high.

Gillian You would get away with that now would you?

DW He didn't then, because they all came in trousers the next day.

Gillian I had, I had I wouldn't say horrendous, but I had a chap here who I remember watching a PE lesson and he had his suit on and he hadn't even changed into trainers. He was sat on the bench and I said to him afterwards "How can you deliver a PE lesson?" I just tell them what to do. And I said, "No, you should be showing them" and you should be changing as well, You're expecting children to change, you should be doing the same" Now that was a difficult one, believe me. If you don't have time because other things have intervened and its straight after lunch I don't have a problem with that its when you can see that there's no effort. Anyway back to...

DW Its all interesting though.

Gillian Its such a complex thing, all this headship. I went through the ranks, I was a junior teacher, scale 2; I moved to Mercia, got the deputy headship and for me the next thing was headship and there was no thought – I don't want to be a head – I was happy as a deputy but I wanted to be head and its like I've said to Sean, you know in the past, I came here and I just walked through and thought I want this, I was determined I really wanted this school. But I've had another argument you see, with Philip Morris, because there was a deputy head, they didn't want to be a head, they had seen what went on and they thought no that's not for me, and I said to him what's wrong with that, I don't see there's a problem there. Why go into something you don't want to do? Surely – its like I went for an interview on the Wirral, big Catholic school, 400 pupils, this was a good few years ago, and day one was a look around the school and I'd taken my wife up to my in-laws and I came back in the evening and she said to me "what's up?" and I said, I don't want it, I don't want this job. I said, "I just did not like what I saw" and I just got this feeling you see and she said, "what are you going to do?" I said, the only decent thing, tomorrow morning I'll go back and I'll tell him that I want to withdraw. And she was a bit – oh, - I said, I can't go for that job because I don't want it. You know when you get this feeling don't you, so I went the next morning and we'd been short listed from the day before from six and there were just three of us left. The chair of governors duly arrived and it was a round robin of interviews and I pulled him to one side and I said, look I'm sorry but I want to withdraw, I've just decided that it's not for me. He said, well I'm very disappointed, he said, because we had you down as number one, but he said thank you for being honest and I really appreciate it. And I was told you wouldn't get any expenses if you withdraw. But he said as you've been so honest, I'll make sure you get your expenses. Fair enough but what I'm trying to get round is if you want it, fine go for it, but I said to Sean, when you're going to headships you'll get a feeling something will hit you and you'll think I want this, but Wendy has only been with me since January, now she's saying to me I don't know whether I'd want your job Gillian, I don't know whether I could do it, how can you teach and do your job, because I do teach, some weeks I can teach as much as three or three and a half days, which I know I am not supposed to be doing, but its this balancing act isn't it, I've got the budget to look after

and I've got a member of staff away and I know how much a supply teacher is going to cost me, and I'm thinking well If I do that, I can save. I mean last year, again, I'm not crowing, but last year I saved this school just under £6,000 by doing NQT release time and supply cover, but at what cost? Because for the first time now I'm going to go in and teach and I'm thinking I should do my SEF I should do this, I should do that, whereas before I used to say to Karen I'm teaching tomorrow and she knew that meant unless it was an emergency I wasn't to be disturbed and I used to feel better, I love teaching, I was trained to teach children...

DW That's why you came into the job?

Gillian ...And I do still enjoy the contact with the children, not as much as I used to, I always make a point in the first term of working with reception so I get to know their names and get to know them because that's so important. I mean I know the names of every child in the school, sometimes I struggles with the Courtneys (which one are you) and sometimes I struggle with the twins (I know you're Tanira, and Kiera but I cant tell you apart)but again that's important. When I first moved to Mercia at St. Francis the Head used to say "you, you, you, boy, you" and they went "who", you know. He didn't even know the names of the children and it's not a huge school 220 children it wasn't massive but you've got to get to know them haven't you?

DW If you want it, though you don't have to, that's the theory behind the triangle you don't need it really but some people find it interesting. There are a couple of other things about it; it's a longitudinal survey, covering 20 years so my first question at the longer interview will be, "can you tell me about the last 20 years in your Professional Trajectory?" and then I will try and put it into the context of the systems you were in. The last thing I will come to will be to ask "if it all got too much, what would you do?" and there are various routes that people have taken or could take and this is them [piece of paper] you can retire, you can write books for children, you can become an advisor, there are all sorts of things.

Gillian We had to do – on the course the first night was one of these things I hate to do. They gave us a big sheet of A3 paper and they said right, "draw what hinders you, what excites you and what you're going to look like in 6-8 months time." Then the bloke said "no writing, its got to be pictorial." I went mad because I hate – I can't draw for toffees as you can see – and when we'd done it we had to give a 5 minute presentation so I said I'll go first. I jumped up and said "well as you can see I am the art co-ordinator", which broke the ice a bit, but its – somebody else asked me that, they said "Where do you think you'll be in 5 years time?" Well I'd like to think I'll still be teaching, I'll still be a head and I'd like to think I've got one more challenge beyond Chapel School [her current school] because I don't want to stay here for the rest of my life but as I said to you earlier, if I ever get up and think – then I'll go, once I realise I'm not putting my heart and soul into it. I still get a buzz out of coming to school despite all the things that are going on despite staffing issues I've had, despite problems with some parents and the community and the government, you name it, I still enjoy the job. Although I do get fed up with having to justify everything I do to all sorts of people: the damned league tables for instance, you know. I've become a SATS rebel over the last few years, I'll be honest with you, because I did a presentation for the governors, Maisie and I, she did PAT and I did target setting and I said "please remember all the time that I'm talking that the central issue is children, little human beings, not robots, not a raw commodity in a factory that you stick in one end and it will come out the other stamped, you know and I do feel that you look at these league tables and I listen to Jeremy Vine I don't often have the radio on, but it was lunch time and I was listening to it and it was the day that the league tables were released and he had for and against them and there were lots of people against them because all it tells you is if you look at the league table this year you'd say this school has gone there; I can tell you exactly why and I can show you lots of evidence to back that up and so can Maisie and I, we can – we've done- we've put everything onto PAT, we've got all our optional SATS on there, I can show you lots of lovely graphs and I can take you through valued added and show you what those children achieved at Keystage 1 and also other factors they don't take into consideration like one of our level 5s decided to beggar off to Turkey for a week and Mum came in on the Monday and said, "Oh I've booked a holiday" I said "its SATS this week" and she said "She can do when she comes

back” “She can’t!” “Well tough” and that was the attitude and this child would definitely have got a level 5, so there's one out of a small cohort of 23.

DW 4%

Gillian Six other children stood absolutely no chance of getting a level 4 so as I said to our link inspector when I was sitting here doing target setting, “why I'm sitting here doing target setting for next year with you, I don’t know, I don’t understand why because that target I set with you this year for the present year 5 will change because this school cohorts change quite dramatically, and in the last Ofsted she sat with me this day and said “right Gillian, lets go through every year group and I want you to highlight all the children that have come in here since reception.” In some cases, we’re talking 50-60%, massive change so as I said to him I don’t know why I'm sitting here spending half an hour giving you targets for the present year 5, its just crazy. It’s like the present year 6 Maisie and I sat down and I did target setting with all the teachers we had all the data available so its just plucking a figure out of the air, 3 that’ll do because I have heard that. I had a member of staff a few years ago and he sat in the staffroom with a support assistant and he went “what do you reckon, oh that'll do”. Anyway it’s a lot more sophisticated now but my point is that, you know, they are children and I mean I had an incident four years ago when a girl came in SATs morning very distressed and Steven said, “I'm a bit worried about Tara.” You could see this kid was distressed, so I said come on Tara and we took her out and found some jobs for her in the office and things. Her mum and dad had had a mega, massive bust up that night and Dad had walked out. So I was asked why I withdrew that child and I said because she wasn’t fit to sit doing a silly test when she was emotionally very upset and they said “well you shouldn’t have done it” and I said, “I don’t care! The children come first”

Right, sorry, you'll notice that with me by the way, you'll have to pull me back on track because I do it, the kids, I’ll go into class and I’ll say to the TA, if I'm doing literacy, I'll say, “right, give me the nod if I'm talking too much” because I go off at a tangent; I do it at home, and Linda will say, “hang on, you asked me so and so, Why are we on to that?” Where do you come from, you know, its just my mind.

DW I’ll have to go through a few ethical issues whatever you say, is not divulged to anybody its strictly confidential and I have the nod from my supervisor that if anybody is at all concerned that it will get back to anyone we can lock it for fifty years, it can only be put into the University library if we lock it. I shall probably, follow in another piece of research that somebody else did, call all the headteachers females anyway there will be no names and you will be designated three letters which mean something to me, but not to other people. You will get a copy of my analysis, but it will be quite a while yet. I would think because it takes a bit of writing, so you can look through it and say, “I can recognise myself there”, but will somebody else? Also, I have to talk to the Inspectors because I have to get triangulation but I never mention people and I will actually go throughout about 20 schools with them, saying things like, “what do you think of the system in this school?” How is it run?

Gillian So it'll be interesting analysing their perception against my perception

DW That’s right, that’s the triangulation, otherwise the data will be subjective. The last ethical issue is that I can’t pay you, I'm very sorry and after that the only thing we need to do is make an appointment for the longer interview.

Gillian “How long will it take?”

DW I've told everybody to leave two hours, but usually its between an hour and a quarter and an hour and a half.

Gillian I can do next Wednesday, shall I pencil you in between 3.30 and 4pm.

DW I can certainly be here by 4 o’clock. That’s the year 4 Christmas show but I don’t teach year 4

Gillian That's the other thing you see about delegation, isn't it. I was very conscious the first few years I was here; again my wife used to say to me "why do you go to all the PTA meetings?" and again it was very difficult I didn't have a very responsive staff and some of them, not all of them, and, you know, it was very much "oh no, once I've finished that's it", where as I have a completely different set now and its come round and its like, "Oh, I'll do it". My deputy said to me, "Gillian we'll do it between us, I have a member of staff who has taken on responsibility and she's happy to go to every PTA meeting this year and be the staff representative and Wendy and I will attend the meetings, She'll go to one and I'll go to the next, so its getting a lot better, that might come out in our chat. That's fine, I'm happy with that.

DW Thank you very much.

DW The first part is probably the most important, for about fifteen to twenty minutes could you run through what I have called your Professional Trajectory since about 1985, the last twenty years, what you've done, what you've been. Concentrate on major events and things that have had a significant effect on you particularly. Obviously moving from one school to another...

Gillian Is this just Professional you're talking about, not personal.

DW No, professional

Gillian Professional? Well I moved down to Mercia in September 1984, em to take up the deputy headship at St. Francis. Em I got – sorry '85 I beg your pardon. September '85 I've got to get my years right. I got married the following year, that's why. I was at St. Francis, I was acting head after one year, em which I found quite a daunting task, only having been the deputy for one year but the then head was desperate to go on secondment, he wanted to do his masters degree, partly because when I got the job he shook my hand and said, "of course I didn't want you because your degree is better than mine" I don't know whether he was joking or not but anyway he went – because I had an honours degree – he went for a year and for the first few weeks actually sat in the office and thought what does he do with his time? It was quite incredible really because of course that was pre LMS and I had what we called a capitation, in those days. So I had £3000 a year if a teacher was ill I rang up the office and said I need a supply teacher, I didn't have to worry about the budget. If you were appointing people you didn't have to worry about – you didn't have those worries that I have now got. Em the head came back the following year...

DW With his masters?

Gillian He got his masters and I stayed at St. Francis for the next few years and in 1992 – 93 the then head, there had been some problems and it was a very difficult job for me as deputy because, let's just say that he was the old style head, "I am the leader, you do as I tell you, and you tell the others what I tell you" type of thing. We had a new parish priest, and he was asked whether he would take some time off to think about what he wanted to do in the future, so I was greeted – I can remember it being a Friday morning and the chair of governors was waiting for me outside the school, about quarter to eight in the morning and he said "Gillian, we'd like you to take over the running of the school" and he said "all I'm asking you to do is get morale back up please" so I was quite shocked and I walked in and got everybody together and said "look, this is the situation, he's been asked to take some time off to consider his future, I believe its on a month by month basis," which it was, so consequently I took over the running of the school. I did that for fourteen months and as, rightly, the chair of governors said "I didn't do anything innovative" because I just thought here are these people who need a little bit of a boost, so that's what we did, lots of team building and everything, and then eventually the then head resigned, they advertised the position and em I didn't get it, and having run the school for fourteen months, I was a little bit peeved to say the least. There were reasons, and I won't go into them now, there were issues with it being a Catholic school so that was the low point in my career, the real low point because the new head came in and I went back to being a deputy and for the first six months I considered giving up, I thought I've had enough of this I've had a kick in the teeth and I just thought, you know, why am I here? And, but, I had two children and home so I had to, we'd just moved house and everything was conspiring against my leaving, it was, and anyway a few months later I had a phone call from Mike Collins and he said "look Gillian, would you consider taking over the acting headship of St Mary's School, so I said where is it? I don't know where St Mary's is, and he said if you go to the bottom of the steep Hill, look to your right, because of course when you are driving a car you don't, you'll see it, set back from the road, so I said, to my wife and girls, come in, get in the car and lets go, so we did, and I sat and it was the summer and he wanted me to take over in September and it was just before the summer holidays and we sat and Linda said, "this is gorgeous it's a beautiful little setting" so I rang up the next day and said yes please. Em that was probably the most challenging year of my life because they were a very challenging group of children but my wife always says that it was the happiest. Em there were lots of pressures on me but it was a fantastic team there. There were

13 children when I first arrived, I had 8 in keystone 2 and Gail had 5 in keystone 1. Now people would say, oh, eight kids, it must have been a doddle, but every one of those children had special needs of one type or another and it was hard work, but very rewarding and I did have a wonderful year, I got the numbers up to 22 I opened a pre-school group because I recognised that this was an area of real – well a lot of parents came from – The Close was just an area where they just grabbed all these problem families and dumped them in their little village with no amenities, apart from a shop which most of them were banned from using, a garage rather, you know the Texaco garage on the right as you go round. So consequently every day was different, you know people say about teaching that no two days are the same and certainly in that school it was. So I left there, I came back to St. Francis and again came straight back to an Ofsted, straight into an Ofsted, and then started applying for headships because I thought I've got to move on. Em I was interviewed for five or six, and obviously I didn't get the jobs and my wife used to say they used to stare out of the window and wait for me to come down the street and if my head was low they would know, and anyway this school came, up I came to visit it, walked through the door and thought I want this and I just had a really good feeling about it and it was one of those very quirky things because I'd been to some very high pressured interviews, one of them three days, yes, at one it was very much sort of look round the school, and we had to have lunch with the governors, a set of governors, then you had your pudding with another, coffee with another and then it was round robin interviews, and then a whole day of presentations the next day. I came here and I was interviewed for twenty minutes and I was asked six questions and they ranged from; tell us about your experience of reception, to we've just raised a £1,000 to build a pond, do you think that's a good idea – [whispered] you're not going to say no are you – and eh but it was a very strange thing because it was in the staffroom and I always remember we were sat in a classroom, I was called through, and the governors then stood up and said "do you mind if we have a cup of tea, its been a long afternoon" and I had to sit in the chair for ten or fifteen minutes while they had a cup of tea, thinking – and Mike Collins was looking at me, you know, anyway I got the job here and I was appointed in the December and I started in the April of 97 and again I was here three or four, five weeks, and the Ofsted letter arrived so it was straight into it, so I spent the whole summer holiday moving, changing, because when I arrived here, and I'm not, being unprofessional about my predecessor, but there was no planning, there was no school development plan so I had to do something, so consequently when the staff came back after summer holidays, suddenly everything, or not everything, but there was lots of change and I said, sorry but I've got to do it, and when the Ofsted team arrived, I gave them my school Development plan as it was known then, because its been through a few changes hasn't it – institutional development plan, school development plan, School Improvement Plan, whatever...

DW And back to school development plan

Gillian Its been everything! And anyway I said, that's my picture of the school, its nobody else's because there was no time to write one with every one consultation and I said, please don't ask me to do a three year projection, its impossible, I can't do it, you couldn't do it, and that's why I had many a row, because they arrived in the end of November, beginning of December, for three days and anyway over the Christmas holiday, the Lead Inspector and I, the Reggie and I, had many conversations on the telephone, he sent me the original one which I scribbled on and said don't agreed with this, this contradicts so and so on page so and so, paragraph 6, blah, blah, blah, and I'm very proud to say that I managed to get us from unsatisfactory to satisfactory, I did! I fought tooth and nail and I got it up there, [Arguing with inspectors – c.f. Barbara] so anyway that was that. Em the last few years have been interesting I've had to deal with quite a few – two very difficult staffing issues, involving capability, not nice. And em it's had a big strain on me but to finish off I would like to say that the staff I've got now, I've got a very good group of people and I'm very happy and – well I was talking to my governors last night and my chair of governors said "he just thinks the school has made huge strides forward over the last year or two and I think our profile in the community has risen, certainly amongst the army community, because there was one incident a few years ago and it took its toll on me and it took its toll on the school, and its taken me four years to get back the reputation and to hopefully up it. So that's it.

DW Right, that's brilliant, thank you very much. I'd like you now if you can to think of three times, one is now, one is pre ERA perhaps when you were with the bureaucratic head, because that would be a nice contrast, and one in the middle some time when things were either absolutely awful and you were thinking what do I do next, or a time when it was like when you were at St Mary's when it was absolutely brilliant and things were moving forward and you could feel that things were right. With those three times I'd look to look at the triangle if we can. You will recall that you are the subject, it might be you, or it might be you and the staff, its whoever is driving the school forward, so at the moment I would imagine that as you've got a good team, and there is team work that the subject is actually you and the staff. The Object is what drives you, which I will come to in a moment and the outcomes are what you are getting.

The object may not necessarily be permanent because sometimes you have an interim object; its not like an objective, but there are certain things which in your philosophy of education, you say this is what's very important, this is what's pushing me forward at the moment and then that, once you've achieved outcomes to do with that object may then move on to become a tool which you use to achieve your next object and so on. Although I'm not supposed to say, achieve an object because an object by its very nature is not achievable so, looking at those three times if you could just start with the initial point, what drives you as a teacher, as a head.

Gillian Em, it's the children that drive me, and they always – I mean the children are at the centre of everything that I do and hopefully they always will be and whatever I do, its for them because that's the reason why I'm here, you know I was trained to teach. I was very lucky because originally and if I digress, you must pull me back, and say don't do it, because I warn you I do. Originally I wanted to be an archaeologist, I've always loved archaeology and as a child I used to have a sandpit that wasn't a sandpit it was a long lost pharaohs tomb, but then, they wanted three straight A's at A level and I didn't get those unfortunately. So I sat very disappointedly thinking what am I going to do and my aunt was a headmistress and she said look, come and do some voluntary work in school and I went in and I thought I like this, and I took a football team because there was nobody to do it and I thought, yes, so I had an interview at Newman College and went on teaching practice and I've never looked back, and I love, I love, I mean, part of the job that's frustrating for me now is that I tend to do a lot of work in here [the office] but I miss the daily contact – well, no that's not true, I have daily contact with children because I do duty every week and every morning, unless something dramatic happens, I'm on that playground. I love contact with the children so, em, its their smiley faces its coming up for a sticker, it's the achievements, it's the sharing assembly on Friday, when I given them a certificate and it's the look of expectancy from those rows of little people and that's what drives me and that's what I say to staff, you know, that's hopefully why you're here, you want to be with children, do you know what I mean?

DW You want to see them progress, you want to see them achieve.

Gillian I do, I want to see them, I want to see them happy. Yes I want them to achieve, but I want them to be happy. I want them to feel safe here and I want them to say to me as I've had children say, ah I'll miss Chapel School, you always find, its probably the same at your school, but you always find that year sevens do, they miss you, because suddenly they are the little fish in this massive pond when they used to be the big fish and you find that they come back and they say oh I miss this. So yes I mean it's the children. Its them and that's the reason why we're here, but it is getting a bit frustrating because I don't spend as much time as I used to, you know.

DW Right, that's good, we've more or less defined the object. I could actually focus down and ask what is it about the children?

Gillian Em, well as I said, its just when I go into class and you're doing something and a child achieves something, or they manage to work something out, or you've given them help and suddenly you almost see the light coming on and its that look of [sigh] as I said that is wonderful that – surely every teacher enjoys that.

DW That's really interested me because you've actually got two things there, you've got the child's satisfaction at the achievement but you've also got your satisfaction. You are satisfied because you have helped that child to achieve. So that's not just the children, there's a personal aspect to it as well.

Gillian But I would have thought that every teacher, surely that should be what drives them at the end of the day.

DW Yes, but I've met some who are more curriculum based, although I can't say who they are. Delivery of the curriculum is their object.

Gillian I think it's the same with the SATS isn't it, you know, its sort of, there are some who are SATS driven and its sort of we must improve our results at all costs and ok if I've got a child in year 6 who I know is capable of achieving a level 5 who got a level 3, I'd start asking serious questions, of course you would, but at the end of the day I don't want the children to become stressed out because of the SATS. So you've got to get a balance haven't you, but at the end of the time if the children are happy and if the children feel safe and if the children are enjoying then they'll achieve. So although yes its very important to deliver the curriculum, there's all the little bits that go along with it and its also acknowledging that children sometimes come in with their excess baggage and they just – like at St Mary's it's a classic example. I mean I could spend half my day just listening to children talking because they just have to unwind, unload, get something off their chest. I mean St Mary's is a classic where at 9 in the morning I used to look at Gail my keystone 1 teacher and say, we'd look at the children's faces and say I'm not going to do literacy she'd say what are you going to do, and I'd say, I'm going to do games, I'm going to do art, I'm going to do something that they really enjoy I'll do literacy later when they're happy and they're settled. Otherwise you stick with literacy and it sets a bad tone for the day.

DW Right, so, we've looked at that part, can I just move onto that first period, where you are a deputy and had a bureaucratic head...

Gillian Very much so

DW ... at that point, if you look at this triangle; this triangle is very interesting in that it actually looks at tensions and contradictions in the triangle, so at that point you were the subject, you were the deputy head and you had this object of helping the children seeing them happy...

Gillian ...as well as the children, I had to bring the staff in there

DW ... That's another object, to build a good team, to help the staff because that's what actually meant about the tool. You see if your first object is to bring up the staff, get the staff right, get the staff happy, get the staff moving in the right direction, working as a team, then you can take that object that you've achieved, well, you haven't achieved it because you could always do better but you have moved towards it, and you take that staff team and you use them as a tool to achieve your primary object which is the children.

Gillian I see what you are saying because at the end of the day if you've got a disgruntled staff if you've got an unhappy staff, staff that aren't particularly motivated, then they're not going to be delivering. Well at least they're not going to be delivering to their full potential and I mean it soon struck me after being – I wasn't at St Francis long, before I sensed that there was a real gulf between him and us and I also sensed I was taken on because when I was interviewed one of the governors said, I think you'll be strong enough to deal with him, so the governors knew what he was like and they wanted somebody who was strong. Now obviously for me, I'd come from a school in North Wales where I'd been happy, and I mean happy. I'd worked for a fantastic head, and although I wasn't a deputy when I left, she said to me although you weren't paid as a deputy you were my deputy because we had a lovely lady Una, God rest her soul, she was a lovely lady but she was not a deputy, do you know what I mean, so consequently Sister Patricia used to sort of – I did a lot of the deputy tasks and so it was a good learning experience for me and I moved to Mercia and bear in mind I left home, family going

down to live in a strange place where I'd never been before. Moved in with a chap, well lodged with a guy, on Stadium road, Seamus so everything was new to me and I found the experience quite difficult because I sensed straight away that these were people who were under a lot of stress and when we had staff meetings, they were very strange affairs and em – because I'm one of these people I've had to learn over the years to actually, you can't shy away or run away from conflict, at times you have to make things head on and in the early stages I put it off, I'll do it tomorrow I'll see him tomorrow, I will confront him and I used to say to my wife I've got to go and do it but the longer you put it off, the harder it is, but then he was a very nasty man, he was a bully basically and he used to enjoy putting people down, or his classic line would be to come to you on any morning and say I want to see you at the end of the day, don't go early. You'd spend the whole day thinking, what have I done? And you'd knock on his door and he'd say, "oh it was nothing, bye", he did, and so it was very difficult for me because I thought I am supposed to be learning. If I want to be a headteacher, I thought all I'm learning from you is what not to do, or is sort of the exact opposite of the way I should be treating people or the way I should be doing things. He'd single out parents he wanted to speak to and he'd by-pass others. He didn't know the children's names, very strange, but the fact that the team, we got on well as a team so I used to sometimes just get them all together and say, look, I know things are tough and I am trying to deal with it but it was very frustrating because the LEA were very much "you're a catholic school, go and see your parish priest" and it's only when we got Father Peter at Belmont he actually said, Gillian, I've heard and I'm going to do something about it and that's when it happened.

DW And that's where this triangle comes in because the rules are actually the historical rules of the school, which he had obviously built up and these rules were I'm the boss, and what I say goes and you as a deputy head where trying to work with the staff but you had a contradiction – we actually show contradictions like this with the sort of lightning arrow so you had this contradiction which may well have strengthened this line here and the analysis that I'm doing looks at these contradictions and how they work.

So you were there and you had this very difficult and bureaucratic head and there was this contradiction, there was also a huge one here which you've mentioned, which was him singling out certain parents, and one right across there where he wasn't living up to your object.

Gillian So in a sense my role as deputy was, well first and foremost I was a full time teacher, there was no management time, even though I was promised it, in fact on one occasion, he came in unannounced and said, "I'll take your children for history now, what are you doing?" "Right I'll do that, you can go and do something else" and that was it, that was like a one off. So first and foremost I had a class of 34 year 6 children but I also saw my role as, obviously I was deputy and therefore I had the staff but there was also the parents because I was very conscious that new parents come into the school, I was worried, very worried, about the sort of picture that they would get particularly if they were shown around by the boss. So I had all these different hats I had to wear and I saw that as my role, em the cleaning staff because one of the things I think I do when I go into places, I don't single people out I treat everyone the same so if you clean the school, or you're the highest paid teacher in the school you're no different to me, you're part of the team and it was very interesting when I spoke to a cleaner she said, I said, look, I'm Gillian, call me Gillian, and she said, do you mind, and I said, no why should I mind, and she said, well he insists on being called "mister" and I said, no, no, no I said, look don't worry I'll tell you what, I said, put the kettle on, let's have a cup of tea and about a week later I was called into his office and he said to me, I don't want you fraternising with the cleaning staff, and I said, why, and he said because they're below you and I said, I'm sorry, I said, these are people who work for you, I said, they keep this school clean, I said, what's wrong with them I was really – at that point I thought – so we had our first of many scraps that night and I said, look I shall carry on having a cup of tea if I feel like it and you certainly can't stop me doing that I said I'm going to go and put the kettle on for her now and I walked out of his office. It was at that point that I got the stare and I thought oh I don't care, but it was it was very difficult. The enjoyment came from the children and the enjoyment came from being a really tight unit of people, we looked after each other if one was down we'd all close ranks and hence the reason why when I was acting head for the second period I gathered them all together and said, look, this is a good school, you're a good group of teachers, we've got lovely

children, I said come on lets get out there, and do the right thing. So that was – sorry I've probably gone off the track a bit.

DW No you haven't you were talking about stronger connections and you said you had a stronger connection with the parents.

Gillian Now, you see the interesting thing is if I move across to St Mary's, at St Mary's what I had there was a lovely team, a really good team but a very wary group of parents, now the first day I remember I was in class and there was this big knot of people by the gate. So I had to Jane my classroom assistant I'm just going out a minute Jane and I went into Gail and she said Oh they're probably sussing you out, don't forget you're the fourth acting head we've had in two years. So I thought right, and I went out to them and said look everybody I'm a human being I said lets have a chat about things, do you all want to come in and I'll put the kettle on, lets sit in the hall for ten minutes and I said, Gail do you want to take an assembly and she said yes I'll do it, and we sat there and I explained why I was there and everything and there were one or two, but it broke the ice because I noticed that evening that they started to come in, but I thought that I didn't want this group of people out there thinking he's only there for one thing, a bit of experience and he'll go because I was totally honest with them and I said look I've only been asked to be the acting head for a year but I said I can promise you that I will give you and this school and your children a 110% you'll get everything, I said, yes I'll be honest with you, of course I'm using it as a step up and I'm being totally honest with you but that doesn't mean I'm just going to sit back and take the money and think, oh well, I said, I promise that I will give you a 110% so I broke the ice and I sort of made them understand because I didn't want this group of people to be out there again.

That was different, and some of them had obviously had a bad childhood, a bad education and so on and therefore "I'm not welcome here" you can sense it, but I mean you can get amongst them and you can do something about it. Here I've got some very good parent governors, particularly the new ones and I say to them, look if you hear anything, let me know, or say something – "have you been in to see the head", no go in there, have a chat with her, the door's open, she is accessible and she will speak to people and she will put the kettle on; she's busy but he will find time. That was quite interesting as I said, here, the difference here was that I had three distinct groups of parents, you had the army, the village and you have what was then the housing association, so for example when people used to come in I used to go up and you can imagine there's the top of the drive and there would be the army, the villagers would be here, and the Oak and elm would come down and go straight back. So there was no – they didn't ever get together so I said to the staff and I said the governors, look, I want this to be a community we need to have some sort of a social, lets get everybody together and that's why for example I started the end of term bash and that has grown over the years and we have parachute displays, barbecue discos, rounders matches. I started it as a way of saying thank you to everybody and its not a fund raiser although we do make a lot of money now. We charge a £1. per family so if you've got 10 children it will cost you a £1. obviously they've got to pay for their booze and everything but its become quite legendary now and they turn up in their droves and if it's a nice summers evening they'll sit out on the grass and its lovely its really pleasant and that was something I noticed. It was very obvious. I stood there one day thinking you're here, you're there and you don't even speak to them, you know.

DW Yes that's the case in a few communities isn't it.
Just think for a short time about the national curriculum and all the different government initiatives that have come in, because there are some that everybody says, oh that's fine, and have adopted that wholeheartedly and they said we will go for that. Literacy is usually one of them and there are some which snow you under like perhaps the beginning of LMS.

Gillian Yes, I think the trouble with LMS was that they suddenly decided that they would give over more or less total control of budgets to schools but they didn't really give you enough training to do the job. I mean as I said to you earlier, before LMS in the capitation days I just bought the paper and the books and then suddenly it was oh, I want supply cover how much am I going to allocate for this, or how many days did we have last year, and there were all these different things. Now when Karen and I do the budget its broken down so carefully into contracts into how much West Mercia its everything so I

did feel at the time that it really – of course I don't know whether you remember those very early LMS days when we ended up with massive carry-overs from one year to the next because everybody thought I've got to under spend, you know, hang on folks we've got to be very careful and no, you can't have that because I've got to hang onto my money and as a consequence suddenly you can imagine the government saying do you see how much Mercia schools have got? Right lets cut their grant, you know and there are still now the budget – I mean I was doing it last night while I was waiting for my performance management guy to come in and there are still things on there that I'll be honest with you I don't understand or haven't quite got the grasp of. I mean I do understand devolved capital I do more or less understand the standards fund but I think that one of the frustrating things about government initiatives is they give it to you and you've got to spend it within a certain time. I don't know whether you remember about four or five years ago they gave us some money after Christmas, quite a large sum of money to be spent on literacy and books you had until the end of February to spend it and you couldn't get hold of a book rep for love nor money because every school was grabbing them and I said this is ridiculous you can't expect people to behave like this and it was if you don't spend it before the 31st March we'll have it back – I remember that and consequently its we've got to get so and so, we've got to spend and of course you're not used to it.

DW I remember we took a Saturday and went up to an educational book store near Worcester and went round the warehouse for this company and picked out our books – it was the only way we could do it.

Gillian I mean its just that in our profession we're not used to being given lots of money and I remember the staff saying how much? What are we going to do? So I said "hang on, lets sit down and think what do we need" I said, "we don't want to spend it all and then say we didn't need that" and I think at the time we'd just brought in Oxford reading tree and we bought in Literacy world into keystage 2 so we supplemented it for guided reading and we did that sort of thing. What I was trying to say was with the government initiatives very often its got a time limit and you've got to spend it by a certain date and that's frustrating but I mean yes the thing is though with the literacy and all the other government initiatives don't you feel – its like the new phonics, we've come full circle again are we going round?

DW Yes its a pendulum, we swing from one extreme to another and back.

Gillian And you think I've done that before I know all about that and its frightening if you think of the number of initiatives that Blair and his government have brought in since 97. I would think it runs into hundreds. When you think that he came in and said teaching and teachers as a profession have had a lot of changes. We're not going to do that – excuse me! I sometimes I just wish they'd leave people like us to get on with the job because that's what we're trained to do. I know we need professional development, we always need that....

DW ... it wouldn't be politically viable for them because they have to be able to say look what we've done and you can't do that unless you've got your fingers in it and you're stirring madly.

Gillian I mean, you see, you remember the time pre-national literacy strategy when you used to do the good old fashioned grammar lessons and creative writing they are old fashioned but I don't see any harm in them because I taught my children nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs and I'll be honest with you if I went into my year 6, there are some in there that I could guarantee because it was a structured scheme that worked its way through we taught the children grammar and they knew it and we taught then tables and things like that. I mean there are aspects of the literacy strategy that I like but I think that what its done is its got rid of all the creativity and the spark it went because suddenly there were all these people going shared text work, I don't know and as a teacher myself as you've probably guessed I can't work like that because very often I have to be – Gillian you talk too long – but sometimes you've just got to go with the flow.

DW You've really got to sense what the class want and what they really need – its a feeling between you and the children.

Gillian Well I mean yesterday I had a year 5 class and my year 5 teacher was doing mental arithmetic strategies as training with the TAs actually. So I said I'll take your class what do you want me to do, and she said, will you do some visualising with them and I said yes that's no problem. Anyway she had the classroom arranged like this [horseshoe shaped] and I went and sat on the chair and the kids were all sat round like that and I sat there and said, its like being in an interview, go on then I said ask me some questions and before I knew it was half an hour later and they'd – we'd had a wonderful time and they thought it was hilarious they thought it was really funny – who's your favourite football team em and are you married and what ages are your children all this sort of stuff you know then at the end I said to them all right have I got the job and they said, yeah, you're all right but its, its just that spontaneity isn't it, seizing a situation and thinking oh it's a bit of fun.

DW Yes and they learn from it – social skills and all sorts

Gillian They do they do, but you just feel that you wouldn't have done that in the morning, Oh literacy, and then I've got break and then I've got that.

DW So if something comes in like that and you're not particularly enamoured with it and you feel that "this really isn't what I should be doing, I know what I want to do and know how I want to do it, we want to achieve the same aims but I can't see how that is helping!" What would you do?

Gillian Em, well I'd, obviously I'd I mean I'd go the staff first and say look, what do you think about it and say – I might not even say I'm not particularly happy about it, I might throw it open to them and say, "be honest with me, are you happy with it?" Now if they as a whole group of people say "actually Gillian, we think its really, really good," if that was a whole group consensus I'd be thinking well ok, you'll be doing the teaching day in and day out I'm not, whereas if there was a consensus that actually we consider it a bit ropey I'd say "ok let's change it". If we don't feel its good enough for our children and we can prove that what we've put in place, is better than what's being suggested there's no problem. I mean I don't like, I've never been one that could ever follow a scheme from page 1 to page whatever, I mean ok going back to good old Haydn Richards and stuff fine you know, but you could still I like to pluck things I mean some teachers have to be very prescriptive it has to be – you know I've had them in the past when they've said with the literacy strategy I – that's why I got literacy world keystone 2 because I have two who were sinking and they just couldn't grasp it and I said right this has got your lessons Monday Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, that's what you'll teach that's what you'll do, is that what you want?" Yes, yes please! Ok off you go. But at least I knew that it was being, things were being taught although I could never do it like that, but – sorry I mean to answer your question simply if I honestly and the group felt – I wouldn't push it on them. I'd say fine lets change it as long as I could prove to an Ofsted Inspector or anybody coming in or my own patch inspector, we didn't like it, this is what we're doing and we feel this is more beneficial to the children this is what the staff – because at the end of the day you know yourself if I gave you something and said, right Dave that's your lesson for tomorrow, and you went – [groan]

DW I'd make sure the door was closed when I didn't do it.

Gillian Or else at the end of the day you'd deliver it and the end product wouldn't be particularly good would it? I mean you've got to be happy with whatever you're delivering and I've always said that to the staff and I've always said look, you know its like the RE syllabus, whatever, you know lets look at it. If you're happy with it and there are aspects you are not happy with tell me I don't mind I'm all for change as long as, again it's going back to the children isn't it?

DW So overall would you consider yourself a resister or a complier?

Jm Hmm if I don't really like something I'll say it, if I'm really unhappy about something – I'm willing to have a go at anything, I will and initiatives that come in I might say well I like that bit and that bit and that bit, I wouldn't just dismiss something and say no. I'm not doing it, I'd pick but if something came in and they said to me, right this is the new whatever, and it will be done, and I thought no, I would say no I'm sorry I don't like it.

DW So overall does that makes you a resister; would the fact that you're thinking about it and your picking the bits that you want make you less of a complier, I suppose it might mean that you're, your own person

Gillian I'm willing to extract bits that I think would be useful. So although I would never, never dismiss anything outright and say no, I would always look at it, I'd look at it in a sort of positive light and say ok, let's see, lets put it alongside this.

DW By complier, I mean somebody who says; well the government have told me I've got to do this I really ought to give it a go so I going to do it as they say. That's the sort of person who tends to be SAT directed, or national curriculum directed.

Gillian Em, the way I'd look at it is, I'd say ok gang we have another initiative from the government now lets look at it and lets see if there's anything here that we think, yes we can use this, this positive and if there's stuff you don't want to us, fine, I mean you're the people delivering it on a daily basis we wont throw it in the bin straight away, we know its another initiative, but it might be that there's stuff in here that's actually quite good. Lets think oh, I actually quite like that, you know at the end of the day you're acknowledging that something new has come in you're not saying bin it you're saying I'll look at it but if I really don't think its going to work for me, fine. As long as people, I mean that's fine, as long as they've got something else to do it then that's fine.

DW We'll come back to the triangle, the bottom line just looking at the bottom bit here in the three situations, starting with the bureaucratic one, then you've got the one where you were at St. Mary's and things were going well but you're working your head off and now, if you look at these bottom, this bottom line you've told me that in the first school the historical rules the bureaucracy was...

Gillian ... "that's what you'll do!"

DW Something which you really couldn't work, and something with which you may have had these tensions, the community the children, the parents, the governors, how were they in that school?

Gillian Em, the first school? Well the governors were wanting to do things, but the fact that the chair of governors was very friendly with the head one or two thought they couldn't say too much because, because actually they were bound by these historical rules and it was very much sort of, governors meetings, well, I went to – I was introduced to all the governors at the first meeting and then it was a case of right, you've had your introductions off you go and sit in the staffroom and I'll be done in an hour, whereas when I took over the governing when he went off and I was acting head I remember the first meeting saying, right well, you know, first of all I said, I'm not going to be here for four hours please, you know, I have a wife and children at home and I want to get home at a reasonable time but I was conscious that like the staff there were only two or three governors that would actually say anything so I tried saying, well, what do you think? "Oh I don't know anything about it" but you're a governor and again what I did was I said look can I ask how many of you have actually been in the school during the day because I said I'll be honest with you a lot of the staff don't know who you are a lot of the parents don't know who you are, I said what about a notice board, I said are you happy with that? "Oh," I said, but you're the governors of the school, I said you've got to get to know your staff, so I said we've got o think about – even in those early days – link governors, with subject responsibility but I said first and foremost lets have a social, lets do something social where you meet the staff on a social basis and the parents, what can we do? It never really came off because we could never agree a night when everybody could come so I said, look come in, come in, into the school but I was very conscious that the staff did not know who their governors were. Em, at St Mary's it was very awkward because, the ex head was one of the governors, and used to clash dreadfully with one or two of the other governors who were from the council estate and the one in particular, well, he didn't mince his words, and his language was very flowery – I wont say any more – so they were very interesting and the chair of governors was a very interesting character Charlie, we were interviewing a lady I'm going off the point slightly and I'm going to swear is that all right? We were interviewing for

a teaching post and we had this young lady in, a very nice young lady and we were asking about her experience and she was very quiet and so Charlie just said, "what would you do if a child told you to f .. off and she said "ah [gasp]" she said, oh language, and he said "you have no idea, that's how our children talk" do you know what I mean, but I was quite shocked that the vicar had come out with this, but he said afterwards, well, we couldn't go pussy-footing around we had to ask the question. Because you know what Scott and Aaron are like don't you, and I said, I get sworn at every day Charlie but it was interesting how he had sort of thought I don't think this person would last five minutes in our school it had to be a particular sort of person, but again as I said with the governors there it was slightly different from St Francis because I think that at St Francis they were just used to being told, whereas there were quite heated debates at St Mary's, they were a different class of people there. Here again, it was very much the head who had told them this is what we've done, governors meetings were held after school at 3.45 so the first term I was here I thought ok, so about seven or eight turned up and, the then vicar, chair of governors said to me, you won't be long will you, because I've got communion at 4.30. I said, you want me to do a full governing body in 45 minutes. He said well that's how long they used to last, oh right I said, so at the end of the meeting I said all right it was an hour, I said can I suggest that we meet in the evening, and one or two went phew, I said only we really can't get all the business done and I'm aware that some of you are working and you've had to take time off I have to say the vicar wasn't very amused, but I said look we need to meet in the evenings, 7pm we'll keep the meeting to about an hour and half and if we meet fairly regularly we can do that, but this historical bit where we've always met straight after school I said these are people who are working. I was a bit worried about afterwards, I thought I had upset the vicar and so I called him up the next day and said George come down and see me and I said, look you know, because first of all he said to me it's going to be very difficult for me in the evening, so I said I'm sorry but there were three governors who weren't there and they admit they can't get there at 3.45 it's not realistic to hold a governing body meeting at 3.45, you can't do it, so I tried to sort of you know, pacify him if you like, I said, we'll try and go and you tell us when you can make it, we'll try, if you've got a mass or a communion or whatever, that evening, we'll go for another evening, but, em so, that was another completely different scenario, and also it was very much sort of me talking at the first meeting and I thought again you need to get involved, particularly as Ofsted were coming. And I said, none of them knew anything about Ofsted, not a clue, so I said, right, I went through – luckily because I'd been through Ofsted at St Francis, I said right, those are the days when they will want to meet you as a group, they will want to know how you get involved in the school, well your involvement with the school, and they said, "oh", and I said I know but you need to get involved. Again, I said, one of the staff thought the chair of governors was the electrician. I said, does that not say something? You know, you need to be more high profile, you need to get into the school and – so that was – that took me a while but eventually – so again it's this business I mean I don't know this division of labour.

DW Division of labour is..

Gillian ..yes I know. I know what you mean, and I mean if I'm thinking about it I did a lot of that, an awful lot of that, for the simple reason that I felt I couldn't, I had to do it myself. Partly because it wouldn't get done if I didn't and partly because I didn't think some of the others would have been able to actually do it. Now, it's there it's getting there, not completely but we're getting there.

DW It is the case that you have to build the team yourself and then the team work with you but there's actually more to it than that. For instance in St Francis at the beginning when there were things to be done then there were points to be made to the head, who was the person who made them?

Gillian Me,

DW You. Now is that because of the historical rules or because...

Gillian ... because the staff, some of the staff were actually frightened of him, they would not go into his office because they were either wary or in some cases frightened, so I was the one that, well you are the deputy, you are a go between, between the devil and the deep blue sea, and you know it's very difficult but, particularly with him because it was the old fashioned desk there him here you'd be there

DW The desk was the barrier.

Gillian And when I came here, the first thing I did – my wife came and she said “what are you going to do first?” and I said, push that out of the way, so I said we’ll have a little chair for the children and when staff come in and I remember the first week I said come on, pull the chair up and I sat like that and they said, Oh, I said don’t worry its just that I don’t like that as a barrier its useful, it has its uses as it holds my clutter but it shouldn’t be seen as a – particularly with parents because I think that’s where sometimes with parents that they do feel a little wary or even frightened of approaching because you’ve got this big barrier and again if they’ve had bad experiences as a child in school I think what happens with some parents I’ve had in here is, and I’ve had it in other places, there’s an expectation that the children will suffer as they did.

DW That’s right. I’m fortunate I have a very long thin office so I’ve got the working end with the desk in and then I’ve got the talking end which has comfy chairs in.

Gillian That’s nice, I must admit that my deputy would love an office bless her, its just that I haven’t got anywhere for her.

DW I don’t think there’ll be any in the new school

Gillian Of course, have you met your new head?

DW Yes, I’ve taught him on courses.

Gillian Oh, of course you would, yes. Very interesting isn’t it, its going to be an exciting time ahead, when does he start, Easter?

DW He’s starting at Easter and working through with Nick until the summer, he’s got a whole term to wind down, its much better than going to the summer holidays and suddenly stopping because that adrenalin drop kills people

Gillian Oh, yes I know you’ve got to be very careful. But you’re right I think that when you take over a place you want to start and I think my attitude would be I need to learn from you, I need to learn from your experience, but you’re going soon let me – not straight away you wouldn’t do that but really I would have said that by after half term he should be beginning to take over, leading staff meetings perhaps, whatever.

DW Lets carry on. I was going to ask about contradictions and conflicts but you’ve talked about them. Thinking about the government initiatives, do you think at any time you may have pre-empted any of them?

Long pause

A few people have said to me we were doing plenaries long before literacy came in and that was something we pre-empted. Is there anywhere that you think you may have done that?

Gillian I mean mental maths for example with the numeracy strategy, that was something that I’ve been keen on for a long, long time and pleased when they brought it in because I was very worried about the children and their mental maths particularly because when I came here I through, oh we’ve got a problem, so I actually got the staff together and we looked at some schemes and I got a mental maths thing and I said we need to do about five minutes a day of mental maths. I said because that’s something – well it came really because before Ofsted I asked the LEA to do one of their MOT inspections as I call them and it was Ted, Philip, three of them came in – the heavy gang and they said is there anything Gillian that you’re – and I said, look I don’t want to pre-empt what you are going to do but I’m a bit worried about mental maths, so they gave me a bit of ammo and it was Ted who said you need to – so I said look lets get some books and I told them what I used to do as a teacher, I said but you need to be doing it on a daily basis, you can’t have just a bit of a mental maths test on a Friday

you need to be doing it regularly even if you do a little bit. So of course when the numeracy strategy came in I thought oh good they've recognised that there needs to be an emphasis on it so that was definitely one.

I'm trying to think was there anything else. Well I'll tell you what, PPA time. I recognised when I was at St Francis again and I had no non contact time, none, and Angela used to play the piano she used to do hymn practice so we took it in turns and the only non contact time that any of the staff got in those days was forty minutes a week. When I came here I thought how can I release staff so I thought well, I did bits, for example I said look I'll do your CAT tests I'll do your optional SATs I'll do this and the other and I'll mark your things and you go off and do something else, and I was doing an awful lot of bitty teaching. To get to the children but also to give them a bit of time and then I suddenly realised – hang on – if I take two classes swimming I can release two people, so I've done that ever since I've been here. All right its not every week but they know that if their class is swimming in the first half of the autumn term, because its takes half an hour to get there and half an hour to get back, its virtually the whole afternoon. It was giving people regular non-contact time, because I recognised that they needed a little bit, so although I find PPA a bit of a nightmare at least its recognising that teachers do need some non-contact time, so there was that as well.

DW An important question – not just the government initiatives but decisions that have been made in schools, the systems you've had to work in, how have they affected you as a person?

Gillian Em, well I think they've made me, how can I put this, I'm a very, I used to be a very – do this do that and then I'll do this and do the other and it made me sit down and plan more carefully and made me realise that I need to get A done then B and D and C and E that type of thing because I am by nature a little bit of a flitter. I have a butterfly brain but I think because I've had time constraints I've had to do this, I've had to do that, SEF forms whatever, I actually now plan things and try and make sure that you know on any given day I got down on my pad I'll do this and this so I suppose its made me change the way I work.

DW Is that a stress reducing technique?

Gillian No I don't think it is, but maybe, I don't quite know because you see I'm a very strange person I love my job I do love my job. I don't care how many hours I put in I have a very, very understanding wife and she knows that I've never been one that counts the hours that teachers come in but I sort of – I've had to sort of step back and think hang on I need to spend more time at home, therefore if I make sure I get this and this done I won't have to come in this weekend. So I've had to say to people no I can't do this, because I've got to do A B or C whereas in the past I would have said look I'll take your class you go and do so and so. I've had to be actually harder on them and harder on myself in the sense that I've said no I've got to do this I'm sorry which is not in my nature but it's had to be something I do.

DW You have become more directed. The very final thing if you remember the last piece of paper I gave you with all the adaptive strategies: looking at those, the three different types of adaptive strategies which are broken down into other areas, retreatism, which could be retiring but could also be moving into a different area of work and the others are self actualisation and downshifting. I have known some heads who have downshifted and said "I am going to teach" I don't want to do this anymore and some who have tried self actualising by re-locating and because they have had differences with governors have gone to another school, that's re-locating, and re-routing is moving into another area such as writing children's books, or some other way of still being involved with children rather than teaching. If everything was just too much and you got to that point where you said I'm not enjoying it anymore which one would you choose?

Gillian Self actualising, self, actualising, not retreatism, that's not in my nature, though that comes to everybody in the end, but if we were talking about a situation that arose now and I thought I can't stand this any longer, I've always said if I came in and thought I don't want to be here I'd go and do something else. I've done a whole variety of things before I was a teacher and even while I was a teacher I might go and help build a house, I don't know. I mean down shifting, I couldn't do that, no I would self actualise, self actualising, definitely I would love to have some, something to do in the

music business that's would I – I mean if somebody said right here we are Gillian here's some premises I would like to sell second hand records, wonderful. I'd talk all day about bands, my wife would probably say oh just leave him he's in his element and if somebody came in and said to me I've got some quite rare Beatles singles can you appraise them for me I'd say bring them in I'd love to do that. I'd find something, I hope I'd never ever, because I'd miss the children, there's no doubt about it. I wouldn't want that but I mean if as you say a situation arose like that I'd do that.








DW So you are in fact a driven person, you need to be doing something.

Gillian Yes, I mean, I want to do things when I retire I don't just want to retire and just sit in a chair and read a book. Yes on certain days I love sitting in a chair and reading a book, with a cold beer but I couldn't do that day after day after day. That's actually what drove my poor father em you know. I think when you've busy all your life. My father was in the air force for many years and then he worked for British aerospace and he was just basically working as a – what would you call him – he worked in a shop giving out tools, ah a store-man, and I remember him coming home after that first couple of weeks and he said to me, "do you know what dear, I could re-organise that place", he said, I've already done it in my head. And I said, well do it Dad I said that might be just what they are looking for and what happened was Dad did and his boss took all the praise for it, and Dad came home and he said "it doesn't matter, the job's being done more effectively and the people are in a happier environment, things are getting done, I'm happy." I was quite young and I was saying things like, he's pinched your ideas, you want to tell him, I mean he's probably going to get promotion out of that and Dad said "I don't mind," he was quite happy. And I was like this young eighteen year old saying Dad what are you doing.

DW Is that fair? Well thank you very much it's been absolutely brilliant and given me an awful lot of data to work with.

Gillian No problem I hope it's not been too much waffle.

16307 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions

Preliminary interview with Helen (lp17105a)

DW It is important that I let you know that whatever is said, even my supervisor does not find out. Not just who said it, but the full transcript of the interviews.

Helen I did my masters so I know what you are going to tell me, if you want to pass by it I know what you are going to say. When I did mine I didn't have one of these, I actually had to make notes by hand. So I do know what you are doing.

DW All my interviewees are denoted by just three letters which mean nothing to anybody else.

There are a few simple questions I need to ask, and then I will tell you what the study is all about. I need to establish how long you have been a Head.

Helen Eight years.

DW That's good, because I need some interviewees who have been Heads for a shorter time, and others who have been Heads for a longer time. Some of the people I have interviewed have been Heads for over thirty years. And the length of your career, I need to know how long you've been teaching.

Helen Twenty-nine years.

DW A bit less than me then; and is this your only school as a Head.

Helen Yes, as a Head of a school, I have been an advisory Head Teacher.

DW That's good because I am looking for different career paths.

The aims of the study are to look at Heads and try to discover if there are any discrepancies between what they want of the school, and the way they are directed by the National curriculum and the Education Reform Act. Although of course now with the National Primary Strategy things are moving in a different direction. It's really from 1988 and how you felt then, and how the schools you were in worked, because I am looking at the schools as systems, and now with the National Primary Strategy (Excellence and Enjoyment) and the way you feel that is directing you, and the bit in the middle where you were pushed towards curriculum and how that fits with your ideals and your route for the school. So what I will be looking at is what I call your 'professional trajectory', your career path, how you have gone through your career, your directions, and what you really want for your school.

Helen If I can remember

DW That's why I do two interviews. To give you chance to think.

These are the things I told you about over the phone, my aims, objectives, and research questions and I'll leave that with you so that you have plenty of time to look at it. This is my most important part, which is how I'm going to analyse what Head Teachers tell me. It's called an "activity triangle" and it's vaguely Vygotskian in its synthesis, but it has a lot more to do with other psychologists. Like Luria and Leont'ev. In each of my cases the Head Teacher is the subject and the object, which is *not* the objective but is your driving force which leads you to achieve the outcomes. I really need to get at the object, so you may well find that I'm a bit of a pain and I say "Why? Why? Why?" because I want to get down to the root of the object. So for instance if I was talking to a teacher about what they did in the classroom and they said to me I want them to learn to add up and take away and that's my object I might say "why?" Well because they need to know how to add up and take away because it's part of the curriculum. "Why? Because I want them to do well in their tests, "Why?" because that makes me look good

and that maybe the root object – I want to show that I’m a good teacher. So I may well do that. What I’m looking for is what you really want for the school, and how that’s changed over your career or how it’s stayed the same and the directions you’ve gone with the National curriculum and all those folders and the literacy and numeracy strategies and all the other innovations since 1988.

Helen Stunning isn’t it. I threaten Governors that I’m actually going to invite them one day and barricade myself in with them or barricade them in with them, and it’s still happening.

DW I am looking at how that has affected Heads and the tensions particularly the tensions between what they want for the school, what they want for the children and the way they feel they are being led by the Government. I can’t really say much more than that because I might be accused of leading you and your answers. If you want to you can look at this which is the basis of the triangle and how it works. It’s quite fun but fairly deep.

Helen You really get into these things. I really enjoyed doing mine

DW The final part of the interview will look to any possible ideas you may have had or you know other people may have had, because it may not apply to you, about what are called “adaptive strategies”. Have the Heads considered retirement because it’s all too much, have they considered a sideways move into the Inspectorate or as an advisor. One Head has gone in for downshifting he has become a teacher again rather than a Head because he didn’t want to continue with that level of stress. This piece of paper has a list of the strategies and their explanations. It’s not a complete list but there are some ideas of adaptive strategies. It just gives some idea of what people think about.

This is a longitudinal study so I will be asking you to give me a recount of your Professional Trajectory over the last twenty years, but that will be a brief overview. I particularly want people to concentrate on areas of tension at this point when all those folders came in about Geography and Maths and History and we didn’t know where we were going to go and they had numerous statements of attained, far too many. How that caused tension, not as stress in you particularly but a tension between what you wanted to do and what you felt you were being directed to do. Those things have changed over the last twenty years and that’s why a longitudinal study is necessary. Things have got better in some ways; things have got worse in some ways. Some of the longer serving Heads particularly mentioned financial reform - that was their big thing. They were rolling along nicely, the LEA were doing it all for them and then it hit me and I had to do it and that was their big tension because in 1989 they were just thrown in at the deep end with no training, and they had to deal with it but now they say it gives us so much more flexibility, it’s great, so their view or perception of it has changed over the last fifteen years.

Helen I suppose it depends whether they are large or small schools as well. Because I wouldn’t say the same – and whether they’ve got a bursar.

It’ll be very interesting I hope you are going to send me a copy when you finish.

DW That was one of the other ethical things, I will send you a copy of my findings so that you can have a look through it and say whether they infringe your anonymity or misrepresent you. I have tried my very best to get a balance of large and small schools male and female Heads to keep close to the balance in the County. Will make sure you get a copy, but even the gender of Heads will not be divulged. My interviews last until the end of the year so it will be next year before you get it.

Arrangements were made for the second interview which was held out of school so that interruptions were minimised.

Main interview with Helen (lp17105b)

DW May I just remind you that anything you say is totally confidential. For the next fifteen minutes or so, would you run me through the important points of your Professional Trajectory since about 1985 concentrate on major events, anything that had a significant effect on you or has been important

Helen That's a long time ago

DW I chose 1985 because it's just before the Education Reform Act which is what I am particularly looking at.

Helen In 1985 I was working in a junior-mixed-infant in London. That was really my first post; in 1985 I was just leaving there and on the way to a middle school further north because I'd moved without moving job. I only stayed there a year, I actually can't believe I only stayed there a year, it seemed such a long time, but what I do remember about it was good teamwork. Then I actually spotted a post which fascinated me in another county which was working with children with specific needs. It was called being "a specialist teacher" and was based at a junior school but working with children from four to nearly sixteen. I decided to find out more about it, applied, got the job. I found it a very inspiring job. I had lots of ideas and there was tons of scope. I actually did that for a year and then my line manager went off sick and I was asked to do her job whilst she was off sick. At that point it was called an "advisory teacher" but it covered the whole of two counties, so I suddenly found myself from classroom to working in three schools as a specialist teacher. But then found myself at a desk in one of the counties thinking what the heck do I do now? I did that for about five years – no it can't have been that long. What I did was, there was available funding to split the two counties because two counties was too much, I'd actually got two staffs, one in each county and I chose to stay with one because it was near home. It was quite different from the other, but it was fascinating working for both, being on both advisory services. I was the headteacher for the nearest which meant that I had a team of people who worked in schools rather like the peripatetic music teams here but I also taught in schools myself. By seeing what happened in different schools I had this ongoing feeling that if I was head of a school this is what I would like to do. The feeling grew and grew and I decided to try and apply. I had a spate of applying and eventually came to my current school. I think the Governors saw my, perhaps, strange past, I don't know, but it's not the conventional way of coming to headship, they actually saw it as a positive and I obviously expressed what I felt about being in so many schools in different situations getting a different welcome seeing different teaching and learning in classrooms working alongside people that must have come across as an enthusiasm to be a headteacher and actually be in one place rather than in everyone else's schools. So here I am eight years on, just pre-Ofsted I think, any minute now.

DW Are there any particular points in that time where you felt that there was an external imposition from the DfES or the LEA or one of the two counties. It doesn't really matter what effect it had, whether it was good or not, but where you felt that you were being directed?

Helen Absolutely! It was the DfEE then and it was a section grant and actually ran the services and that was very directed in terms of doing what we are doing now. You had to provide a self-evaluation of your service and although this is a long time ago, eight or nine years ago, you had to provide a financial breakdown surveys of your Stakeholders analyse the evaluation forms and questionnaires that you got from various people, come up with results and write a report on that. Frequent visits not for negative reasons, but frequent visits by the HMI meant that you were very accountable and in a way you almost felt that the LEA facilitated by giving you a line manager in those days no one was quite sure whether it should be part of multi-cultural or part of equal opportunities and I suppose these days it's part of equal ops and

inclusion. In those days the DfEE was very instrumental particularly in its demands and of course a big inspection – I think it was every three years – certainly honed your skills at evaluating what you were doing.

DW It would be really helpful to look at the systems, the context you worked in. Do you remember I showed this before [activity triangle]. You are the subject and what you are working towards is the object which then produces outcomes. You may use certain tools and strategies and things which may help or hinder you are the historical rules, the community with which you work and the division of labour, how you prefer to work. What I would really like you to do is pick three points on your career path. One of them just before the Education Reform Act, what was the school like then, what was the community like? One around about now, either now, when things are moving back to how they were before the ERA with the introduction of excellence and enjoyment, or a little before now when things were a little more prescriptive, and one in the middle of your own choice which would be somewhere particularly where they was either something which you felt was particularly good and moved you forward and helped you or something which you found quite restrictive and would rather have not had it but it directed you in the way you had to go.

Helen That's a lot to take on board could you go through it again.

DW I'll lead you through it. Just before the ERA you were working in a school, well two schools, one for a year and one before that. Choose one of those schools, what was the school like, what sort of community was it?

Helen I'll choose the one in London, it was a multi-cultural community and very urban, mostly young staff in their twenties, but the senior management team were older, the deputy and the Head. The Head had – he saw his role as being very authoritarian. The school was directed by him, although he had an enthusiasm and a joy in the work that young teachers did, he was really supportive, but I think it was the trend in those days that the Head wrote the curriculum, there wasn't much negotiation. The staff meeting would be that he had written the History curriculum and we'd sort of talk about it, and then we'd go away and do it, but within that there was a lot of flexibility to pursue things that we really enjoyed doing. I remember that we had a very strong musician in the school and that was allowed to flourish and develop and was encouraged by the Head who obviously felt immediately responsible for whatever happened in the school and probably was in those days. There was no documentation behind him except his own and an LEA inspector, or advisor coming in occasionally, so something like that was allowed to flourish and really made the community very tight knit and I remember it with huge fondness. I'm sure it wasn't all the time, but it reached, through music, reached out to parents who themselves were disaffected and had poor experiences at school. Not frequently but sometimes there was violence around the school and a couple of times there was violence within the school, certainly one member of staff was attacked, but generally the parents felt able to come in and via music was a less inhibiting way of doing it, than these days when we feel that we should be doing – come and teach your child to read- sort of thing. We had a lot of parental support.

DW In that school, I would like particularly to look at your object as a teacher. What was your object, not your objective, because objectives are where you want to get to, they relate more to outcomes. Your object is rather like your philosophy. Why were you there? What were you doing? What was your guiding principle, if you like for teaching at that particular time?

Helen It's not just at that particular time, the guiding principle for me is – and I don't think it's unusual – is my own background which is from a Council Estate and parents who were afraid to go into a school. Wanting to do my best, eventually scraping into grammar school, and just

being the first to do all these things in my family for various reasons. So my guiding principle is to, in my own way, ensure that children get the most out of their education. To try and remove barriers and encourage and enjoy.

DW That's the thing that most Headteachers say, so that the children can get the greatest benefit from their education.

Helen YES

DW Can I just be awkward and say, why do you want to do that?

Helen It's this inbuilt thing in me which says how amazing that someone did it for you, or teachers did it for you and wanting to do the same for other children because they are our future and that is basically it. And I like children (laugh)

DW That's a very important statement you've made there. How about the now? How would you describe your school now in terms of community and the parameters you use – for example you said the Head was authoritarian, yet the teachers had some autonomy. How would you describe your school?

Helen I know having done the Headship course the difference between what you think and what you know. I think on most occasions it has a really good team feel about it and that's something I've worked hard with – with staff, and they with me – to create an atmosphere for learning, security, to respond to the needs of the children who come to the school. The school I think has a very friendly ethos a very family based ethos. My style I would say is not authoritarian but tending more towards the collaborative, very collaborative, but I've actually shifted direction because lots of things have made me think that I've got to be more specific in my views in terms of honing down what it is we need to do and who is going to do it and where. So I'm much more specific and state exactly where we are going in a directed collegiate fashion. Much more but there are still some things which are collaborative it depends what it is. We have a very stable staff, although sometimes that's not such a good thing, they obviously like being there we've got a staff of very experienced teachers which can be great in terms of experience to draw on, to build the school, but financially can and has broken us in the past which does make it very difficult. At the moment we – I'm having to pull together the vision and state it more often because everything has become rather fragmented with PPA time and two week timetables. There's this feeling – you've got frenetic, it's frenetic activity but there's such a lot, we all know it happens, in September, but suddenly more initiatives on the go and they are not always, which is really frustrating, to do with the vision that I have. They can be linked into it but those sorts of things that you can't really select, you know, you are pushed in that direction rather than sticking to your own priorities in your school improvement plan. That becomes frustrating.

DW What's pushing you in those directions?

Helen The feeling that you've got to be seen to be doing the right thing.. Being afraid of missing out on something because if you are not there you won't know what you are choosing or not choosing. I suppose it is fear of being sort of left behind in terms of what the thought is now, what the big ideas are now.

DW Is that you left behind or the school left behind?

Helen We have some responsibility in pressurising. I have come to realise, rightly or wrongly, that their vision of what we are like in our school is not the one that we have and sometimes in the past, quite rightly, we have been pushed in a certain direction to do the Literacy Strategy

and Numeracy Strategy which was good and right but these days I'm not sure that the way we are being – sort of being- directed is the one that we want and there doesn't seem to be anything else on offer. Does that make sense?

DW I know exactly what you mean because lots of people feel that, every Headteacher that's got some experience has built up an identity through that experience which is why I asked about what you have done. When that personal identity, who you are, where you are, and where you want to go is in conflict with where you are being directed to go, what is your reaction to that? There are two words which come immediately to mind and they are Resist and Comply, which camp would you put yourself in?

Helen Both. Occasionally I just bin it and think No, and I haven't actually got the time to think it through but I think that I should be sticking to my School Improvement Plan; the issue that we want to improve on, the ethos that we want to continue to build, tear it up and bin it. Sometimes it's quite a release. And sometimes compliance because it's like the excellence and enjoyment, we are sort of on that track at the moment, we have just started and at the moment I'm not sure whether it's going to deliver what we need when we need it, but we are going to do it even though it looks like quite a lot of work because obviously we know that's the way things are going. We need to do it so it's a feeling of, well we're not going to be left out here, because even if we complete the course and we only select out some of those things, at least you know what it is that there's to be developed.

DW So what you are looking for is a range of tools which you can draw from it, pick the good bits and use them to your benefit or at least the children's benefit.

Helen I want to pick the bits that are good bits because they support the School Improvement Plan but occasionally there are those great bits that just pop up and you think wow that's really brilliant. I'm glad I came to this because even though I've only got this one great bit out of here I can be creative I can get some mileage out of this in terms of ethos or teaching and learning or staff development and it's worth it.

DW If we could just consider "somewhere in the middle" this is the hard one, a time which was really good, really beneficial to you, really worked well, or a time when there were tensions between that identity you built up and what you were being directed to do, something which may have been totally alien to your philosophy. Can you think of a time like that when something you have been directed to do has been intention with what you believe in educationally?

Helen It's just something fairly straight forward but, in terms of attendance, all the legislation that came out about attendance, all the scare stories, knee jerk reactions about children who hadn't arrived at school, who had been abducted, etc. etc. To me what we were asked to do and the suggestions which I don't think came to fruition about keeping closer tabs on children, ringing on the first day of absence, I found that totally against the ethos that we had and the relationship with parents. I felt that we didn't need to be told that. We already did it, we are a small school and if a child wasn't there and we had concerns, we did it.

DW There is the example of LFM where some heads found it very difficult at first but then enjoyed the freedom that devolved funding gave them to spend money in more constructive ways.

Helen Other things like devolved funding for GA schools and this foolish idea that the Government is actually giving you money for large projects and they actually make it so bureaucratically heavy and treated GA schools in that way but not other schools, the LEA schools where it was devolved to the budget. Again that didn't tally with being responsible for

your own financial management, but suddenly – and that's not the only one in terms of grants – that you are expected to jump through hoops that you didn't have to, to be allocated the whole of the budget for the whole school. That didn't really follow and the freedom that we were given with budgets wasn't available for things like buildings if you were a Church School.

DW Getting back to your school at the moment, I want to look at this bottom line. In the school you were talking about the historical rules would have been that it was an autocratic but with the freedom in the classroom, that you were strongly guided in what you were going to do and that the Headteacher bore the responsibility for what went on in the school.

Helen He was an ex-services man and he was one of those who had gone into teaching from the services because there was a lack of particularly male teachers at that time in primaries so that would have been his background.

DW Regarding the Community you said that the parents had a difficult time themselves and the music brought them into school, it may well have been that the Governors were very supportive of the Head and the Head tended to work alone but then devolved his authority down through the Deputy to the teachers so that they had the authority in the classroom as long as they were doing what he said. How would you describe your school now? If somebody came into the school and said "how does this school function historically, for the last seven years how has this school worked, what would they see, what are the expectations overall on the staff, on the pupils, how are people directed?

Helen Are we talking about ethos?

DW Partially ethos but more a historical ethos. It's, if a new teacher comes in what are the things they have to learn about this School, how it runs, how it functions. What do they have to learn about you, about the way you direct your curriculum, or not?

Helen That even though we are a small school, not everyone knows everything they should. Despite the fact that there is a really good communication system set up. So one thing someone has to learn is that it is a very busy school, lots of things go on, lots of people are around, we welcome parents and friends to work in school. That's an historical thing isn't it. Basically you're responsible for checking it out, we have a white board and a diary and a staff book, so you are expected to track your own things because such a lot goes on.

DW So there is a good deal of individual responsibility.

Helen Yes. But then people are welcome in the school and I do have an open door policy. I will back them up with any disciplinary matters and pass it back to them and work with them and support them in seeing parents.

We have an outreach to the community, we try, it's hard but enjoyable, you can laugh and enjoy things. Things do sometimes get tough. There is a very supportive staff always there to pick you up and dust you off and point you in the right direction, or understand that that child has driven you absolutely nuts and that it's probably not to do with your skills as a teacher but you actually have been pushed beyond your limits. People are very emotionally intelligent generally through the school and that is valued. That the church nature of the school is important there are expectations that staff will join in worship not all the time but will play that part and support the school in bringing children up in a Christian way. That every child matters. There is a very strong expectation that every child matters and that respect between adults and children is paramount, even in the most frantic times. That children know when they are happy and enjoying themselves they do their best and that we have got very high expectations for them, but that doesn't mean that the expectations are the same for every child. It could be a child that – Oh isn't it awful – gets a level 3 at Key stage 2 then that is absolutely

tremendous. It's stupendous so we try and celebrate all those things, even though we are caught up on a parallel conversation with the DfES and PANDAS and SEF. We still have to acknowledge that but those are the things which are most important (the children).

DW

Helen There is a very strong sense of school which I inherited from the previous Head which has stayed with us and because we get involved in lots of sporting events that gives us an identity. The School has an identity and the principles of wanting to be there and work there and do your best there is part of this identity, of being in the family of my current school which will reprimand you but will support you and give you a secure footpath through their learning.

DW How about the division of labour? How do you work as a team? You've told me quite a lot already about the way you like to work, does it always work that way, as a directed collegiate group?

Helen It depends what it is. Because I am a teaching Head and I've got a deputy who has half a days deputy time and there is a shared Senco job with an allowance we don't have a flat structure but we don't have a huge Senior Management Team. Grabbing time to do things together seems to be that the deputy and I will manage to discuss things but I will have already thought something through and I will be putting some proposals to her. In the same way she does think things through and out proposals to me and in the same way the staff may come up with some proposals (sometimes they've been thought through and sometimes not) and sometimes I will say we will do it because we've got to do it.

DW So in general it is a very supportive familial type structure.

Helen Yes I wouldn't say I mean Yes but there isn't that openness about teaching and learning that I would like. We've got to break that sort of what-you-call-it. You know when you put wax on top of jam or something to preserve it; we've got to crack the wax. We have had some really good staff meetings recently where we've actually talked about children's work and teaching but they are – I don't know whether it's because they are more experienced teachers but there seems to be a bit of holding back about what they can say about one another's teaching methods. They shift around to try and find the right way to say things without upsetting people. It's true that if you upset someone in a small school it runs like wildfire – 30 seconds and you've got a riot on your hands, so you have to tread very carefully. You can't walk into the staffroom and avoid somebody's eyes because you've apparently made some criticism that they feel isn't justified. You've got to fit in the corners together and face up to it or go out for lunch and work through things.

You tend to be a little reticent sometimes and I think that's because, coming from the time when you shut your door as a teacher, those of us who then went on to the open plan schooling had that experience to draw on. Yeah

DW Looking at the school you are in now sometimes the system, the school, and that includes outside agencies like the LEA and the DfES, that system influences the direction you are going at any particular time. At the moment how much is that system influencing the direction you are taking the school, or are you just saying I'll go my way?

Helen No, I'm not saying that, because you've always got the double check of Ofsted and you know what they are going to be looking for, so unless you want to retire very early you have to have a sensible check on what the rules of the game are. I do find as I've been in this particular Headship I do get braver about saying no. I do find – last year because we had to make a redundancy I was teaching four days out of five and I found that tremendously difficult and I know lots of the Headteacher things just went by the by, but one thing I got out of it was that

you can just lose some things at the bottom of the pile and they fall out of the tray and then you can bin them. I think you go from being a new Head wanting to do the right thing and looking at every sheet of paper that comes in to that knowledge of what you can get rid of – I hope its wisdom and not just being blasé. I feel sometimes you are pressured and I find that the LEA has a very strange way of pressurising people that I find inappropriate these days. I don't know if it's because they've been inspected and they feel the pressure and pass it on to schools.

DW I think the LEA is more of a channel these days. It used to be that the LEA was the authority and they guided and they directed when they needed to direct and they checked, but now they are more of a channel for what the DfES want done. So they tend to become the flow through which you are directed but it is difficult for them because they may not want you to do it either.

Helen Probably some of the pressures that I feel are inappropriate are coming from the DfES, the number of LEA departments that do send out questionnaires and one or two really put the pressure on for you to do it when you think it is inappropriate. In the past I would have given it more time but I'm afraid I can't do all of it, even though I've got a bit more head teaching now its just not possible to respond to all the initiatives. It's like funnelling isn't it. DfES, LEA and when you come – I'm very pro small school but when you come to small school you've got it coming out of the top, you've only got so much there that you can deal with and it's literally falling out of the top and these days, more and more I've shared that with Governors. I've talked about what's coming over the top that I can't do anything about and I've let it go – shredded it.

DW I think you've actually gone through most of the bits and answered most of all my questions in what you have already said about the features of schools and how they have helped you in the way that you have moved forward and how you like to school to be, so now there is the last little bit which maybe the most awkward.

Helen Can you remind me what the title of your thesis is.

DW The interaction between Headteachers and what they want of their school and the DfES initiatives and the way they are directing and the tensions that causes, psychological tensions between your identity that you have built up and the way your identity would have the school and what you want for the children for their best benefit and the way the DfES initiatives would like you to go which is their view of what's best for the children which may contradict your view of what is best for the children because you may not consider that a child getting a 4 or above is actually best for the children as individuals. It's the tensions between those two things that I am looking at.

Helen That brought immediately to mind The Performance Management Training which ultimately I agree can provide lots of scope for improving teaching and learning but the tension between the LEA and schools and the DfES was palpable when we were bussed like refugees to camps in Bath and Bristol and presented with people who were not allowed to discuss – were you there? – any of the implications and you were allowed to put it onto a Post-it. That was an incredible experience.

DW Yes I went to Bristol, it was amazing.

Helen I wonder what they learnt from that, It was stunning. I've never come across anything like it since and never heard of anything like it since.

DW Yes that's the sort of thing that builds up those tensions. That is not where you are as a teacher of children.

Helen No and also if you felt that the LEA played a supportive role then the by-passing of the LEA also caused tensions within the LEA between LEA's and schools and it was a very strange to do. Obviously politically motivated, that one could fill vessels and send them away – very odd.

DW As are many things which come from Central rather than local government. That's the sort of thing that I was going to ask, whether they were any contradictions that arose and that must have been quite a large contradiction.

Helen Well the contradiction wasn't in the ultimate aim of improving teaching and learning and obviously looking at teachers professional development, the conflict was in the way it was delivered.

DW I think that's partly due to the fact that they used private enterprise to try and deliver it because it was CEA wasn't it and because of that – the Government were getting into privatisation at the time I seem to recall.....

Helen But if you took that – in many of these things that the Government deliver – if you took that as an indication of teaching style you'd have children that are getting nowhere. Their example of how to teach people and how people learn, with life long learners etc. they haven't a clue and I think that creates a lot of conflict. Wasn't it Lord Tebbit who said that "every child should be above average" and the Government still believe that, that results are above everything. I can see what motivated you to write this thesis.

DW Do you consider that you may have pre-empted any of the initiatives at any time?

Helen In my previous job I did. In 1987 I had a lot of accountability to the DfES and we went to Conferences with Education Officers and underwent self evaluation with questionnaires about what your stakeholders think of you. Financial Management. Bidding all of those things we were miles ahead of what then happened and it was really interesting to see. I feel that when I got to Mercia it was a long way off where the previous county was but then the previous county always liked to be in the forefront. I felt that it gave me good experience for what was to come. I had to remind myself of it the other day as I sat down to look at the SEF and do some more and I thought I've been here before. I've done this but that was to get funding to continue – prove your worth and we'll give you the money.

Value added a great measurement - straightforward predictions, value added was an initiative that gives a bit more qualitative information about the work in schools but they are going to get their comeuppance because they are not going to achieve what they want to achieve because schools are different and we keep telling them and they won't listen. Then again we could all cheat and let them get their percentages and then perhaps they'll lay off a little bit, I don't know, or will they want higher percentages?

DW One last little thing, which I don't think applies to you lots of the Heads I've talked to have been in times of particular tension and at those times they've thought of escape routes. Have you ever been in that situation where you thought should I retire now – I've actually know Heads who have given up being heads and become a teacher again, or other Heads who have become advisors. If you remember, one of the bits of paper I gave you was on all the different possibilities. Have you ever considered one of those and if so which one? If you were particularly under stress and you felt I've got to do something before I crack up what route would you be most likely to take. Would you change to something completely different, stay in education?

Helen I'd have to work with people whether it was children or old people or whatever. I think it would be in something where I felt I was making contribution in a service industry rather than business although it depends what has brought on the stress. Sometimes you feel if I became an Inspector I can change things from the other end – its about change – I often think how lovely it would be to be able to teach all the time. Last year was hell but it was great to have my own classroom except I never had time to do really great things with it and its nice to teach and have a class and so on. It was brilliant but you still can't do it properly so I sometimes think of that. When we had a redundancy last year that was a very stressful time I thought I would like to have beamed up to another planet. It was terrible, then I felt that I would just like to have not gone back to the school at all because the atmosphere was that terrible but it is good at the moment.








To me retirement does not mean that you pack up everything that you have done it means that you reassess what you are going to do.

The Government are going to have look again because obviously raising salaries isn't attracting people to be Heads, no one in my school wants to be a Head, not even my Deputy and I'm sad. Teachers needing to do an NPQH doesn't help but I'm lucky because when I became a Head we didn't have to do it. It's a great pity that it is stopping people wanting to be Heads.

DW Thank you very much

Helen Good luck.

7375 words

-  Ofsted
-  Historical changes
-  Tests / League tables
-  Finance / LFM
-  Literacy and numeracy strategies
-  Triangle
-  Research questions