PRIMARY STRATEGY LEARNING NETWORKS:

A LOCAL STUDY OF A NATIONAL INITIATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

Although there is limited research into the success of primary school networking initiatives in the UK, there seems to be an unquestioning faith displayed at national Government level for school collaborative working arrangements as a key means for driving forward whole school improvement. This research considers the possible benefits and challenges of one such initiative – *Primary Strategy Learning Networks* (DfES, 2004a).

The research focuses on a reliance on school networks as power bases for promoting a national standards agenda. It considers the impact of an imposed model of school collaboration on the fluid nature of networking. It also acknowledges the benefits of a 'network balance' between the positive and negative features that impact on a network's success and sustainability. Furthermore, the research explores the impact of power, authority and influence on the sustainability of networks.

This is a qualitative study and data is gathered through interviews with network headteacher participants in two Primary Strategy Learning Networks over the course of an academic year. The research is also informed by an initial study of a *Networked Learning Community* (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). Following an analysis of the findings, a number of recommendations are made. A suggested 'ideal' model for productive networking relationships among key stakeholders is offered for consideration and a *Realistic Approach* (Pawson, 2006) to evaluating such initiatives is argued to ensure a higher degree of success in implementing collaborative working practices for school improvement.

DEDICATION

To my father

ALFRED JAMES DAY

who gave me the gift of tenacity

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

CPD	Continual Professional Development (of school teachers and non teaching staff)
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families (the official Government body responsible for standards and education in UK schools)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (currently known as DCSF – definition as above)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (formerly DfEE - currently known as DCSF – definition as above)
FFT	Fischer Family Trust (a national pupil performance database of over 10 million pupils in England and Wales)
LEA	Local Education Authority (currently known as Local Authority – definition as below)
LA	Local Authority (the body of officers at Local Government level responsible for Children's Services including standards and education)
LMS	Local Management of Schools (a scheme introduced in 1990 gave delegated powers for budgets to maintained schools in England and Wales)
LPSH	Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (introduced in 1998 to offer nationally recognised professional development and accreditation to experienced headteachers)
NCSL	National College for School Leadership (an organisation set up by the Labour Government in November 2000 to build capacity for leadership in UK schools)
NLC	Networked Learning Communities (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/eips/existingmodels/nlc - an initiative launched in 2002 by DfES in partnership with NCSL and the Innovations Unit - see appendix i for further details)
NLS	National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) (a non-statutory national framework for teaching literacy in schools)
NNS	National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE, 1999) (a non-statutory national framework for teaching numeracy in schools)
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship (nationally recognised professional development and accreditation for aspiring headteachers or those new into headship and a mandatory requirement from 2004)
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education (the national body responsible for inspecting standards in UK schools)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS (continued)

PPA	Planning, Preparation and Marking (from 2005, a statutory allocation of 10% non teaching time during the working week for teachers to plan and prepare lessons and to assess and mark pupils' work)
PSLN	Primary Strategy Learning Network (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/wholeschool/learning_networks/ accessed on 22/07/07 - an initiative launched in 2005 by DfES in partnership with Primary National Strategies, SureStart and the Innovations Unit - see appendix ii for further details)
ROL	RAISEonline (http://www.raiseonline.org - a national web based data system available to schools)
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks (national assessment tasks and tests administered to 7 year olds and 11 year olds in English primary schools)
SF	Standards Funds (Government ring fenced allocations of funds directly to schools for spending on school effectiveness and school improvement)
TA	Teaching Assistant (classroom support personnel with no qualified teacher status)
UA	Unitary Authority (the abolition of the two-tier structure of Local Government in Scotland, Wales and some parts of England from 1996 and replacement with unitary authorities responsible for all Local Government services)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The use of networks as a means of communicating knowledge and ideas and in promoting innovation among schools has emerged globally over the past decade (Veugelers and O' Hair, 2005). The term 'networking' sounds trend-setting, politically credible and in keeping with the new technological age in which we live. However, internationally, collaborative working arrangements in education have existed for some time now and the education system in the UK is no exception. More recently, inter-school collaboration has not only come to the fore nationally, but also has become integral to the school improvement agenda (Connolly and James, 2006). The current Labour Government is intent on promoting a myriad of networking initiatives for schools and local authorities and, although network theory is still in its infancy (Veugelers and O' Hair, 2005), there seems to be an unquestioning faith displayed at Government level for school collaborative working arrangements as a key means for driving forward whole school improvement. This thesis explores the effectiveness and sustainability of two such initiatives.

The focus of the research

This chapter introduces a study of primary school networks in England and considers the possible benefits and challenges of imposed networking arrangements. Specifically, the

research focuses on these imposed arrangements through a study of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative (DfES, 2004a) within one London authority. The research is also informed by an initial smaller scale study of a Networked Learning Community (NLC) undertaken in the West Midlands. A detailed description of both these initiatives is included in appendices i and ii.

The Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) initiative is a large scale educational reform that initially involved a third of all primary schools in England. It was introduced in 2005 with an expectation that the vast majority of primary schools would be part of the initiative by 2008. The initiative arose from a Government commitment to a particular model of collaboration based on groups of 5-8 primary schools working together (DfES, 2004a) with the purpose of raising standards in literacy and numeracy. The author of this thesis is a Senior Education Adviser involved in the roll out of the PSLN initiative at Local Authority level and the personal interest in this research lies in an understanding of the success and sustainability of a centrally imposed large scale reform which radically impacts on traditional ways of working in schools. Therefore, the aims of the research are to explore the implications of large scale reform generally and, more specifically, an imposed model of collaborative working for raising standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools nationally - so, in effect, the notion of networks as power bases for driving forward educational reform. More specific research questions have been derived from these general aims and these are set out at the end of this chapter.

However, in considering the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative, it is first necessary to understand why Central Government has made such a radical commitment to

networks as the "single most important way" (DfES, 2004b, p 42) to move primary education forward and why a significant sum of money (£28 million over two years) was committed to the success of this large scale reform.

The context of the research

Following 17 years of Conservative Government, New Labour took office in 1997 with hopes of change as promised in Tony Blair's three word 'education' mantra. Many educationalists at first experienced a feeling of euphoria after what Labour pundits were labelling a long period of 'Tory misrule'. The Conservative Government had, in the early nineteen eighties, backed some sporadic forays into collaborative working between schools (Wallace, 1998). But, from the time of the Education Reform Act in the late eighties (DES, 1988), it was proactively promoting a culture of market principles amongst schools:

> For the previous Conservative governments – that is until the General Election in May 1997 – the main strategy for raising standards was to promote largely autonomous schools that would then compete in the market place for students, and the funds that followed them. (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006, p 438)

Successive Conservative Governments in this period had also openly displayed mistrust of education professionals; had appeared mean in funding education; and had accelerated the pace of change to unacceptable levels as far as teachers were concerned (Brighouse, 2001). In addition, headteachers had found the managerial demands of Local Management of Schools (LMS) increasingly daunting (Bell and Rowley, 2002). Large scale educational reform and, in particular, a prescriptive National Curriculum, enforced pay and conditions, and a punitive school inspection system had led to damaged relationships between the Government and the

teaching profession. This in turn culminated in a feeling of lack of trust, low morale and, in part, had contributed to the growing crises in teacher retention and recruitment (Bottery, 2003).

Labour's first term – 1997 to 2001

As a consequence, New Labour meant new hope for many and the new Prime Minister started well with a number of promises which his administration then set about fulfilling. Innovations such as *Excellence in Cities* (DfES, 2001) to tackle underachievement in inner cities and other urban areas and the endorsement of *SureStart* (DfEE, 2001) to support schemes for deprived families of 0-3 year olds were centrally introduced and were generally welcomed. Up to this point, New Labour had seemed as good as its word. But then a series of what have been described as ill thought out actions (Brighouse, 2001) took place. One such example was the previous Conservative Governments' strategies to cajole and pressure schools to improve pupils' attainment levels and, now, here was New Labour promoting a drive for even higher standards and a promise to increase the available data on individual school's performance (Southworth, 1999). Consequently, by the beginning of New Labour's second term, the Government seemed to be facing in two directions (Brighouse, 2001).

Intervention in education was back. Inspection was still punitive with 'zero tolerance' for underperforming schools (Evans *et al*, 2005). The reappointment by New Labour of Chris Woodhead as Chief Inspector of Schools was seen as controversial and did little to promote the Government's popularity with teachers. This particular Chief Inspector, first appointed under the Conservative Government in 1992, represented a strong accountability agenda with

no excuse for failure and his reappointment now reminded teachers of a past Government that had appeared brutal and confrontational in its handling of the teaching profession. Under the New Labour Government, competition among schools was still a powerful theme (Evans *et al*, 2005). Undoubtedly, new policies and new approaches were being introduced, but with many driven by related performance targets (Bell and Rowley, 2002). The seeds of collaborative practices for school improvement, however, were still in evidence through *Excellence in Cities* (DfES, 2001) and other previous Government introduced initiatives such as *Education Action Zones* (School Standards and Framework Act, 1998) and *Beacon Schools* (DfES, 2000).

Labour's second term – 2001 to 2005

At the start of a second term of office for the New Labour Government, a set of measures needed to be undertaken (Brighouse, 2001; Bottery, 2003) to rekindle professional trust, to improve educational standards, to alter the perception of Government by educationalists and to repair the increasingly negative perception of education by the public. These measures were manifold and included recognition that teachers' work was valued; an attempt to alleviate teachers' heavy workload; a focus on the recruitment, retention and motivation of teachers; and a move towards a greater degree of trust through the development of accountability within the profession rather than that which was externally imposed. However, it was acknowledged that educators in turn needed to commit to reasoned argument based on sound research evidence for promoting educational values and practices, along with an acceptance of the Government's right to a role in setting educational policy (Bottery, 2003).

By 2002, the Government had committed to collaborative initiatives such as the National College for School Leadership's *Networked Learning Communities* (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002), thus acknowledging the value of practitioner research as a key tool for developing innovative practices and school improvement. The *Specialist Schools* (DfES, 2003a) initiative was also being centrally promoted to spread innovation through collaboration.

Many other initiatives were also introduced in the second term of New Labour such as the upskilling of classroom assistants to reduce teachers' workload; and a review of the inspection process towards greater school self evaluation. But any suggestion that the face of the Government had changed to one of support and celebration of success was still not fully realised (Brighouse, 2001). The comment that "improvement has happened, but transformation has not yet begun" (Brighouse, 2001, p 29) was still true even at the start of the third term of Government office.

Labour's third term – 2005 to present day

Measures being taken in more recent times have led towards the development of a renewed relationship with schools and one which the Government has actively promoted. This has come about in a number of ways including the introduction of lighter touch inspections, which began in September 2005, with school self evaluation central to the process (OfSTED, 2004). Additionally, increased funding streams direct to schools have further minimised local authority control over the purse strings. However, in this context of reduced 'middle level management' of schools:

Without some form of networking, it is highly unlikely that the aspirations for governmental programmes of educational reform, particularly in decentralised systems, will be realised. (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002, p 9)

One could argue that support of networks through direct funding lines not only helps to rebuild relationships with schools but also provide a new and powerful vehicle for driving Government reforms forward. This could be seen as a further move to sideline local authorities, continuing to disempower them in their influence on educational policy and practice, and counteracting what has been seen by some as local authorities "buttressing the status quo [rather] than supporting change" (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002, p 9). However, some might argue that this subsequent change in the Government's policy orientation could be interpreted as using those educational practices favoured by the profession to political advantage.

Additionally, the pressure on politicians globally to intervene in state education has resulted in an attempt in England to modernize school cultures (Wallace, 2003). The impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act which introduced financial delegation to schools, along with active promotion of competition among schools, had led to system fragmentation (Glatter, 2003). Secondary school collaborative working arrangements, such as the 14-19 Strategy (DfES, 2005) and primary school networking initiatives such as the PSLN (DfES, 2004a), could arguably be considered as purposeful moves toward "a new search for integration, coherence and systematic change" (Wallace and Hall, 1994, in Glatter, 2003, p 17). Undeniably, inter-school collaborative working practices are becoming an integral part of Government initiatives to improve educational practice, academic standards and pupil achievement (Connolly and James, 2006).

The Government's official policy on this significant change in primary school working saw the launch of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative (PSLN) in the wake of *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003b), which placed considerable emphasis on encouraging every primary school to be part of a network. This Government commitment was further endorsed with the launch of *The Five Year Strategy* (DfES, 2004b), which states that effective learning networks of primary schools:

> … can build the capacity of primary schools to continue to develop and improve, and in particular to offer better teaching and learning and a wider range of opportunities to pupils and to their communities. (DfES, 2004b, p 42)

This Government commitment to encouraging networks is laudable, but this seems to be ideas based rather than evidence based as it is unsubstantiated in the DfES documentation by any research into the benefits of primary school networking as 'the single most important way' (DfES, 2004b) to move primary education forward. This thesis attempts to assess the role of networks as a power base for educational reform through a review of the current literature and through empirical research into the field of primary learning networks.

An overview of the literature

Although much has been documented on the impact of large scale reform in education, a minimal amount of research currently exists on the impact on educational partnership working in general (Rudd, 2003) and even less on the impact of Government introduced initiatives which encourage schools to collaborate (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006). The review of the literature in Chapter 2 first seeks to explore lessons learned about large scale reform

initiatives in general and then, more specifically, how previous research into networking arrangements might well have informed the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative.

Fullan (2000), Wallace (2003), Gunter (2004a) and other academics explore the implications of such large scale reforms, consider lessons previously learned, offer insights and discuss the complexities of managing large scale reform.   Busher and Hodgkinson (1996), Glatter (2003) and Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) discuss various definitions of networking and, alongside Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992), explore different types of networks. A number of other authors including Little and Veugelers (2005), Veugelers and Zijlstra (2005), Connolly and James (2006), Woods *et a*l (2006), and Stoll *et al* (2006) explore the requirements for successful networks.   And, along with Mullen and Kochen (2000), these authors also elaborate on the benefits of networking. Alternately, Huxman and Vangen (2000) suggest inhibitors to successful networking arrangements and the disadvantages of networking, while Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) expand upon the idea that traditional autocratic leadership itself could be an inhibitor to effective networking.   All of this echoes a much earlier sociological literature - Weber (1927, in Merton *et al*, 1952), Durkheim (1933), Burns and Stalker (1961) and Etzioni (1961). The thesis will use ideas derived from these earlier social theorists to contribute to the overarching key conceptual framework with particular reference to the tensions associated with power within networks.   This concept is further discussed briefly in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter 2.

Other related UK and international literature has also been taken into consideration to support this research. These are discussed in the literature review, along with publications from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and various Networked Learning

Communities (NLC) promotional materials. Following an analysis of all this literature, themes are generated which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 to produce a framework for successful networks on which to base this study into Primary Strategy Learning Networks.

Overarching themes that arise from the literature and that are important to consider in this research are the apparent tensions within power relations and the tensions between bureaucratic organisations and the organic nature of networking. These tensions have been the centre of long standing debate in the social sciences over the years and are seen, for example, in the early works of Weber (1927) and Etzioni (1961). The theme of bureaucratic versus organic organisations is explored in depth by Burns and Stalker (1961) in industrial settings. They theorise a model representing a continuum with a mechanistic bureaucratic type of organisation at one end and an adaptive, organic type at the other. These concepts in turn derive from the work of Durkheim (1933) and the mechanistic style that Burns and Stalker (1961) suggest is also similar to Weber's definition of bureaucracy (Weber, 1927, in Merton *et al*, 1952), which supposedly thrives in relatively stable conditions. Organic types of organisations, on the other hand, are seen to flourish in more dynamic, fast moving conditions (Burns and Stalker, 1961).

The bureaucratic nature of a centrally imposed networking model was observed as a significant finding in the first small scale study undertaken for this research and is tracked through the main study, along with the idea of innovation and empowerment existing in a culture of control. These themes are explored further in the conclusions in Chapters 6, with an 'ideal' model of networking relationships offered for wider educational debate.

The key research questions

To recall, the overarching aim of this thesis is to consider the success and sustainability of a centrally imposed model of school collaboration for driving forward educational reform. In order to offer an insight into the challenges of large scale educational reform in general and the complexities of managing the PSLN initiative as such, the first key research question in this thesis is:

- What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform? (This will be answered from the literature review.)

Then, to explore what is already known about effective collaborative practices and whether these have been considered in introducing such a radical change in primary school working arrangements, the second key research question is:

- What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent has this informed the PSLN initiative? (This will be answered from the literature review *and* the empirical research.)

Next, as a means of investigating the benefits and challenges of the PSLN 'model' when put into practice, the third key research question is:

- What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward? (This is answered from the empirical research.)

Finally, to draw conclusions on this centrally imposed model, its success and its sustainability, the fourth key research question is:

- Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative? (This is answered from the empirical research.)

These four questions are explored in a number of ways in this research, through:

- a review of the current literature on school networks

- a small scale study of a National College for School Leadership (NCSL) 'Networked Learning Community' (NLC).

- and a major research study undertaken in two networks formed as part of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) initiative within one London LA.

The approach for exploring these questions is further explained in both grid and text format in Chapter 3.

The research design

The empirical part of this work is a qualitative research study that draws mainly on the perceptions of the participants in two different networks of heads and additionally is supported by findings from an initial smaller scale study of networking. The methodological approach chosen is survey and the method for gathering data from both the small scale study and the main research project is through in-depth qualitative interviews. The field work in the small scale study began in November 2004 and took place in the West Midlands. It involved seven primary schools within an NCSL 'Networked Learning Community' (NLC). Interviews were undertaken with the seven headteachers of the schools within the network at the end of a two year involvement in the NLC initiative. This small scale study was also used to pilot the research tool for the main study. The main research commenced in September 2005. This aligned with the launch of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) initiative. It involved 12 primary schools from two Primary Strategy Learning Networks within one London Authority (LA). Headteachers from each of the schools were interviewed

at the start of the initiative and again at the end of the first year. Comparisons were made with the West Midlands study and additional information from the roll out of the PSLN initiative within the LA contributed to the findings. The researcher's perceptions as an active LA participant in the initiative are also included in the data.

The structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 is offered as an *Introduction* to the research. The thesis is then arranged in the following chapters: *Chapter 2   Review of the Literature; Chapter 3   Research Design; Chapter 4 Presentation of the Findings – Phase 1; Chapter 5   Presentation of the Findings – Phase 2; Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations*. Additional documentation and information are included as *Appendices* to the thesis.

An outline of the chapters

Prior to an analysis of the perceptions of headteachers involved in Primary Strategy Learning Networks in Chapters 4 and 5, an exploration of large scale educational reform in relation to the PSLN initiative is undertaken in Chapter 2. Definitions of networks and network types are also investigated, along with characteristics of effective networks and perceived inhibitors to collaborative working arrangements. The tensions associated with power with particular regard to the seeming paradox of the organic nature of networking existing within imposed bureaucratic structures are also explored through the literature and inform the overarching conceptual framework of the thesis as discussed in the final section of Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the research design is explained, including the methodological approach and reasons for the

preferred method. Ethical issues are given due regard, particularly in light of the researcher's position as a participant in the PSLN initiative at Local Authority (LA) level. Also, as the research is qualitative, rigorous analysis was key to the credibility of the findings. Therefore, the procedures for the process of data analysis are explained and additional data offered as appendices to the thesis. In Chapter 4, the findings from the pilot study of the West Midlands Networked Learning Community are presented as Phase 1. Hypotheses are formed and related to Phase 2 of the research in Chapter 5. This chapter presents key findings from the main study of the Primary Strategy Learning Network initiative in its first year within one London authority. Conclusions are made and recommendations discussed in Chapter 6. An 'ideal' model of networking is put forward for wider educational debate and a 'realistic' approach to evaluating such initiatives is argued. It is proposed that lessons learned from the research could inform future strategic decision making on local networking initiatives at LA level.

Reporting the findings

In addition to the findings being presented in this 50,000 word Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, a short executive summary of the main findings was disseminated to research contributors and senior education personnel of the London authority involved in the research. A report of the findings will also be prepared for publication, along with further papers generated by the data gathered in the project.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN) initiative arose from a Government commitment to a particular model of collaboration and was based on the principle of small groups of primary schools working together with the common purpose of raising pupil academic standards. Therefore, the two research questions that will be explored in the literature are:

- What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform?

- What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent have these informed the PSLN initiative?

In the first section of this chapter, theories of large scale educational reform are discussed to consider factors conducive to successful educational change and to acknowledge the complexities of managing large scale reform. The second section explores network terms and types in order to determine a clear definition of what is meant by a learning network when discussed in this thesis. In the third section, the requirements, benefits of and inhibitors to networking are explored further to offer an insight into characteristics of successful networks. The arising themes of power structures and dynamics within organisations are then discussed in the fourth and final section of this chapter as the overarching conceptual framework of the

thesis. Thus, the texts and papers selected for the review are presented thematically in this chapter.

Large scale reform

It is important to explore the literature for an understanding of what factors make large scale educational reform successful in order to set the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative in the context of a major educational change process. However, previous insights into large scale educational reform and theories of educational change are numerous and complex. This section reviews some of the literature on the subject but, first, it is necessary to define what is meant by both educational change and large scale educational reform. Change and reform involve a process of altering current educational thinking and practices, but reform implies making things better, whereas change does not necessarily imply the same.

Fullan (2000) defines large scale reform as affecting an entire system. His research reviews large scale reforms that have taken place in both the Canadian and English education systems over the last 50 years and he explores three different types – whole school, district and national reform. From these, the author identifies a number of insights into the success or failure of large scale reform and considers why these must be addressed in order to affect successful change. Fullan's work on large scale educational reform is of particular interest. The Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative being researched involved a third of all primary schools in each Local Authority (LA) in England in the first year with a second year offered to remaining primary schools – a proposed significant reform in the English primary

education system in Fullan's (2000) terms and a significant commitment in terms of Government funding.

The other authors that feature in this section have been chosen for their interest in the nature of large scale educational change and large scale educational reform. Following Fullan's work on the implications of educational change (see appendix iii), Wallace (2003) suggests a typology for "managing the unmanageable" (p 9) within large scale reform (see appendix iii). Gunter's (2004a) typology on the process of change is also considered (see appendix iv) along with change models from other recent Government initiatives (see appendix v) and ideas from various other prominent academics on the characteristics, the factors, the phases and the strategies of change. The purpose of this review is not to compare and contrast all these theories and theoretical models, but rather to elucidate on them for the purpose of this research. However, links between each of these theories and theoretical models are made in discussion and a summary of each theory is offered in table i on page 32 of the thesis.

Factors conducive to successful large scale educational reform

Fullan with Stiegelbauer (1991) concentrate on change agents' roles in the change process and acknowledge that a number of stakeholders are involved in change at school, provincial and federal level in the Canadian education system. The critical factor suggested by the authors is that change will not be successful without the engagement of the primary stakeholder – the practitioner in the classroom – and without the support of all stakeholders at other levels. This important factor is revisited in the conclusion to the research when evaluating the success of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative. Fullan with Stiegelbauer

(1991) suggest a number of issues, implications and guidelines for stakeholders in their crucial role in the change process. The authors also acknowledge the paradoxes and dilemmas between authority over the change at Government level and influence on the change at local levels. To define the distinction between authority and influence:

> *Authority* is the legally supported form of power which involves the right to make decisions and is supported by a set of sanctions which is ultimately coercive. *Influence* is the capacity to affect the actions of others without legal sanctions. (Hoyle, 1982, p 90)

The relationship between power in the form of authority and influence in terms of response to the authority is discussed at a later stage in this thesis.

The earlier work of Fullan with Stiegelbauer (1991) is also important to acknowledge as it underpins Fullan's subsequent work on understanding the meaning of change on the human participants in order to optimise success in the change process. In later work, Fullan (1992) acknowledges that:

> Educational change fails many more times than it succeeds. One of the main reasons is that implementation – or the process of achieving something new into practice – has been neglected. (Fullan, 1992, p 7)

This statement launches Fullan's (1992) work on a practical theory of change and continues his research to unpick the complexities of the change process within educational settings. Fullan (1992) suggests that change requires impetus to get started and therefore, active initiation and participation. According to Fullan, ownership is a key element, in order to encourage enthusiasm for and commitment to the change. Alongside this, is a need for pressure and support for the change. An example of this in the English education system is

the introduction of the Primary National Strategies – national frameworks for teaching literacy (DfEE, 1998) and numeracy (DfEE, 1999) – which were centrally conceived and directed with "pressure and support in place to initiate the change" (Earl *et al*, 2002, p 44). But Fullan (1992) argues that equally important is the need for changes in values and beliefs, in effect a cultural shift for meaningful change to take place.

In another work (Fullan, 1993), he acknowledges the fact that change processes cannot be stage managed with rigidity of rules and structures, as there is often no clear way to proceed. The change process itself is particular to the organisation and not a 'one size fits all' process. The author suggests eight lessons for harnessing the forces of change. And, in still later work, Fullan (1999) further acknowledges schools as rapidly changing and complex environments and reviews his eight lessons for large scale reform. In light of Fullan's warnings against stage managed change within a rigid structure, one has to question the very prescriptive and structured format of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative as a means to promote collaborative working practices in and among schools.

In spite of the author's shift from the idea of four insights on managing change (Fullan, 1992) to eight complex change lessons (Fullan, 1999), what is consistent in his work is agreement on the theoretical model of the change process, derived from Miles *et al* (1987, in Hopkins *et al*, 1994), and consisting of three overlapping phases of initiation, implementation and institutionalisation (see appendix vi). These phases represent the decision to begin the change process, the action taken and, subsequently, the point at which the change becomes the norm. However, Fullan with Stiegelbauer (1991) suggests a fourth phase of 'outcome' - that is to say the extent of the improvement or impact.

Each one of the original three overlapping phases in the change process is important, but an emphasis on the first two phases (initiation and implementation) at the expense of the third (institutionalisation) leads to short-termism (Hopkins *et al*, 1994). Examples given by these authors are where educational pilot studies have then been implemented school-wide without the necessary continued funding, thus dooming them to failure. It is worthwhile drawing a parallel here with the PSLN initiative. This was funded for one year only (initiation) with a commitment from schools to work together for a second year (implementation). Sustainability of the network (institutionalisation) must then be brought into question if one is to heed the warning that lack of emphasis on supporting and embedding change encourages "faddism" (Hopkins *et al*, 1994, p 36) and has little long term impact (outcomes).

The notion of change as a complex process involving human interconnections is highlighted by Kouzes and Mico (1979) who suggest the importance of the interconnectedness of people in their work and refer to five distinct groups within a school that have an interest or 'stake' in the change process. These are governors, leaders and managers, teachers, pupils and parents/carers, church and community. The authors suggest on-going tensions between each of these groups, with each favouring different approaches to change. Furthermore, Dalin (1997) expresses a belief that the change will only be successful if all these stakeholders are convinced that the change will be profitable for them or the group they represent. Dalin (1997) sees this 'real need' as being one of the four key factors for successful change, the other three being ownership, in that the change has to fit with the values and convictions of the individuals that are immediately involved; capability, or professional confidence and competence in the change; and leadership, or the opportunity for shared vision process and agreed actions. These four key factors complement Berg and Ostergren's (1979) four

decisive factors to successful change, which are gain/loss, ownership, leadership and power. Both this model and Dalin's model for change acknowledge the importance of ownership, benefit, empowerment and leadership, thus conceding that:

> There are almost as many conceptions of the change process as there are writers on the subject, but despite this there is some broad area of agreement. (Hopkins *et al*, 1994, p 27)

Hopkins *et al* (1994) concur with Bennis *et al* (1969, in Hopkins *et al*, 1994) and their fundamental strategies for securing change. These fundamental strategies fall into three broad groupings: power-coercive which is a direct and prescriptive approach; normative re-educative which encourages ownership and creativity in the process; and rational-empirical which favours detailed planning and launch techniques. One might conclude that the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative fits all three depending on the perspective of the stakeholder! From the point of view of headteachers, it could be seen as power-coercive and a fore-runner to federations of schools under one lead professional, as it is supported by extra funding and has a specific national agenda. Central government might view it as being normative re-educative, where creativity and self directed change are encouraged within groups of schools. However, it could also be argued that the national approach is rational-empirical, with action plans expected as an integral part of the submission bids. What is interesting to consider in relation to these fundamental strategies for change is the balance between a 'top down' and a 'bottom up' approach.

Gunter (2004a) explores this balance further in her quadrant model on theorising change (see appendix iv). Here, the author sees four main approaches to change - that of mediating

change; working for change; controlling change; and delivering change. The first two are where the activity is political and "where interests take priority" (p 2). This can be explained further in that 'mediating' change is about working within an existing system to affect change and 'working for change' is about working, hopefully, to create a better system. The second two approaches are where the activity is rational and "where causal relations between intervention and outcome can be controlled". (p 2). This can be explained further in that 'controlling change' is about manipulating and controlling groups and 'delivering change' is about preventing any deviation from the proposed change through a rigid structure and planning process. Thus, once again, 'top down' approaches and 'bottom up' approaches to change are acknowledged in the literature. One could argue that the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative aligns with 'controlling change', where the current power structures are maintained through financial accountability using the LA as a 'gatekeeper'; where the group is manipulated centrally through a national agenda focused on raising standards in literacy and numeracy; and where restrictions occur through the prescribed structures of the network model and the formality of a 'bidding' process. The PSLN also fits Gunter's definition of 'delivering change', where the preferred change - as per the Government agenda - is delivered through planning, implementation and evaluation at local authority level.

Many of the theories of large scale educational reform imply that stakeholders play a crucial role as change agents for success. Gunter acknowledges this. Her typology, however, is one that also acknowledges 'controlled' and 'delivered' change. This is an interesting point as one might argue that a nationally imposed educational change can equally be implemented successfully, without the total agreement but with the compliance of stakeholders. An

example of this would be the 1944 Education Reform Act that dictated the tripartite system of schooling in England. Another example is the reintroduction of school inspection in 1992, which could be seen as a major catalyst for school improvement. A third example is explored in the work of Fullan and Earl (2002), which documents an evaluation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NLNS) after five years of implementation. The NLNS was introduced soon after the Labour Government came into power in 1997 and arose from a Government commitment for improving the life chances of young people by addressing proficiency in basic literacy and numeracy skills. An ensuing evaluation (Fullan and Earl, 2002) showed impressive results, judged by attainment scores of 11 year olds in end of year national tests. There is no doubt that this large scale reform was heavily directed centrally with prescribed targets at national, local and school level; with structured schemes of work; and with close monitoring across the system. However, the sustainability of such a success remains a question (Fullan and Earl, 2002). Renewed Government input in terms of a NLNS review with more opportunities for local and school based autonomy was suggested by the authors and is currently being introduced into the system over a two year period (from 2006-2008). Fullan and Earl (2002) acknowledge that, in large scale reform:

> … a fair degree of top down initiative is required at the beginning, followed by investment in local capacity-building, followed in turn by greater attention to local creativity, reflection and networking. (Fullan and Earl, 2002, p 4)

thus conceding that controlled or directed initiation is sometimes acceptable under certain conditions (Miles, 1986, in Hopkins *et al*, 1994).

To return to Gunter's (2004a) quadrant model on theorizing change, Gunter does not see change as linear but more a complex process involving competing interests, of

interconnections between people and of securing gains. Gunter (2004a) discusses the role that power structures and culture play in the four approaches to change. The author sees power structures as both localised and at macro policy making level. It is interesting to note Gunter's (2004a) acknowledgement of the part that culture plays in change, as Hargreaves (1995) suggests that scant acknowledgement had been previously made of culture in relation to school effectiveness and school improvement. Hargreaves (1995) also notes the importance of recognising cultures as "the way we do things round here" (p 25) and warns how, if we do not give this due regard, it can impact negatively on educational reform.

To summarise the factors conducive to large scale educational reform, the academic literature reveals agreement on the importance of the role of change agents; the influence of existing cultures; the impact of power structures; support for the change; ownership at all levels; and a flexible approach to leadership of the change. As well as a number of factors conducive to large scale educational reform, there are a number and variety of models for supporting the change process in organisations. For instance, the National Remodelling Initiative (National Remodelling Team, 2003) was launched in schools to promote a process of self directed change to more efficient and effective work practices through a five stage model of:

- *mobilise* (the organisation)
- *discover* (what works and the issues)
- *deepen* (through probing and analysing issues)
- *develop* (the vision and start the planning process)
- *deliver* (the results or action the change)

(adapted from National Remodelling Team, 2003 – see appendix v)

This was a very structured and rational format for implementing national workforce reform although the initiative purported to encourage self directed change. Additionally, the Primary Leadership Programme (Primary National Strategy, 2003) was a Government initiative to

raise standards and build leadership capacity within primary schools. This initiative promoted

a six stage model to secure change, subsequently revised to a simpler three stage model that

involved:

- *exploring issues* (looking at what's happening now)
- *creating a vision for the future* (imagining what could happen)
- *action-planning and implementing change* (making it happen)

(adapted from Primary National Strategy, 2003 – see appendix v)

Fullan's (2001) theory is not as prescriptive as both these Government promoted initiatives.

His approach is based on understanding that "the change process is exceedingly elusive" (p 5)

and he suggests a framework for leading complex change. This relies on getting the

conditions right causing "more good things to happen and fewer bad things to happen" (p 10)

rather than following a set of predetermined actions in order to elicit the change in a formulaic

way. The following section focuses on the later works of Fullan, which have evolved towards

a broad agreement that rationally constructed reform strategies do not work in the face of a

rapidly changing environment and the inevitable risk taking that accompanies it, as large scale

reform is intrinsically complex to manage (Fullan, 1999).

Factors for managing the complexities of large scale educational reform

Fullan (2000) sets his particular research on large scale reform in the context of what he sees

as a second attempt at it since the 1950s and 1960s, when a series of large scale national

curriculum reform initiatives had been introduced into the US education system. Fullan

(2000) labels this previous period "the adoption era" (p 6) and describes a seemingly rational-

empirical strategy (Bennis *et al*, 1969, in Hopkins *et al*, 1994) with huge sums of Government

money being poured into educational initiatives at this time, as if, "flooding the system with external ideas would bring about desired improvements" (p 6). The author goes on to warn of these previously learnt lessons, where schools felt pressured to take on new initiatives and become innovative, resulting in a rather cosmetic adoption of new ideas, which altered "languages and structures" (p 7), but not necessarily practice.

Fullan's (2000) study defines eight factors or insights that he sees as critical to successful large scale reform (see appendix iii). The first of these is *upgrading the system context*, which is seen as a need to radically change the teaching profession in order to strengthen the system to adapt to and sustain any change. The second factor Fullan (2000) suggests is *coherence making*, as schools struggle to prioritise the myriad of seemingly uncoordinated school based initiatives facing them. Fullan (2000) also sees *crossover structures* as an important element of large scale reform. This is to say the network of agencies that play a role in the implementation of large scale reform and, by engaging in the reform effort, are seen by the author to create energy for further reform. Connolly and James (2006) also acknowledge these and note that they can operate in varied ways at different levels in the system with, what Evans *et al* (2005) describe as, the LA playing the role of the "strategic partner" in this network of agencies (p 76).

Fullan (2000) also explores the idea of *downward investment/ upward identity*, the former being an allocation of resources to increase capacity for improvement and the latter being a cohesive identity with the reform from those directly affected. Another of the eight factors that Fullan (2000) identifies in order for large scale reform to succeed is *invest[ment] in quality materials* in order to propel the process of large scale reform. Fullan (2000) also

introduces the idea of *integrate[ing] pressure and support* as a factor of successful large scale reform. That is to say a seamless approach to incorporating these two strands in order to encourage a system of accountability. Interestingly, he sees this as one of the key elements of professional learning communities or networks of schools working together to improve educational practices. The author further suggests that it is important to *get out of implementing someone else's reform*, and key to this is capacity building as the organisation then begins to define and drive forward its own reform agenda. This was displayed in some of the networks that Busher and Hodgkinson (1996) studied where they noted headteachers using the power of networking to be "the voice of state education" (p 62). Finally, Fullan (2000) talks of *work[ing] with systems* and working towards "alignment and connections" (p 25) rather than introducing change in a fragmented way. These eight factors of large scale reform (Fullan, 2000) are listed in table i (on page 32) and outlined further in appendix iii of this thesis.

An interesting point to consider in Fullan's (2000) work is the tension between "systems expectations and school variability" (p 9), that is to say the conflict between the unique nature of schools as individual organisations within a large and complex system. In fact, Fullan (2000) acknowledges that:

> Large scale change cannot be achieved if principals [headteachers] identify only with their own school, and are not similarly concerned with the success of other principals [headteachers] and schools in the district. (Fullan, 2000, p 23)

Therefore, it seems that in order for any large scale reform to have a chance of success, the climate of competition between schools that has been positively promoted by successive UK governments over the years will have to be turned round to one of collaboration. However,

the history of government driven school collaborative practices militate against this (Rudd, 2003), thus posing a number of questions. Can true inter-school collaboration be achieved whilst performance league tables still hold such an important position both politically and publicly? Furthermore, can it be achieved when government policy promises parental choice of schooling and thus encourages a competing market? And, finally, can it be achieved when individual school funding is based heavily on pupil numbers and weighting and a pressure on schools to 'sell' a service? Hall and Southworth (1997), in their research into headship, note:

> Heads have had to adapt to the ideology of an 'educational market'. The increase in competition between schools for pupils has, in part, led to a concomitant need for heads to be entrepreneurial in promoting the school and securing resources for it. Without doubt, the 'selling of schools' has advanced. (Hall and Southworth, 1997, p 166)

Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) substantiate this point when they remark that their research shows:

> … that the network style relationships often associated with partnership working – resting on trust and mutuality – are threatened, or undermined, by the imperative to compete [to ensure survival].   (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998, p 326)

Although these comments were made in the first term of the New Labour Government, this paradox of collaboration being driven forward as a major reform to raise standards within an 'educational market' of competition is further acknowledged and substantiated in more recent literature (Brighouse, 2001; Evans *et al*, 2003; Connolly and James, 2006; Woods *et al*, 2006). Fullan (2001), in his subsequent work, suggests a framework for leading complex change, which consists of the five key components of moral purpose, understanding change, coherence making, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing. The author reinforces the importance of leadership and puts this at the core of any successful change

process. The importance of leadership as a key factor in the success and sustainability of a network is discussed in later sections of this chapter.

A number of Fullan's (2000) insights with regard to systems and people within the systems complement the arguments put forward by Wallace (2003) who sees educational change as becoming even more complex and suggests that realistically it is unmanageable. Wallace's (2003) research focuses on the reorganisation of local provision of state schools in England and, more specifically, on an ensuing problem within one LA. He uses his research to theorise about the complexities of managing large-scale educational reform and he creates a typology of five characteristics, each with a number of 'constituents', to explain why complex educational change is equally complex to manage (see appendix iii). Wallace (2003) suggests that complex educational change is generally speaking *large scale* and affects a large number of stakeholders with varying degrees of knowledge and a wide range of values and beliefs. Complex educational change, according to Wallace (2003) is also *componential* and concerned with a jigsaw of interrelated and overlapping management tasks that are difficult to manage. Complex educational change, according to Wallace (2003), also tends to be *systemic* and spans the different administrative levels of the system. This characteristic is linked to different levels of power and control, attempting to 'both shape and constrain stakeholders' interaction' (p 20). This is an interesting theory that is expanded upon further in this research with regard to perceived power tensions between those with authority and those with influence. Wallace (2003) describes his fourth characteristic of complex educational change as *differentially impacting*. This considers the varying degrees of the impact of change on different stakeholders. According to the author, peoples' reactions to the change will vary

according to what they do (their role in the change) and what they can do (their expertise and experience), so that those for whom the change is easy will react positively and those for whom the change is more challenging may act negatively or indifferently. Different stakeholders will also have different tasks to fulfil, which will be of greater concern to the individual than the totality of the change. Wallace sees the fifth and final characteristic of complex educational change as *contextually dependent,* or how the impact of one change after another can have a positive or adverse affect depending on the context of the schools involved and/or the opportunities taken to maximise alignment.

Wallace's (2003) typology, along with various theoretical models regarding the characteristics, key factors, strategies, stages and approaches to large scale reform and educational change as discussed in this chapter are outlined in table i (on page 32). Similarities and interconnections between aspects of these various theories have already been acknowledged throughout this section of the literature. Consequently, table i endeavours only to summarise these theories rather than compare them. And although each of these theories is considered for its own merit throughout this research, a synthesis of the elements of change which is described below is offered by the researcher as an explanation of the term 'the change process' when used in this thesis.

The change process

In order for change to take place, it has to be actively initiated or 'kick started', often by an external stakeholder in the change process (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991). The change then

has to be adopted by the main stakeholders (Fullan, 1992; Huberman, 1992). A period of implementation is then necessary whereby those stakeholders begin to understand the need for the change, the elements that need to be changed and the actions necessary to realise that change (Berg and Ostergren, 1979; Fullan, 1991; Huberman, 1992; Dalin, 1997). Then there needs to be a period of continuation in order to embed the change (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991) and to see alterations in behaviour and beliefs from previous accepted practices (Fullan, 1992; Hopkins *et al,* 1994). Only then, when the change has become embedded and when the main stakeholders have taken ownership of the agenda for the change, will there be measurable outcomes in terms of impact on pupils (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991; Huberman, 1992). However, it needs to be acknowledged that these outcomes will impact differently in different circumstances dependant on school and local context (Fullan, 1999; Wallace, 2003).

Table i: Theories of large scale change and educational reform

1969	1979	1987	1991	1992	1992	1993
Bennis et al **Three strategies of change**	**Berg and Ostergren** **Four decisive factors of successful change**	**Miles et al** **Three overlapping phases of change**	**Fullan (with Stiegelbauer)** **Four key phases of change**	**Fullan** **Four insights into the process of change**	**Huberman** **Five causal relationships to change**	**Fullan** **Eight lessons for harnessing the forces of change**
1.Power co-ercive	1. Gain/loss	1. Initiation	1. Initiation	1. Active initiation and participation	1. Adoption	1. You can't mandate what matters
2. Normative re-educative	2. Ownership	2. Implementation	2. Implementation	2. Pressure and support	2. Implementation	2. Change is a journey not a blue print
3. Rational- empirical	3. Leadership	3.Institutionalisation	3. Continuation	3. Changes in behaviour and beliefs	3. Enhanced technical capacity	3. Problems are our friends
	4. Power		4. Outcome	4. The overriding problem of ownership	4. Revised institutional arrangements	4. Vision and strategic planning come later
					5. Measurable impact on pupils	5. Individualism and collectivism must have equal power
						6. Neither centralisation nor decentralisation work
						7. Connection with the wider environment is critical to success
						8. Everyone is a change agent

1994	1997	1999	2000	2001	2003	2004(a)
Hopkins **Five key messages about change**	**Dalin** **Four key factors for successful change**	**Fullan** **Eight lessons for large scale reform**	**Fullan** **Eight factors/insights into large scale reform**	**Fullan** **Five key components for leading complex change**	**Wallace** **Five characteristics of complex change**	**Gunter** **Four approaches to change**
1. Change takes place over time	1. 'Real' need	1. Moral purpose is complex and problematic	1. Upgrade the system context	1. Moral purpose	1. Large scale	1. Mediating change
2. Enhance multiple perspectives	2. Ownership	2. Theories of change and theories of education need each other	2. Become preoccupied with coherence making in the service of instructional improvement and student learning	2. Understanding change	2. Componential	2. Working for change
3. Be self conscious about the process of change	3. Capability	3. Conflict and diversity are our friends	3. Establish crossover structures	3. Coherence making	3. Systemic	3. Controlling change
4. Assume resistance	4. Leadership	4. Understand the meaning of operating on the edge of chaos	4. Downward investment/upward identity	4. Relationship building	4. Differentially impacting	4. Delivering change
5. Invest in teachers and schools		5. Emotional intelligence is anxiety provoking and anxiety containing	5. Invest in quality materials	5. Knowledge creation and sharing	5. Contextually dependent	
		6. Collaborative cultures are anxiety provoking and anxiety containing	6. Integrate pressure and support			
		7. Attack incoherence: connectedness and knowledge creation are critical	7.Get out of implementing someone else's reform agenda			
		8. There is no single solution: craft your own theories and actions by being a critical consumer	8. Work with systems			

Therefore, in response to the research question 'What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform?' a consistent message throughout the literature is that it is complex. There is also general consensus in the literature that, in order for the complexities of change to be successfully managed and in order to maximise opportunities for large scale reform, the key players in the change have to have an understanding of the change process, as well as working proactively for the change itself. Additionally, if meaningful change is to take place and be sustained, it requires support at every level in the system and throughout each of the key phases of the change process. What is also noticeable in the literature is that controlled and directed large scale reform should be given due regard, as evidence shows that this can also bring about successful system change. Gunter's (2004a) typology alludes to various 'top down, bottom up' approaches and what is recognised elsewhere in the literature is the success of active initiation from 'the top' to kick starting an innovation (Miles, 1986, in Hopkins *et al* 1994; Earl *et al*, 2002; Fullan and Earl, 2002). What must also be taken into account is getting the balance right between control and creativity. Therefore, although ownership of the change and engagement with the change are critical to its success, a well managed prescribed and centrally directed change can secure the reforms needed.

With these considerations in mind, this thesis now attempts to explore the benefits and challenges facing Primary Strategy Learning Networks involved in this Central Government directed approach towards inter-school collaboration. However, before doing so, it is necessary to clarify what is understood by the term 'learning networks'. This next section of the chapter explores different school collaborative working arrangements in order to agree a definitive term for a 'network' and an understanding of the term 'learning network'. The

following section also explores the different types of networks in the literature to compare those with the primary function of a learning network.

Defining networks

The terminology for defining networks is complicated. 'Networks', 'partnerships', 'clusters', 'federations', 'families' and 'development groups' have all previously been used interchangeably in the field of education (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). However, Benford (1988, in Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) attempts to define clusters and federations, regarding the former as retaining their autonomy while having a common purpose, whereas federations lose some of that autonomy through external and internal control. This definition is supported by Harman (2000, in Glatter, 2003), who sees federations as sharing responsibility between participating organisations with a new overarching body. The research also suggests that, in addition to some form of federation control, either externally through governance or management, there may also be some form of power through funding streams. It has also been suggested that the difference in definition between clusters and federations lies in the latter having joint budgets for shared activities Bell (1988, in Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). Governmental agencies (DfES, 2007) have defined federations further into 'hard governance' and 'soft' federations, with the first being a more formal arrangement and having a single governing body (and sometimes single headteacher). Rutherford and Jackson (2008) see collegiates positioned within soft federations and the work of these authors particularly refers to groups of secondary schools in partnership with each other, each having their own governing body but with a "collegiate management board" (p 3) steering the decision making and funding allocations for the group.

Other terminology that exists for groups of schools working together are development groups which are generally LA co-ordinated, and families of schools which can be groups of same phase schools or be made up of a secondary school and its feeder primaries usually serving a specific geographical location (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). These authors found that the terms families and clusters were often interpreted as one and the same by teachers in their research. Busher and Hodgkinson, (1996) also note that budgets were often used as power tools by some schools over their families. Certainly clusters, families and development groups seem more nebulous in their nature, interchangeable in their terminology and may or may not have geographical location and LA co-ordination in common.

Glatter (2003) introduces the notion of partnerships also as being 'slippery' terminology when discussed in term of networks. This is supported by Rudd (2003) who notes that the term 'partnership' is widely used, but ill defined and could range from a description of a two-school arrangement to groups of schools working together. Most of the partnerships in Rudd's (2003) research are predominantly formal, with an agreed structure for working (p 4). Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) note a distinction between partnerships and networks, where the former is not always as cosy as the latter. Networks, according to these authors, "seem to be based on trust, loyalty and reciprocity" (p 318), whereas they see partnerships as including command, control and competition. A synopsis of all these definitions of collaborative working arrangements for primary schools is included in table ii overleaf although, in reality, the lines of demarcation between each type of collaborative are much less distinct than portrayed in table ii and the characteristics of different types of collaborations overlap in definition.

Table ii: Defining primary school collaborative groups

TERMINOLOGY	CHARACTERISTICS
Networks	-Trust -Loyalty -Reciprocity
Clusters	-Common purpose -Retained autonomy
Development Groups	-External support/facilitation -(Generally) LA co-ordinated
Families	-(Generally) geographically located -(Some) shared aspects of budgets -(Some) control wielded through shared budgets
Partnerships	-Formal (possibly contractual) -Command -Control -Competition -Shared accountability
Federations	-Single governing body (or joint governance) -Joint accountability -Joint funding arrangements -Power wielded through funding streams -(Possibly) single headship

Networks – the definitive term

To summarise, although the term network is often used in a generic way in education for groups of schools working at various levels of collaboration, a network is defined for the purpose of this research as a group of schools that come together for a common purpose (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992; Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998; Mullen and Kochen, 2000). That purpose will be meaningful to the individual schools, whilst of benefit to the network as a whole (Connolly and James, 2006). The network will be accepting of external support and internal expectations, and accountability will be realistically balanced between the two (Fullan, 2000). Members of the network will be equal partners (Bennett and Anderson, 2002

in Glatter, 2003; Haeusler, 2003) and the role of leaders within the network will be 'fluid' in nature (Mullen and Kochen, 2000), although key drivers at any one time may enhance the network's rigour and success. External facilitation may benefit the network, but external control will not be a permanent part of the structure (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992) as it may inhibit the fragile nature, add to the bureaucracy, inhibit ownership from within and ultimately cause inertia or stagnation (Huxman and Vangen, 2000). Internal control through financial power or domination by strong individuals or groups within the network should be deterred as these could also be inhibitors (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) of the natural growth and organic nature of the network (Mullen and Kochen, 2000).

Types of networks

Although there are many different arrangements of school networks in terms of size, phases, and structures, Busher and Hodgkinson (1996) found in their research that there were basically three different types. First, and most common, are curriculum or staff development networks. These seemed to involve the largest number of staff. This notion is substantiated in Lieberman and McLaughlin's (1992) study which looks at the popularity among teachers for networks and explores the notion that networks succeed where traditional continual professional development fails to meet changing needs within the profession. This is seen as one of the successful features of networks, along with 'relevance', 'colleagueship' and 'efficacy' and it was felt that participants seemed to grow professionally as a result of being involved in network activities (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). The second type of networks defined by Busher and Hodgkinson (1996) are of the organisational/administrative type formed by schools who worked collaboratively to resolve administrative requirements

and respond to Government initiatives. The authors see the function of these networks as offering a service in areas such as budget management, something with which LAs have become less familiar since the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS), a system of funding delegation to schools to increase autonomy and a competing market. The third type of networks are seen as policy making, where groups of schools seemed to involve themselves at local government level on various consultation groups, debating policy and lobbying LA officers. However, Jackson (2004) suggests a fourth type of network whereby:

> The 'networked' part is designed to imply interconnectedness, interdependence and sustained commitment – shared destinies; the 'learning' element suggests collaborative commitment to learning processes such as enquiry and knowledge generation; and the 'community' dimension is about moral purpose – caring about one another and working on behalf of one another. (Jackson, 2004, in Earl and Katz, 2005, p 28)

This fourth type defines *Networked Learning Communities* (Jackson, 2004) which are explained further in the following section.

Learning networks – the definitive term

A Networked Learning Community (Jackson, 2004) or a learning network is a collaborative group of educational practitioners, sharing relationships "based on trust, loyalty and reciprocity" (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998 p 318), engaging with one another "to enquire into practice, to innovate, to exchange knowledge and to learn together" (Jackson, 2004, in Earl and Katz, 2005, p 28) in order to impact on pupil learning (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). For the purpose of this research, the type of network to be studied is that of a Networked Learning Community.

The following section of this chapter now moves on to explores the literature to determine the characteristics of successful networks. Network inhibitors are also discussed, including the notion of leadership as a key inhibitor to effective networking.

Characteristics of successful networks

In researching the literature, it became apparent that the characteristics of successful networks fall into two categories: what networks need in practical terms in order to function successfully – so, in effect, the requirements for successful networking; and what networks offer the participants in order to be deemed successful – so, in effect, the benefits of successful networking. Woods *et al* (2006) further categorise the requirements for successful collaborative working practices into *contextual* and *organisational variables* (see appendix vii for details). These authors noted a number of such variables which enhanced or hindered the success of secondary school collaborations in their evaluation of the Diversity Pathfinders Project (Woods *et al*, 2006), a Government initiative to encourage secondary schools "to collaborate, to diversify and to develop as specialist schools" (Woods *et al*, 2006, p 3). These findings are discussed below and compared to examples in this research.

Requirements and benefits – another perspective

Woods *et al* (2006), in evaluating this Government initiative to encourage groups of secondary schools to work together as Diversity Pathfinders (DPs), noted three *contextual variables* that positively influenced the development of these groups.

The first was *external challenge* for the schools which, in turn, generated group support. Interestingly, this was noted in Phase 1 of the research into the NLC initiative, as the West Midlands schools had initially formed their network to support each other through LA reorganisation and the threat of rural school closures.

The second positive contextual variable noted by Woods *et al* (2006) was *advocacy and facilitation* from the LA. This was also seen as a positive feature of the PSLN initiative in Phase 2 of the research where the LA structure of support and guidance through the planning stage of networking was highly evaluated both regionally by DfES representatives and locally by participating headteachers.

The third positive variable that influenced the way in which DPs developed was *take off capacity*, through funding and through previous experiences of collaboration. Certainly, funding was an incentive in both phases of this research. And additionally, the primary networking experiences of PSLN participants strengthened their position in networking through understanding 'how to network'.

The two negative contextual variables noted by Woods *et al* (2006) – that of *prior competition and hierarchies* between DP schools, and *geographical constraints* for schools within the DPs - were not raised as particular issues by the primary school networks involved in this research. Although there had been previous competition particularly between the schools in the West Midlands authority due to funding allocations, this was not noted as an ongoing issue at the time of the research. One explanation might be that, historically, secondary schools have an embedded culture of competition and are driven by market forces

to ensure their survival in a climate of parental choice. Primary schools, on the other hand, are more likely to serve an immediate local community and feel somewhat less competitive pressure than their secondary school colleagues.

Additionally, the geographical constraints noted by Woods *et al* (2006) were not raised as an issue in this research. A possible explanation may have been that the schools in both the NLC initiative and the PSLN initiative were self selecting and had chosen to work with schools which were in close geographical proximity.

Along with contextual variables, Woods *et al* (2006) also noted a number of *organisational variables* which constituted the way in which DPs were run and managed. These were *social integration* including trust and group/area identity, *internal control* and ownership of the DP's agenda, *sustained capacity* enhanced by a strong infrastructure, *flexibility and capacity* within the DP schools, *strategic vision* that was collectively owned, and *engagement of interests* - that is to say the needs of individual schools being acknowledged and met by the DP.

Many of these organisational variables were noted in this research, and three that were of particular concern in the primary school networks studied were those of *internal control, strategic vision and engagement of interests*. Issues concerning these three were inextricably linked to the models of networking put forward by the Government and promoted by the NCSL. In the PSLN initiative, the aims and expected outcomes were prescribed by Central Government. Although participating schools could to some extent shape the processes by which they met the aims, nevertheless the priorities of raising standards in literacy and numeracy were Government driven and non-negotiable. So, engagement of interests and

opportunities for the PSLNs to have a strategic vision of their own were limited by this imposed model of networking. In the NLC networks, the cumulative pressures of 'top down' bureaucracy impacted on ownership, engagement and strategic vision. In this respect, the participating schools were being asked to implement someone else's agenda – a characteristic of educational reform that should be avoided (Fullan, 2000).

To summarise, both the contextual and organisational variables noted by Woods *et al* (2006), along with the additional resources that the DP initiative brought with it in terms of *funding*, *teacher time* to engage in networking, and what Woods *et al* (2006) describe as *leverage and synergy* – that is to say the collaborative's capacity to sustain itself and make effective use of funding - are seen as key factors that influenced the success of these secondary school collaboratives, thus the <u>requirements</u> for successful collaboration.

Woods *et al* (2006) also go on to note that these variables interact with one another and produce outcomes in terms of *professional processes*, *diversification*, *provision* and ultimate *educational effects*. – thus the <u>benefits</u> of successful collaboration. Many of these benefits - apart from diversification, which was a specific focus of DP initiative - were also noted in both phases of this research into the two primary school networking initiatives and are summarised in table iii on page 62.

Requirements for successful networks

To return to what is suggested in the literature for networks to have more success in functioning effectively, there are a number of key elements required including clear

objectives; trust; time given for networking opportunities; agreed systems and structures; and clear exit routes. Other conditions that provide 'fertile ground' for networks include the quality of existing professional relationships within the school alongside the stability and capacity of the staff; the LA context and the political relations within the community; suitable incentives within and between organisations; and the quality of the leadership. Many of these conditions may range from "minimal threshold to robust" (Little and Veugelers, 2005, p 279) and the range in itself impacts on the quality and the success of the network.

It is important to note, however, that a cautious approach needs to be taken to any findings on the requirements for successful networking, as it should not be considered that certain requirements will always ensure success in terms of certain benefits. Pawson (2006) warns against assuming any one set of criteria that work in all circumstances and argues the importance of considering all the features that explain just how interventions such as the PSLN initiative work or do not as the case may be when reviewing the evidence. Additionally, Arnold (2005) recommends keeping "under constant review what is proving successful and what is not" (p 21) in any ongoing evaluation of a new initiative. These two elements of a realistic approach to research evaluation are considered more fully in the conclusions and recommendations to this research in Chapter 6.

The requirements suggested in the literature to ensure sustainable and successful networks are now discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Clear objectives

The notion of clear objectives (Glatter, 2003) is seen as important and interpreted with varying terminology such as 'clear focus' (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992); 'a shared vision and sense of purpose' (Stoll *et al*, 2006); 'common purpose' (DfES, 2004a); and 'matched organisational goals' (Mullen and Kochen, 2000). Additionally, Mullen and Kochen's (2000) research shows that matched organisational goals are one of the key initial motivators for members joining the network or 'coalition' in their study. With regard to a 'common purpose' (DfES, 2004a) leading to clear goals, it is worth noting that the PSLN initiative is very consistent in its message to newly forming networks applying for funding, that a main criteria for selection is for groups of schools to have a shared 'compelling idea' (DfES, 2004a), based on a clear pupil learning focus. However, in stipulating the need for a shared common focus specifically on raising standards in literacy and mathematics (DfES, 2004a), one might argue that a 'top down' central Government control mechanism has been maintained within Primary Strategy Learning Networks.

Trust

Trust is an important requirement for the success of a network (Glatter, 2003) and a framework of three consecutive phases in the life of a network, those of preconditions, process and outcomes (Connolly *et al,* 2000) highlights trust as a key precondition. Trust is also an important component if a network is to achieve success, as the key players must feel confident to take risks in a mutually supportive environment (Day and Hadfield, 2005). However, the paradox of simultaneously competing and collaborating in an education market place causes tensions and conflicts, the most obvious of which is the attempt to create a

climate of professional trust within a competitive environment (Connolly and James, 2006). Additionally, competing climates not only exist between schools, but also exist within schools (Little and Veugelers, 2005), another complex issue for networks to address if they are to be effective. Trust is a key element to successful networking (Stoll *et al*, 2006). It is enhanced through colleagueship (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992), that is to say a working relationship with colleagues involving "active listening and negotiation" (p 675). Within this, the social aspect of networking should not be undervalued as it is an important element of developing trust amongst groups of teachers (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992), but crucially networks have to be allowed to grow gradually in order to enable an atmosphere of professional confidence and trust to develop (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 1998). The PSLN initiative outlines this basic principle of developing professional trust and confidence, but timescales imposed in the first year of the initiative are such that they do not allow for the gradual development of professional relationships. Breaking down the barriers of mutual suspicion between individuals and schools may well take longer than the Government anticipates before real network benefits can be seen.

Time

As well as the importance of time to allow for developing mutual confidence and trust within the network, there is also an issue with regard to allowing time for network activities to take place. Time is crucial to allow teachers to discuss and exchange ideas about professional issues, this being a key indicator of a learning community (Stoll *et al*, 2006). However, it needs to be acknowledged that many individuals involved in networks are also working under the pressures of their own schools' agendas (Coulton, 2006). Constraints on the time that

those below senior leadership level in school can give during the working day are, to a large extent, dictated by teaching commitments (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1992). A creative approach to organisation and allocation of time within the working day for staff to meet and talk regularly (Little and Veugelers, 2005) goes some way to alleviating such pressures.

Systems and structures

Agreement on modes of operation (Glatter, 2003) and clear network structures (DfES, 2004a) are important factors in the successful functioning of a network. Open lines of communication within the network and regular communication through a range of means (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005) encourage the bonding process and ensure network consolidation (Rué, 2005). Clear, agreed systems for decision making are crucial and shared decision making should be encouraged rather than "hierarchical decision making practices." (O' Hair *et al*, 2005, p 75). Interestingly, the paradox with regard to systems and structures is that participants are attracted to the flexibility of network structures, but continuity and sustainability often rely on clearly understood and embedded structures developed from within the network (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005). The ideal is to succeed at keeping the network 'fluid' (Veugelers and O' Hair, 2005) which acknowledges the importance of structures within a network but allows their flexible and temporary nature to accommodate pace and change in times of uncertainty.

Exit routes

Clear exit routes are important for those participating in network activities (Glatter, 2003). Individual schools need to be able to relinquish the network and, equally, those involved in the network need to be clear as to when the network will cease. Terminating partnerships when goals have been achieved can be seen as a mark of the network's success (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998), particularly as the burden of work to keep it going – including communicating with partners, attending meetings, completing documentation and other organisational demands (Rudd, 2003) - can be exhausting for key groups and individuals.

Staffing and relationships

Personal relationships between members very much dictate the success of networks (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) and the arising collaboration aspect of networking then impacts beneficially on pupil achievement (Connolly and James, 2006). Participants bring their own existing social resources with them to networking activities (Little and Veugelers, 2005) and the delicate balance of relationships and dynamics within the group is critical in the success or otherwise of the network. Group dynamics rely on a combination of personalities and their ideas, values and beliefs. How members cope with these will impact on the success and effectiveness of the group (Stoll *et al*, 2006). Achieving the right mix of individuals and "maintain[ing] a stability of membership" (p 796) are critical to the success of the network and for those involved in setting up such collaborative practices.

LA and community

Network collaboration takes place at a number of levels within the organisation – individual level, institutional level and Local Authority (LA) level (Connolly and James, 2006). The LA will be significant in terms of statutory obligations through provision of an educational service and in its school improvement role. So, examples of effective practice may be defined by the network but would need to be endorsed externally – for instance, by the Local Authority (Glatter *et al*, 2005). Indeed, LAs play a number of important roles including facilitation of networks, leadership and management, that of an advisory body to the network (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) or part of a support structure for the network. Comparisons can be drawn in this instance with Fullan's (2000) acknowledgement of *crossover structures* and their importance in supporting the implementation of large scale reforms such as the PSLN initiative. Additionally, Woods *et al* (2006) acknowledge the crucial role the LA plays as one of the "local change agents working to advocate and facilitate collaboration" (p 56).

As well as operating at different levels, network collaboration also offers a variety of incentives which are key to a school's engagement.

Incentives and reciprocity

What is evident in the literature, for example Glatter (2003) and Woods *et al* (2006) is that "human behaviour is influenced by incentives" (Woods *et al*, 2006, p 62). Suitable incentives within and between organisations are an important requirement for schools to want to network together. Individual organisations will have entered into the collaborative arrangement asking 'What's in it for us?' Equally, moral purpose and a sense of pride beg the question 'What can

we offer the network?' This encourages a partnership wherein the participants have the opportunity to both give and take (Little and Veugelers, 2005). However, this situation is reflexive and the needs of the school and the network change over time.   It is also synergetic and the network itself, as well as the participating schools, benefits and strengthens over time due to mutual contributions and support among partner organisations. This culture of 'give and take' is a crucial element in creating a successful network (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005). Schools can benefit from the experiences of others but also benefit from presenting their own experiences to others (Little and Veugelers, 2005). This can be expressed further in terms of collaboration and interdependence (Stoll *et al*, 2006). As well as being a requirement for participation in the network, this two-way process is also a benefit of networking. However, Foley and Grace (2001) acknowledge the difficulties of holding back from that which may directly benefit the individual school in order to benefit others.   But they see the term 'partnerships' purely as rhetoric if they do not serve "the common good in education" (p 11).

Leadership

Leadership is another important element for networks to function successfully, both in terms of leading the network (Connolly and James, 2006) and in terms of offering leadership opportunities to others within the network (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992).   Ribbins (2003), in building on the work of Gronn (1993) and Day and Baklioglu (1996), suggests a four phase model in the lives of headteachers as leaders. These phases are noted by the author as *formation*, *accession*, *incumbency* and *moving on.   Formation* or "the making of headteachers" (p 63) is acknowledged as the stage where the norms and values of leaders are determined by key agencies such as family, school and peers. The second phase of *accession*

is seen as the period of time in which a person achieves headship, "develops their capacity and test[s] their readiness in comparison with existing headteachers and likely rivals" (p 64). The third phase, that of *incumbency*, is further defined by Ribbins (2003) in terms of *initiation*, *development*, *autonomy* and *enchantment/disenchantment*. This, according to Ribbins (2003), leads to the fourth phase of *moving on* to divestiture or reinvention dependant on the level of enchantment or disenchantment experienced by the headteacher.

During the third phase of *incumbency* and, in particular, the periods of *development* and *autonomy*, it is argued that headteachers are more confident, self assured and able to "advocate a collegial or teamwork approach" (Ribbins, 2003, p 66).

MacBeath (2005) also researches school leadership and suggests three phases – the first being where the new headteacher "treads cautiously, observing the formal structures and formality of the school" (p 363). The second phase describes the creation of a culture that allows collaboration at all levels and involvement in decision making. The third and final phase is described as characterised by mutual trust, where the leadership "become[s] followership as the occasion demands" (p 364). In linking both these theories of leadership development (Ribbins, 2003; Macbeath, 2005) to the leadership of networks, it seems reasonable to assume that headteachers in the later stages of leadership would be more inclined to a style of leadership that allows others to share the power.

The role of one or more lead professionals, who are significant in driving the network forward, is also seen as pivotal (DfES, 2004a). These may be the formal leaders such as the 'banker' (DfES, 2004a) or the designated person handling the finances and fulfilling the role

of the communication link between LA, DfES and participating schools in the PSLN initiative. Equally, it may be the informal leaders who are empowered within the network, such as those "who have no formal power but whose knowledge and personality are significant in enabling collaboration" (Connolly and James, 2006, p 79). However, leadership can also be seen as an inhibitor of networking and this important point is explored further in this chapter.

Benefits of successful networking

Having discussed the requirements for successful networks in terms of what networks need in order to function effectively, this section now moves on to consider the benefits of networking for individual players, for participating schools and for the network itself. These are manifold, but the main benefits are discussed in this section in terms of common issues; professional development and support; mutual benefit through resources and legitimacy; and empowerment of others.

Common issues

With regard to what networks offer in order to be deemed successful by participants, one of the key benefits is the value that participants place on networking as a support mechanism when there are shared common issues. This is a particularly strong feature of small school networks (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). Although this may seem very similar to having 'clear objectives' or the 'shared goals' that were noted in the previous section, there are subtle differences. 'Common issues' are seen as the reason for networking and an added benefit for

participants gelling together as a network. 'Shared goals' or 'common purpose' is more to do with where the network is going in terms of school improvement. Hence, the first is about issues and has an element of immediacy, the second is about solutions and more long term action.

Professional development and support

Professional development and support offer both collegiality and opportunities for reflective practice (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). A varied and tailor-made approach to professional development is seen as being crucial in catering for the diverse needs of individuals and groups within networks (Stoll *et al*, 2006). These types of developmental opportunities are radically different to the broader programmes of support that have been offered to teachers by external agencies previously (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). The Primary Strategy Learning Networks guidance document (DfES, 2004a) talks of adult learning as being a major component of the PSLN initiative and also suggests a variety of approaches, leaving it to each network to design and manage its own needs-driven professional development programme through the use of internal and external expertise and resources. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) also promote the notion of networks as "discourse communities" (p 674), which encourage exchange of ideas among members. Additionally, Stoll *et a*l (2006) argue the importance of offering network members opportunities for reflection, analysis and collaborative learning with peers.

Resources

Mutual benefit can be expressed from a 'resource dependency' perspective (Connolly and James, 2006). This suggests resources in the broader sense, in terms not only of additional funding but also in a number of other ways. It can be seen in extended leadership opportunities within networks and through an enriched knowledge base or intellectual 'pool' of ideas. It can also be seen through opportunities taken for joint information sharing and training. Throughout the literature, there is great value placed on this notion of shared resources - in terms of expertise (Veugelers and Zijlstra,1998); information access and knowledge sharing (Mullen and Kochen, 2000); shared workload (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996); shared interpretation of government policies (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005); shared curriculum resources, pooled funding and value for money (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) – thus offering professional, personal and practical support for network participants. Parker's work on networks for school improvement, completed four decades ago (Parker, 1977, in Lieberman and Wood, 2002) acknowledges this "mixture of information sharing and psychological support" (p 331) as a key ingredient of networks.

Legitimacy

Mutual benefit can also be expressed from an 'institutional perspective' as offering legitimacy in terms of professional practice and school improvement (Connolly and James, 2006). There are two accepted dictionary definitions of legitimacy (Butterfield, 2002) – the first being that of "authorised or in accordance with the law" (p 432) and the second being that of "based on correct or acceptable principles of reasoning" (p 432). In interpreting Connolly and James' work, legitimacy seems to be an interrelation between the two - thus defined in terms of a

professional credibility and an accepted authority on educational practices. However, legitimacy is earned rather than bestowed. The key elements of professional dialogue, empowerment and decision making offered through networking (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992; Stoll *et al*, 2006) ensure that teachers' knowledge and opinions are valued within the network and allow them to develop professional confidence beyond the network. Thus, the credibility of the group (James, 2007) is generated through sharing knowledge and opinions which, in turn, gives strength to the corporate voice of the network. The status of the network then develops in terms of personal or positional power and ensures its legitimacy (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005) in the educational and political arena. Rutherford and Jackson (2008) also note legitimacy as a factor in their research on secondary collegiates, where membership "immediately added to a school's reputation and standing in the City" (p 7).

One could argue that the professional standing of the individuals within the group, as trained educationalists, would offer that authority or legitimacy (Connolly and James, 2006). However, lack of professional confidence – either because of the isolated nature of schools as organisations; or the recent political history of devaluing state education in general and those within the profession specifically (Bottery, 2003); or both – has led to a situation where practitioners are more used to being told what to do and how to do it as a 'top down' model rather than being trusted to use their own professional judgements. But, practitioner research opportunities within networks (DfES, 2004a) and opportunities for adult enquiry (Mullen and Kochen, 2000) improves professional confidence of the group, influences theory and practice within the group and, in turn, can be used by networks to impact on wider educational policy (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 1998) beyond the group.

Empowerment

In developing professional confidence and an ability for discourse at various levels, teachers begin to feel empowered to take on more of a leadership role in their own organisations and beyond. Networks offer opportunities for individuals to develop and refine their skills of leadership in a safe and supportive professional environment. Although networks may have formal directors, leadership opportunities are offered within collaborative working arrangements through a variety of ways (Lieberman and Wood, 2002). These include shared leadership (Harris, 2003), improved leadership skills and corporate responsibility (Mullen and Kochen, 2000; Stoll *et al*, 2006); and through support for new leadership (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). The PSLN initiative promotes this principle of distributing the leadership and empowering others (DfES, 2004a). Whether key personnel within these newly formed Primary Strategy Learning Networks fully understand the term or the implications of shared leadership and empowerment of others remains to be seen, as the research develops. What is clear in the literature is that, once the requirements for the functionality of the network are established, the benefits of networking are manifold. However, they rely on a sense of commitment, common purpose and common good.

Having considered the factors that contribute to successful networking, this review now considers the pitfalls and challenges facing those involved in networking projects such as the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative. Just as with the characteristics of successful networks, there are two types of factors that directly and negatively impact on networking: those which affect the functionality of the network so, in effect, the *inhibitors* to effective networking; and those which are perceived negatively by participants so, in effect, the *disadvantages* of networking.

Inhibitors to effective networking

Having stated the operational requirements for successful networking in the previous section, one might assume that the opposite would be true in that a network would not function effectively if any of these elements were missing. In summary, these factors were:

- clear objectives
- support and trust among partner organisations
- time given for networking opportunities
- systems and structures
- clear exit routes
- staffing and relationships
- LA context and the community
- suitable incentives within and between organisations
- quality of the leadership

Additional inhibitors to networking are described by Huxman and Vangen (2000). Although their research is focused on inter-organisational collaborations within the public sector, their findings are pertinent in this research as they argue that much of what they report is applicable in other sectors. Also, as 'collaboratives' is a general term relating to groups of people working together on a joint project (Butterfield, 2002), many of Huxman and Vangen's (2000) perceptions can be legitimately related to networks.

Huxman and Vangen (2000) suggest that collaborative groups decide to work together for collaborative advantage. That is to say in order to achieve outcomes that could not be reached by working alone. The main advantage that a collaborative has over an individual is diversity in terms of resources, knowledge and ideas. However, diversity can cause conflicts within a group (Townsley *et al*, 1998). Subsequent conflicts may arise as a result of communication barriers, structural disagreements or personal difficulties (Varney, 1989, in Townsley *et al*, 1998). Although conflict can lead to challenge and create positives opportunities for new

ideas, conflict can also become destructive when it escalates to the point at which distrust and suspicion develop (Bowditch and Buono, 1997, in Townsley *et al*, 1998). Collaboratives are also hard to manage. The work output is often less rigorous and can result in "collaborative inertia" (Huxman and Vangen, 2000, p 772). Factors leading to this include operational difficulties and difficulties in negotiating joint purpose; managing the balance of power; and managing accountability (Huxman and Vangen, 2000). Ambiguities, complexities and dynamics of the membership of a network can also impact negatively upon successful networking (Huxman and Vangen, 2000). These are summarised in the following sections.

Ambiguities

Ambiguities include factors such as members' perceptions of other members and their status; and confusion as to whether a member represents their own or their organisation's viewpoint. Indeed, one of the key challenges to effective collaboration is "overcoming personal and professional agendas" (Haeusler, 2003, p 4). Networks may find that individuals collaborate to serve their own different interests and that the needs being met by the collaboration between the schools do not necessarily match the needs of the individuals within the schools (Connolly and James, 2006). In discussing the micropolitics within educational settings, Hoyle (1982) notes that:

> … individuals and groups in organisational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests. (Hoyle, 1982, p 88)

Furthermore, education reforms produce a flow of policies at different levels (Wallace, 1998) and the competing priorities, in terms of the vast array of initiatives that schools face, create management difficulties for schools involved in networking priorities (Coulton, 2006).

Complexities

Overly complex hierarchical structures can also impact negatively on networks (Huxman and Vangen, 2000). Overlapping memberships of various other organisations as well as liaisons or loyalties to partnerships working independently of each other also make demands on schools. Therefore, the capacity to engage fully in networks is often strained (Coulton, 2006).

Dynamics

The dynamics of an organisation can also create inertia through organisations within the collaborative restructuring or individual membership changing. The transient nature of staffing can mean that time is wasted inducting new staff (Coulton, 2006) and revisiting old ground instead of moving on to new. The dynamics of the group constantly changes with recurring staff turnover. Therefore, the fragile nature in terms of sustaining internal capacity is frequently affected by movement of personnel (Day and Hadfield, 2005). A mismatch in members' agendas or changes in external agendas can also impact on group dynamics and the pace of change can be difficult for the group to keep up with (Huxman and Vangen, 2000).

Other elements that various research suggests contribute to networks being unsuccessful seem endless and can be reduced into the following key areas of power, involvement and goals:

Power	leadership	*Involvement*	ownership	*Goals*	expanding objectives
	control		cooperation		over extension
	competition		application		
	finance		mutual suspicion		
			workload		
			time restraints		

These themes are explored further in the fourth and final section of this chapter and in the conclusions at Chapter 6 to consider the key conceptual framework of power and power dynamics.

Leadership – an inhibitor to effective networking?

It is interesting to note leadership as a negative element listed above. To see leadership in terms of an inhibitor of successful networking seems somewhat contradictory. Undoubtedly, the characteristics of the network leader are critical to the network's success (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). Without sensitive and successful leadership, "networks soon become very much like the bureaucracies that they are trying to change" (p 676). Network leaders need to have vision, be flexible in their approach and comfortable working in a range of settings with a variety of different stakeholders. Such leaders also need to be at ease with ambiguity and able to recognise and develop emergent talent (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). However "English schools are by history and nature hierarchical" (MacBeath, 2005, p 357) and a 'top-down' management structure can militate against teacher autonomy and be a major impediment to the development of teacher leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2003). For headteachers, distributing the leadership implies relinquishing their role as ultimate decision maker (MacBeath, 2005). School management may seem threatened by teachers taking on leadership roles and this may also be true in network management. Support and validation of

teacher leadership needs to come from headteachers themselves and this may necessitate them becoming facilitators rather than 'top-down' managers. (Muijs and Harris, 2003).

Ribbins (2003) and MacBeath (2005) suggest phases of leadership develop over time as the leader becomes experienced and more self assured. Therefore, if school leaders come to networks already at a stage in their career in which they are at ease with 'followership', there is more chance of the leadership being distributed at all levels throughout the network. The dichotomy is that the role of primary school leadership has become more complex and challenging in recent years (Hall and Southworth, 1997), with headship needing to be "strongly concerned with organisational power, with heads being key players in their schools' power relations" (p 155). One has to question, therefore, whether the style of 'strong' leadership necessary within an individual organisation will create tensions within a networking situation, where individuals are encouraged to be seen as equal partners.

Another interesting aspect of leadership within networks is that, in order to be effective, networks need clear and simple management structures (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). But, in order to remain effective, networks tend to create complex hierarchical structures to manage the organisation. Hierarchical structures can support networks, but hierarchies can be problematic when they alter status or authority within the network or when they are used for control (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). The success of networks is very much dependent on the personal relationships between the members of the group. The complexity of those relationships and the organic nature of networking do not sit comfortably in any hierarchical structure or bureaucratic style of management introduced into the network (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996). As previously stated in Chapter 1, this theme of bureaucratic versus

organic organisations was explored in depth by Burns and Stalker (1961) and is discussed later in this chapter. Burns and Stalker (1961) focused on aspects of English and Scottish industry facing difficulties adjusting to change – an easy comparison to make with the seemingly relentless changes that the education system currently and persistently experiences.

Interestingly, the *Five Year Strategy* (DfES, 2004b) at one level acknowledges the need for primary school organisational structures that can adapt to change - therefore, seeming to support a flexible and currently fashionable approach to school organisation and leadership in order to address a number of key issues:

> … the world in which schools find themselves is turbulent and uncertain – containing forces that act in dynamic interplay with the climate of the school…. All these factors (and others) have led to a focus world-wide upon attempts at school restructuring, redesign or reengineering. (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002, p 2)

However, the dichotomy of the *Five Year Strategy* (DfES, 2004b) is that it then launches an initiative that seems to impose a structure on the ways in which primary schools should work collaboratively. This bureaucratic versus organic theme is key to the conceptual framework that underpins the research along with that of the power within and beyond networks.

Following a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of networking in table iii overleaf, this chapter moves on to discuss the notion of power structures and power dynamics.

Table iii: Advantages and disadvantages of networking – a summary

Advantages		Disadvantages	
Common issues	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Glatter, 2003 Little and Veugelers, 2005 Stoll *et al*, 2006 Woods *et al* (2006)	Lack of common purpose/ ownership/ or involvement Varying/conflicting priorities Group dynamics/power/struggles and power struggles	Townsley *et al*, 1998 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Connolly and James, 2006 Townsley *et al*, 1998 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Glatter, 2003 Day and Hadfield, 2005 Coulton, 2006
Professional development and support	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Woods *et al* (2006)		
Leadership development	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992		
Reflective practice	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992	Difficulties in negotiating joint purpose	Huxman and Vangen, 2000
Resource sharing	Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Veugelers and Zijlstra, 1998 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Lieberman and Wood, 2002 Connolly and James, 2006 Woods *et al* (2006)	Difficulties in managing accountability Lack of finance Time restraints Expanding objectives Over extension	Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Coulton, 2006
Colleagueship	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992		
Legitimacy	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005 Stoll *et al*, 2006 Connolly and James, 2006 James, 2007	Other agendas	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Haeusler, 2003 Glatter, 2003 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Connolly and James, 2006
Empowerment	Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Lieberman and Wood, 2002 Stoll *et al*, 2006	Hierarchies	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Glatter, 2003 Woods *et al* (2006)
Improved provision	Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005 Connolly and James, 2006 Woods *et al* (2006)	Instability Staleness	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998
Educational effects	Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992 Mullen and Kochen, 2000 Stoll *et al*, 2006 Woods *et al* (2006)	Management/operational difficulties Mutual suspicion Accountability versus autonomy Leadership	Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Coulton, 2006 Day and Hadfield, 2005 Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Huxman and Vangen, 2000 Muijs and Harris, 2003

Power structures and power dynamics

In considering the factors that impact on the success or otherwise of a network, the literature has revealed issues related to both *functionality* and *participant perceptions*. The next section of this chapter focuses in on functionality to further explore how networks might function successfully as organisations. There are three key texts discussed in the following section and it is important to acknowledge that all three are much earlier studies into the complexities of organisations. These texts - Weber (1927), Etzioni (1961), and Burns and Stalker (1961) - are discussed separately, compared with each other and key points drawn out to offer a better understanding of power structures within organisations and how power dynamics cause tensions that affect organisation functionality. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that the three texts discussed are also compared with and used to substantiate more recent academic papers. Where this occurs, due consideration is given to the historical context of these earlier works.

The work of Burns and Stalker (1961) is based on primary source material from studies carried out in industrial settings in England and Scotland in the 1950s and 1960s. The authors explore social structures and dynamics within organisations experiencing the need for rapid change in what was a fast growing technological age. Burns and Stalker (1961) suggest that, for an organisation to be effective, it needs to complete specific tasks and to do so it must assign parts of these tasks to specific individuals or groups. Then, in order for the parts of the tasks to join together and make the whole, collaboration is needed between the individuals and groups, each having some rights of control over the task and equally sharing some accountability to others for that task. The way in which the organisation sets this up constitutes a *management system*. Furthermore, the organisation recruits personnel or

members to fulfil activities to complete these tasks. Therefore, the management system plus these directed activities make up the *working organisation* (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Schools as educational organisations function in this way and schools within a network continue to function like this, independently from the network, in order to fulfil their core purpose. But, as the literature suggests, in order for the network to function effectively as an organisation in its own right it also needs some such management system and working organisation.

However, Burns and Stalker (1961) note that as the organisation is set up and the personnel are recruited, complexities then arise. Those recruited bring their own private purposes or agendas to the organisation and, although there is a particular commitment through contractual obligation, individuals also seek to fulfil other purposes as well as those belonging to the organisation. This ambiguity is also noted elsewhere in the literature. For example, Huxman and Vangen (2000) highlight this issue of 'representativeness' in their study on collaborations, where individual members may not necessarily be representing anything over and above their own self interest when they participate in a collaborative.

From a management point of view, the core purpose of the organisation is paramount and there will be an attempt within the management structure to mobilise human and technical resources as a means to an end. However, humans without fail resist being used as a means and they create their own structures within the formal one to achieve their own ends (Selznick, 1948 in Burns and Stalker, 1961). This *informal structure* or "social sub set observably present in organisations" (Burns and Stalker, 1961, p *xiii*) wields a significant amount of power and so control or power over the effectiveness of the organisation.

Furthermore, the commitment of individuals to the common purpose of these informal structures can be powerful enough to persist over and above the express need for the organisation to adapt to change. In later literature, the influence of both these formal and informal structures is described as the 'culture' of an organisation. For instance, in Hargreaves' (1995) typology of five school cultures, the author expresses the formal structure within an organisation as *political* or "the character and formal distribution of power, authority and status" (p 31). The informal structure suggested by Burns and Stalker (1961) is further expressed by Hargreaves (1995) as *micropolitical* or "an informal network of individuals and groups who plot, plan and act together to advance their interests" (p 31). Hoyle (1982) refers to micropolitics as an "organisational underworld" (p 87) where:

> Interests are pursued by individuals but frequently they are most effectively pursued in collaboration with others who share a common concern. (Hoyle, 1982, p 89)

Hargreaves' (1995) typology of school cultures continues with three further structures – those of maintenance and development which support stability and change: and that of service which forges social relations between the service provider and the client. The author argues that the political and micropolitical structures are permanently interlocked and exist in contest or conflict with each other. West (1999) concurs that it is "in this running together of formal and informal arrangements that micropolitics thrives" (p 192).

Hoyle (1982) argues that the politics within an organisation concerns itself with three areas of interest – personal, professional and political. These three areas, however, are inextricably linked. So, for instance, any proposed new idea or practice may be argued against by an individual from a professional standpoint if it is seen as threatening a personal interest in

terms of "autonomy, status, territory or reward" (p 88). Where interests are threatened, Hoyle (1982) suggests that those who share common concerns may form loose collaborative arrangements to influence the establishment to their own ends. West (1999) agrees and warns against a focus on developing formal 'teams' while ignoring those informal groups in schools "that can be the real determinants of what develops" (p 193). For an organisation to adapt successfully to any change, it not only needs to acknowledge and manage these situations and groups, but also to develop and encourage a certain type of management style.

Burns and Stalker (1961) suggest two types of management; *mechanistic* and *organic*. A mechanistic management system encourages a hierarchic structure of authority, control and communication with the emphasis on fulfilling the individual activity or task separate to the totality of the operation. This style is seen as appropriate in stable conditions. On the other hand, an organic management system is considered more appropriate to changing conditions. In this environment, each individual task is set in the context of the purpose of the organisation as a whole to allow for adjustment and continual re-definition of individual tasks in order to reach the organisational goal. Lateral rather than vertical directions of communication are encouraged, along with joint responsibilities. However, there is still room in organic management for a stratified system that acknowledges position or rank differentiated according to authority (Burns and Stalker, 1961). This is an important consideration within networks made up of schools with their own existing systems and hierarchical structures. It might be argued that a stratified system of management within a network would be more acceptable to those in positions of authority in their own organisations, rather than a hierarchical structure that could be viewed as disempowering individuals and individual schools within the network. Burns and Stalker (1961) also argue

that the commitment of the individual in an organic system is far more extensive than in a mechanistic system where co-operation or compliance is ensured by coercion. The development of shared beliefs, values and goals of the organisation in an organic system compensates for the loss of the more formal controlling and monitoring approach of the mechanistic system.

These two very different forms of management systems, although polarised, need not function exclusively in an organisation. Indeed, Burns and Stalker (1961) acknowledge that as an organisation moves between relative stability and relative change, it may also operate with a management system that displays elements of both mechanistic and organic styles. And although the authors suggest that each system is appropriate to a specific set of conditions, they do not conclude that either system is superior, but rather that each should be adopted for optimum effect to suit the conditions of the organisation at the time. Because of the complexities of networks (of schools), as organisations of organisations (the schools themselves), it is realistic to assume that they will exist in a climate of on-going change, turbulence and uncertainties. Changes within the member organisations, along with external pressures, will impact on the structure of a collaborative or network. Additionally, as time progresses, inevitable changes will take place to the overall purpose of the collaborative. Veugelers and O' Hair (2005) note that:

> Networks avoid formal structures by responding to the needs of participants and not to the organisation itself. Their structures are fluid and follow the interests and challenges of their members. (Veugelers and O' Hair, 2005, p 6)

Therefore, a working organisation that accepts change as the norm, along with a management system that supports and encourages change will be a more beneficial network structure than one which assumes total power and endeavours to impose total authority and control.

This thesis studies the effect of an imposed model of networking that brings with it a prescribed management set-up and agenda, in order to determine whether or not there is flexibility to promote and encourage organic networking arrangements within such a controlled system. Also, in researching the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative, the power that the dynamics of the group wield within the organisation will be an important feature to explore further in terms of personal agendas; leadership; motivation; and influence within and beyond the organisation. Motivation is identified by Burns and Stalker (1961) as the balance between satisfaction and expectation in that, if either one overtakes the other, a search for ways of improving performance occurs so that satisfaction will again match expectations. The notion of motivation is also an important one to consider in this study as it underpins the sustainability of Primary Strategy Learning Networks to continue beyond the point at which they are promoted by Local Authorities and financed through Central Government funding streams.

Etzioni (1961) is another author who studies the complexities of power and influence within organisations. In contrast to Burns and Stalker (1961), Etzioni's (1961) work derives from secondary source material as the author studies a wide variety of organisations from the early 1900s through to the 1950s and 1960s. Although dated, Etzioni's work is still relevant today and comparable to more recent studies on cultures that exist within organisations (Hargreaves, 1995) and micropolitics that play a significant part in the success or otherwise of

organisations (Hoyle, 1982). Etzioni's (1961) work is based in the US. However, his research considers other organisations worldwide, particularly with regard to military organisations and punitive institutions. Etzioni (1961) explores power within organisations and the relationships between compliance and other variables. He defines compliance as "the organisational equivalent of social order" (p xvii). At the time of his work, Etzioni (1961) believed that previous studies had concentrated on similarities in organisations, and explained differences as the exception. However, he argues that these variables are the norm. Etzioni (1961) sees power as the ability to influence another's actions to achieve one's own ends and suggests three types - *coercive power*, based on control over sanctions; *remunerative power*, based on control over rewards; and *normative power*, which seems to be a combination of the two but is more to do with persuasion and manipulation through beliefs, values and esteem. Etzioni (1961) sees organisations as using all three types of power to some degree, although emphasising or specialising in one more than the others. Furthermore, the author sees this power specialisation as critical within an organisation, arguing that an equal emphasis on two or more dominant types tends to work against or neutralise the power. French and Raven (1960) had previously put forward five forms of power. *Coercive* and *remunerative* (reward) power as acknowledged by Etzioni (1961) and, additionally, *legitimate* power or that which is invested in a role; *referent* power or the power of charisma; and *expert* power or that which derives from a specialist knowledge or expertise (French and Raven, 1960). Different types of power are explored further in the research when determining power bases and power relationships within the networks studied.

Etzioni (1961) also suggests various reasons for involvement within organisations, of which there are three. These are *alienative*, which refers to a negative approach to involvement;

moral, which demonstrates a high commitment linked to belief in the purpose of the organisation; and *calculative*, which is neither positive nor negative and suggests involvement as a means to an end. Etzioni (1961) argues that complexities within organisations are due to various combinations of the three different types of power and the three different kinds of involvement. He goes on to suggest groups of organisations that display certain combinations of power and involvement in varying degrees. So, for instance, punitive establishments such as prisons or correctional institutions demonstrate a coercive style of power and an alienative form of involvement by the inmates. Furthermore, the author suggests a continuum within his typology, arguing that the extent to which the organisation is coercive depends on its context. The more punitive an organisation, the more coercive the style and, therefore, the more alienative the involvement of the inmates. In contrast, utilitarian organisations such as industries display remunerative power through wages, promotion and the like. The workforce in turn is calculative in its involvement, seeking rewards through the way in which individuals operate. In determining where schools lie in this typology, Etzioni (1961) suggests that professional organisations display mainly normative types of power and, in these early writings, he places schools generally in the normative grouping in relation to teachers and their students. Etzioni (1961) argues that censure and deprivation are the main forms of control used to gain compliance from students. However, this seems to display a more coercive form of control than that of normative, particularly as the author notes that alienative involvement is more apparent in schools than in typical normative organisations.

There are two important points to consider here. First, it must be acknowledged that Etzioni's (1961) research is dated and although many of his findings with regard to comparative analysis of organisations still hold true today, some aspects have changed over time. The

developments in our understanding of pedagogy and the importance of a positive climate being conducive to learning, along with the growth of 'pupil voice', has significantly altered the ways in which many UK schools operate. The notion of "scolding, sarcasm, demanding apology [and] ridicule" (p 46) would not now necessarily be considered the norm as the main forms of control. The second important point of consideration is that when Etzioni (1961) groups schools, he focuses on the power, control and forms of compliance between teachers and students. However, if we primarily focus in on the workforce – that is employers in terms of headteachers and governing bodies, and employees in terms of teaching and non teaching staff - our viewpoint with regard to power and involvement changes. Here, the picture is more diverse with many primary schools operating within a remunerative/calculative mode and others still functioning as normative or coercive organisations determined by their historical contexts, governor expectations, community perceptions or leadership preferences. Therefore, other correlates come into force, which are discussed later in this chapter.

In his work, Etzioni (1961) succeeds in grouping certain types of organisations within his typology of power, involvement and their correlates (see Fig 1 on page 74). When attempting to go on to position school networks in Etzioni's (1961) typology, the network power base could be described as dominantly remunerative, with the rewards seen as the determinants for the employees in terms of organisational resources, staff benefits and pupil outcomes. The type of involvement of the players within the network might be considered as either moral and based on a shared belief in the purpose of the network, or calculative and based on a 'what's in it for me?' attitude of individual players or schools. However, the difficulty with attempting to position networks within Etzioni's (1961) typology lies in the structure of schools as already existing organisations (the schools themselves) within organisations (of networks).

This creates additional complexities. The dominant power base within one school may be coercive and the involvement of the staff within the school may in turn be alienative, as opposed to another school operating within a remunerative/calculative framework. So, individuals and schools will come to networks with their own variants in terms of power and involvement. Interestingly noted in the literature is that, in periods of a strong 'top down' movement, the strategy of a network is more defensive (Veugelers and Zijlstra, 2005) or alienative. It will be important to consider Etzioni's (1961) typology further in this thesis when studying schools involved in the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative and exploring different types of power bases and involvement, and their impact on the overall success of the PSLN initiative.

Etzioni (1961) also suggests other correlates that come into play when analysing complex organisations. These include *goals*; *elites*; *cultural integration*; *organisational environment* and *charisma*. *Goals* are defined as the image of the future that the organisation is attempting to realise. Etzioni (1961) suggests goals of order, culture and economics and he sees political goals as falling into all three categories. Just as the author links types of involvement to power structures within organisations, so he correlates different types of goals as more or less typical within certain compliance structures. The author sees schools as having mainly cultural goals, whereby the cultural heritage is passed from generation to generation through the teaching, and this is still arguably true today. Etzioni (1961) also discusses *elites* as the groups within an organisation that wield the power. He sees these as either *officers* who have positional power; *informal leaders* who have personal power; or *formal leaders* who have both types of power. Again, Etzioni (1961) links these three types of elites to different groups of organisations and, again, the tensions between formal and informal leaders will be crucial

within this study. The author also explores *cultural integration* in terms of cultural systems or held values and beliefs and the extent to which participants 'buy into' these. Furthermore, socialisation into this cultural system is defined by Etzioni (1961) as the way in which new participants are integrated into the culture. Once again, these cultural processes are seen as inextricably linked to organisation types. Therefore, if we consider networks to be generally remunerative, it should follow that the communication systems within networks are expressive and used to reinforce the values of the organisation. The author also notes that recruitment within the *organisational environment* is determined by organisation types. For instance, selectivity is an important aspect of remunerative organisations and would therefore be an important feature of networks. Etzioni (1961) also considers scope and pervasiveness in organisations, the former being the extent to which participants share activities and the latter being the range of activities made available within and outside the organisation. Scope and pervasiveness and ways in which the organisation relates with its social environment are again determined by the type of organisation and one would anticipate this being a key feature of networks. *Charisma* is also defined by Etzioni (1961), both in terms of natural charisma and of invested or conferred charisma. It is explained as the diffuse influence of an individual over others and he defines this as either personal charisma generated by natural leaders or routinised charisma generated by an individual's special knowledge, skills or organisational rank.

And so Etzioni (1961) succeeds in producing a 'toolkit' for understanding the complexities that make up various types of organisations, and which allows them to function successfully or otherwise. This typology has been adapted by the author of this thesis and is presented in Fig 1 (on page 74) as a series of interconnecting wheels that, when arranged in one sequence,

represent one group of organisations and their complexities. But when arranged differently represent another group, thus creating a kaleidoscope of power; responses through involvement; and other contributory factors that influence organisational functionality.

Fig 1 – Power, involvement and other correlates

Coercive power

Alienative involvement

Order goals

Calculative involvement

Formal leaders

Cultural integration

Officer elites

Natural charisma

Organisational environment

Invested charisma

Normative power

Cultural goals

Cultural integration

Informal leaders

Economic goals

Remunerative power

Moral involvement

adapted from Etzioni (1961)

Additionally if we consider Etzioni's (1961) typology alongside the work of Burns and Stalker (1961), we begin to see comparisons in both these earlier studies that inform our understanding of power within organisations today. Compliance is seen by Etzioni (1961) as the power of control over subordinates related to their response to the power, and he suggests formal leaders as having positional power within the structure. This compares to the formal management structures within organisations that Burns and Stalker (1961) discuss, whereas

the informal structures or sub-cultures that these authors go on to explain compare with Etzioni's (1961) suggestion of informal leaders who wield personal power in organisations and their involvement with other power bases therein.

The works of both Burns and Stalker (1961) and Etzioni (1961) derive from a much earlier literature and their key ideas are developed from those of well respected social theorists including Durkheim (1933), Weber (1927) and Selznick (1943). Weber's work demonstrates not only his criticism of bureaucratised organisations but also his acknowledgement of "ambiguity as fundamental to the human condition and its manifold social constructions" (Samier, 2002, p 27). In his highly regarded and systematic study of bureaucracy, Weber (1927) makes a clear distinction between power and authority. Weber (1927) explains power in a social relationship as one party's ability to impose their own will on the other regardless of the other's resistance. Authority, on the other hand, is defined by the author where the first party is accepted as having the legitimacy to impose their will because of their organisational position or rank. Weber's interpretations of power and authority are still reflected in many writers' work today. Heywood (2000), for instance, alludes to this in suggesting that "whereas power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others, authority is the right to do so" (p 15). And Dowding (1996) argues two concepts of power – outcomes power or the power to do something, and social power or the power over someone to do something. Gunter (2004b) elaborates that 'power to' assumes cooperation, whereas 'power over' suggests possible conflict.

For the purpose of this research, the term *power* is used in a more general way to describe different types of formal and informal control, whereas the Weberian definition of the term

authority as a bestowed right is acknowledged and used by the researcher. More precise definitions for power, authority, influence and legitimacy as used in this research are explained more fully in Chapter 6.

To return to authority, Weber (1927, in Merton *et al*, 1952) divides *legitimate authority* into three categories – *charismatic*, *traditional* and *legal rational*. If we understand personal charisma as based on the special and sometimes 'magical' qualities of an individual, then we can relate to Weber's (1927, in Merton *et al*, 1952) argument that charismatic authority in its purist form is unsustainable in an organisation as it relies too much on the individual leader. Traditional authority, the author argues exists through traditional rules and hereditary claims. Thus, the monarchy and other long standing establishments would be seen in terms of having traditional authority. Legal rational authority is seen by the author as having an established, agreed code of practice within which the authority functions and the selection of the individual in authority is based on the skills and qualifications held or through election. Weber (1927) argues that it is this legal rational approach to authority within an organisation that necessitates the creation of bureaucratic structures and systems based on hierarchies of office, rules of authority and codes of conduct (Kelly, 1980). Weber (1927) offers a detailed analysis of bureaucratic structures and systems, concluding that:

> … the bureaucratic machine will ordinarily continue to operate essentially unchanged even in the face of revolutionary changes in society. (Merton *et al*, 1952, p 18)

In studying power within networks and the power of networks, an interesting feature will be the *legitimate authority* of individuals and groups, and the structures and systems set up by the network to support these. This takes us back to the work of Connolly and James (2006) as

discussed earlier in this chapter. And a feature that will be expanded upon in this thesis will be the power 'in' networks and the power 'of' networks. As networks are organisations made up of already existing organisations (the schools themselves) and established leaders (the headteachers) within each organisation, one area to be explored will be the important role played by power dynamics and micropolitics within networks. Another area for exploration will be the power of networks and their legitimacy in the educational and political arena.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a review of the literature in order to address two research questions. In exploring the question - What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform? - the literature has revealed a number of models for managing change and dealing with the complexities of large scale educational reform. It has also revealed that well managed, centrally directed reform can be beneficial to kick start an initiative. But it has warned against too prescriptive a model for sustainable reform.

In exploring the question - What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent has this informed the PSLN initiative? - the literature has revealed two things – first, there are a number of factors that are key for networks to function successfully and second, there are a number of commonly acknowledged benefits and disadvantages of schools networking together. These are summarised in table iii (on page 61). The critical factor that impacts on both benefits and disadvantages is power. This manifests itself in terms of authority (Etzioni, 1961), influence (Hoyle, 1999) and legitimacy (Connolly and James, 2006).

This thesis now moves on to explore these issues further through research into the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative over the course of its first year within one local education authority. Therefore, the findings from the literature offer a sound theoretical knowledge base on which to explore the further key research questions - What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of one particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward? and - Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative?

The design for the research which addresses these key questions is explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This thesis lies predominantly in the qualitative paradigm:

> Qualitative approaches are often associated with research which is carried out in an interpretive frame in which the concern is with the production of meaning. Quantitative methods are, correspondingly, associated with positivist forms of enquiry which are concerned with the search for facts. (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p 82)

However, these polarised views of research very often do not exist in reality and many qualitative studies include quantifiable measures. Brown and Dowling (1998) warn against any one sole approach and express concern over "naïve empiricism" (p 83) – a belief that the method itself will guarantee the quality of the work. A dual approach to data analysis can help overcome this, as:

> The qualitative imagination will tend to demand that quantitative analysis explains itself in terms of the non-statistical concepts that it is claiming to measure. The quantitative imagination will demand a degree of precision in definition that qualitative work may slide away from. … the best option will always be for a dialogical use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p 83)

The reader will note examples of both qualitative and quantitative approaches used to complement each other within the research design of this thesis - *qualitative*, in that rich data

were gathered on primary school networking through the perceptions of those immersed in two Government promoted national networking initiatives; *quantitative*, in that the data were also analysed using counting, coding and tagging techniques to determine relevance when considering arising themes.

The key research questions in this thesis were addressed in three specific ways – through:

- a review of the current literature on large scale change, educational reform and school networks

- a small scale study of a network of heads in seven primary schools involved in a National College for School Leadership (NCSL) *Networked Learning Community* (NLC) based in the West Midlands (also used for piloting the main research)

- a main study of a network of heads in twelve primary schools involved in the *Primary Strategy Learning Networks* (PSLN) initiative based in one London authority.

Each of these three areas of study addressed one or more of the research questions described in Chapter 1 and displayed in table iv below:

Table iv: The Key Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	SMALL SCALE STUDY	LARGE SCALE STUDY
What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform?	√		
What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of successful networks and to what extent has this informed the new PSLN initiative?	√	√	
What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward?		√	√
Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative?			√

It is important to note that question 3 was answered in the main by the empirical research into PSLNs in Phase 2 of the research. However, the findings were triangulated from information accessed in Phase 1 of the research.

Addressing the questions in this way led to progressive focusing – a process which dealt with each research question in turn and used a layered approach, thus exploring key questions in different ways. This approach also offered opportunities for methodological triangulation within the research to "enhance the validity of the data" (Denscombe, 2003, p 133).

In comparing the findings from the small scale study and the main study in this thesis, the NLC initiative is referred to as *Phase 1* and the PSLN initiative as *Phase 2* of the research. Phase 1 field work was undertaken in Autumn 2004. Phase 2 field work was undertaken from Autumn 2005 to Summer 2006.

Wider Frameworks

Hartley (2007) in interpreting Habermas (1971) describes a typology of the kinds of knowledge that the researcher may seek. This may emanate from a *technical* interest, a *practical* interest or an *emancipatory* interest. Hartley (2007) further argues that, as a *technical* interest focuses on tasks, it requires an empirical and analytical mode of enquiry. In studying network initiatives for this research, there was a focus on how networks functioned, which relied on this type of enquiry.

However, Hartley (2007) also explains how a researcher with a *practical* interest focuses on understanding , thus favouring an interpretive mode of enquiry. In determining why networks worked in certain contexts and not in others, and why and how group dynamics and power relationships impacted on network success and sustainability, it was also necessary to consider an interpretive approach to this research.

The third type of interest a researcher may have, according to Hartley (2007, after Habermas, 1971), is *emancipatory* and concerned with power. It is the type of research that has the intention to emancipate and, therefore, requires subsequent action.

The researcher, in considering Habermas' (1971) typology, acknowledges both a *technical* and a *practical* interest in this research.

Ribbins and Gunter (2002) also identify research within a theoretical framework. Their model suggests five key 'knowledge domains' – *conceptual, evaluative, humanistic, critical* and *instrumental.* In attempting to place this research within their wider framework, again it is unlikely that it sits purely within any one domain. Certainly, the definition given of the *evaluative* domain suggests a reasonably good fit in that:

> In the broadest sense it may be taken to mean any research that seeks to abstract and measure the impact in this case of leadership and its effectiveness at micro, macro and meso levels of social interaction. In a narrower sense it can be thought of as having a special concern for measuring effectiveness and the conditions for improvement. (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p 375)

This reflects the purpose of the research in its attempts to analyse the effectiveness of the PSLN initiative on raising standards at school level; building capacity for leadership at network level; and impacting on a cultural shift in primary school leadership at national level.

However, Ribbins and Gunter's (2002) definition of *instrumental* research is also relevant in that:

> It seeks to provide leaders and others with effective strategies and tactics to deliver organizational and system level goals. … At its best, such research can offer helpful practical assistance about what works and what does not work. (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p 376)

This sits well with an overall aim that the resulting findings from this research will inform the future of the PSLN initiative both locally and nationally, and contribute to the on-going wider educational debate on large scale reform.

Philosophical Approach

In order to understand the chosen design of this research in terms of methodology and method, it is first necessary to explain the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance. Simplistically defined, ontology focuses on the reality we seek to know and epistemology focuses on knowledge. Potter (2000) explains ontology as:

> … the enquiry into the nature of being of existence … the nature of what sorts of entities could be said to exist (Potter, 2000, p 242)

Additionally, he defines epistemology as:

> Theories of what knowledge is, what it is possible to have knowledge of at all etc. Epistemology asks … What is the source of knowledge? What does it mean to say we know something? What criteria should be used to judge something as being knowledge? (Potter, 2000, p 234)

The knowledge sought in this research is something that the researcher could only study by seeing the world from the perspective of primary school network participants. Therefore, the epistemological position relies on an interactive link between the researcher and those participants (Mertons, 1998). To a large extent, this position determines an epistemological stance based on experience and insight, normally researched using qualitative data. This requires an interpretive approach and one that Cohen *et al* (2000) suggest as appropriate for investigating the 'taken for granted'. In order to address the key questions in this research, it was necessary to gather and interpret data derived from the perceptions of those participants. Therefore, the ontological stance in this research is that reality and truth are defined as the product of individuals' perceptions and the assumptions are those of socially constructed realities (Mertons, 1998). The focus of this research relies on interpreting these thoughts, ideas and feelings in order for themes to develop and theories to emerge. However, as discussed earlier, a polarisation of approach is not always productive (Brown and Dowling, 1998; McQueen and Knusson, 2002). The positivist approach seeks measurable, definable data and attempts to restrict researcher bias so that the research stands up to peer scrutiny. In doing so, the positivist attempts an objective view, taking the stance of an outsider in the research (Oakley, 2000). If positivism is what can be observed and measured in an objective way, the post-positivist acknowledges that objectivity should be sought but can never be perfectly achieved (Trochim, 2006a). The reader of this thesis, therefore, will note some blurring of the edges between interpretivism and a more post-positivist approach, where researcher objectivity is sought and some quantitative techniques used in the data analysis (Oakley, 2000).

Research Strategy

The research strategy is phenomenological, as this generally deals with perceptions or meanings and principally with human experiences (Denscombe, 2003). Denscombe suggests two types of phenomenological approaches to research: a European version which delves deeply into the fundamental aspects of particular human experiences and a North American version which relies more on human interpretation of those experiences. This research tended towards the North American interpretation of a phenomenological approach, in that the researcher's interests were in the perceptions of the participants rather than the 'essence' of networking and of the experience itself.

Methodology and methods

In considering methodology and method, Cohen *et al* (2000) define the difference:

> If methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering, the aim of methodology then is … to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself. (Cohen *et al*, 2000, pp 42-43)

The methodological approach for both phases of this research was a survey. Although surveys are normally associated with large scale quantitative research, they also lend themselves to small scale qualitative research projects (Denscombe, 2003). The method for gathering the data in both phases was through semi-structured interviews. Other methods of data collection were considered before deciding upon semi-structured interviews. These included focus group interviews and questionnaires. These considerations are now discussed in the following sections.

Focus groups

Focus groups are normally small groups of people brought together to explore ideas, attitudes and perceptions about a topic (Denscombe, 2003). The focus group method was considered for this research as the network leaders were small groups of key stakeholders and ideal groups to consider interviewing in this way. The advantages of holding focus group interviews would have been, first of all, efficiency of time management. It might also have seemed less daunting for participants to respond as a group rather than in individual interviews. However, the main disadvantage of focus group interviews in this research would have been that participants were being asked to divulge their opinions on the positives and negatives of networking with other headteacher colleagues and other schools represented within the groups. Consideration always needs to be given to support for vulnerable members of a group (McQueen and Knusson, 2002). Individuals put in this situation may not have felt able to respond candidly about the various roles or the impact of certain individuals in the network if their colleagues had been present and McQueen and Knusson (2002) note that particpants' responses "will be affected by the presence of others" (p 209). Less forceful members of the group may not have had their opinions recorded if a focus group interview had been used.

The issue of an effective way of gathering and recording the data in a focus group situation was also considered, along with the issue of documentating data to allow identification of individuals (Flick, 2002). But, in this particular research, the disadvantages of the focus group method seemed to outweigh the advantages.

Questionnaires

Distributing a questionnaire was another method considered for gathering the data from the headteacher participants in networks:

> Well-constructed questionnaire-based research - be it an experiment, an observation study or a survey – can demonstrate relationships, explore differences and test hypotheses; in some respects it acts as an amalgam of observational and experimental approaches, with responses to questions serving as observations across a wide range of individuals. (McQueen and Knusson, 2002, p 14)

Denscombe (2003) notes some appropriate contexts for using questionnaires including:

- when used with large numbers
- when gathering straightforward information
- when the social climate is open
- when there is a need for standardised data
- when time allows for delays
- when resources allow for costs
- when levels of literacy can be assumed   (adapted from Denscombe, 2003, p 145)

The main disadvantage with using this method for this research was felt to be the limited data that it would produce in terms of participants' perceptions of various aspects of networking. Whereas individual face to face interviews were felt to offer a considerably greater amount of rich, in depth quality data on which to base the researcher's findings. Also, questionnaires arrive in school in many and varied forms and are an irritatingly regular occurrence. It was felt that the success rate of completion would be far greater with face-to-face interviews than with a questionnaire, one of the disadvantages found to be a low percentage of returns (Cohen *et al*, 2000).   Questionnaires can also be a source of "unintentional bias" (Brown and Dowling, 1994, p 68) as a lack of response could be due to the particular topic of research.

Semi-structured interviews

The choice of face-to-face interviews available to the researcher may take the form of structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews, although the term 'unstructured' is misleading as there can be no such thing as interviews without any structure whatsoever (Brown and Dowling, 1998) as the researcher will always have some agenda.

The format of an interview can be as structured as a scripted questionnaire, the advantage over a postal questionnaire being the opportunity for immediate clarification by the researcher. Or it can be as unstructured as a conversation with open questions and a loose set of guidelines for the interviewer. Clearly, a semi-structured interview falls somewhere between these two possibilities and relies on the researcher gauging the balance between the openness of the questions and the focus and order of the topics to be explored (Denscombe, 2003). Individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for this research as they offered a reliable data gathering method from individuals in an informal and unobtrusive environment, with an assurance of confidentiality. Clearly, semi-structured interviews also seemed the most reasonable method to yield the answers required to the questions posed in this research.

Range of analyses

In qualitative research, as with all research, there is a range of possible analyses available for the researcher to use in analysing and interpreting data. Consideration was given to a number of these in both phases of the research.

Narrative analysis

In *narrative analysis* the text, written or verbal, is studied as a whole and not compartmentalised in terms of responses to individual questions. The focus is on exploring narrative threads alongside analysing the structure of the narrative. The pace and texture of the narrative is also studied; the speed at which the story is retold; and with what amount of elaborate detail. The context of the narrative is explored and the extent to which a similar story might be told in a similar situation. Narrative analysis tends to be used in biographical research (Flick, 2002), but equally could have been chosen in this research to consider individual interviews in their entirety as potential narratives. This was a possibility, particularly in the first phase of the research, as the four questions posed in the interviews were sequential in terms of time and lent themselves to the interviewee 'telling a story' as such, from the beginnings of informally networking with colleagues; through a formal process of bidding for network status; to a position of experience as a Networked Learning Community. This aligns with the notion that "the simplest definition of 'narrative' is written history as a story, a sequence of events" (Watts, 2005, p 2).

Henderson (2005) warns against using this type of analysis unless the researcher is familiar with language practices and structures. Another consideration was that the structure of the narrative in the first set of interviews of Phase 1 of the research had been more or less predetermined by the sequential nature of the questioning which formed a narrative in themselves. Therefore, this type of analysis was not considered appropriate for the research.

Discourse analysis

If narrative analysis is defined as analysing what someone has said or the story they have told, then *discourse analysis* could be defined as analysing how the story was produced. The emphasis here is on discourse as social practice:

> … discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relations between people and groups of people. … (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, in Titscher *et al*, 2000, p 26)

The questions for the researcher in discourse analysis are why the interviewee decided on the particular story chosen at that particular point in time and for what purpose and audience. Thus "the things that we learn and how the story is constructed will depend on audience and other contexts" (Henderson, 2005, p 5). Therefore, discourse analysis concentrates on studying narratives in context and, to a large extent, 'reading between the lines' of what the narrator is telling the listener. In this type of analysis, there also needs to be an acknowledgement that not everything in a story told will be fact and that some inclusions may be there for their symbolic reference. An additional skill of the researcher in discourse analysis is in recognising symbolism within the text and interpreting it using the contextual clues given by the narrator. Discourse analysis was discounted in this research, as the interest was in the themes arising from the narrative, rather than the reasons for the narrative.

Grounded Theory Analysis

Another method of analysing interview transcripts is a *grounded theory* approach. This method originated from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and although there are now a

number of variants certain criteria are constant (Denscombe, 2003).   Denscombe (2003) also notes that grounded theory is generally used in large scale research as it works towards generalisability and, therefore, determines research in large population fields. It is text based and emergent. It is also best used in a professional context where the practitioner has a notion about the client, but a suspicion that the notion is not right. As the focus in grounded theory is the generation of hypotheses from the data, coding is central to the analysis of the data. The emerging themes are analysed as summative statements from different stories by this method. (Henderson, 2005).   The grounded theory approach necessitates continuous field work throughout the research in order to pursue and refine emerging themes:

> Concepts and theories are developed out of the data through a persistent process of comparing the ideas with the existing data, and improving the emerging concepts and theories by checking them against new data collected specifically for the purpose.
>
> (Denscombe, 2003, p 111)

One could arguably define the grounded theory approach as a mixture of discourse and thematic analysis, where the story and its context are important to the researcher, but where the theory is developed from the emerging themes. Denscombe (2003) discusses grounded theory as a strategy for social research and suggests that five criteria are necessary for the research to be grounded. These are:

- Theories should be 'grounded' in empirical research
- Theories should be generated by a systematic analysis of the data
- Theories should be useful at a practical level and meaningful to those on the ground
- The selection of people, instances etc. to be included in the research reflects the developing nature of the theory and cannot be predicted at the start
- Researchers should start with an 'open-mind'

(adapted from Denscombe, 2003, pp 110-112)

Grounded theory analysis attempts to produce a 'scientific' approach to research in the social sciences and a more rigorous approach to the truth. It was recognised that this research fulfilled the first three criteria for grounded theory as stated by Denscombe (2003), in that the theories were grounded in empirical research; were generated by systematic data analysis; and would be practically useful to those educationalists involved in developing school networks. With regard to the remaining two criteria, the selection of people within this research was dictated by the purpose. It did not arise as the research progressed as it was crucial to focus on key stakeholders already involved in networks to gather the relevant data. Also, every opportunity was taken to limit the effect of researcher bias, where considered to be problematic or impacting on open-mindedness. This research is not presented as grounded theory as it does not fulfil all the criteria. However, it is acknowledged that there are elements of a grounded theory approach to the analysis of the data.

Content analysis

Content analysis identifies themes and patterns through the study of documents or other forms of written communication (Holloway, 1997) and is useful when attempting to *quantify* the contents of text (Denscombe, 2003). It involves breaking the text down into small units, coding relevant words and/or sentences and counting frequency. (Denscombe, 2003) One of the limitations of this type of analysis is that the overarching themes can get lost in the breaking down or compartmentalising of smaller units of texts and Denscombe (2003) suggests that:

> Content analysis is at its best when dealing with aspects of communication which tend to be more straightforward, obvious and simple. (Denscombe, 2003, p 222)

The concern in this research was that the underlying themes that were being sought out would become less apparent through quantitative content analysis.

Conversation analysis

Whereas content analysis involves a detailed breakdown of text focusing in on the frequency of words, sentences and hesitations, *conversation analysis* breaks down the structures of the speech within the text. The principle behind this type of analysis is that in order to perceive the basic units of human interactions and speech, it is first necessary to break down the parts. This particular form of analysis requires such detailed breakdowns as "a record of the duration of hesitations between utterances" (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p76). Holloway (1997) defines the similarity between discourse and conversation analysis as both focusing on language and text, and the difference being that discourse analysis "considers the broader context" (p 45), whereas conversation analysis "emphasises turn-taking and explains the deeper sense of interaction in which people are engaged" (p 45). This research was not concerned with forms of interaction and the intricacies of speech, but focused rather on the themes and ideas arising from responses to the key research questions.

Thematic analysis

Both *thematic analysis* and *content analysis* are similar in approach. However, Holloway (1997) sees thematic analysis as the identification of "themes and patterns in interviews through listening to tapes and reading transcripts" (p 152) – in effect, an analysis that searches for the threads of ideas that arise from these texts, rather than the study of documentation

which is the focus in content analysis. One might argue that all qualitative studies include some form of thematic analysis through a search for patterns, groups or categories of arising themes. The intention in this research was to gather the perceptions, thoughts and ideas of individuals involved in networking initiatives, explore arising themes and hypothesise on the benefits and disadvantages of imposed models of networking for driving forward educational reforms. Thematic analysis lent itself to a search for relevant arising themes. Additionally, in thematic analysis, the researcher moves back and forth from the source material to continually check for theme relevance and arranges the findings to determine "thematic significance" (Holloway, 1997, p 152). Thematic analysis in this thesis offered the researcher opportunities to continually sift through a rich source of data, synthesise tagged categories into arising themes and revisit the dataset to confirm findings. Therefore, after considering all reasonable approaches to analysing data, the researcher decided in favour of thematic analysis of the interviews scripts from the field work.

As there are two distinct and separate research areas in this thesis – a small scale study of a Networked Learning Community in the West Midlands (Phase 1) and the main study of a Primary Strategy Learning Network in a London authority (Phase 2) – this chapter now moves on to detail the data gathering, interview processes and data analysis techniques for each in turn. Also, as the NLC research was used to pilot the PSLN research, the first smaller scale study informed the methodological approach to the main study and adaptations made to Phase 2 of the research are discussed in the following sections.

Data gathering – phase 1 of the research

In the field work for this phase which took place in Autumn 2004, interviews were conducted with seven headteacher members of a Networked Learning Community. The form of the interviews was semi structured and each lasted approximately half an hour. All seven interviews were based on four questions about the benefits and disadvantages of networking generally and, more specifically, involvement in the NLC (see appendix viii). In conducting the interviews at this pilot stage, several good practice tips were taken into consideration from Denscombe (2003) as follows.

Note taking

Although the interviews were being taped, brief notes were also taken by the researcher at the same time. This helped to distract from the intrusive nature of the tape recorder. However, where the content of the interview was sensitive in nature, participant comments indicated a reticence due to the presence of the tape recorder:

> Interviewee) I can't focus with that tape! … I think the disadvantages... I just
> feel ... I'm wary of the tape …

A small number of interviewees throughout the research also needed reassurance that their taped responses would not be shared with their colleagues, in spite of a clear message of confidentiality being given at the outset.

Summarising

The note taking exercise also offered the researcher opportunities to summarise after each question. This was of particular value when responses had been complex, long winded or muddled. Summarising also offered opportunities for the interviewee to agree or disagree with what had been understood by the researcher; to adapt or amend any given responses; and to offer clarification or additional information. In the case of nervous participants, it also offered opportunities to have perceived feelings voiced in order to agree or disagree:

> Interviewer)   So when we say, as a network, we are developing distributed
>   leadership, is that just cosmetic?

> Interviewee)   Yes, in my opinion. And I mean, it hurts to say that but you want me to
>   be honest? I think it is.

However, it is acknowledged that there needs to be a clear distinction between summarizing and 'leading' the interviewee.

Permission to continue

A strategy was also adopted at the end of the discussion around each of the set questions of asking the interviewee if they were happy to move on to the next area of questioning, if they had anything else to add and if they felt they had answered the question sufficiently for their needs:

> Interviewer)   Are you happy that you have covered the positive aspects?
>   We'll move on? Have you anything else to add to that?

> Interviewee)   I think one of the main things from my point of view was, being a small
>   school, I can see how much individual staff members have grown
>   within their own group and the confidence it's given them.

In this way, interviewees had an opportunity to reflect on the responses given so far and add any further information that had been omitted.

Interview probes and prompts

Although the interview format was semi-structured, additional questions were posed in individual interviews in order to probe further on certain answers given. Posing additional sub questions was felt to be an appropriate strategy, as the research was fundamentally being carried out to 'discover' something and not merely to gather information (Denscombe, 2003). There was, however, a need to be aware of a possible conflict between additional probing questions to tease out new information and any doggedness to draw out ideas and perceptions that aligned with the researcher's own values and beliefs. It was, therefore, important to look for indications of the latter when analysing the findings. Brown and Dowling (1998) further explain this as the difference between *probes* and *prompts,* the former being:

> … a question used in an interview to gather further information, clarification, or which seeks to access underlying causes or reasons for a particular response. (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p 62)

The authors go on to suggest that a prompt involves the interviewer in suggesting possible responses. A further analysis of probes and prompts in the interview transcripts of the pilot study took place to analyse the types of sub questions posed and to consider any bias on the part of the researcher or any inclination to 'lead' the interviewee when answering the questions. Initial impressions when reviewing the sub questions were that some interviewees were more verbose than others and needed less prompting, and some interviewees needed prompts to stay focused. However, in order to consider the probes and prompts from the pilot

in a more systematic way, the sub questions on each transcript were further analysed and tagged under one of four categories:

probes to investigate further   *prompts to summarise*
probes to clarify   *prompts to lead*

The fourth category of *prompts to lead* was considered the most significant when exploring the issue of researcher bias. An issue that arose from this analysis was an acknowledgement by the researcher of the significant number of sub-questions posed for the question that explored the disadvantages of a national networking initiative. As a result, consideration was given in Phase 2 of the research to predetermining probes and prompts prior to interviews taking place and using them as a guide during the interviews. However, a process such as this needs to be carefully considered, as interfering with the flow of the interviews could adversely affect access to the rich pool of data on which any research findings are based. This is discussed further in this chapter and the final decision outlined later when considering data collection issues for Phase 2.

Data analysis – phase 1 of the research

Tape transcription and text recording

Initially, the tapes of the interviews with the seven headteachers involved in the small scale research of the Networked Learning Community were sent off for transcribing in text format. As the tapes were transcribed in this instance by an audio typist who was not directly involved in the research, it was crucial to implement a number of procedures on return of the typed draft copies. First draft transcripts were read while listening to the tapes of the interviews to amend any typing errors; to include any missed text; to revise any misheard comments; and to

correct any misunderstood specialised vocabulary. Computer files and hard copies of these final drafts were produced and returned to interviewees who had requested this. These final draft transcript hard copies were also read a number of times by the researcher while listening to the original tapes of the interviews to regain a 'feel' for the interview after a period of elapsed time between data gathering and data analysis; and to record informal comments and notes on the draft papers. A point to consider within this process is that the reading of the first draft transcripts in conjunction with the tapes highlighted a number of significant findings that may have been lost to the researcher when sifting through the data if the transcripts had not been checked rigorously by this method. For instance:

- the response to one question had been completely missed on one transcript

- a crucial finding had been misread on a second transcript

- three pertinent comments had been misinterpreted on a third transcript.

The three types of examples given above emphasise the importance of a systematic and rigorous approach to transcribing tape recordings into text for the purpose of thematic text analysis. This issue in Phase 1 of the research was reviewed and revised for main study and is discussed later in this chapter.

Qualitative data analysis can be defined as "three concurrent flows of activity" (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p10). These are *data reduction*; *data display*; *conclusion drawing and verification*. Along with the initial activity of *data collection* itself, the authors argue that these form an "interactive cyclical process" (p 12). In this research, *data reduction* took the form of summarising each relevant comment and noting it in the margin of the transcript. The

informal comments and notes made on the transcripts were then recorded on four grids, one for each area of questioning. This formed the second analysis activity – that of *data display*. Each one of these grids was worked on separately and systematically in order to group the comments of the individual interviewees into issues that considered advantages and disadvantages of early networking arrangements; and advantages and disadvantages of becoming part of the NLC initiative. This was completed by physically cutting and pasting portions of texts into broad groupings on large sheets of paper and then labelling each group with a relevant descriptor. Denscombe (2003) defines this method as tagging, which allows chunks of data to be coded or tagged as "belonging to a broader category" (p 119). These issues were then recorded on a separate grid and were routinely checked against the source material before being grouped into arising themes. Prioritisation of themes took place related to numbers of occurrences in interviews. This formed the third analysis activity – that of *conclusion drawing and verification*. Although not predetermined during the study, certain themes had been considered as possibly arising prior to the analysis taking place. These themes were then related to theoretical models from the literature review and new ideas interpreted and reflected upon in the findings.

The researcher's position in Phase 1 of the research was as a member and former co-leader of the Networked Learning Community chosen for this study. Although this gave ease of access through already existing professional relationships with participants and familiarity with settings (Hockey, 1993), there was a concern, in transcribing the tapes of:

> … potential disadvantages to possessing such *a priori* 'insider' knowledge, namely that social processes will be taken for granted – assumed and not dealt with as topics for analysis. (Hockey, 1993, p 202)

In order to limit any potential risk of either assuming the relevance of perceived themes or missing certain obvious topics, a random sample of two of the seven transcripts was read through by a researcher colleague unconnected with the research. This was to confirm that all pertinent issues had been captured and recorded at the initial stage of summarising and grouping the data into recurring themes. This checking system was also adopted in the main research for the thesis.

Data gathering – phase 2 of the research

The field work for Phase 2 of the research was conducted over the course of an academic year commencing from Autumn 2005 – one year on from Phase 1. The data for the second phase were gathered both through observations and semi-structured interviews in the first year of the life of two London based Primary Strategy Learning Networks. This coincided with the start of the PSLN initiative in these schools. For the purposes of this research, the field work ceased in July 2006.

The two networks studied in this part of the research each comprised of 5-8 schools. The perceptions of the Senior Adviser/Facilitator of the other existing networks within the LA also informed the findings. These were gathered during professional discussions at LA team meetings when the PSLN initiative was a priority on the agenda. These discussions assisted in the researcher's reflections on the findings rather than in the collection of new empirical data. Therefore, the overall London based research took account of the involvement of some 55 primary schools in this particular authority, which offered some opportunities for the purposes of triangulation and generalisability. The findings are also supported by the

researcher's own perceptions as a Local Authority participant in the research and also draw upon findings from the earlier West Midlands study.

The first set of interviews for Phase 2 of the research took place during the Autumn term 2005. Each headteacher within each of the networks was visited at their school and interviewed for a maximum of 40 minutes. These interviews were tape recorded and all twelve interviews were based on questions regarding headteachers' previous experiences of collaborative arrangements; and headteachers' perceptions of benefits and disadvantages of the PSLN initiative (see appendix viii for details of questions). As with Phase 1 of the research, the interviews were semi-structured and additional sub questions posed in order to clarify, investigate further and summarise. As the evaluation of the earlier pilot study had highlighted the use of a number of leading questions, researcher awareness of this ensured that this was less likely to occur in the second phase. In fact, the nature of the questions was not particularly controversial at this point, as had been noted with specific questions in Phase 1 of the research.

The second set of interviews for the main study took place in July 2006, at the end of the first year of the initiative. The same twelve headteachers participating in the same two networks in Phase 2 were re-interviewed. Again, the interviews were semi-structured, took place in the same settings and were taped recorded. On this occasion, the interviews each lasted approximately 20 minutes. These were shorter interviews as it was not felt necessary to revisit the question on headteachers' previous and current experiences of networking. The interviews concentrated on comparisons between participants' perceptions of the PSLN initiative at the start and again at the end of the academic year. These second set of interviews

were based on seven questions capturing the perceptions of the headteachers one year into the initiative (see appendix viii for details of questions). The final question asked of all interviewees in the second round of interviews was based on findings from Phase 1 and, as such, could have been construed as leading. However, it was felt necessary to be open and transparent about the arising issues from the earlier study and to state the findings factually in order for participants to consider the issues and respond accordingly. Additionally, there were a number of issues arising from the process of data analysis in the small scale study that had been discussed in the write up of the findings. These were taken into account in Phase 2 of the research and the subsequent review and amendments to procedures are explained further in the following sections.

Interview process

In the second phase of the research, the participants were interviewed at the start of the PSLN initiative and then revisited one year later. As the interviewees were being asked to review and reconsider their initial comments, it was necessary to ensure that they could accurately recall what had been said previously. Consideration was given to distributing copies of first interview transcripts for interviewees to refer to. However, as this might have complicated the second round of interviews, particularly if participants were trawling through 40 minutes of transcribed text to find and discuss one pertinent point, a method was devised to offer interviewees a succinct, but accurate *aide memoire* with which to generate discussion. The process for this was that the pertinent sections of the first interview were re-read by the researcher and each advantage/disadvantage expressed by the respondent highlighted. These comments were then typed up and tagged with arising themes on the researcher's copy. This

aide memoire was then taken along to the second interview and a copy shared with the participant. The document was briefly introduced and initial discussion was generated by reviewing the previously perceived advantages/disadvantages and by reference to the arising themes. This process worked well and respondents seemed confident at the start of the second interviews once the document was introduced. Additionally, as part of the process of producing the *aide memoire*, each of the comments made by participants was numerically coded and referenced to an arising theme. The benefits of this were two-fold. First, the number of responses on any one theme could be easily counted and noted. Second, any responses on a given theme could be easily referenced back to any one of the 24 transcripts at a later date.

In Phase 1 of the research, there had been an issue with regard to probes and prompts used during the semi-structured interviews. Initially, consideration was given to a more structured format with probes and prompts being pre-determined. However, the concern was that this might inhibit the interview and adversely affect the richness of the data gathered. The method finally decided upon and used in the second round of interviews was to take along a more structured format to the interview in the form of a prompt sheet to guide the interviewer, but not attempt to contrive the probes and prompts during the interview.

Data analysis – phase 2 of the research

Tape transcription and text recording

The taped interviews in Phase 1 of the research had been initially transcribed by an audio typist. Proof reading of these transcriptions highlighted misheard, misunderstood and, in

some instances missed text. This generated a significant amount of additional proof reading and checking work. Therefore, for the main research, the tapes of the two sets of interviews were transcribed in long hand by the researcher. Although this proved to be time consuming, it ensured that the first draft texts for the main research were accurate accounts of the 24 interviews conducted over the course of the research. An additional advantage to this process was that the researcher became steeped in the texts and had a more in-depth working knowledge of the perceptions of the interviewees throughout Phase 2 of the research.

The initial analysis of the data in the main study involved three steps, as noted in the smaller scale study. These were summarising (reducing the material by omitting less relevant passages); and grouping (and categorising certain pieces of the raw data); drawing conclusions on the arising themes and verifying these against the source material (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The emerging themes seemed to fit what Glaser and Strauss (1967) define as grounded theory although, as discussed earlier in this chapter, this research is not presented as grounded theory. It is acknowledged, however, that some elements of a grounded theory approach are evident in the data analysis.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, the emerging themes from the research are reconsidered and the importance of a realistic approach to reviewing the evidence is argued (Arnold, 2005; Pawson, 2006) to consider the causal relationships that impacted on the overall success of the PSLN initiative and to acknowledge the importance of ongoing review in any new initiative.

The next section of this chapter details the research management in terms of ethics. Blaxter *et al* (1996) define research ethics as "being clear about the nature of the agreement entered into with your research subjects or contacts" (p 146). This research fulfils the requirements as stated in the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association, 2004) on *voluntary informed consent* (p 6); *right to withdraw* (p 6); *privacy* (p 8); *storage and use of personal data* (p 9). The research also fulfils the requirements as stated in the Research Ethics Framework (Economic and Social Research Council, 2005) and, in particular, with regard to a *no harm* clause (p 1). These key principles of ethical research are explained further within the following section, along with issues relating to access, reflexivity, generalisability and interviewer effect.

Research management

Access

The researcher's position working within both LAs where the research was based offered easy access. However, a number of issues became apparent as the initial organisation of the research programme began to take shape. The samples drawn for both phases of the research were purposive in that the participants were hand picked for the study (Denscombe, 2003). Participants for Phase 1 were the headteachers in the researcher's own Networked Learning Community and the purposive selection in Phase 2 of the research was made through evaluations of the initial network submissions and action plans, in order to choose two networks to study that gave the widest variation possible from a small sample.

It is important to state that all participants in both phases of the research were known to the researcher, either as a colleague and co-worker in Phase 1 or as a headteacher participant in Phase 2 of the research. Therefore, the researcher's position in the research allowed 'insider knowledge'. Hockey (2003), in exploring issues when researching peers and familiar settings, suggests "that which is closest may well be that which is most difficult to see" (p 221). His arguments for and against 'insider' research culminate in the conclusion that:

> Perhaps the main issue in terms of the insider/outsider dichotomy is which position is most productive for the research process? (Hockey, 2003, p 220)

In considering this, the advantages in this research outweighed the disadvantages, in that insider knowledge provided opportunities for the researcher to draw from experiences of a number of different roles relating to networking initiatives, such as headteacher of one of the primary schools involved in the NLC initiative and a colleague of the research participants, as well as Senior Adviser in the authority chosen for the PSLN research at a later date and the LA facilitator of the roll-out of the PSLN initiative at Local Authority level.

Consent and right to withdraw

All personnel were appropriately notified and had the opportunity for voluntary informed consent to their own and their organisation's involvement in the study. It was also important to be open and transparent about the intentions of the research. But this is known on occasions to taint the responses of the participants to the questions posed. Denscombe (2003) discusses this problem and warns of interviewees fulfilling the perceived expectations of the researcher and how, subsequently, the quality of the data suffers:

> The answers might tend to be tailor made to match what the interviewee suspects is the researcher's point of view, keeping the researcher happy. (Denscombe, 2003, p 170)

This was particularly pertinent in this research with regard to the fact that the researcher was also an insider and professionally acquainted with all of the participants.

An example of how this issue was addressed quite early on in both phases of the research was through submitting fairly non-committal brief thesis outlines to the participants along with consent forms. This gave the framework of the study without explicit reference to the main aims of the research. The outlines of the thesis distributed to participants are included as appendices x to xiii. The Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association, 2004) was the reference used for debating this issue. The principles underpinning the guidelines state that the educational researcher should respect not only the person, but also the quality of the research. As the quality of this research would have been tainted by offering too much information at the outset it was felt that, in this instance, the action taken was within acceptable limits of ethics. Personnel to be approached for consent to access were all headteachers of the schools in each of the networks involved in the research and the LA Head of School Improvement for the London based networks. Right to withdraw was made explicit in all initial communications (see appendix xi).

Reflexivity

Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, relies much more on the subjectivity of the researcher. The researcher's reflections, perceptions, interpretations and feelings form a significant part of the findings (Flick, 2002). An awareness of 'self' in the process of the

research and in the interpretation of the findings and any conclusions reached is important in order to consider researcher reflexivity (Denscombe, 2003). In presenting the findings of this research, it is important to acknowledge the influence of 'self' on the research. The perceptions the researcher holds and the meanings interpreted from the findings will inevitably be affected by the researcher's own "culture, social background and personal experiences" (Denscombe, 2003, p 88). Previous work, for instance with the National College for School Leadership, immersed the researcher in the positive benefits of networking. Subsequently, as a senior representative of the LA involved in this research, the researcher was positively promoting the PSLN initiative. Other previous experiences also had impacted on the researcher's thinking and beliefs. In the role of headteacher and of network co-leader for a NCSL Networked Learning Community, the researcher entered into the research with doubts about aspects of centrally directed networking initiatives, particularly with regard to the bureaucratic nature of imposing a specific model of networking on groups of schools. As Denscombe (2003) explains:

> Making sense of what is observed during fieldwork observation is a process that relies on what the researcher already knows and already believes, and it is not a voyage of discovery which starts with a clean sheet. (Denscombe, 2003, p 88)

However, the attempt in this research is for researcher impartiality to give justice to the findings in as balanced and unbiased a way as possible.

Generalisability

As stated earlier, the researcher had a particular interest in this national initiative as one of the LA facilitators for the PSLN initiative within the authority. As such, there was an obvious

drive to make the initiative successful at local level. Generalisability, therefore, comes into question due to potential researcher effect, and the professional interests of the researcher in the success of this initiative at a local level. However, as this was a small-scale qualitative study, relating it to other studies is possibly a more appropriate concept here to determine whether or not the findings are replicated and to improve the external validity of the research (Trochim, 2006b). This study will offer opportunities for comparison to other studies in similar contexts, thus being of value to a wider educational research field.

Interviewer effect

Another consideration that has to be taken into account is interviewer effect and, in particular, the 'Hawthorn' effect – derived from a set of industrial studies – whereby the special attention of an external observer creates a positive effect on that being studied (McQueen and Knusson, 2002). This is particularly pertinent here as the notion of the researcher as a Senior Education Adviser within the authority taking a particular interest in a group of schools could have proved a threat to the validity of the research. The researcher's role within the Local Authority also afforded a position which could also have been construed as influential. As one of the key principles of ethical research is that "harm to research participants must be avoided" (Economic and Social Research Council, 2005, p 1), participants were made aware of a 'no harm' clause in carrying out this research.

Anonymity

All participants were assured of anonymity or privacy from the outset of the research project. There was no intention for any participant to be named at any time in the study. The 'Networked Learning Community' is only described as located in the West Midlands and the LA chosen for the PSLN study as being one of the London boroughs. Access to the thesis was offered to all participants before final submission, although the researcher reserved the right at such a late stage to maintain the interpretations of the findings. As Trochim (2006c) notes, in order to encourage an 'evaluation culture':

> We should move away from private ownership of and exclusive access to data. The data from all our evaluations needs [sic] to be accessible to all interested groups allowing more extensive independent secondary analyses and opportunities for replication or refutation of original results. We should encourage open commentary and debate regarding the results of specific evaluations. Especially when there are multiple parties who have a stake in such results, it is important for our reporting procedure to include formal opportunities for competitive review and response. (Trochim, 2006c, p 3)

Additionally, an executive summary was distributed at the end of the project. This offered further engagement with the respondents and other stakeholders to provide any additional dialogue on outcomes of the research (Trochim, 2006c).

Storage and Use of Personal Data

It was made clear to participants that all taped recordings of interviews would be kept securely and would not be made available to anyone other than research supervisors. All data arising from the research were kept in three ways - as hard copy (available to research tutors and examiners); as data files on a computer c drive; as back up on a computer memory stick.

No names of anyone involved in the research were stored by any electronic means as part of this project. Additionally, in order to conceal identity of participants, a fairly simple letter and numerical coding system was used on quotes from transcripts used in the thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research design including the methodology, methods and management of this research. It is important to note at this stage that the Phase 1 data were limited and representative of only one network involved in the NLC initiative. Therefore, the findings for this phase of the research are not presented as generalisable, but rather as relatable to others in similar contexts. The data gathered from Phase 2, however, are also supported by Senior Adviser/Facilitator perceptions of the other networks within the authority. This, therefore, offers a broader, triangulated set of findings and greater confidence in their generalisability.

It became apparent during the research that strategies needed to be adopted to limit any positive or negative effect that the researcher's position in the research might have had on the findings. These included analysis of tape transcripts to consider any 'leading' questions; and triangulated data to support researcher perceptions and limit bias. The main point of consideration for the researcher was insider knowledge as a headteacher participant in Phase 1 of the research and, subsequently, as a Local Authority Adviser/ Facilitator of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative in Phase 2. An awareness of these positions and their possible effect on the findings was critical, as was an acknowledgement that "the researcher's identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated from the process" (Denscombe,

2003, p 268). A statement of the researcher's position in the research is included as appendix

xxv. Thus, with the researcher's identity, values and beliefs clearly stated and acknowledged,

this thesis now moves on to present the findings of the research in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS - PHASE 1

THE NETWORKED LEARNING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from Phase 1 of the research to explore one of the four key research questions - What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent have these informed the PSLN initiative? This question was also addressed in the literature review. This first phase of the research – a small scale study of a NCSL *Networked Learning Community* (see appendix i) – was used to pilot the second phase of the research – a study of two *Primary Strategy Learning Networks,* reported in Chapter 5. To recall, the model of networking promoted by the NLC initiative supported small or large groups of schools working together as a network for three years with a focus on learning at six levels – pupil, adult, leadership, organisational, school-to-school and network-to-network (Networked Learning Communities, 2003).

Context

The Networked Learning Community (NLC) involved in this phase of the research was made up of eight participating schools, seven of which took part in the study. The eighth school was the researcher's own school and, as such, was excluded from the study (see appendix i for further details of NLC schools). The field work for Phase 1 took place in Autumn 2004 and

the purpose of the research was two-fold. The first intention was to pilot the research tool. And the second intention was to explore participants' perceptions of networking before and after the time at which the group attained NLC status.

The following section of this chapter briefly explains the approach to the analysis of the data for Phase 1. The findings are then explored in subsequent sections of this chapter in terms of the perceived benefits and disadvantages of initially deciding to network together and the positive and negative aspects of subsequently gaining NLC status. The final sections of the chapter summarise the findings in terms of an imposed model of networking and its impact on network success and sustainability and the arising theme of power and power relationships in networks. Lessons learned in piloting the research tool are also discussed in the final section of the chapter in order to review and revise the research strategies for Phase 2 of the research.

Data analysis

It is acknowledged that there is a risk when relying on a small pilot study to generate reliable data. Researchers tend to use a pilot solely as a means of checking the research process prior to carrying out the main study. However, the qualitative tradition emphasises the importance of the findings emerging from all stages of the research. Consequently, in testing out the chosen tool for this research in Phase 1, it was inevitable that a significant amount of rich data would emerge that would be relevant to the main study in Phase 2, and the overall design of the research presumed this from the outset. It is important to note, however, that the sample for Phase 1 was small and purposive, and as such did not represent "a cross section or a balanced choice" (Denscombe, 2003, p 16). Furthermore, although arising themes may be

linked to existing theoretical models highlighted in the literature review, there is no claim or expectation of the findings representing general views about these themes.

The transcripts of tapes of respondents' interviews in both phases of the research were simply labelled and all respondent quotations given in this chapter are labelled as shown in table v below.

Table v: Transcript labels

	Phase 1
Headteacher respondents	West Midlands Research (WM)
Headteacher 1	1WM
Headteacher 2	2 WM
Headteacher 3	3 WM
Headteacher 4	4 WM
Headteacher 5	5 WM
Headteacher 6	6 WM
Headteacher 7	7 WM

This technique was used by the researcher to refer back to the data and also to determine the number of responses made on any particular issue under arising themes and the relevance in terms of frequency. The labelling technique has also been used in this thesis to fulfil the confidentiality clause agreed with participants at the start of the research.

In Phase 1 of the research, the perceptions of the seven NLC headteachers were explored through individual semi-structured interviews by asking them four questions:

- What were the real benefits for you and your school of initially deciding to network with other primary schools?

- Were there any disadvantages in those early days [from your experiences of the network]?

- What were the positive aspects of becoming part of the NLC project [from your experiences of the network]?

- In your view, have there been any disadvantages to the network's involvement with the NLC project?

The themes arising from these four questions are dealt with in the following sections of this chapter and then compared and discussed as a summary. The findings are also considered along with those from Phase 2 of the research in Chapter 5 and discussed further in Chapter 6. The themes arising from the pilot study and the issues that informed the themes are reported in appendices to this thesis.

Additional to the themes arising from the data, a significant amount of researcher knowledge informed the reporting of Phase 1. This was possible due to the researcher's position as one of the co-leaders of the NLC initiative at the time of the study. This knowledge has been used solely as a means to offer background information and to set participant responses within a historical context for the reader. Also, the quotations offered in this chapter were chosen by the researcher as 'best examples' of the ideas expressed, issues shared and comments made by the respondents in order to put their points across at the time of the interviews.

Findings

The following sections of this chapter explore the findings from Phase 1 of the research - the West Midlands Networked Learning Community. The first section explores the perceived benefits and disadvantages of the schools initially deciding to network together. Subsequent sections consider the participants' perceptions regarding the positive aspects and the disadvantages of networking after receiving NLC funding and status. The arising themes of

particpants' expectations not being met by the initiative and the additional perceived pressures of the imposed nature of the initiative are then discussed further, along with the arising theme of power and power relationships. These themes then inform the next phase of the research into Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative in Chapter 5. The final section of this chapter explores the lessons learned through piloting the research tool in Phase 1, in order to review and revise the research design for the second phase.

What were the real benefits for you and your school of initially deciding to network with other primary schools?

There were four overarching themes in the responses recording the advantages of initially forming the West Midlands network. These were:

- aspects of sharing
- professional support
- commonalities
- empowerment

Aspects of sharing

The culture in the seven schools studied had not previously been one of sharing in a collaborative way, but rather one of mistrust and competition due to the historical funding formula within the Local Authority (LA). This was because one or two additional pupils in any one school would place that establishment in a higher band than the others for funding. The reorganisation to a new Unitary Authority brought with it a revision of the formula and relaxed the need to compete for pupils. However, these schools were at the early stages of

this and, therefore, were starting from a point of very little experience of collaborative practices. The network assisted significantly in breaking down these age old barriers.

> There was quite a predominant feeling when I came into headship, which was that feeling of competitiveness, and that changed dramatically into one of collaboration and working together after the network. (3WM)

Therefore, the developing feeling of collaboration and sharing rather than competition and mutual suspicion became stronger after the network formed. There were several aspects to the theme of sharing as perceived by the network participants and this sharing in a multifaceted way was valued by the West Midlands headteachers who not only benefited from sharing the responsibility and accountability downwards through the school as staff began to develop their leadership capacity, but also themselves benefited at leadership level from the professional support of colleague headteachers in the network.

Professional support

Headteachers in the research noted that the professional support of the network helped them to re-focus on 'leading the learning' rather than day-to-day management issues that can so easily distract from the purpose of headship:

> It gave me an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the whole of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 curriculum … So, that deeper understanding of a broader range. (5WM)

One of the key principles behind the NLC initiative was concerned with building capacity for leadership at all levels (Networked Learning Communities, 2003). The professional support

offered to those at middle management level within the school through opportunities for leading in a specialist area, chairing network meetings and presenting in-service training to other network colleagues was considered a benefit of networking together, as many of these aspiring leaders had worked in isolation in their own small school settings:

> And the coordinators, I think, grew in terms of their own development. It was very good for them to be able to bounce ideas off fellow coordinators. (4WM)

This notion of professional talk and learning together as discourse communities is key to empowerment and a core component of building capacity to sustain continual school improvement (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). Discourse communities are seen to promote and encourage professional exchange amongst teachers and ensure that their views are valued. The support that the network gave these headteachers for moving their own knowledge forward, for development of their middle managers and for reflective practice through these professional learning or 'discourse communities' within the network was felt to be of real value in promoting professional confidence and a willingness to take risks. The potential of group learning was very much promoted by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) as part of the Networked Learning Communities initiative and was one of the appeals that led this group to eventually becoming a NLC.

The challenge that working with other educational establishments offered was seen as key within this support. Standards within these seven schools were consistently high when benchmarked with others both locally and nationally. The headteachers of the seven schools acknowledged that, with this in mind, they could be "accused of being coasting schools" (4WM) – thus using a derogatory term for achieving high standards with little effort due to

favourable socio-economic factors regarding pupil and school context. Involvement in the network offered colleagues opportunities to see how others in similar contexts were raising standards even further. It offered benchmarking of similar schools in similar contexts prior to the more sophisticated data banks of Fischer Family Trust (Fischer Trust, 2007) and RAISEonline (OfSTED, 2007) now available nationally for school to school comparisons. And the commonalities of being similar schools in similar contexts and with similar issues was a further arising theme from the research.

Commonalities

Participants felt able to respond to each other in terms of collaborating, sharing, challenging and offering peer support because they shared commonalities both of context and of purpose. The seven schools were all small, rural schools (small being defined by the LA as having pupil numbers of less than 200 on roll). and were all high attaining with above average SATs results at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2. Therefore, the LA's stance of intervention in inverse proportion to success meant that these schools had previously received very little in terms of local advisory support or national funding that was normally ring fenced in local authorities for underachieving and generally urban schools. The seven headteachers were all fairly new in post and, therefore, had begun to meet informally in the early days of the network to provide personal and professional support to one another:

> When you are taking on the role for the first time, there are lots of unanswered questions and you don't necessarily want to go running to the LEA all the time with them. And I think [the other headteachers in the network] offered me very practical advice. (4WM)

This was at the time of the introduction of many new curriculum initiatives into schools, including the new Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfEE, 2000), a separate curriculum for children in the early years of their primary and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 1999):

> It became apparent that these national strategies needed to be adapted to suit the needs of the children within our schools and [we began] to work together as a group of schools in looking at ways in which this might be done. (1WM)

Therefore, the network supported the schools' common purpose. But the schools also had a more compelling reason for networking together as discussed next.

Empowerment

Involvement in the network offered the seven schools a powerful corporate voice within the new authority. Indeed, one of the original reasons that the West Midlands' network had formed was as a result of the reorganisation of the LA into a Unitary Authority. This had generated perceived problems among the headteachers in the network with regard to rural isolation in an urban authority and threat of small school closures. These headteachers had presented a united front ensuring that rural schools were represented on working parties and fora within the new authority and insisting that rural issues were key agenda items at LA meetings.

Headteachers also felt empowered to make decisions based on their professional confidence developed through being part of a discourse community. These joint decisions made on pedagogy and practice helped promote the teachers' legitimacy within the profession and

assured them that their knowledge was respected. As leaders of successful schools the headteachers in the network began to afford some risk taking with the highly prescriptive National Literacy (DfEE, 1998) and Numeracy (DfEE, 1999) Strategies, challenging the status quo and questioning the use of those pre-packaged national programmes:

> Certainly what I've found is that schools were reluctant to adapt and amend the strategies because of lack of confidence. (1WM)

Trialling new initiatives and evaluating the impact together was exciting but professionally safe. The idea of working collaboratively and corporately addressed the feelings of isolation often felt within the educational profession and, in particular, with colleagues in these small rural schools. Insularity is a consequence of isolation, and working corporately was perceived to broaden the educational horizons of colleagues and move people on from the insular nature of the classroom:

> … rather than just everybody being hooked on to the ethos of 'I'm a teacher, I'm in a classroom, this is what I do'. (7WM)

Involvement in the network also added to colleagueship and further promoting professional confidence. Staff across schools began to meet together over and above designated network times, to speak on the telephone and to email each other for advice, support, as a sounding board for new ideas and to reinforce their own professional self esteem and professional status.

In summary, the opportunities for sharing policy, practice, information and ideas; along with professional support and challenge, both within a common context and for a common

purpose, generated a feeling of <u>empowerment</u> amongst network participants. These key elements were seen by the West Midlands' headteachers as the most valuable aspects of early networking arrangements.

What also arose from the interviews was the value expressed by participants with regard to having the time to focus on networking activities. This revealed itself as a crucial requirement for the network to function successfully. Many of the headteachers in the network had significant teaching commitments at the time of the research, with some heads teaching a 0.9 timetable per week. Allocating non-teaching time to the networking initiative was seen as a critical requirement. The network had been able to access a recently introduced and ring fenced Standards Fund Grant (TeacherNet, 2007) called the Small Schools Fund. This was one of a number of Central Government grants to schools that had specific criteria for spending attached. Having the additional funding to support the time to network can be seen as one of the key elements in the following section and one of the main reasons why the lure of the national Networked Learning Communities initiative was received so readily.

What were the positive aspects of becoming part of the NLC project?

There were four themes arising from the perceived advantages of subsequently becoming a Networked Learning Community and these were:

- funded time
- structure and focus
- national perspective
- professional development

It is worth noting that the first two bullet pointed sets of themes – those of time (Stoll *et al*, 2006), structure (Veugelers and O'Hair, 2005) and focus (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992) – are considered in the literature to be requirements of successful networking rather than benefits. However, due to the priority placed on these by participants, they are included for discussion in the following sections of this chapter.

Funded Time

The most commonly cited advantage for becoming part of the NLC project after two years of informal networking arrangements was central funding to release teachers to network and learn together. The network's successful bid had accessed £50,000 per year over three years, which had to be match-funded by the schools themselves. Each of the schools from the network used their Small Schools Standards Fund Grant to match-fund and they therefore benefited as a network from £300,000 worth of funding allocated for focused network activities among the schools involved. So, although lack of funding had not been perceived by many of the headteachers as a disadvantage in the early days of networking, the lure of a significant amount of additional funding was perceived by many as an added bonus:

> The positive aspects? Well, obviously funding was one. The reason that it was so valuable at that time was it was certainly coming to the point where funding was becoming a big issue for schools such as ours … it was looking as if it would become difficult to carry on [networking] without additional funding. (1WM)

What was important was the impact that the funding had in giving people time to network. This was prior to the Government dictat that all teachers should have 10% planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time as an entitlement from September 2005 (Training and

Development Agency, 2007). So, in terms of supply cover for teachers with 100% teaching timetables and headteachers with significant teaching commitments, the main advantages were "being able to hold the [teachers'] meetings in school time… so that at the start of the school day they are all fresh" (2WM). Headteachers also felt that this eased any burden of additional workloads if staff were given opportunities to meet and network during the working day. This benefit of the network was received positively and, interestingly, some groups forged such strong bonds that they elected to meet additionally over and above the school day for certain projects and network activities.

Structure and focus

The initial bid submitted by the seven schools for NLC status had to incorporate an action plan. Previously the network had functioned on a fairly loose plan of action that evolved from suggestions made at heads' meetings, thus the headteachers drove the agenda. Once a significant amount of funding was involved and a perceived accountability linked to the allocation of substantial Government funding, a tighter action plan began to drive the network. With a tighter plan of action, there was felt to be more focus and this was perceived as an added advantage:

> But, as time's gone on within the network it has become far more structured and [there is] far more clarity than there was in the early days. (6WM)

However, one headteacher did note that, although the network felt the benefits in terms of a tighter focus, there was some feeling of doing someone else's bidding and the network participants "kicked our heels a little bit to a certain extent" (1WM) at having to do things in a

certain way. The involvement with the NLC project also provided more structure in terms of personnel. There was an expectation from the project organisers that two key drivers or co-leaders would co-ordinate the network, manage the funding and be the communications link between the NCSL and the network schools. The structure of the NLC project and the allocation of three year funding also offered a defined end time to the networking arrangements and this feature of clear exit routes is an important element of networking, with the terminating of network partnerships as recognition of the success of the network in terms of fulfilling original objectives.

National Perspective

Another arising theme from the advantages of becoming part of a Networked Learning Community was the wider national perspective that involvement in the NLC project was seen to offer. A benefit of the early stages of networking had been a broader professional view in terms of meeting colleagues and sharing ideas and information across schools. But now, with NLC involvement:

> [It] enabled us to think in wider terms and to address, if you like, school issues, the LA agenda and the national agenda with an input from the National College [for School Leadership] and I think that was very important. (4WM)

The National College for School Leadership was offering this national perspective mainly through opportunities for network to network conferences. However, NCSL was also offering a wide range of opportunities for courses, workshops and seminars over and above this, which was one aspect of wider professional development that the NLC participants began to access. There were different aspects to this arising theme of professional development.

Professional Development

The first development was that the headteachers themselves began to attend some high quality external conferences on offer through links with NCSL. Also, teachers in the schools involved were able to access joint training, which was tailor-made to their needs and that of the network. And, as the network began to organise its own training, teachers were given opportunities to run those events. This gave staff a sense of being valued by their own schools when given the responsibility and opportunity to organise and present at these events:

> I think a distinct advantage of that was that it was able to cascade down to other people and develop their professional skills in management, but also their self-esteem, a sharing of the subject knowledge, and enable them to carry out a role they had not done before. (5WM)

An added advantage was that the Teaching Assistants (TAs) who, to a large extent, had previously been on the periphery when it came to professional development opportunities, also took part in the training and in leading some aspects of it. Therefore, professional development was catered for at all levels within the network and, as one headteacher stated:

> Well, what it made us do, it made us identify the structures that we needed to put in place to enable all adults within the organisation to benefit and to ensure that people did have opportunities for adult learning. (2WM)

And so the opportunities accessed for professional development and for professional dialogue among colleagues across schools helped develop leadership skills, improve staff self-confidence and generate a feeling of worth and self-esteem. Access to professional development at all levels and involvement in other NLC network activities was regarded by

the seven headteachers as developing staff as reflective practitioners to impact on learning and standards in the schools:

> Coordinators have actually had to think - What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What do I have to do next to make it better? (7WM)

Therefore, in summary, the additional funded time was seen to offer a variety of networking opportunities, including access to high quality professional development at all levels. Involvement in the network also gave staff wider experiences and a broader national perspective. These aspects, along with structure and focus, were seen by the headteachers of the West Midlands network as critical in development of reflective practice in their schools, which ultimately would have a positive impact on learning. It is worth noting that three of these four key elements of networking - time to network, the structure of a network and a clear focus - were considered attributes for successful network functionality. It might be suggested, therefore, that the NLC model was instrumental in providing the foundation stones for the development of successful Networked Learning Communities.

Were there any disadvantages in those early days?

There were four arising themes from the perceived disadvantages of initially networking together and these were:

- funding commitments
- sustaining common purpose
- learning how to network
- group dynamics

However, it is important to note that the number of negative responses gathered in relation to these early days of networking were minimal and were voiced by only a few of the participants. This needs to be judged carefully against the significant number of positive responses gathered in relation to the early stages of the West Midlands' network.

Funding commitments

With regard to the disadvantages of early networking arrangements, only two headteachers interviewed described funding as an issue. The Small Schools Fund that headteachers had accessed to finance network activities in these early days could only be accessed to support work that occurred across schools and local authorities. This additional stream of funding had come at an opportune moment for the West Midlands Network, but it was still only a small amount for each of the seven schools. Although limited, the funding was important as it bought time. However, "finding the time to network when it does require a commitment in terms of time can sometimes be tricky" (1WM). It was felt there needed to be a shared "compelling reason" (1WM) to network with other schools over and above pressing school issues in order to sustain the network. In the early days for this group of small rural schools, survival in a largely urban authority had been that compelling reason.

Sustaining common purpose

Being able to sustain a common purpose was a perceived challenge because of the West Midlands headteachers' own school commitments and also in terms of being side tracked by other people's agendas or their own school priorities taking precedence:

And [having] to move your school development plan, plus your inset [in-service training] and everything else into something you maybe hadn't thought of was going to be your priority. (7WM)

So, although the common purpose may have stayed constant in the early days, school matters of necessity took priority over and above the network agenda.

Learning how to network

A lack of professional confidence was an aspect of the emerging theme of 'learning how to network'. Just as the headteachers had found themselves new to networking, so staff who worked in many of the isolated rural locations or in small market town settings experienced the loss of security that they felt in the familiarity of their own schools:

Some of the disadvantages [were] when people weren't sure about what was happening they could come back quite frightened in a way about what was going on somewhere else that maybe we hadn't tackled. (2WM)

This concern was sometimes as a result of the situation they found themselves in, but more often was as a result of their perception of others within the network and the dynamics within the group.

Group dynamics

The theme of group dynamics had two different strands. First, in developing relationships:

And again, I think that is down to developing relationships within teams and within the network so that they can accept the differences and work together.   (3WM)

And then the problems faced with strong characters and negative personalities:

> We have some very dominant characters there as well who would want to direct a certain aspect of learning in a certain way. (3WM)

> Sometimes they [the teachers] came back and they felt that other people in the group had been very negative. (2WM)

Personal relationships were seen as critical to the success of the network, along with the right mix of individuals to impact on group productivity.

In summary, the four arising themes from the disadvantages of initially forming the network were issues of <u>funding</u> and of <u>sustaining common purpose</u>, along with <u>learning how to network</u> and the tensions in <u>group dynamics</u> when working together. However, these issues were small in number and it is important to state again that, of the seven respondents, two felt that there were no disadvantages whatsoever in the early stages. Also, with regard to the emerging themes, there was no one specific disadvantage that was more significant than others quoted and the number of perceived advantages, certainly in the early stages of networking, outweighed the number of disadvantages by almost two to one. As summarised by one of the headteachers:

> It was all very positive. It was something everybody was caught up in and wanted to do because they could see the benefits of networking. (4WM)

And so, it was on this positive note that the group committed to the Networked Learning Communities initiative after two years of informal network arrangements between the seven schools.

In your view, have there been any disadvantages to the network's involvement with the NLC initiative?

In sorting and categorising the statements made by the headteachers regarding the perceived disadvantages of subsequently becoming part of a NLC, two things were apparent in the findings. First, the number of disadvantages quoted was now significantly higher than prior to involvement in the NLC initiative and, second, three distinct categories emerged from the data. Category 1 highlighted issues directly related to the unique nature of the West Midlands' network and its prior existence. Category 2 highlighted issues arising that were fairly common to networks in general. Category 3 highlighted issues related to the role that the National College for School Leadership played in directing and facilitating the initiative centrally. These three distinct categories are listed below and discussed in the final sections of this chapter.

Category 1 – unique to the West Midland NLC
▪ established hierarchies
▪ mindsets

Category 2 – common network issues
▪ sustainability
▪ group dynamics
▪ lack of engagement
▪ network insularity

Category 3 – specifically related to the NLC initiative
▪ participant expectations
▪ external/internal impositions

Category 1 – unique to the West Midland NLC

To put the first set of arising themes into context, those that are directly related to the unique nature of the West Midlands Network, it is first necessary to remember that this network had been in existence for two years prior to its involvement in the NLC project. As an already established network, the West Midlands NLC had informal management structures that other newly formed NLCs did not have in place and Headteacher respondents expressed concern over these with regard specifically to the hierarchies already in existence in their network:

> I think other [NLC] networks have come together through different ways … So, therefore, there was no pecking order already established. (6WM)

This established nature of the network was also felt to have a detrimental effect with regard to the opinions of some established personnel who were not open to challenge or change. So, although the network had experienced a very positive early stage, there was a perception that it was now experiencing a hierarchical structure and a mindset which were having an adverse effect on the free thinking spirit from which the network participants had initially benefited. What is unclear from the findings is whether or not this was a direct result of involvement in the NLC initiative or whether this was the natural next stage in the life of a network and a move towards network stagnation, bearing in mind that the group had worked together for two years prior to NLC status and the research took place over two years after NLC status was confirmed.

Category 2 – common network issues

The second set of arising themes that are common to networking were concerned with issues of sustainability, group dynamics, lack of engagement and network insularity. There were two main reasons pertaining to the issue of sustainability. First, sustainability due to the future inaccessibility of network funding from Central Government and, then, there was concern expressed over being able to sustain a continued shared common purpose over the long term:

> [And] to be constantly thinking about what would be the compelling reason for the TAs to work together, for teachers to work together, for subject leaders, for anybody. What would be the compelling reason? (1WM)

The general feeling was that if there was no compelling shared purpose, the network would just exist rather than thrive. Sustainability issues were also voiced due to certain forceful characters within the group and certain individual drivers of the network who had not been willing to incorporate other points of view into the network's action plan:

> But you need drivers who are prepared to listen - who are prepared to listen to the more quiet members of the group and not just say 'that's a good idea, we'll put that off till the next time'. (6WM)

The impact a few negative staff could have on the group and the influence they held over the motivation and drive of the group made it difficult to ensure that all staff engaged actively and that some participants were not barriers to the engagement of others. Mobility of personnel was also considered by respondents as having an adverse effect, both in terms of sustaining internal capacity and providing 'catch up' time for new members. Additionally, those that were newcomers to individual schools within the network had not experienced the same

bonding process or been involved in agreeing the common goals of the network, so did not always have the same feelings of ownership as founder members. It was also perceived that founder members were becoming too inward looking:

> If you are only within one network and you are not in contact with other professional people or networks or organisations or whatever, then you can become insular. (7WM)

From the theme of insularity, a feeling of 'sameness' or over-familiarity emerged relating to network activities and network personnel and it was felt by some participants that the network could do with refreshing or reinvigorating with a change of leadership personnel.

Category 3 – specifically related to the NLC initiative

The third and final set of themes arising from the disadvantages of formalising as a NLC are concerned with the NCSL's roll out of the project itself and the expectations of those involved. The first disappointment expressed was that of participant expectations and headteacher disappointment about the level and quality of facilitation offered by the NCSL. The group of headteachers initially had had high hopes that the facilitator would be their 'gatekeeper' to NCSL opportunities and would also be their 'advocate' in terms of promoting their network in a wider educational arena both regionally and nationally.

> I don't know about disadvantages. My big disappointment really is that I don't think we've been facilitated properly. … That was the main thing about our facilitator because, if I fell over her, I wouldn't know her. (2WM)

The NCSL had promoted the appointment of two co-leaders within each NLC to be the point of contact centrally. However, the two co-leaders of the West Midlands NLC had had a limited amount of contact with the NCSL facilitator and the rest of the group had had no access whatsoever. This issue arose from a perceived lack of NCSL involvement. Interestingly, a number of other concerns were voiced in terms of too much central direction and imposed features. For instance, there was a suspicion that the National College for School Leadership was attempting to impose a fixed model of networking:

> Yes, a model which they seem to expect the networks to conform to. And I think as the programme has gone on, the new networks that are coming in do that. (2WM)

There was also a feeling expressed of expected conformity to "an external agenda that's had to be addressed by everybody" (7WM). Concern was also voiced over imposed bureaucracy and the difficulty it brought with it in terms of some of the group feeling left out:

> I think actually it was at headteacher level that the distributed leadership was threatened by the structure that was put in place. … I think what happened when we became a Networked Learning Community was the structure of having co-leaders started to get in the way potentially of some of the engagement of all. (1WM)

The early days of the network had seen true sharing of ideas, distributed workload and equality in terms of headteacher network participation. In promoting two co-leaders as key drivers of the network, the NLC structure was seen to be divisive and responsible for imposing an unwanted hierarchy on the group. Two respondents also highlighted the pressures of imposed accountability related to the allocation of central funding:

As a school, I felt compelled to support something I had taken on board to be part of and, therefore, [I] would not let them down. Once you've committed you can't say, 'yes, I'll take the money' Do you know what I mean? You actually had to take part. (6WM)

Initially, the NCSL had suggested a 'light touch' central approach to the NLC project. However, as time went on, all networks involved in this initiative were expected to complete national documentation, attend conferences, host visits and respond to communications. The national funding and the commitment to the initiative had initially been for three years. In the third year, the NLC networks were informed by the NCSL that a network review and accompanying paperwork was required in order to access the final tranche of that funding. Therefore, it came as no surprise that one of the recurring themes was that of imposed workloads. Additional to this, there were perceived to be very tightly imposed timescales from the College and very short notice of dates for attendance at central events or returns of documentation. The impositions were voiced as having an adverse effect on the positive attitude with which all participants had originally approached the initiative. And, although networks need systems, structures and posts of responsibility, clearly the externally imposed arrangements created by involvement in the initiative were felt by respondents to be having an adverse effect. These were voiced as the main disadvantages of involvement in the network, along with issues arising that were common to networks in general and those of already established hierarchies and mindsets specifically related to the West Midlands' network.

Conclusion on findings

The findings from Phase 1 are pertinent to the main research by providing some of the answers to the research question - What lessons have already been learned about the common

characteristics of networks and to what extent has this informed the PSLN initiative?

Certainly, much of what is cited in the literature (see table iii on page 62) with regard to the

benefits and disadvantages of networking are apparent in this pilot study. What is

additionally noted as an interesting development is that in the early stages of the West

Midlands network the number of advantages identified by the participants compared to the

number of disadvantages was almost double. After becoming part of the NLC initiative and in

time, the view had altered and disadvantages significantly outweighed the advantages. What

is unclear, however, is whether or not many of the disadvantages cited at this latter stage

would have become apparent anyway as the network matured.

Categorising these disadvantages into those themes unique to the West Midlands Network,

those that were common in many networks and those that were particularly pertinent to an

involvement in the NLC project highlighted an interesting feature. Many of the disadvantages

of involvement in the Networked Learning Communities initiative, as noted in Categories 1

and 2, we might assume would have occurred in the natural life cycle of the network.

However, Category 3 disadvantages are particularly pertinent to involvement in the NLC

initiative. This suggested involvement in the NLC project to have had some perceived

negative impact on the network and this, therefore, needed further investigation. The two

issues were participant expectation of the NLC initiative and imposed arrangements in terms

of workload, agendas, timescales, bureaucracy, accountability and an imposed model of

networking. These disadvantages specifically relating to the NLC initiative thus became areas

of focus when researching the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative with regard to

the research questions - What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this

particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward? – and - Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative?

Additionally, it is interesting to note that, throughout Phase 1, the concept of power was expressed by NLC respondents in both positive and negative terms. During the early life of the network, it is expressed as empowerment. However, power is also seen as a negative element in the early days and is expressed by participants as the undue influence of others on the dynamics within the groups. Later on, as the network developed in terms of structure and status, power is viewed positively by these same headteachers in terms of legitimacy.   The negative aspect of power is still apparent at the later stage and also still expressed in terms of undue influence of others within groups. However, it is now also seen as control through the hierarchical structures that have developed. This important, emerging and overarching concept of power is, therefore, studied in further depth throughout Phase 2 of the research in Chapter 5.

A review of lessons learned throughout Phase 1

In reviewing the Phase 1 of the research, a number of lessons learned and amendments to the research are now reported under methods, data analysis, ethics and developing concepts to theory. These are discussed in the following sections.

Methods

In reviewing the methods chosen for Phase 1, the choice of semi-structured interviews worked well in that they produced rich data on the advantages and disadvantages of networking within a similar national initiative to that of the PSLN initiative in Phase 2 of the research. The choice of thematic analysis also worked well in that it offered opportunities to explore key issues arising from the data and group them together under arising themes. These approaches were, therefore, considered to be appropriate for Phase 2. However, problems were noted at the transcribing stage with regard to the accuracy of the transcripts from interviews. Therefore, adaptations were made to the methods of transcribing the interview tapes in Phase 2 of the research and this has been described in more detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Analysis

A problem that the researcher faced at the analysis stage was in simply dealing with the large amount of data that the interviews had produced. There were many examples of issues reported by respondents which were both significant to the research and substantial in number. These were recorded on a grid system at the start of the data analysis process (see appendices xiii-xvi). However, it became apparent that the researcher needed to reduce the data into manageable proportions under key themes for discussion (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This was tackled practically in the Phase 1 through a 'cut and paste' exercise. First, the transcript papers were physically cut into sections. Then, each of the participants' comments was grouped according to similarities with others as key issues. Several stages of grouping and regrouping took place until the result was a collation of a significant number of

important points made by respondents into fewer focused arising themes. The resulting themes can be viewed as appendix xvii to this thesis.

Ethics

From an ethical point of view, the research in Phase 1 highlighted an issue with regard to probes and prompts and the point at which these become leading questions. This issue led to a cautious approach to the interview technique for Phase 2 of the research which has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Additionally, the sensitive nature of a number of comments made about other network members, reiterated the importance of confidentiality and anonymity when reporting the findings from the research.

Developing concepts to theory

Using Phase 1 as the pilot study offered opportunities to test out and adapt the methods for the main research. It also provided a rich pool of data for exploring the key research question - What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent have these informed the PSLN initiative? Additionally, concerns began to emerge with regard to power within networks that the research was then able to develop through the main research in order to suggest a theoretical model which is offered to the reader in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

It is important to report that, due to a number of staff changes, it was not possible to feed back the results of the findings from Phase 1 of the research to the original NLC participants to offer opportunities for further debate (Trochim 2006c). Between the time of the field work and the report writing, five of the seven original network headteachers had either relocated or retired and the researcher had moved from the West Midlands area to take up a new position in the London Authority where the next phase of the research took place.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS - PHASE 2

THE PRIMARY STRATEGY LEARNING NETWORKS INITIATIVE

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings from Phase 2 of the research to explore the two key research questions - What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward? – and - Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative? This second phase of the research was conducted in two networks newly formed as part of the Primary Strategy Learning network (PSLN) initiative in one of the London boroughs (see appendix ii). Although each of the two phases of the research are reported separately in Chapters 4 and 5, comparisons and differences between the two are discussed throughout this chapter and summarised in the concluding section.

To recall the model of networking promoted by the PSLN initiative, it dictated that participating schools form a network of five to eight primary schools and commit to working together for two years with a focus on raising standards in literacy or numeracy (DfES 2004a).

The choice of two networks for Phase 2 guaranteed sufficient respondents for the research and it was also considered that the diversity of the two networks would bring to the research the widest possible range of views from a small selected sample of twelve headteacher participants of the 55 schools involved in this initiative across the Authority. One PSLN network chosen for the research was considered to be strong in terms of leadership, focus and commitment. The second network had experienced difficulties in the setting up stage, had lacked clarity of purpose and had the smallest number of participants. The choice of these two networks was informed by the professional judgements of the researcher and a colleague who was responsible for the implementation of the initiative within the authority. The evidence drawn upon to make this choice was through perceptions gained from a series of workshops run for newly formed networks in the planning stage and from the quality of network presentations and action plans at the launch of the initiative within the Local Authority.

Context

The first network was made up of seven participating schools and the second network consisted of five participating schools. Each interviewee was the headteacher of a Key Stage 1 school (5-7 age range), a Key Stage 2 school (7-11 age range) or an all-through (5-11 age range) primary school (see appendix ii for breakdown and contexts of schools). The field work for this study took place in the academic year 2005-2006 and the first set of interviews took place at the start of that academic year. The purpose was initially to investigate what experiences of networking, either formal or informal, the headteachers of the participating schools had had prior to becoming involved in the Primary Strategy Learning Network. The

interviews were then designed to explore the headteachers' perceptions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the PSLN initiative and their thoughts on issues for the future of the network (see appendix viii for a full list of interview questions).

The purpose of the second set of interviews, completed with the same participants at the end of the same academic year was to determine whether or not the headteachers' perceptions had changed in that time and what they felt could have been improved in the initiative if feeding back nationally. These second interviews also explored participants' views on the best and worst experiences of being involved in the initiative and any perceptions on external and internal impositions that had arisen in the findings from Phase 1 of the research (see appendix viii for a full list of interview questions). A subsequent analysis of the data from the two sets of interviews in Phase 2 makes comparisons with Phase 1 of the research and draws hypotheses from the findings for further discussion in Chapter 6.

The following section of this chapter briefly explains the approach to the analysis of the data for Phase 2. The findings are then explored in subsequent sections of the chapter in terms of the perceived advantages at the start and end of the first year of the PSLN initiative and the perceived disadvantages over the same period of time. The final sections of the chapter summarise the findings and include points for consideration and for further discussion.

Data analysis

The two sets of data to be analysed in Phase 2 of the research were the transcripts of headteacher interviews both at the start and at the end of a year of networking together. This

was to be a thematic analysis of the data. Therefore, when analysing the transcripts with regard to the perceived advantages and disadvantages at the start of the Primary Strategy Learning Network initiative, the findings that arose from the data in this first set of interviews were grouped under arising themes due to the relationship or <u>similarities</u> each arising issue had with another. So, for instance, the issues of 'sharing expertise' and 'sharing workload' were quite simply grouped under the arising theme of 'sharing'. This system of analysis allowed broader arising themes to emerge from the data.

In the analysis of the second set of transcripts, however, it was noted that headteachers were now almost telling a story or a sequence of events, where one issue had a 'knock on' effect causing the next issue to arise. It became clear that the links between the arising issues were different in the second set of data than in the first. Therefore, in analysing the second set of interviews, these issues were grouped according to <u>cause and effect</u> rather than similarities. So, for example, through 'network bonding', 'peer support groups' were formed, which in turn led to a 'widening of professional circle', etc. – thus forming a group under the overarching theme of 'developing relationships'. The researcher returned to the data to consider regrouping the first set of interviews in a similar fashion in order to offer some consistency of approach to the data analysis. However, only one or two of the arising issues in the first transcripts had a 'cause and effect' link – so, for instance, 'funding' gave people 'time' to network. Generally speaking, the headteachers expressed their opinions in the early stages of networking in a more 'ad hoc' way, as they thought through and talked about their perceptions. Therefore, arising issues were not linked in the same way, possibly due to the newness of the initiative and the lack of a narrative with regard to networking at such an early stage of the research. The reader needs to be aware of this variation in the data analysis and

the subsequent arrival at broader themes in Phase 2 of the research. As with Phase 1 of the research, the transcripts of tapes of respondents' interviews have been simply labelled and all participant quotes given in this chapter are labelled as shown in table vi below.

Table vi: Transcript labels

	Phase 2
Headteacher participant	London Borough Research (LB)
Headteacher 1	1LB
Headteacher 2	2 LB
Headteacher 3	3 LB
Headteacher 4	4 LB
Headteacher 5	5 LB
Headteacher 6	6 LB
Headteacher 7	7 LB
Headteacher 8	8 LB
Headteacher 9	9 LB
Headteacher 10	10 LB
Headteacher 11	11 LB
Headteacher 12	12 LB

The arising themes from Phase 2 of the research and the categories that informed the themes are reported in an additional table of appendices available within this thesis. As previously stated, researcher knowledge is used in the write up of the findings from both phases of the research to offer background information and to set participant responses within a historical context. Again, 'best example' quotations are also used in this chapter to elaborate points made by respondents at the time of the interviews.

Findings

 The following sections of this chapter explore the findings from the research in to the first year of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative at local level. The first section

explores the participants' previous experiences of networking. Subsequent sections consider the particpants' perceptions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of PSLN involvement at the start and one year into the initiative. In the concluding sections the original aim of the initiative to raise standards in literacy and numeracy in primary schools are revisited and possible reasons as to why that aim was not ultimately fulfilled are discussed.

Previous experiences of networking

The research shows that each of the twelve headteachers involved in the PSLN initiative had had a variety of experiences of working with colleagues previously in a number of networking situations. During the interviews, the term network was used quite loosely by participants to describe any groups and working parties that they had accessed. This was also found to be so in the literature (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996) where the term network was often used in a generic way in education for groups of schools linking together in collaborative working arrangements. At the time of the research, headteacher involvement in other networking arrangements ranged in number up to six. (Appendices xxiii and xxiv offer further details of the types, numbers and foci of networks in which these headteachers were or had been involved).

The findings of the first interview question – What collaborative arrangements have you been involved in so far in headship and how have they supported you? – are important and relevant when comparing PSLN participants with NLC participants from Phase 1 of the research. The PSLN headteachers had far more experience of working in collaborative situations and this may well have had a bearing on any variations in other findings between the two phases of the

research.   Phase 2 primary school leaders were already adept at accessing various networking groups and conclusions drawn from the data are that PSLN participants tended to dip in and out of networks when time permitted and in order to fulfil a perceived leadership, management, pedagogical, intellectual, psychological or social need:

> If they [the networks] are discussing something that is a burning issue to me, then I would find a way of going. But if it isn't, then you have to decide which the bigger priority is at the time. … I think people network with different groups of people for different things. The most effective ones are the casual ones. (1LB)

It was also apparent that, whatever the reason for the implementation of a national initiative to encourage primary school networking, it was unnecessary as an incentive to encourage these headteachers to network with colleagues across the sector as the PSLN participants had a wealth of experience in doing so. However, many of these other networking arrangements were support for aspects of school management and very few of the existing networks were driven by a pupil learning or pedagogical focus. So, networking for a specific pupil need was generally a new experience for the group.

The perceived advantages at the start of the PSLN initiative

There were seven arising themes from the advantages of involvement in the PSLN initiative as perceived by participants and these were:

- sharing
- support
- empowerment
- group dynamics

- standards
- structure
- time

In comparison with Phase 1 of the research, six of these seven themes were also considered key attributes of networking. Interestingly, group dynamics was not noted as an arising theme when West Midlands' headteachers were discussing the advantages of the earlier NLC initiative, but rather cited as a disadvantage both before and after becoming a Networked Learning Community. This anomaly is explored in greater detail later in this chapter. Additionally, the themes of structure (of the initiative) and time (to network) arose in both phases of the research. As stated in the previous chapter, these are not considered benefits in the literature, but rather requirements of successful networking. However, they are discussed in the following sections due to their importance as perceived by PSLN participants.

Sharing

Although the main thrust of the PSLN initiative nationally was a focus on pupil learning in order to raise standards, it was interesting to note at the start of Phase 2 that the most important aspect of networking for participants was felt to be in sharing through:

- sharing workload
  We shouldn't be inventing our own wheel and that's one of the reasons why we network (3LB)

- sharing expertise
  [To be able] to use the knowledge and expertise of other schools. (7LB)

- sharing ideas
  I'm finding out … what someone else is doing about the same issue. (1LB)

With regard to sharing ideas, the capacity for group problem solving was seen as a strength of the group:

When you sit with five or six other people, one of these …will have thought of something that you haven't. But, between you, it extends all of your thoughts and your ideas. (1LB)

In both phases of the research, the notion of sharing ideas, tackling problems together and finding solutions to new challenges were considered by far the most beneficial aspects of teachers networking together. To return to the literature (Connolly and James, 2006), there is great value placed upon sharing within networks and the notion of sharing in a multifaceted way reflects a 'resource dependency' perspective where network participants come to value the benefits of a varied resource pool accessed through network links.   This theme of sharing is inextricably linked with the support and professional development it offers colleagues in a secure learning environment.

Support

Along with the sharing of expertise, ideas and common purpose, the positive aspects of professional support and development of other colleagues also scored highly amongst respondents in Phase 2 of the research. What was particularly apparent was the value placed on the professional development of teachers by other teachers. As noted in the literature review, Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) label this notion of professional talk and learning together as 'discourse communities'. And, to recall, this aspect was also highlighted by respondents in the earlier NLC pilot study. This important characteristic of network learning involves the learning of colleagues, both within and across the schools:

The focus is not just on individual teachers' professional learning but on professional learning within a community context – a community of learners and the notion of collective learning. (Stoll *et al*, 2006, p 225)

This aspect of discourse communities was acknowledged and highly valued by respondents:

> [We have] visits to other schools and peer mentoring…the staff are really excited that that's going to happen. (2LB)

A feature also occurring in the joint training was the added opportunity for teachers to widen their professional circle at meetings and other network events, thus addressing the isolatory nature of the job:

> Reception teachers, particularly, get really excited at the opportunity to talk to other Reception teachers. (3LB)

In referring back to the early days of the West Midlands network, it is interesting to note that it was this group of primary teachers that also showed the most enthusiasm for working together in the newly formed NLC network. The Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfEE, 2000), which stands separate from the National Curriculum in English primary schools, adds to the isolatory conditions under which these Reception teachers work. Networking opportunities were considered greatly beneficial to this specific group of staff and gave them a greater sense of 'belonging':

> Those who join networks "establish a sense of identity through the pursuit of activities relating to their common interest and objectives" (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 674)

The support aspect for leadership and, in particular, the role of the headteacher was also expressed as an advantage of networking together. As one participant remarked: "It's about the loneliness of headship, you realise that everybody's got the same issues" (1LB). This is

an interesting perception as, throughout the literature, much is discussed in terms of leading the network (Connolly and James, 2006) and leadership opportunities for network participants (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). Leaders of networks are seen as critical in developing the vision and providing support for others (Earl and Katz, 2005). They are considered instrumental in distributing the leadership across the network and in cascading it down through the network (Day and Hadfield, 2005). Their flexible style of leadership is a crucial factor in the success of the network (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). So, arguably, the benefits of networking are all heavily reliant on support from the leadership. However, there is very little acknowledgement in the literature of support for the leadership specifically of the individual headteacher in their own school. Yet, throughout both phases of the research, the support from which headteachers felt they benefited was very apparent and highly valued.

Within the supportive environment of the network, the idea of peer challenge or peer pressure was seen in a positive light. The notion of 'critical friends' within the network to support yet challenge was expressed by participants as a way of driving the initiative forward, as "being part of the network, you have to do it … and I think that's the power of it" (2LB). In broader terms, this role of critical friends across networks is seen as "accelerating the learning" (O' Hair and Veugelers, 2005, p 7).

There were also number of practical examples reported by the headteachers which offered professional development and support opportunities. These were mainly to do with tapping into initiatives in which other schools were involved and that were separate to the main focus of the network. Two examples quoted were the development of school-based websites and access to a project on brain-based learning (Mind Kind Way, 2007). Several headteachers

had also engaged with the initiative because it was different and 'out of the norm'. They felt they had the confidence to do "out of the box stuff" (8LB) because they were doing it together. Opportunities for headteachers and subject leaders to get out of their own environment, visit other schools and other authorities, focus in on learning, and be creative within a supportive environment were expressed in terms of empowerment, enjoyment and opportunities for practitioner research.

Empowerment

It was felt that the supportive climate in the network and the power of corporate voice from the network offered credence to network research projects within the Local Authority. The idea of corporate voice was also a strong feature of the findings from Phase 1 of the research and this feeling of empowerment was now expressed in the PSLN initiative thus:

> It's going to give us more power to say the things that we want to say to the LA. Because there's five schools saying [it] …it's a very powerful message to come back and say 'This is an issue across our network'. (1LB)

Other respondents felt that they were now ready to empower staff further at other levels in the organisation, although some reticence to do so in terms of headteacher accountability is discussed later in this chapter.

Development of professional confidence was key to empowerment. It was the early days of staff being given lead roles across schools and they were benefiting from working with groups of other colleagues to confirm that their own practice was secure. Interestingly, 'aspiring stars' in the networks were not always the obvious candidates to take these leadership roles as

noted: "at one of the meetings, she [a less confident teacher] was leading it" (3LB). This aspect of developing professional confidence was only possible through the growing trust and relationships of groups and working parties within the networks.

Group dynamics

The group dynamics of the network, where they worked well, were seen as a positive aspect of networking:

> I think the dynamics of the group, the management and organisation of the group, has supported its success at the end of the day. (11LB)

Insights into others' personalities and how other colleagues worked was also a noted positive aspect. Further analysis of responses regarding the dynamics of the groups showed that a number were specifically relating to the banker in one of the networks who had been the driving force with regard to the management of the group's activities. The remaining comments across both networks concentrated on the advantages of having a mixture of personnel in any network, with a mixture of skills and attributes:

> Within our network, people do different things. People just tend to take on roles, it's very interesting …we're all very different personalities as headteachers, but we do have this common thread … the advantages are as well, some people are…good at instigating things…[some are] good at continuing things…[some are] good at completing them. But when you're in a network, you all help each other along the way. (2LB)

To return to the first phase of the research, the theme of group dynamics did not arise as a positive aspect of networking with NLC participants. On reflection, there may be one of

several reasons for no mention of group dynamics in positive terms in Phase 1. First, headteachers in the West Midlands' study had been working together for nearly four years, had built up strong working relationships and were very familiar with each other's work patterns to the extent that this aspect was now probably imperceptible within the NLC and, therefore, not mentioned by participants. Or, second, the Phase 2 headteachers had more experience in working in a variety of collaborative arrangements and were more adept at drawing out the positive aspects of working groups to the benefit of the network. Or, third, the finding was just unique to these networks and is one of the limitations of this research in that small samples can produce evidence in research that is not always generalisable. In order to determine the validity of this finding, it would need exploring over a wider range of network participants.

The idea of group dynamics as critical in determining the success and effectiveness of the network is explained in the literature review (Stoll *et al*, 2006). It is also discussed later in this chapter, as headteacher participants perceived a positive team culture and strong working relationships as beneficial to the network in the follow up interviews a year later.

Standards

The London headteachers recognised the value placed on a pupil learning focus by the PSLN initiative and expressed their excitement during the initial interviews at being involved in a project where the participants had a common purpose linked to a clear pedagogical focus that was meaningful to their school:

> When I was talking around that at the meeting, there were other people with the same problem… [I thought] it would be good to journey together. (10LB)

And, just as in Phase 1 of the research, headteachers expressed the positive aspect of focusing in on curriculum and pupil learning rather than being constantly side-tracked by management issues. The national PSLN materials had been very specific in intention at the outset that each network should have a clear pupil focus on raising standards in English or mathematics. Although this was being acknowledged by participants in the early days of the initiative, it was interesting to see to what extent it would remain a priority throughout the year. For this purpose the issue of a focus on standards and pupil learning is visited again at the end of this chapter.

Two additional themes arose from the interviews with PSLN participants when discussing the positive aspects of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative – that of structure (Veugelers and O' Hair, 2005) and time (Stoll *et al*, 2006). As noted in the literature, these particular aspects are not considered advantages of networking, but rather ideal prerequisites for networking. However, they are important in ensuring the success of the initiative and, therefore, are discussed in the following sections.

Structure

Comments on the structure of the network were made by several respondents. However, many of these pertained to the pivotal role played by the 'banker'. This had originally been a role designated by the DfES for a school leader within the network to hold the PSLN funding in their school budget and to be the point of contact for the DfES and the Local Authority. As

the initiative had rolled out, the role had developed and the banker became the manager of the network, the person who organised meetings, communicated across the network and communicated with the LA. The bankers in both networks also seemed to be key drivers and kept the schools on track with regard to the agreed action plans:

> I think [the banker] was very good at leading the group…so that at the end of the meeting, you knew what you were going to go away and do. (11LB)

Respondents in both networks were also in agreement that the structure of the networks and the opportunities for adult learning offered staff engagement at all levels because:

> Often heads might network, but other staff don't always get the same opportunity. (7LB)
>
> The Learning Network is probably the most powerful vehicle that I've experienced for a long time … because it's actually cascaded to [other] staff as well, [and] to Teaching Assistants. (4LB)

The opportunities that the network structure gave for the professional development of all staff was also considered a benefit of the earlier NLC initiative and was seen to improve professional confidence at all levels within schools involved.

In defining the structure of the network, the PSLN initiative had determined the size as between five and eight schools, and one headteacher felt that this size of network was optimum. The initiative had also determined a common focus linked to raising standards, and another respondent felt that there was flexibility within this for each school to have a 'tailor made' focus under the overarching umbrella of a common pupil focus. The external structure and support available was also mentioned by participants in positive terms and, in particular,

the framework of support that the LA had given schools in clarifying the process, explaining the national model and helping networks make sense of the plethora of national support materials and documentation. Thus, the overall structure of the initiative was seen as generally supportive to participants and not so rigid as to be unworkable in the early stages of this initiative.

Time

As with the findings in Phase 1 of the research, having the time to network was also seen as a critical requirement for the success of the networks in Phase 2. It was also perceived that staff felt valued by being given time and heads themselves valued the time both they and their staff had to get together during the working day:

> The staff are 'over the moon'…just the fact that we're combining them together…the staff and the support assistants…they just felt so valued. … The money side of it has really, really helped… we longed to do things like this, but being in deficit budgets, you can't. (2LB)

The PSLNs had been able to fund the time to network through centrally released money, which gave them between £12,000 and £14,000 each. However, it is acknowledged in the literature that:

> Given the slow pace of change in schools, there must be some assurance that the necessary resources will be available for an extended period of time. … The eventual withdrawal of such support threatens a network's survival. (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 675)

The question as the year progressed would be whether or not there was a will to sustain networking initiatives without the central funding. This aspect is revisited in the final sections of the chapter.

In summary, the notion of sharing and support through networking with like minded colleagues for a common purpose focused on pupil progress had provided these teachers with the motivation to challenge existing practices and the opportunity to grow professionally. (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992). Certainly what was apparent in the interviews at the start of the year was a real positive feeling about what the network might offer those involved and an excitement in moving forward together as a Primary Strategy Learning Network.

The perceived advantages one year into PSLN initiative

In the follow up interviews, one academic year on, each of the twelve headteachers felt that all their earlier responses were still pertinent and additionally noted further advantages. These were two newly arising themes of extending knowledge frontiers and accountability as seen in a positive light for successful networking. PSLN participants also cited many of the original perceived advantages as having developed further over the course of the year and, in particular, the network bonding that had occurred over the time and the development of leadership skills for participants at all levels. Therefore the four main advantages one year on were perceived as:

- developing relationships
- leadership opportunities
- knowledge frontiers
- shared accountability

Developing relationships

What came across quite strongly in the second set of interviews one year on was the focus on the further development of the relationships among network participants. Interestingly, network bonding was now a perceived strength in sustaining the group. This was over and above any importance placed on the money, even though funding was still seen as an essential element to access time for networking:

> I've said funding is very, very important which it is. [But] we've gone along with that [commitment to the network], whether it's funded or not. We'll manage that. (6LB)

The building of relationships had extended out, with two infant school headteachers in the networks stating that, through the work of the PSLN, they had developed further links with their partner junior schools who were not network participants. As relationships across schools developed, trust and openness meant that practitioners came to rely more on peer support groups. This idea of widening professional circles was reiterated from the initial interviews and seen as a positive aspect, both socially and professionally, with the added benefit of "cross fertilisation of ideas" (7LB):

> Networks that engage and sustain teachers' interest and commitment blend, rather than differentiate between, personal and professional, social and work related activities. … This social aspect of networks is an important ingredient in establishing a climate of trust and support because it enables members to know and appreciate one another as people, not just as maths teachers or science specialists. (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 674)

Developing relationships across the schools in the PSLNs certainly gave staff an insight into how other colleagues worked and developed their confidence in their own abilities:

Take, for instance my staff [who] were particularly nervous … and they came back and they said 'Oh, that's easy'… (2LB)

With that development of relationships, trust and confidence came the strength to continually challenge practice in a safe environment:

They [colleagues in other schools] have a slightly different perspective to you. They challenge. They talk about something that's pertinent to them and you think 'actually that would transfer to what I'm doing'. (8LB)

And as a result of growing confidence in their own abilities, colleagues were more confident to take on leadership roles within the network.

Leadership opportunities

Therefore, a theme that had been cited in the early days of the networks and was reiterated strongly was the opportunity that the network gave for empowering others and developing leadership potential and capacity:

She represented me [as the headteacher] at meetings because she had the background knowledge and she had better skills. I think it's developed her. (12LB)

This was sometimes in spite of whether or not staff were actively seeking the challenge of leadership as noted by one headteacher whose ICT co-ordinator was not perceived to be a natural leader, but was put in the position of having to lead a two day joint training event – "he rose to the challenge" (8LB). Time and again in the literature, sharing the leadership is noted as a key requirement for successful networking:

> Becoming a community of practice requires a learning environment in which each voice can be heard and in which everyone has a feeling of empowerment, belonging and mutual care. Leadership in the network therefore has to be shared. (Little and Veugelers, 2005, pp 286-287)

This is an important aspect of networking, where leadership has to be dispersed in order to increase the capacity within the organisation.

Knowledge frontiers

A new theme of knowledge frontiers arose a year into the life of the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative. There were several strands to this theme. First, newcomers welcomed the advantage of accessing insider knowledge with regard to LA procedures and school contexts:

> Being new to the authority, and not knowing the schools very well or their catchment area very well, it gave us a wider knowledge. (11LB)

Second, there was an excitement at being at the forefront of something ground-breaking for one group of participants who were involved in a practitioner research project on new ways to track pupil learning:

> And I think particularly because what we'd taken as our research had become a focus of the local authority as well, it's really helped us to be in with the running, if you like. (2LB)

And, finally, knowledge frontiers were expressed in terms of reciprocity:

> I think, in essence, the idea of actually reaching out, opening up the school and opening ourselves to new ideas and new possibilities has probably turned out to be the most beneficial aspect of the whole process. (4LB)

This idea of offering other colleagues in other schools some professional development and gaining something in return is also acknowledged in the literature as a fundamental element of successful networking (Stoll *et al*, 2006).

Shared accountability

Accountability also arose as a positive aspect of networking and, as one headteacher noted, a useful tool in keeping all stakeholders engaged.

> We've got to do this, we've got to account for that money, to make sure that we're using it properly. So, that's made us meet and, as part of that, it's made us move forward as well. (2LB)

It is interesting to note that the accountability aspect of the initiative was mainly self perpetuated. Certainly, from an LA point of view throughout the initiative, the issue of accountability had been fairly 'light touch' in approach. A request had been made by the Local Authority for participating networks to self evaluate at the end of the year and share their work with other network colleagues in the form of a brief LA presentation, but there was purposefully no additional burden in terms of accounts and audits. However, network headteachers and, in particular, network bankers felt a duty to adhere to the network action plan that had originally secured the funding for the initiative. In the words of Weber (1921, in Guenther *et al*, 1968):

> No machinery in the world functions so precisely as this apparatus of men. … [It] reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. … This passion for bureaucratization drives us to despair. (Weber, 1921, in Guenther *et al*, 1968, p iii)

This interesting and important observation made by Weber (1921) can be still seen as pertinent in modern day school networks, where teachers and headteachers seek freedom from bureaucracy but begin to create it themselves in newly formed educational organisations.

Accountability was also raised by several respondents as a disadvantage in the second round of interviews and is discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

In summary, all participants in Phase 2 of the research agreed that all expectations had been met and often exceeded by the end of a year's involvement in the PSLN initiative. What came across very strongly in the analysis of the data were the very positive feelings expressed with regard to the strong and supportive relationships that had developed over the period of a year and the positive dynamics that existed within the groups. These relationships, above all else, were seen as the glue that held the networks together as the participants had developed a sense of corporate identity "through the pursuit of activities relating to their common interest and objectives" (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 674). However, towards the end of the year, with personnel changes at senior leadership level in participating schools, the dynamics of the network groups became very fragile indeed as noted in the following sections of this chapter. The literature acknowledges that the way in which networks cope with this uncertainty may be a significant factor in their effectiveness (Stoll *et al*, 2006).

The perceived disadvantages at the start of the PSLN initiative

There were four arising themes on the disadvantages of involvement in the PSLN initiative as perceived by participants at the start of the initiative and these were:

- priorities
- mobility
- autonomy
- bureaucracy

Priorities

This theme had a number of different strands, the main one being that there were many other priorities making demands on headteachers' time and that unless the focus of the network was a specific focus of their school they would not carry on investing time in the initiative on a long term basis.

> We've got so little time, we've got so little money, we've got a limited amount of energy … and we need to make sure that we get the best possible return for it. (4LB)

There was already a feeling that there had been too many meetings, particularly at the planning stage of the initiative, and that precious time had been wasted going round in circles, trying to find common ground, because "in a way it's a disparate group with some [participants] way ahead of others" (10LB).

> It took quite a bit of time to set up in the first place and for five heads to be out [of school] for that amount of time probably is pushing it a little bit in some schools. (5LB)

There was also a frustration felt by network leaders when participants' school priorities took precedence over those of the network. Participants had not yet taken on board the notion of working for "the common good" (Foley and Grace, 2001, p 11) and displayed egocentricity in terms of their own personal and professional interests and those of their schools.

> One of the disadvantages is trying to organise things for it [the network], particularly when you're very busy or when people let you down. (8LB)

Certainly, the setting up of the initiative by the Local Authority was seen to have been long and drawn out with the time taken getting groups of schools together for networking purposes seemingly endless. Also, setting diaries for a group of five to eight schools had been continuously difficult throughout the project in terms of common dates for meetings, joint training and visits. The frustration of these busy professionals was apparent in their responses of "trying to make our diaries match" (1LB), to attend a meeting that in the first instance did not seem particularly productive because time was wasted being "side tracked by too much 'blue skies' thinking" (7LB). The Local Authority, in its well meant intention to support schools through the planning stage had arranged a series of set planning meetings, but "where you have to do things on certain days or at certain times" (5LB) had been practically impossible for headteachers with all their other school priorities. There was an acknowledgement in the literature that schools were constantly working hard on their own agendas and that sometimes "collaboration meant extra pressure rather than extra support" (Coulton, 2006, p 25).

Releasing staff from school for meetings was also an issue expressed by the headteachers. And, although the initiative funded teacher release time, it was often school commitments and

ensuring supply staff cover in the schools that were the problems, particularly in the smaller schools. So, although there was a willingness to be involved and a clear commitment to the aims of the network, school priorities always had to take precedence over network commitments.

Mobility

The theme of staff mobility arose as an issue and was seen to be so particularly at leadership level. A case of headteacher mobility in one network had proved to have an adverse effect due to the resulting lack of ownership and lack of engagement on the part of the newcomer, with one respondent noting that the new headteacher "has been completely disinterested" (7LB) in the work of the network. Huxman and Vangen (2000) argue that members' perceptions of other members and the consequent impact is one of the ambiguities that exist within networks as complex organisations. This issue became exacerbated as time progressed and is further noted in the follow up interview discussed later in this chapter. Additionally, as staff moved in and out of the participating schools and the network, precious time had to be spent updating new members, where it was acknowledged that "key players missed out and I'm not sure how they'll catch up" (8LB). These issues arising in networks due to this transient nature of staff are common in the literature (Coulton, 2006; Day and Hadfield, 2005).

Autonomy

Loss of leadership power or autonomy arose as an issue fairly early on in the initiative with school leaders struggling with the notion of delegating responsibility and accountability to others in the group. This issue was noted in the literature where:

> Establishing patterns of distributed leadership is a subtle dance of power and authority. Sharing leadership within schools and across the network can cause confusion, resentment and protection of position and power, especially if the expectations for the differentiation of roles are not clearly specified. (Earl and Katz, 2005, p 71)

One respondent in the initial interviews felt quite strongly about the loss of her leadership power in terms of quality control:

> If you work in a group in your own school, you tend to get it done your way because you're in a senior management position. You don't want things to be presented in such a way that seems a waste of time for all those people who are listening. The quality of the [network] launch was not as it should have been and if I'd have been doing all of it, it wouldn't have been like that. (4LB)

Although much had been expressed at the action planning stage in terms of developing leadership potential and distributing leadership to others, headteachers within the networks were struggling with the notion of releasing the power and control:

> We still feel the need to keep a hold on it. We did talk about letting the lead staff get on with it, but we thought 'No, we can't'. We just felt we need to check up … what if they meet and change it? (9LB)

Autonomy shared with other headteachers was expressed as "too many chiefs" with "an awful long time [spent] getting nowhere actually" (7LB) when attempting to action plan together. It

could be argued that the nature of schools as traditionally hierarchical structures and the headteacher as the leader conflicts with the style of leadership promoted in networks, thus the "more hierarchical the management structure, the more the liberation of leadership capacity is likely to be stifled" (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002, p 11). Certainly, to have a scenario where twelve school hierarchical structures were being merged into two Primary Strategy Learning Networks was a cause of tension for those headteacher participants at the top of the hierarchical structure in their own school. This noted disadvantage of hierarchical structures is closely linked to participants' perceptions of bureaucratisation as discussed below, and a key concept noted in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Bureaucracy

Formalisation is acknowledged in the literature (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998) as a necessity 'to get things done' and bureaucracy was another arising theme.   Strong feelings were expressed by one respondent with regard to work overload created by the documentation required both nationally and locally in the planning stage:

> Filling in the wretched paperwork was one step too far …that's another three or four hours of a head's time… so, that's when you question whether it's worth it. (1LB)

Some heads had experienced a feeling of initiative overload, as "you can only channel your energies really productively into a limited number [of initiatives]" (7LB).   There were also concerns expressed of having to "jump through hoops" (4LB) for the funding and concerns raised over accountability and related paperwork in order to justify the spending of the money, with "accountability to the Nth degree" (8LB). As noted in the literature (Lowndes

and Skelcher, 1998), the setting up of some kind of bureaucratic structure is seen as a stage in the life cycle of a network as it moves "from a concern with exchanging information and ideas to a focus on project or policy implementation" (p 324). It is important to note, however, that the authors warn against collaborations having formality forced upon them. Certainly, frustrations were beginning to show:

> I'm doing an action plan, but my school improvement plan is far more important. I haven't got the time to invest in a blow-by-blow account of what we're going to do with £2,000 [each] when I'm dealing with a £1 million budget, you know! (8LB)

In noting these early frustrations with the initiative, it is worth acknowledging the possibility of 'implementation dip' described by Fullan with Stiegelbauer (1991) which suggests that, within the process of change, things get worse before they get better.

Issues of accountability and imposed bureaucracy are discussed further in this chapter when considering the impositions of an externally driven model of networking.

In summary, priorities other than those of the network's made demands upon headteachers, and the mobility of schools' staff held up network proceedings and altered established working relationships. These, along with developing bureaucratic inhibitors and headteacher concerns over perceived loss of autonomy were the main disadvantages in the early stages of the PSLN initiative.

The perceived disadvantages one year into the PSLN initiative

In the follow up interviews, one academic year on, there were no new arising themes regarding the disadvantages of involvement in the PSLN initiative, rather a number of the original issues had evolved to the extent that they were a significant threat to the future sustainability of the PSLN initiative and now expressed under one overarching theme of:

- engagement

As with Phase 1 of the research, the structure of the initiative also arose as a point of discussion and will be dealt with later in this section when addressing participants' perceptions of an externally imposed model of networking. Respondents were also questioned about perceived external impositions which arose as a finding in the pilot study and this theme is considered in a later section of this chapter.

Engagement

Continuing staff changes had caused a loss of positive dynamics as the make up of the group changed. This issue with mobility of personnel is acknowledged in the literature (Coulton, 2006; Day and Hadfield, 2005; Huxman and Vangen, 2000) as having an adverse effect in terms of sustaining internal capacity and requiring 'catch up' time for new members. As Huxman and Vangen (2000) note:

> Continually shifting membership means a continual need to reassess and renegotiate others' agendas. Hard-won compromises can suddenly be reopened. (Huxman and Vangen, 2000, p 799)

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People began to join the two networks not having experienced the initial network bonding that had thrashed out the common purpose in the infancy of the network:

> And that, actually, is quite hard to deal with. I think that's where you lose your dynamic. It's too much like hard work trying to keep those people up to speed with things. Who is going to invest the time to bring them on board? (8LB)

One of the networks was finding itself managing the issue of engagement due to changes in school leadership and the second network was finding itself managing the issue of engagement due to downward delegation - and consequent lessening of importance - on the part of a school. As a consequence of this, the PSLN initiative was now not perceived as a priority by some participants in both networks and, consequently, network leadership meetings were rarely fully quorate. In addition to lack of ownership by some of the headteachers, lack of involvement with network activities were due to a number of other reasons including time restraints, too many other conflicting commitments, breakdowns in network communications or, as one headteacher remarked:

> What happened was the Holy Grail wasn't out there. We were seeking something that wasn't as tangible as we hoped it would be. (10LB)

Therefore, the excitement and expectations of the network participants at the start of the initiative had not been realised one year on.

These key issues of ownership, involvement and engagement are strongly linked to the earlier theme of priorities which had been the most significant disadvantage noted at the start of the PSLN initiative. Heads felt that there was a general lack of engagement because networking

took a lot of time and effort. As school purpose was still seen as being the absolute priority, if the network purpose did not link closely with this, then heads could not afford the time or effort to network:

> I think if ultimately the pupils at the school are not going to benefit or the staff don't benefit, or both, we let go. Because there's too much involved. I wouldn't want to do anything with anybody unless it was worth doing [for the pupils]. (4LB)

As noted in the literature (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996), headteachers recognise the need to collaborate but preserve their autonomy to respond first and foremost to the needs of their pupils and their own schools.

The issue of a new headteacher joining one of the networks and the feeling that the school was benefiting from the network without putting anything back in terms of commitment and leadership was also beginning to cause a rift within this network. It had significantly altered the dynamics of this group of headteachers who now felt unable to be as open with one another due to variance in representation at meetings.

Structure

The structure of the networking initiative also came to the fore as being disadvantageous to the process of networking. It is important to note that issues around the model or structure arose quite naturally out of discussions with headteachers. Issues such as the additional workload during the setting up stage; the development of hierarchical structures within the model; the difficulties experienced with setting joint diary dates for the network meetings and

other organisational issues such as communication systems and protocols; the limited amount of funding allocated; the limited focus; and the feeling of initiative overload for headteachers. Although each of these issues was only expressed by one or two network participants, taken together they represent a significant acknowledgement that there was a degree of discomfort with an imposed structure. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) note that although networks need systems, structures and clear assignments of responsibility:

> To remain effective, networks must tread a fine line between the explicit assignment of organisational responsibility and the temptation to create hierarchical structures to manage the network growth or to respond to mandates or constraints imposed by outside funders or governmental bodies (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 676)

This finding leads into the final question posed to network participants which related specifically to the findings in Phase 1 - that the imposed nature of a centrally directed initiative brought with it a number of disadvantages to the organic nature of networking. The purpose of posing such a question to the PSLNs in this research was to ascertain whether or not one might generalise that these disadvantages were common in other centrally directed government initiatives for networking. As a reminder, the specific examples of disadvantages given by participants given in Phase 1 of the research were those of impositions in terms of workload, agendas, timescales, bureaucracy, accountability and an imposed model of networking. In posing this additional question, due care was given to explaining the context of the NLC initiative. This was felt necessary in order to be open and transparent about the nature of the question in order not to lead the interviewees in their responses.

External impositions

There were mixed feelings across both networks with regard to the external impositions of a centrally introduced (by Government) and locally directed (by Local Authority) model of networking. Many acknowledged the imposed nature of the initiative but felt it was manageable and, in some instances, beneficial:

> Actually [imposed timescales], that's been an advantage. I'm quite glad that it's been a year and that we might see an end to it. (8LB)

> It's [the imposed agenda] given us the opportunity to look quite closely at something that was one of our [school] concerns. (5LB)

With regard to the issue of an imposed model, only one headteacher felt strongly about this:

> That's why I'm talking about [jumping through] 'hoops' with the initial structure… it's one size fits all, this is the template folks! (4LB)

Imposed accountability, both actual and wrongly perceived, was seen at three different levels: centrally (DfES); locally (LA); but also from the network itself. A further analysis of participant responses suggests that the networks in this research had set up their own internal bureaucratic systems to cope with external pressures of accountability. This tension is discussed in the literature (Day and Hadfield, 2005) with a move from "informality and flexibility to more formal and rigid forms" (p 56) acknowledged as networks grow.

Conclusion on findings

Over the course of the academic year, the headteachers in the PSLNs had remained, on the whole, very positive about the initiative. Many of their initial perceptions on the benefits of networking together had been fulfilled and some of their initial concerns had not been manifested. Additional advantages had arisen throughout the year once supportive network relationships had begun to develop. When participants had been asked what the best thing had been about the PSLN initiative, by far the most common response from headteachers was the support and insight that working with other colleagues and familiarising themselves with practices offered in other schools. The "significant claims that networks make on teachers time and energy" (Lieberman and McLaughlin, 1992, p 673) were acknowledged when respondents were asked what the worst thing had been about the PSLN initiative. The most common responses were centred on time, energy and effort in terms of commitment and other priorities, and the frustration of staff turnover. Generally speaking the PSLNs were perceived as very successful both at school and LA level. Feedback from regional DfES officers linked to the authority was positive with regard to the local implementation of the initiative and the work of the 55 schools involved. However, end of year evaluations presented by each of the networks to the Local Authority displayed little evidence of real impact in terms of raising standards.

At the start of the PSLN initiative and throughout the first year, the positive feedback concerning the dynamics of the groups was at odds with the negative feedback on group dynamics expressed by NLC participants in Phase 1 of the research. However, in the final set of interviews in Phase 2, disquiet was apparent in terms of alterations to personnel which had

changed the dynamics of groups and ultimately impacted on the engagement of some in the initiative. This is an important finding as:

> Educational reforms continuously fail because attention is not paid to the alteration of power dynamics. (Sarason, 1990, in Stoll *et al*, 2006)

This impact of group dynamics will be discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to the power within networks and the power of networks, as acknowledged in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

With regard to issues arising as a result of an externally imposed initiative, it became apparent that the disadvantages of an imposed model perceived in Phase 1 of the research also existed to some extent in the Phase 2. However, although there was general acknowledgement of central impositions, there seemed to be an acceptance of these from most headteachers. To a large extent, the bureaucratic structures due to accountability and the additional workload in terms of meetings, minutes and reports were, in the main, instigated by the networks themselves and were the main areas of concern arising in Phase 2. The imposed nature of a Central Government introduced and a Local Authority directed initiative was viewed, on the whole, as at an appropriate and an acceptable level, with the majority of headteacher participants stating that they would involve their schools in a similar initiative again. There may be one of two reasons for this. First, the central involvement in the PSLN initiative seemed to be 'light touch' compared to the NLC initiative in Phase 1. Therefore, the imposed aspect was perceived to be at an acceptable level. Or, the second explanation might be that, in the elapsed time between the two pieces of research (20 months), schools had become more

adept in applying for money for initiatives for specific purposes, with specified agendas having access to ring fenced funding. If this were the case, one might conclude that schools had become more adept at and accepting of "jumping through hoops" (4LB) to access funding streams. Probably, the truth lies somewhere between these two explanations.

A final reflection

To revisit the purpose of the PSLN initiative, it was to be very much focused on pupil learning and an improvement in standards of literacy and/or numeracy in schools. Although the primary aim of this research was not to investigate the educational outcomes at pupil level, a very obvious issue arising from the findings is the notable lack of responses in follow up interviews with regard to the benefits for pupils. Indeed, the benefits for staff in terms of support, colleagueship, shared workload, corporate voice, professional development, motivation, challenge, engagement and so forth arising from the findings far outweigh the few examples of direct impact on classroom practices and improvements in learning opportunities to raise standards. One could assume that the myriad of benefits at practitioner level might eventually have an indirect impact in the classroom. But comments on specific details of each network's focus at pupil level were, on the whole, absent from the findings. In this respect, one could presume that the Government's initiative was unsuccessful in steering the national agenda to directly impact on standards in the short term. It seems from the findings that networking cannot be viewed as a 'quick fix' for a national issue on standards, but should rather be encouraged as a means to support the profession for the long term benefits of both practitioners and pupils. This hypothesis, along with other research finding will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The data produced in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the research have been analysed in previous chapters of this thesis and linked to theoretical frameworks that evolved from the literature. This final chapter, Chapter 6, focuses on new learning arising from these. To recall the findings from the data, there were a number of elements that were crucial for networks to function successfully and there were a number of commonly acknowledged advantages and disadvantages for schools networking together. The critical factor that impacted on both of these was power. This manifested itself in the networks studied as authority (control over the network), micropolitics (influence within the network), and legitimacy (validity and influence beyond the network). Power in all these forms was a key concept in the literature review and it has been explored throughout this research with regard to the notion of networks as power bases for driving forward school improvement. Definitions of the terms power, authority, influence and legitimacy, as used in this final conclusion, are explained in the second section of this chapter to clarify their meaning in this research and to describe them as distinct from Weberian theories of power.

A further concept noted in the literature and explored within this research was the notion of networks as *fluid* organisations, their complex structures, and their ability to function

successfully within a rigid and prescribed organisational structure – thus the tension between fluid and organic versus bureaucratic organisations for promoting innovation.

This final chapter acknowledges these theoretical frameworks in addressing the four key research questions. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, there is a brief review of the findings to contextualise the new theories that will be presented from the research. These findings are reported in terms of lessons learned on large scale educational reform, the requirements for successful networking, and the advantages and disadvantages of networking. These findings arise from the data in both the pilot study of a Networked Learning Community (Phase 1) and the main study of two Primary Strategy Learning Networks (Phase 2 of the research). To conclude the first section, a typology of the positive and negative elements that occurred within and beyond the networks in this research is presented for consideration.

In the second section, the problems of a centrally directed approach are discussed and linked to the theoretical framework of power and involvement outlined in the literature review and discussed in previous chapters. A summary of power partnerships in networks and their consequences in relation to school impact is then discussed. Consequently, a suggested 'ideal' model for productive networking relationships between key stakeholders is offered for consideration.

In the third and final section of this chapter, proposals are put forward from the research for evaluating the impact of such large scale initiatives as school networks on system wide reform. These proposals are offered by the researcher to promote a wider educational debate

and to contribute to a higher degree of success when planning change agendas such as the implementation of networking initiatives as a means of raising standards in primary schools nationally.

Additionally, the limitations of this research and the possibilities for further research are considered in the concluding sections of this chapter.

Review of the findings

Research Question 1: What lessons have already been learned about large scale educational reform?

Models of change

Change agendas and change models for education reform are manifold in the literature. They also tend to be an integral part of current Government change initiative 'packages'. Undoubtedly, the evidence shows that both networking initiatives in Phase 1 and Phase 2 in this research display the features of tried and tested change management models that lead the participants through several stages in the change (see appendices v for examples). However, there is no one ideal model for change, rather the complexities within organisations need to be managed in order to ensure some success in the change process (Fullan, 2000). This research recognises that flexibility should be built into Government introduced networking initiatives to acknowledge these complexities and to accommodate the different contexts in which such initiatives are to be introduced – thus promoting 'adaptive' rather than 'adoptive' models of change (Hopkins *et al*, 1994). Adoptive approaches tend to favour top-down implementation

with undue regard for individual school contexts, whereas adaptive approaches display far more sensitivity to individual school environments and local contexts. This research also acknowledges that the requirements for successful networking need to be catered for within any introduced models. These requirements, as reported by respondents in the research, are summarised in the following sections.

Research Question 2: What lessons have already been learned about the common characteristics of networks and to what extent have these informed the PSLN initiative?

Requirements

What came across strongly in the findings from both the pilot study in Phase 1 and the main study in Phase 2 of the research was that participants in both the NLC and the PSLN national networking initiatives viewed certain requirements as essential for success. These requirements were expressed mainly in terms of <u>structure</u> and <u>funded time</u>. It is noted in the literature (Woods *et al*, 2006) that "collaborative ventures require strong organisational structures" (p 61). However, care needs to be taken in prescribing the structure of a network so as not to inhibit its organic growth as "the organisation of a network should be characterised by *structuring the fluid"* (Veugelers and O'Hair, 2005, p 220) – thus supporting the organic nature of the network with systems and structures that are adaptable to any necessary changes. This is a key finding acknowledged in the analytical framework from the literature review and substantiated in the findings. The need for a flexible approach that is readily adaptable to local contexts is key to success when introducing structures or models of networking.

Structures, as perceived by respondents in this research, not only pertained to the internal structure of the network but also to the external structures that supported or constrained the network. So, for instance, internal structures were expressed in terms of clear, well organised management, agreed goals, systems and procedures, clear lines of communication and of accountability. External structures were acknowledged in terms of a flexible model that included guidance on network size, overall focus, time scales, network management and reporting requirements. Precise and manageable action plans were also perceived by respondents as crucial in order to steer the network, to maintain the focus and to hold network participants to account. Other external structures that were considered valuable by respondents included a local framework of guidance at the setting up stage to support those learning 'how to network', as well as access to high quality professional development 'tailor made' to the needs of those involved.

Within the frenetic nature of school life, allocating time to networking activities was also seen as an important success criterion. Additional to this was the requirement that the time be allocated during the working day rather than as a 'bolt-on' to an already busy and overloaded work schedule. In order for this to occur, adequate funding needed to be available to schools already working within tight budget restraints. Furthermore, to support networks through the stages of change from initiation to outcome (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991), it was argued by respondents that the funding needed to be sustained over a significant period. Rutherford and Jackson (2006) when writing about networks in secondary schools, concur:

> It is also clear that partnership working is not cheap and, in times of plenty, schools are keen to be involved but, in leaner times, there is retrenchment. The key theme, then, is that of sustainability and especially of funding. (Rutherford and Jackson, 2006, p 449)

The PSLN initiative itself had acknowledged the need for structure, focus, management, time scales and action planning (DfES, 2004a). Therefore, in this respect, it had proved successful as a model for networking. Certainly, in comparison to the earlier NLC initiative in the Phase 1 of this research, the external impositions of a prescribed model were not viewed by these PSLN respondents as excessively demanding, controlling or inhibiting. However, the funding for the PSLN initiative was short term, with financial support for one year only but an expectation of a two year commitment (DfES, 2004a) – thus not taking into account the need for continued external support through all stages of the change process (Hopkins *et al*, 1994).

Impact

In terms of impact on learning, a study of the PSLN initiative would need to continue over the longer term to provide any evidence of such. However, within the time constraints of this particular research, networking was not viewed by the headteachers as a 'quick fix' for raising standards in these primary schools. And, in spite of promises made in submissions for funding and network action plans, the idea of raising standards in the classroom seemed almost peripheral in the headteachers' minds. This is a key finding, as outcomes in terms of pupil achievement and attainment is the core purpose of any educational reform. If change is to have any meaning at all, it needs to impact in the classroom and "on the hearts and minds of teachers and students" (Hopkins *et al*, 1994, p 24). Yet, Local Authority evaluations showed limited evidence of any significant impact on 'hearts and minds' or on standards at the end of the first year. In this respect, the Government aims for this initiative seemed too ambitious for immediate impact in the classroom.

Research Question 3: What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this particular model of collaborative working for moving primary education forward?

Advantages

The most important benefits perceived by respondents in both networking initiatives in this research were the reciprocal arrangements in terms of <u>sharing</u> a rich and varied pool of resources, and the professional <u>support</u> available from within and beyond the network. This, again, is a key finding in the research as the PSLN initiative had insisted on a common purpose based on a pupil focus for raising standards. And yet, the participants in the research seemed more intent on investing in staff development than an impact on pupils' learning. This seems to imply that personal gain is more of a focus for individuals to commit to networking than that of the 'common good' (Foley and Grace, 2001).

Other benefits expressed by participants included the power within the network through the influence of groups in steering the agenda and the empowerment of individuals in leading the learning of colleagues. These were highly valued. Additionally, the power of the network within the Local Authority in terms of corporate voice and legitimacy were further noted benefits. Corporate voice is defined and acknowledged in the literature review where headteachers are seen to use the power of networking to be "the voice of state education" (Busher and Hodgkinson, 1996, p 62). Legitimacy in terms of professional validation of practice occurs as practitioner confidence develops and is closely linked to the power of corporate voice. Although this empowerment of individuals and groups was viewed positively, power was also regarded as an inhibitor to networking or as a disadvantage if misused.

Disadvantages

Power was perceived by respondents as an inhibitor when expressed through autocratic network leadership which inhibited rapid decision-making, or through hierarchical structures and excessive accountability to the Local Authority or the Government. Equally, where decisive leadership was acknowledged by respondents as critical to the network's success, it was also expressed as stifling to the network if overly controlling (Hopkins and Jackson, 2002). These issues are linked to the theoretical framework of power and discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Network balance

But first to return to the requirements and advantages and disadvantages of networking, there were many elements that were expressed as either a positive or a negative feature in both the pilot and the main study. However, these were often counter-argued with an opposing viewpoint by other respondents. So, for instance, the positive aspect of a common purpose conflicted with the negative influence on the network of individual or school agendas. Equally, the positive feature of having time to network conflicted with the reality of on-going diary constraints of school leaders. Where negative elements appeared as a temporary feature – for instance, a short term work overload at the planning stage – or where they were small in number, participants in the network managed these with goodwill as part of the process of networking. However, where negative elements were a permanent feature – for instance, autocratic leadership or insufficient engagement – or where they were found to be large in numbers – for instance too many dominant characters - these were more difficult to manage as the balance within the network was adversely affected and disengagement became a problem.

Thus, the research presents the typology in Figure 2 below to map out the interrelatedness of specific positive and negative features that existed within and beyond the networks studied. This typology is set out as a quadrant model with the positive and negative features in networks displayed vertically, and their location - either within the network or beyond the network - displayed horizontally.

Figure 2: Network balance

	Positive features	**Negative features**	
Within the network	Empowerment Common purpose Time to network Effective systems and structures	Accountability Conflicting agendas Diary constraints Bureaucratic overload	**Within the network**
Beyond the network	Sharing of good practice Broader educational perspectives Power of corporate voice Bottom up innovative practices	Spreading of weak practice Insularity Persuasion by dominant voice Top down central control	**Beyond the network**
	Positive features	**Negative features**	

As a further explanation of Figure 2, the elements included in the top left section of the typology are the positive features found within the networks in this research and the elements included in the top right section are the corresponding negative features. The elements included in the bottom left section are the positive features that were considered effective

beyond the network and, equally, the elements in the bottom right hand section are the corresponding negative features that impacted beyond the network. The mid sections of Figure 2 include the corresponding positive and negative features that occurred both within and beyond the networks studied. Connolly and James (2006) acknowledge the value of theories that offer an understanding of the pressures that promote or inhibit collaborative working practices. Therefore, the value of the researcher's new theory is that it recognises the criticality of 'network balance'. The advice offered by the researcher in presenting this theory is that networks ideally flourish when positioned in the left hand sections of the typology or stagnate if positioned more within the right hand sections. However, negative features are inevitable, for networks exist as complex organisations of already existing complex organisations (the schools themselves) composed of complex groups and individuals.

Much of the literature acknowledges the ambiguities, complexities and dynamics within the memberships of collaborations and this is further elaborated in the literature review. Additionally, the importance of getting the conditions right to cause more good things than bad to happen when planning for change is also acknowledged (Fullan, 2000). However, what is not always apparent in the literature is that networks may still flourish within such complex contexts, although Woods *et al* (2006) imply this in their findings on research into secondary school collaboratives. As noted in the literature review, Woods *et al* (2006) suggest key contextual and organisational factors that sustain or hinder partnerships. These are presented as "a set of continua" (p 55), with the extent of a collaborative's success dependent upon its position along each continuum. To take Woods *et al*'s (2006) theory a step further, the key concept put forward in this research is that networks remain stable while there is a healthy balance between negative and positive features. And stakeholders in

networks need to be aware of the fragile nature of this balance and its impact on the successful functioning of the network.

Network balance is only one of two dynamics found in the research to affect the network's success. Additionally, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the roles that both power and involvement play in the success or otherwise of the network. And these are now discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Power and involvement

Research Question 4: Do any problems arise from a centrally directed approach towards such an initiative?

When initially developing an analytical framework from the literature, the researcher was influenced by a number of theoretical ideas offered in earlier works – in particular Etzioni (1961) and Burns and Stalker (1961). These works in turn had drawn upon older sociological literature including Weber (1921; 1927), and Durkheim (1933). It is important to note that this study never intended to test out these previous theories, but rather to draw on them as a theoretical framework and redefine them in a way that is congruent with this particular research on primary school networks. Therefore, the reader will note that terms such as power, influence, authority and legitimacy have been developed and used in this conclusion in different ways to the ways in which these previous authors defined them. Weber makes a clear distinction between power and authority. In Weberian theory, power is about force and authority is about influencing others through conferred 'right'. However, this empirical

research has noted more nuances in power and involvement than in Weber's (1927) 'ideal' types. Therefore, in this final chapter and as a summary of this research, the term *power* is used in a rather more generic way to describe many different forms of control. The term *authority* is used to describe a 'top down' and 'bestowed' power at Government, network and school level. The term *influence* is used to describe an informal and social control existing between individuals and groups within and beyond the networks studied. And, the term legitimacy (drawing on Connolly and James, 2006) is used to describe a professional credibility and accepted authority on educational practices.

Authority

In referring again to the early literature, there are a number of different sources of power that are found within organisations (French and Raven, 1960; Etzioni, 1961). Each of the sources described in these works suggests a downward control from superior to subordinate. Authority is regarded in the literature as *formal power* often conferred legally with the expectation of compliance (Hartley, 2007). Etzioni (1961) defines this type of downward control as either – *normative, remunerative* or *coercive*. To recall, *normative* power is control through persuasion and manipulation (Etzioni, 1961). *Remunerative* or reward power is the control over rewards (Etzioni, 1961) or "the ability to give other people what they want, and hence ask them to do things for you in exchange" (French and Raven, 1960, p 1). *Coercive* power is control over sanctions (Etzioni, 1961) or "when a reward or expertise is withheld" (French and Raven, 1960, p1). The principal goal of coercion is always compliance.

Etzioni's (1961) types of remunerative and normative powers were the main types of authority or 'downward control' found in the networks studied in this research. With regard to remunerative power, the offer of Central Government funding with attached conditions in the PSLN initiative ensured that participants 'bought in' to a specific nationally driven school standards agenda. However, a coercive style was also noted later in the NLC initiative, where the threat of withdrawal of central funding was used to ensure attendance at central functions and completion of set documentation by NCSL. With regard to normative power, the use of external and internal accountability ensured compliance to prescribed plans in both networking initiatives. Loss of authority or 'downward control' was expressed negatively by respondents in this research. There was reluctance to bestow this type of power down to subject leaders, classroom teachers and other staff within PSLN networks. There was also reluctance noted in the research to share this power across the leadership team in the NLC network. It is interesting at this point to refer back to the work of Ribbins (2003) on the life cycle or career phases of leaders and to question whether or not successful network leadership may be, in part, influenced by the stages at which those who share the leadership of the network find themselves. It could be argued that the point at which a headteacher's confidence allows his or her "leadership to become followership, as the occasion demands" (Macbeath, 2005, p 364) is the optimum phase for network involvement.

Power was also wielded at other levels through the influence of individuals and groups. In more recent literature, Gunter (2004b) suggests that influence is less formal than authority and that it implies manipulation. West (1999) concurs and notes that while formal authority is often "linked to initiation or development", informal influence is often used by others below the hierarchy "to inhibit or frustrate" (p 193). These two definitions (Gunter, 2004b; West,

1999) imply that influence is a negative force. However, influence can also be a positive force as described in the next section.

Influence

Theories of micropolitics as discussed in the literature review also acknowledge influence as significant force. Hoyle (1982) warns against marginalising the major part it plays in power structures within an organisation and Woods *et al* (2006) argue the importance of recognising the "differences in power and influence between schools that need to be understood and managed" (p 58) within collaborative groups. The notion of influence was expressed by respondents in this research both positively and negatively. Some decisive characters at various levels within the network were perceived as exercising a strong, negative influence and altering the dynamics of the group, thus affecting its functionality and the response of the group to authority. However, the positive influence that other network participants had within groups in the PSLN initiative was considered by the headteachers to be empowering and a positive force for change.

Etzioni (1961) had previously labelled influence as "social control" (p 256) and more recent authors, for example Dowding (1996), concur. The influence that participants had within and between groups in networks in this research – whether positive or negative - affected the 'bottom up' response made to the 'top down' authority. These interesting dynamics noted by the researcher in the relationships between authority and the responses to that authority within networks are discussed and further elaborated in the next section of this chapter.

Power partnerships

The relationship between 'top-down' authority and 'bottom-up' responses within organisations is critical. This was explored mainly through an earlier literature (Etzioni, 1961) and presented previously in Chapter 2 as a series of interconnecting wheels where specific responses are noted to different types of 'top-down' power in terms of 'bottom-up' involvement. To refer back to this earlier literature, authority can be described as remunerative, normative or coercive. The related responses can be calculative, moral or alienative depending on the type of 'top down' power displayed (Etzioni, 1961). As discussed in previous chapters, involvement in the networks studied was found to display features of all three types of responses – that of a calculative 'what's in it for me/us' culture; and that of a moral culture pertaining to a commitment to 'the common good' (Foley and Grace, 2001) of the network or an obligation to the initiative itself. Etzioni (1961) labels the relationships between power and involvement as "compliance relationships" (p 12). However, non-compliance was also apparent in the complexity of relationships studied in this research and an alienative response to some types of authority was also observed in the networks studied in terms of negativity and disengagement.

A new concept arising from this research draws on the researcher's own interpretation of Etzioni's (1961) model of *power, involvement and other correlates* as displayed in Chapter 2. Etzioni's (1961) remunerative type of authority is redefined in this research as **renumerative/supportive**, acknowledging the need for support from the authority base within a network partnership. Etzioni's (1961) normative type of authority is redefined in this research as **normative/restrictive** to acknowledge a power base that inhibits the organic

nature of networking. And Etzioni's (1961) coercive type of authority is redefined in this research as **coercive/punitive** to acknowledge the negative impact of withdrawal of (financial) support in order to impose a 'top down' agenda on the network which also inhibits the organic nature of networking.   The elements that form the two outermost and interconnecting wheels in Etzioni's (1961) model of power partnerships (shown as Figure 1 on page 74) are acknowledged as forming the main power partnerships in the networks studied and are defined below as Type A, Type B and Type C. The related outcomes of these power partnerships as observed in this research are further described below in terms of network impact and school improvement.

- ▪ **Type A - A renumerative/supportive** type of 'top-down' authority in networks offers professional guidance in the form of a flexible model; ongoing funding for time to network; externally delivered support programmes; clear guidance on structures and systems; and a clear plan of action. This encourages a **calculative (type 1)/moral (type 1) involvement**. It is calculative in terms of a creating a 'what's in it for us' culture where particpants respond for the 'common good' of the network and make use of their 'corporate voice' for influence in the wider educational field. It is moral in terms of a shared sets of goals; displaying reciprocity between the participating schools; with elements of sharing in a multifaceted way; and professional support from external agents and from the network itself. The resulting outcomes are **productive** in terms of the empowerment of network participants; with evidence of growing professional confidence; and improved leadership capacity at classroom, school and network level. This then leads to innovative practices within the network and legitimacy outside the

network. The longer term impact may be evidenced through improved quality in teaching and learning which ultimately raises standards.

Type A was observed in Phase 1 of this research when the West Midlands group of headteachers were beginning to form a Networked Learning Community and were advised and supported by the National College for School Leadership.

- **Type B - A normative/restrictive** type of 'top-down' authority in networks displays external control in the form of a prescribed model; with strict adherence to externally agreed goals; and strong external accountability. The relating response demonstrates a **calculative (type 2)/moral (type 2)/ alienative involvement.** It is calculative in the form of a 'what's in it for me' culture and uses persuasion or manipulation for personal or school gain. It is moral only in terms of showing an obligation to the common prescribed agenda and compliance to external/internal accountability. It is alienative in terms of various responses mainly displayed as negative group dynamics and lack of engagement. The resulting outcomes are **non-productive** and demonstrate a lack of reciprocity; limited ownership of the network vision and goals; and unwieldy bureaucracy. This leads to eventual network stagnation and limited outcomes in terms of any sustained impact on standards.

Type B was observed in Phase 2 of this research when the London based group of headteachers were beginning to form as a Primary Strategy Learning Network and were being controlled by the restraints of the bidding process for funding by the Department for
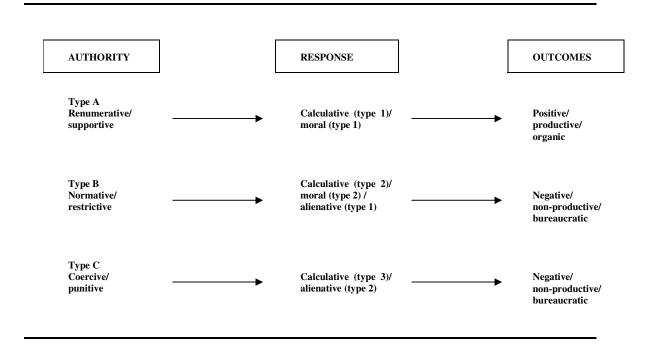
Education and Schools (now DCSF) in partnership with the National College for School Leadership.

- **Type C - A coercive/punitive** type of 'top-down' authority in networks displays control through threat of withdrawal of funding in reaction to non-compliance. The relating response is **calculative (type 3)/alienative (type 2)**. It is calculative in terms of the necessary compliance of participants in order to ensure on-going funding. It is alienative in terms of participant withdrawal from networking activities. The resulting outcome is **non-productive** in terms of a loss of commitment and a lack of ownership by network participants.

Type C was observed in Phase 1 of this research at the later stages of the NLC initiative when the Networked Learning Community felt under pressure to agree to certain actions due to threat of funding withdrawal.

These three types of power partnerships and their related outcomes as noted in this research are displayed in Figure 3 overleaf. The term 'response' as used in Figure 3 acknowledges both compliance and non-compliance within power relationships.
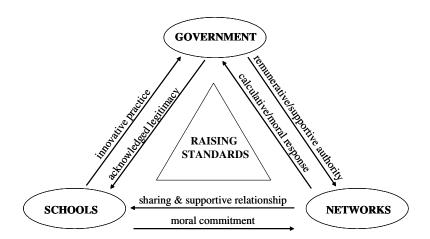
Figure 3: Power partnerships and related outcomes

AUTHORITY	RESPONSE	OUTCOMES
Type A **Renumerative/** **supportive**	**Calculative (type 1)/** **moral (type 1)**	**Positive/** **productive/** **organic**
Type B **Normative/** **restrictive**	**Calculative (type 2)/** **moral (type 2) /** **alienative (type 1)**	**Negative/** **non-productive/** **bureaucratic**
Type C **Coercive/** **punitive**	**Calculative (type 3)/** **alienative (type 2)**	**Negative/** **non-productive/** **bureaucratic**

Productive partnerships

What is apparent from the diagram in Figure 3 is that positive networking relationships that emanate from Type A - a remunerative/supportive 'top down' authority - encourage a calculative/moral 'bottom up' response and complement the organic nature of networking, thus ensuring positive network outcomes. Power partnerships that are overly restrictive or coercive create unwieldy and bureaucratic structures that inhibit the organic nature of networking and produce negative outcomes. This concept forms the basis of an 'ideal' model for productive networking partnerships. West (1999) suggests that explanations of the use of power and influence "to precipitate, resolve or even to avoid conflict are useful conceptual tools" (p 189). Therefore, this suggested 'ideal' model is offered for consideration by the researcher in Figure 4 (on page 200). The arrows in the diagram indicate the flow of the

relationship between the Government and networks, the networks and the schools, and the schools and the Government.

Figure 4: An ideal model for productive networking relationships

As a further explanation of Figure 4, the Government relationship with the network would be remunerative and supportive in nature, offering long term funding and on-going support in terms of the external structures noted earlier in this chapter. The response from networks would be calculative, but focusing on the common good for all schools in the network rather than personal or individual school gain. The relationship from the networks to the schools would be displayed through the benefits noted earlier in this chapter in terms of sharing and support. And the school's response would be to prioritise their commitment to the network and other participating schools. Consequently, this structure of support and commitment would encourage practitioners to develop innovative practices to impact on pupil learning. This would ultimately achieve the Government's goal of raising pupil achievement and

standards. And the Government's response to the schools, in terms of trust and confidence, would offer legitimacy in educational and political terms.

This chapter now moves on to discuss ways in which a more methodical approach to addressing the complexities of school networking initiatives at each stage of the process might also improve outcomes in terms of raising standards in primary schools nationally.

A final reflection

Planning for success – a different perspective

Generally when a new initiative is seized upon at the 'ideas' stage, the view taken, understandably, emanates from a positive orientation. So, for instance, "Networking will raise standards in schools because …". However, consideration needs to be given to the contrary in order to plan successfully. Thus, when introducing a new national initiative such as Primary Strategy Learning Networks, Government officials and educationalists should first consider that "Networking will not raise standards in schools because …". This final section of Chapter 6 considers this in terms of a realistic approach to evaluation.

Realistic intervention

Pawson (2006) challenges established methods for the evaluation of public sector initiatives. He argues that the focus on whether or not an initiative has 'worked' is flawed and suggests that:

> To understand why there is inconsistency of outcomes we need to ask the rather different question of 'why' or 'how' the measure has its effect. We need a method which seeks to understand what the program actually does to change behaviours and why not every situation is conducive to that particular process. (Pawson, 2006, p 11)

Arnold (2005) concurs and argues a number of common principles for monitoring and evaluating public service initiatives, including the need to:

> Make monitoring, evaluation, and measurement an integral part of every aspect of the strategy; learn from mistakes, and keep under constant review what is proving successful and what is not.

> Collect and analyse feedback from all users; take action on their suggestions wherever possible, and report back to them, particularly when their proposals cannot be realised. (Arnold, 2005, p 21)

Therefore, if all stakeholders are aware of the main aims of any new initiative and they are involved at all stages in the on-going evaluation through exploring such questions as – Is it working? How is it working? Why is this bit working? What is the barrier to that bit not working? – adaptations to the programme can be actioned along the way to enable greater success in reaching understood and agreed goals. To take *group dynamics* or participant relationships in groups and their negative impact as an example in the networks studied for this research, headteacher respondents were aware that certain groups were more successful than others, but no-one had explicitly addressed this. A corporate understanding at the outset that group dynamics were crucial to the success of both the NLC and the PSLN initiatives and an agreement that network groups and working parties might be rearranged at any time to optimise impact may have produced a more positive outcome. However, it could be argued that, only in hindsight, had group dynamics been highlighted as an issue so, how could this be determined at the outset? A number of actions are important to consider here. First, a

systematic review needs to be undertaken in order to tap into the "the collective wisdom of successes and failures of previous initiatives" (Pawson, 2006, p 11). Then, participants need to understand the process of the change taking place as well as the change itself (Hopkins *et al*, 1994). Additionally, on-going review and evaluation is necessary throughout the duration of any new initiative (Arnold, 2005) in order to incorporate necessary changes. And, finally, participant involvement is crucial in any on-going evaluation as this will ensure a cohesive identity with the reform from those directly affected and maximise success (Fullan, 2000).

A realistic approach to evaluating success and failure

Realism assumes both success and failure in any new initiative. It then seeks to determine "for which subjects and in which circumstances it has been successful and unsuccessful" (Pawson, 2001). The focus in a realistic approach is on the programme mechanisms or each part in order to provide a better chance of addressing these as they occur. A realistic approach is not an evaluation technique as such, but "a framework for the whole enterprise" (Pawson, 2001, p 4). In adopting this method to explore the main Government aim of raising pupil standards through the PSLN initiative, a clear picture is produced of where and why it failed. In using Pawson's method in this research, the following diagrammatic analysis gives a clear indication of where and how intervention throughout the initiative may have provided more chance of success. And, in focussing on the relationship between different elements in that causal chain (Huberman, 1992), issues might have been addressed at an earlier stage in the initiative to ensure successful outcomes. The set of diagrams and explanations below draw directly on examples from the PSLN initiative as discussed in Chapter 5.

The basic idea behind the launch of Primary Strategy Learning Networks was that money (M) would be offered as an incentive (I) to impact on standards (S) in schools – namely, improved results in maths and English scores in national testing for 11 year olds. Thus:

(M) ⟶ (I) ⟶ (S)

The model chosen to fulfil this Central Government aim offered schools 'ring-fenced' funding for networking (N) on condition of an agreed focus (F) on raising pupil standards in literacy and/or mathematics. Thus:
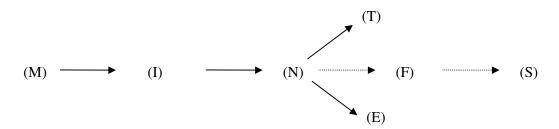
(M) ⟶ (I) ⟶ (N) ⟶ (F) ⟶ (S)

But, what happened was that schools within the networks experienced a number of barriers, difficulties and other issues which deterred them from the main Government objective. In theory, the additional money did offer more time (T) for networking in terms of funding additional personnel to 'free up' practitioners for networking tasks. However, in practical terms, issues such as diary constraints, lack of personnel available for duty cover in small schools and other school based priorities distracting the schools were the first set of barriers that the networks had to overcome. Hence:
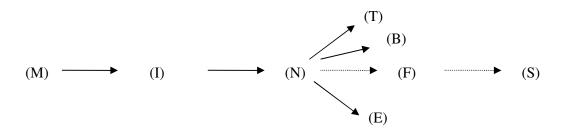
(T)

(M) ⟶ (I) ⟶ (N) ⤑ (F) ⤑ (S)

The second set of difficulties arose from not knowing 'how' to network. So, issues such as lack of network structure, organisation and management impacted on their success.
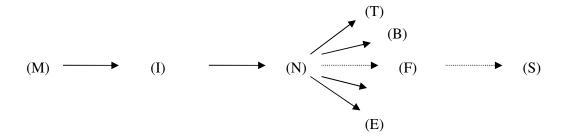
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Additionally, lack of experience (E) to manage these and to work cohesively with colleagues from partner schools created fragile groups in terms of professional confidence, mutual trust, power partnerships, staff mobility and stable dynamics. Hence.

```
                                                    (T)
                                                  ⟋
(M) ──────▶   (I)   ──────▶   (N) ┄┄┄┄▶ (F) ┄┄┄┄▶ (S)
                                                  ⟍
                                                    (E)
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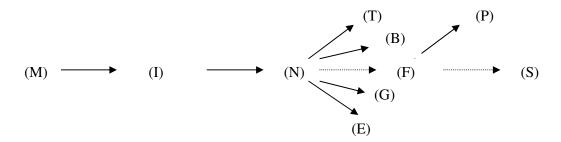
Systems and procedures that were developed both internally and externally to manage some of the issues created bureaucratic (B) difficulties in terms of work overload and hierarchical structures impacting on the organic nature of networking and the synergy that is produced from this. Hence:

```
                                                    (T)
                                                  ⟋  (B)
                                                  ⟋ ⟋
(M) ──────▶   (I)   ──────▶   (N) ┄┄┄┄▶ (F) ┄┄┄┄▶ (S)
                                                  ⟍
                                                    (E)
```

Individual and school players also saw the network as an opportunity for their own personal gain (G) in terms of support, professional development, opportunities of advancement and additional resources. Hence:

Problems also arose with agreeing and maintaining a pupil focus in the networks due to varying school curriculum priorities (P) and the lack of both internal and external expertise to impact on the main pupil focus. Additionally, personal and individual school gain got in the way of a whole-network focus on pupils and learning. Hence:

Finally, tight Government timescales and lack of on-going funding meant that the durability (D) of the network had not been considered centrally in order to allow practice to embed throughout all necessary stages of this major change process for schools from traditional ways of working. Hence:

All these barriers, difficulties and other issues side-tracked schools and networks along the way and ultimately prevented the main Government aim of raising pupil standards from being achieved. And, what are clearly displayed diagrammatically above are the causal relationships. Pawson *et al* (2004) argue that a r*ealistic approach* to interventions such as the PSLN initiative offer a further understanding of that causality.

Limitations of the research

Primary Strategy Learning Networks (DfES, 2004a) was a nationally launched and locally promoted initiative. However, the research was conducted in two networks of heads within only one Local Authority. Therefore, a cautious approach must be taken when relating the findings to other Primary Strategy Learning Networks or different networking initiatives in other Local Authorities. The position of the researcher as a Local Authority employee at the time of the research should also be taken into account by the reader (see appendix xxv). Although every effort was made to address the issue of bias, it could not be totally eliminated in this research. Additionally, the reader needs to be aware that the position the researcher held within the authority may have influenced some favourable participant responses (McQueen and Knusson, 2002) or a reluctance to criticise the Local Authority.

An executive summary of the research findings was disseminated to the Assistant Director of Education in the London Authority chosen for this research and to all headteacher participants involved in Phase 2. This dissemination took place two months prior to completion of the thesis and offered opportunities for "open commentary and debate" (Trochim, 2006c, p 3)

regarding the results and for verification of the conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). However, no responses had been noted by the time of thesis submission.

Possibilities for further research

As the study of the two Primary Strategy Learning Networks took place over the course of one academic year in one Local Authority, this in itself has limitations in terms of time and context. Further research possibilities could include:

▪ Extended research into the PSLNs studied in order to determine any impact on classroom practice or pupil achievement in the longer term.

▪ Comparative studies of other PSLNs in different authorities to triangulate the findings from this research.

▪ Comparative research of other Local Authority PSLN support programmes to determine the impact of a range of localised external support on pupil outcomes in terms of standards and achievement.

Also, as the respondents chosen for the research were all headteachers of the schools involved in the networks, a further research possibility might include:

▪ Additional research into the PSLNs studied at both staff and pupil level to determine real impact on classroom practice and learning.

Conclusions

It is intended that lessons learned from this research will be used to inform practice at a senior level in the Local Authority where the research was conducted. It is also intended that further

dissemination of papers from this research will add to the wider educational debate on the value of such Government introduced initiatives as Primary Strategies Learning Networks in order that they will not fail at the first hurdle in ensuring impact in the classroom and on 'the hearts and minds' of primary school teachers and their pupils. So, what were these lessons? Well, the intention of this research was to explore the success of a nationally introduced and locally directed school networking initiative for driving forward the Government agenda. That agenda focused on raising standards in literacy and numeracy in primary schools nationally.

The first lesson learned was that the Government's aim for the initiative was not fulfilled. This was due to a number of factors as noted diagrammatically earlier in this chapter. And, in particular, it was due to the reluctance of headteachers to hand over the power to class teachers because of accountability issues and perceived loss of control. Therefore, the change did not filter down into the classroom. Fullan, as early as 1991 (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991), was arguing that change can not be successfully implemented without the engagement of the primary stakeholder – and that is to say the practitioner in the classroom. This is a theme that is seen repeated in later literature. For instance, Woods *et al* (2006) note the "challenge of penetration" (p 56) in the Diversity Pathfinders Project where impact on staff below senior management level and on students in the classroom was not met. The value of networking, however, was acknowledged by headteacher participants in this research in terms of the mutual benefits and the professional support it offered. This ensured commitment to the network.

The second lesson learned was that, ideally, networks have many positive features. But, because of the complexity of networks and their diversity in terms of human relationships and

power tensions, negative features will occur. These need to be explicitly looked for, recognised and addressed to ensure at least a healthy balance between positive and negative aspects. Additionally, stakeholders need to actively involve themselves in tackling negative aspects to ensure that the network is not side-tracked from its main purpose.

The third lesson learned was that, in order to ensure positive network outcomes, an 'ideal' model of remunerative/supportive authority and calculative/moral response should be sought. This model is more in tune with the organic nature of networking and encourages commitment to the shared vision, sustainability and impact in terms of achieved goals. This is important for policy-makers to consider in formulating policies for educational change.

The final recommendation in this thesis is quite simple - to put the emphasis for the implementation of educational policy on the people involved in putting policy into practice. And to invest time in ensuring that participants are aware of the process of change from implementation through to impact (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991) as well as focusing on the change itself. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) note that "those in leadership positions in networks are not usually knowledgeable about the process of change" (p 676). Yet, without this knowledge, system wide change may not be achieved. So how can this kind of knowledge be made accessible? And how can the process of creating, implementing, and sustaining change become fundamental to the work of networks? This research argues that by investing in the participants, listening and responding to their views and concerns through all stages of the process, through actively involving them in the local adoption of the policy and the process of the change, and through supporting them with on-going funding, resources and

training at every stage through to outcome, a greater degree of success will be achieved for system wide reform in education and for raising standards in our schools.

National Structure

<u>Launched</u> in 2002 by DfES, in partnership with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and, increasingly, in partnership with the Innovations Unit

<u>Funding</u>
 – £50,000 per network per year for 3 years

<u>Size of network</u> – no maximum size, but a minimum of 8 schools

<u>Bidding process</u> – written plan of action including foci on:
- pupil learning
- adult learning
- leadership learning
- organisational learning
- school to school learning
- network to network learning

<u>Interview process</u> - involving focus group discussions facilitated by NCSL

<u>Network commitment</u> to include:
- schools to 'match fund' 50% over three years (£150,000 per network)
- network representation at annual conferences
- annual written review and evaluation
- co-leader attendance at central network workshops
- NCSL facilitator monitoring/support visits to network

West Midlands Context

The make up of the network for the pilot study was seven (out of eight) small rural schools (all under 200 pupils on roll) situated in and around a thriving market town. The context of each school was as follows:

1WM – One form entry CE (aided) primary school in a village location on the outskirts of the town

2WM – One form entry RC primary school situated in the town

3WM – One form entry maintained primary school in a village location close to the town

4WM – One form entry CE (aided) school in a village location on the outskirts of the town

5WM – Very small maintained infant school in a village on outskirts of the town

6WM – Very small, CE (aided) primary school in farming area on the outskirts of the authority

7WM – One form entry maintained primary school in a village on outermost edge of the authority

8WM – Researcher's own school (not included in the study).

National Structure

Launched in 2005 by DfES, in partnership with the National Strategies and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL)

Funding
- one-off payment of £5,000 per network released for the planning stage
- further one-off post action plan payment of £12,000 per network (£14,000 for networks with a maths focus)

Size of network - between 5 and 8 schools

Bidding process - written statement of intent to authority
- written plan of action submitted on line to the DfES, to include:
  - common purpose
  - pupil learning focus
  - opportunities for adult learning
  - network structure

Interview process – none

Network commitment to include:
- schools working together for a period of two years
- one school to act as 'banker' for the network
- a network focus on raising standards in literacy and/or numeracy
- use of an external mentor/facilitator

London Context
The make up of the two networks for the main study was a network of five schools and a network of seven schools, as follows:

1LB – New one form entry maintained primary school on newly built residential estate
2LB – Two form entry maintained infant school in deprived urban area of the authority
3LB – Two form entry maintained infant school in village location on authority outskirts
4LB – Large three form entry maintained primary school in urban area of the authority
5LB – Two form entry maintained primary school with attached nursery and unit for profound and severe learning difficulties (PSLD), in deprived urban authority area

6LB – Very small maintained primary school in village on the outskirts of authority
7LB – One form entry maintained primary school in village location in the authority
8LB – Two form entry maintained primary school in residential area of the authority
9LB – One form entry maintained primary school in urban area of the authority
10LB – One form entry RC primary school in an urban area of the authority
11LB – One form entry maintained primary school situated in a village location
12LB – Three form entry maintained infant school with attached nursery and hearing impairment unit, located in residential area

Fullan's Eight Factors/Insights of Large Scale Reform

1. Upgrade the System Context
2. Become Preoccupied with Coherence-Making in the Service of Instructional Improvement and Student Learning
3. Establish Plenty of Cross-Over Structures
4. Downward Investment/Upward Identity
5. Invest in Quality Materials (instruction and training)
6. Integrate Pressure and Support (set target/build capacity)
7. Get Out of implementing Someone Else's Reforms Agenda
8. Work with Systems

(Taken from Fullan, 2000, p 20)

Wallace's Five Characteristics of Complex Educational Change

1. Large-scale
   - a multitude of stakeholders with an extensive range of specialist knowledge and priorities
   - the allegiance of stakeholders to partially incompatible beliefs and values, within limits
2. Componential
   - a diversity of sequential and overlapping components affecting different stakeholders at particular times
   - a multiplicity of differentiated but interrelated management tasks
3. Systemic
   - a multidirectional flow of direct and mediated interaction within and between system levels
   - an unequal distribution of power between stakeholders within and between system levels who are nevertheless interdependent
   - the centrality of cross-level management tasks
4. Differentially Impacting
   - a variable shift in practice and learning required
   - variable congruence with perceived interests and its associated emotive force, altering with time
   - a variable reciprocal effect on other ongoing activities
   - variable awareness of the totality beyond those parts of immediate concern
5. Contextually Dependent
   - Interaction with an evolving profile of other planned and unplanned changes
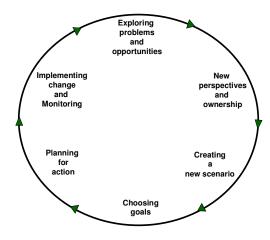   - Impact of the accretion of past changes affecting resource parameters

(Taken from Wallace, 2003, p 20)

Gunter's Typology on the Process of Change

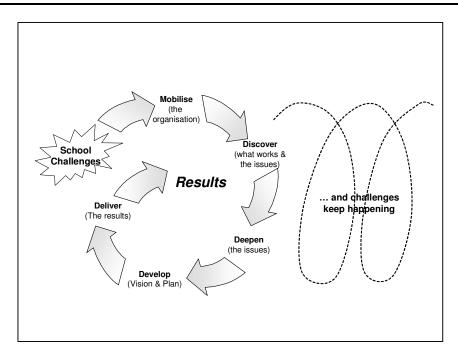|	Political	
Process	**Mediating change** □ Experiencing and using mediating activities within power structures and cultures. □ Mediating change through interest groups and negotiation.	**Working for change** □ Critically evaluating power structures and the cultures that sustain them. □ Working for structural and cultural changes through research and theorising.	**Outcome**
	Controlling change □ Sustaining current power structures and cultures through controlling participation. □ Controlling change through surveillance and team work.	**Delivering change** □ Sustaining current power structures and cultures through performance audits. □ Delivering preferred change through planning and evidence collection.	
	Rational	

(Taken from Gunter, 2004a, p1)

The Primary Leadership Programme - six stage model of consultancy for change

Exploring problems and opportunities

New perspectives and ownership

Implementing change and Monitoring

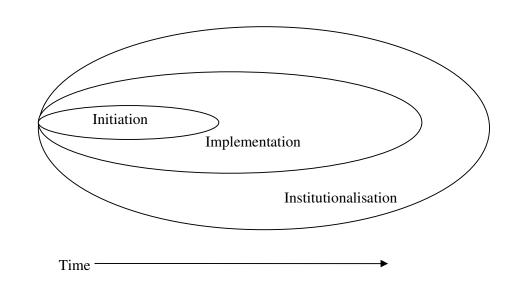Creating a new scenario

Planning for action

Choosing goals

Taken from Primary Leadership Programme (Primary National Strategy, 2003)

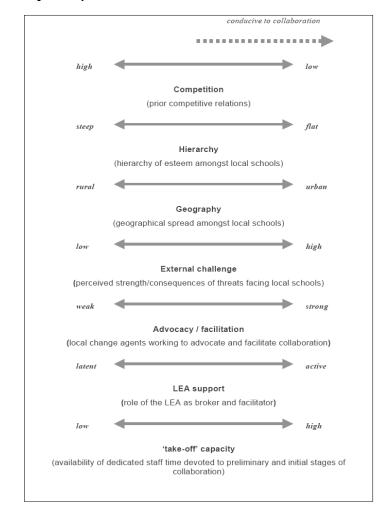**Remodelling the Workforce – five stage model of change management**

Mobilise (the organisation)

School Challenges

Discover (what works & the issues)

Results

… and challenges keep happening

Deliver (The results)

Deepen (the issues)

Develop (Vision & Plan)

Taken from Remodelling Resources (National Remodelling Team, 2003)
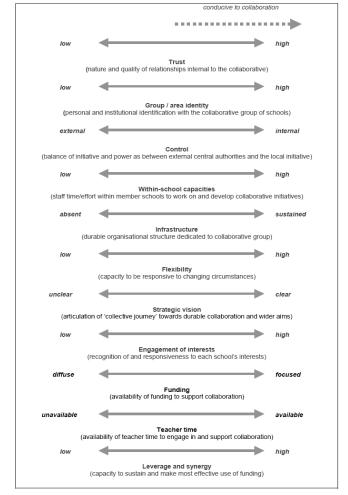
The Three Overlapping Phases of the Change Process

Initiation

Implementation

Institutionalisation

Time ⟶

(Taken from Miles *et al*, 1987, in Hopkins *et al*, 1994, p 36)

Figure 3 - Key contextual factors

conducive to collaboration

high ↔ low

Competition
(prior competitive relations)

steep ↔ flat

Hierarchy
(hierarchy of esteem amongst local schools)

rural ↔ urban

Geography
(geographical spread amongst local schools)

low ↔ high

External challenge
(perceived strength/consequences of threats facing local schools)

weak ↔ strong

Advocacy / facilitation
(local change agents working to advocate and facilitate collaboration)

latent ↔ active

LEA support
(role of the LEA as broker and facilitator)

low ↔ high

'take-off' capacity
(availability of dedicated staff time devoted to preliminary and initial stages of collaboration)

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Figure 4 - Key organisational factors

conducive to collaboration

low ↔ high

Trust
(nature and quality of relationships internal to the collaborative)

low ↔ high

Group / area identity
(personal and institutional identification with the collaborative group of schools)

external ↔ internal

Control
(balance of initiative and power as between external central authorities and the local initiative)

low ↔ high

Within-school capacities
(staff time/effort within member schools to work on and develop collaborative initiatives)

absent ↔ sustained

Infrastructure
(durable organisational structure dedicated to collaborative group)

low ↔ high

Flexibility
(capacity to be responsive to changing circumstances)

unclear ↔ clear

Strategic vision
(articulation of 'collective journey' towards durable collaboration and wider aims)

low ↔ high

Engagement of interests
(recognition of and responsiveness to each school's interests)

diffuse ↔ focused

Funding
(availability of funding to support collaboration)

unavailable ↔ available

Teacher time
(availability of teacher time to engage in and support collaboration)

low ↔ high

Leverage and synergy
(capacity to sustain and make most effective use of funding)

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(Taken from Woods *et al*, 2006, pp 56-57)

Interview questions posed in the small scale study of a Networked Learning Community

1. What were the real benefits for you and your school of initially deciding to network with other primary schools?

2. Were there any disadvantages in those early days?

3. What were the positive aspects of later becoming part of the NLC project?

4. In your view, have there been any disadvantages to the network's involvement with the NLC project?

First set of interview questions posed at the start of the first year of the PSLN initiative

1. What collaborative working arrangements have you been involved in so far in headship and how have they supported you?

2. What do you believe will be the specific benefits of this new networking arrangement to you and to your school?

3. Can you foresee any disadvantages?

Second set of interview questions posed at the end of the first year of the PSLN initiative

1. Do you wish to add or delete anything from the list of advantages? Is there any one that has become more important than the others?

2. Do you wish to add or delete anything from the list of disadvantages
   now or as perceived in the future?

3. What could be learned from your experiences to improve the initiative nationally, if they were to roll it out again?

4. In hindsight would you do it all again? Why?
   What's been the best thing about it?

5. What's been the worst thing about it?

6. Do you wish to add anything else?

7. In the pilot study, the participant's perceived the main disadvantages of the NLC initiative to be:
   a. imposed workload   g. imposed agendas
   b. imposed timescales   h. imposed bureaucracy
   c. imposed accountability   i. imposed model
   d. participant expectations not being met

   Are any of these pertinent to your experiences with the PSLN initiative?

**Letter of request to participants in the Networked Learning Community initiative –
November 2004**

Dear Colleague,

I am currently involved in a four year study for a Doctorate in Education. As a major part of my EdD, I am gathering evidence for a research project on primary school networking. I have attached a brief outline of my research proposals for your information with this letter.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview is so that I can gain some insights for Headteachers currently involved in an NCSL 'Networked Learning Community'. The format would be a taped interview lasting approximately 20-30 minutes. The four questions you will be asked to respond to in that time will be:

- What were the real benefits for you and your school of initially deciding to network with other primary schools?
- Were there any disadvantages in those early days?
- What were the positive aspects of becoming part of the NLC project?
- In your view, have there been any disadvantages to the network's involvement with the NLC project?

The tape of the interview will then be transcribed and analysed, along with responses from several other participants involved in your NLC project. The data gathered in this way may be used in my final dissertation. A transcription of your taped interview will be available to you prior to the final analysis of the data. This will offer you the opportunity to comment and amend if you want to.

You will not be named in any time in the study and the 'Networked Learning Community' will only be described as located in the West Midlands. You will also have access to my finally dissertation before submission if you so wish.

All recordings will be kept securely and will not be made available to anyone other than my research supervisors.

Your name will not be stored by any electronic means as part of this project.

I would be grateful if you could sign and return the attached consent form for my records.

Yours sincerely

Tessa A. Moore

Please tick where appropriate:

I agree to being interviewed for the research into primary school networking ----

I request a copy of the transcript of my interview in order to comment and amend ----

I request a copy of the final dissertation (50,000 words) ----

Signed: --------------------------------   (Print) Name --------------------------------

Date: -----------------------------------

Thesis summary for participants in the NLC initiative

The Focus of this Research

This research will examine the implementation and development of the new Primary Strategy Learning Networks Initiative and will take place within one London borough over the course of a year.

Several things will be explored in this study regarding the nature of successful networking and some preliminary research will initially take place in an existing network.

The preliminary research will focus on whether any lessons learned from research into the field of networking, and in particular the recent Networked Learning Communities project, have been transferred across into the new Primary Strategy Learning Networks Initiative. This initial study will also explore whether it was felt that any restraints were imposed on the network through involvement in an externally driven initiative.

The preliminary study will be a qualitative piece of research that draws mainly on the perceptions of the participants. The method for gathering data will be survey. Interviews will take place with seven Headteacher members of a West Midlands Networked Learning Community and will take the form of semi structured interviews lasting no more than half an hour.

This research will take place in Autumn 2004 and will ultimately feed into the major research planned for 2005 to 2006.

Letter of request to participants in the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative – September 2005

Dear Headteacher,

I am currently involved in a research project on primary school networking through my Doctoral study with Birmingham University. A brief synopsis of the research is attached to this consent form.

As part of this study, I am hoping to gather the perceptions of a number of Headteachers involved in the Primary Strategy Learning Networks initiative within our authority. I have sought and gained the consent of the LEA's Head of School Improvement for this. The purpose of this letter is to gain your written consent to your involvement in this research.

As you are aware from my previous communication, the research would involve me coming to your school this term and interviewing you for about half an hour on the following three questions:

– **What collaborative working arrangements have you been involved in so far and how do you rate their success?**

– **What do you believe will be the benefits specifically of this new network arrangement to you and to your school?**

– **Can you foresee any disadvantages?**

I would then like to return in July '06 and re interview you to gather your perceptions following an academic year of your involvement in the initiative. The nature of these subsequent questions are included overleaf.

The tapes of the two interviews will be transcribed and analysed, along with responses from several other participants in the Learning Networks' initiative. The data gathered and subsequent findings will be presented in my thesis. Transcriptions of your taped interviews will be available to you prior to the final analysis of the data, to offer you the opportunity to comment and amend if you so wish.

You will not be named at any time in this study and the PSLN will only be described as located in one of the London authorities. An executive summary of my findings may be requested and will be sent to you at the end of the research. You may also have access to my thesis before submission if required, although the final responsibility for the content of the thesis and the interpretation of the data therein will be mine.

All recordings of interviews will be kept securely and will not be made available to anyone other than my research supervisors and examiners.

Your name will not be stored by any electronic means as part of this project.

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time during this study. If this happens, your data will not be used in the analysis of the findings.

If you agree, I would be grateful if you could sign the attached consent form for my records.

Please delete where appropriate:

I agree to being interviewed at the start and end of the research into the PSLN initiative.   Yes/No

I request copies of the transcripts of my interviews in order to comment and amend.   Yes/No

I request an executive summary of the findings (approximately 1,500 words).   Yes/No

I request a copy of the final thesis (50,000 words).   Yes/No

Signature: _____   Name: _____

Thesis summary for participants in the PSLN initiative

This research will examine the implementation and development of the new Primary Strategy Learning Networks' initiative. It will take place within one of the London boroughs over the course of one academic year (2005-2006).

Several things will be explored in the research regarding the nature of successful networking. The work will focus on whether any lessons learned from research into the field of networking, and in particular the recent 'Networked Learning Communities' project, have been transferred across into the new Primary Strategy Learning Networks' initiative. The research will also explore the advantages and disadvantages of involvement in a nationally implemented and locally driven government initiative.

This will be a qualitative piece of research, in that it draws on the perceptions of participants within the Learning Networks. The method for gathering the data will be survey and the data will be gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the first year in the life of two primary school networks involved in the initiative.

The two networks to be studied in this part of the research will each comprise of 5-8 schools.

The interviews will take place with the Headteachers of the schools involved in these two networks and will be based on the following questions at the outset of the project:

– What collaborative working arrangements have you been involved in so far and how do you rate their success?
– What do you believe will be the benefits specifically of this new network arrangement to you and to your school?
– Can you foresee any disadvantages?

The interviews will be repeated at the end of the year, posing the following questions:

– Over the course of the year, how have your perceptions with regard to the benefits and disadvantages of this initiative changed?
– In hindsight, would you involve your school again?
– If feeding back centrally, how could the initiative be improved?
– What has been the best thing/ worst thing about the PSLN initiative?
– Have there been any perceived problems with a centrally directed approach to this initiative?

When this field work is complete, the data will be collated, analysed and commented upon. The subsequent findings will be presented in a 50,000 word thesis to be submitted to Birmingham University as part of my study for a Doctoral award.

T.A.Moore (September 2005)

Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
Working together (1)		√	√				
Links with similar schools (3)		√		√			
Understanding of similar problems/experiences (3)		√		√			
Sharing of resources (1)		√					
Similar teaching and learning focus (3)		√					
Similar curriculum focus (3)		√					
Support for isolated staff (2)	√	√		√			
Shared planning (1)		√					
Support to professionally develop staff (2)			√	√			
Confidence building (2)			√				
Reduced competition (1)			√				
Improved collaboration (1)	√		√				
Time to focus on similar issues (3)			√				
Practical advice for new heads (2)				√			
Challenge for high achieving schools (2)				√			
Sharing of information (1)				√			
Professional support in changing times (2)				√			
Sounding board for coordinators (2)				√			
Distributed leadership (4)				√			
Keeping updated on key Issues (2)				√			
Challenge to improve and develop (2)				√			
Professional development for coordinators (2)				√			
Insight into others practices to improve standards (1)				√	√		
Peer support (2)	√			√			
Leadership development for heads (2)	√						
Tailor made CPD (2)	√						
Collaborative leadership (4)	√						
Time to work together (1)	√						
Broader horizons (2)				√			
Support for subject leaders (2)				√			
Sharing similar experiences (1)					√		
Better understanding outside of own experiences (2)					√		
Improved leadership strategies (2)					√		
Corporate voice	√						

ADVANTAGES PRE NLC

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	Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
ADVANTAGES PRE NLC	Exchange of ideas and information (1)					√		
	Sounding board for headteacher (2)					√		
	Sharing practice in a common field (1)						√	
	Sharing expertise (1)						√	
	Sharing ideas on new initiatives (1)						√	
	Sharing practice (1)						√	√
	Focus on leadership for teaching heads (4)						√	
	Focus on the job as the leader (4)						√	
	Encouraging shared leadership (4)						√	
	Shared responsibility (1)						√	
	Shared workload with national initiatives (1)						√	
	Sharing workload (1)							√
	Sharing ideas (1)							√
	'Advice pool' (2)							√
	Support mechanism for heads (2)							√
	Widening professional circle (2)							√

Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
Additional funding (1)	√		√				
Additional opportunities for CPD (4)	√						
Tailor made training and development (4)	√						
Focus on pupil learning (4)	√						
Focus on adult learning (4)	√						
Being able to prioritise (2)		√					
Clear focus (2)		√	√				
Focus on curriculum (4)		√					
Quality time (1)		√	√				
Role modelling (4)		√					
Wider viewpoint (links with other networks) (3)		√					
High quality centrally provided training (4)			√				
Head's professional development (4)			√				
Professional development for coordinators (4)				√			
Keeping updated (3)				√			
Bigger picture (wider viewpoint) (3)				√			
Support of NCSL in terms of quality (4)				√			
Tighter plan of action (2)			√		√		
Increased range of activities (4)					√		
Cascading workload (2)					√		
Development of professional skills (4)					√		
Development of expertise (4)					√		
Development of self esteem (4)					√		
Alignment with school priorities (2)					√		
Reflective practice (4)						√	
Focus on effective practice (4)						√	
More focus in network (2)						√	√
Plan of action (2)							√
First hand knowledge of national initiatives (3)							√
More professionally informed (3)							√
More involvement at all levels (4)							√
More professional development at all levels (4)							√

ADVANTAGES POST NLC

	Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
DISADVANTAGES PRE NLC	Lack of funding for teacher release (1)	√			√			
	Lack of time to meet (1)	√			√			
	Lack of professional confidence in group situations (3)		√					
	Awareness of ones own shortcomings (3)		√					
	Negativity of others (4)		√					
	Poor group dynamics (4)		√					
	Lack of clarity over professional protocols (3)		√					
	Conflict of agendas (4)			√				
	Teaching heads' time commitments (1)			√				
	Group relationships (4)			√				
	Keeping confidence of individuals high in group			√				
	Accepting differences of individuals within a group (4)			√				
	Time to develop as a network (3)	√		√				
	Lack of funding (1)					√		
	Lack of time to meet in working day (1)					√		
	Teaching heads' workload re commitment (1)					√		
	Lack of common agenda (2)						√	
	Conflict between school priorities and n/w priorities (2)						√	√

Appendix xvi

Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
Hierarchy (1)	√						
Disengagement (5)	√						
Tight time scales (8)	√	√	√				
Loss of flexibility of choice (8)		√					
Becoming insular (6)			√				
Personal agendas (4)			√				
External pressure (8)			√				
No time for embedding new practice (initiative overload) (8)			√				
Secondary school model initiative (8)				√			
Lack of engagement of all stakeholders at crucial times (5)				√			
Too much imposed bureaucracy (8)				√			
Not all staff involved due to driven agenda (5)				√			
Temporary disengagement due to other pressures (5)					√		
Diary dates clashing (8)					√		
Sustainability due to reliance on external funding (3)					√		
Too much time out of the classroom (8)						√	
More involvement, hence more workload for small school (8)						√	
Missed opportunities due to established network (2)						√	√
'Mind set' with regard to agenda (2)						√	
Subjective rather than objective (6)						√	
Too inward looking (6)						√	
Too similar in context, therefore insular perspective (6)						√	√
Too many initiatives, too few personnel (8)							√
Established n/w, so no inclination to change (2)							√
End of life span (3)							√
Strong characters in network (4)						√	√
NLC gave power to a few (8)							√
Cosmetic distributed leadership at top level (1)							√
Established 'pecking order, hierarchy in place (1)							√
Too much ownership by some individuals (4)							√
Not everyone prepared to listen to others ideas (4)							√
Not all voices heard equally (4)							√
One speed leadership, too pacey (8)							√
Fitting a required model to secure funding (8)		√					√
Time pressures (8)							√

DISADVANTAGES POST NLC

	Category / Theme number	1WM	2WM	3WM	4WM	5WM	6WM	7WM
DISADVANTAGES POST NLC	Funding pressures (8)							√
	Loss of flexibility (8)							√
	Loss of autonomy (8)							√
	Expectations not being met (7)			√	√			

Recurring Themes from an analysis of the interview transcripts

Advantages pre NLC	
Sharing	**1. Aspects of sharing**
Collaborative practices	
Support with isolation	**2. Professional support**
Challenge	
Professional confidence	
Peer support	
Professional development	
Support for school leaders	
Common context	**3. Commonalities**
Common purpose	
Focus on leadership	**4. Empowerment**
Encouraging shared leadership	

Advantages post NLC	
Funding	**1. Funded time**
Additional time	
Improved management of network	**2. Structure and focus**
Action plan and alignment with schools' APs	
More global perspective	**3. National perspective**
Links with other networks	
Access to high quality central professional development	**4. High quality PD**
Increased range of activities	
Tailor made CPD	
Focus on adult learning	
Focus on pupil learning	
Reflective practice	

Disadvantages pre NLC	
Funding restraints	**1. Funding commitments**
Associated time restraints	
Conflicting priorities	**2. Sustaining common purpose**
Lack of common agenda	
Inexperience of networking	**3. Learning how to network**
Lack of professional confidence	
Group relationships	**4. Group dynamics**
Negativity of others	

Disadvantages post NLC	
Established hierarchies	**1. Hierarchies**
Cosmetic distributed leadership	
Established network	**2. Mindsets**
Missed opportunities	
Mindsets	
Sustained common purpose	**3. Sustainability**
Sustained funding	
Strong characters	**4. Group dynamics**
Personal agendas	
Other agendas	
Insularity	**6. Insularity**
Participant expectations not met	**7. Expectations**
Imposed workload	**8. Internal/External impositions**
Imposed agendas	
Imposed timescales	
Imposed bureaucracy	
Imposed accountability	
Imposed model	

Advantages at the start of the PSLN

Arising themes	Number of responses
1. Sharing	
Sharing of expertise and ideas	*10*
Sharing of workload	*4*
2. Professional development and support	
Professional development	*6*
Widening of professional circle	*8*
Support for leadership	*4*
Broadening of horizons	*4*
Professional confidence	*3*
Peer challenge	*2*
Insight	*1*
LA support and advice	*1*
Spin offs	*3*
'Out of the norm'	*3*
Fun	*2*
Research opportunities	*1*
3. Empowerment	
Empowering others	*2*
Collegiality	*2*
Corporate voice	*1*
Legitimacy	*1*
4. Group dynamics	
Group dynamics	*4*
Trust & openness	*4*
Group intellect	*1*
5. Raising standards	
Focus on standards	*2*
Common purpose	*8*
Pedagogical focus	*6*
6. Structure	
Structure	*3*
Engagement of staff at all levels	*5*
Flexibility	*2*
Context	*1*
Size	*1*
7. Time	
Time to focus	*4*
Money	*4*

Additional perceived advantages one year on

Arising themes	Number of responses
1. Developing relationships	
Network bonding	*1*
Peer support groups	*1*
Widening professional circle	*2*
Shared workload	*3*
Shared expertise	*3*
Challenge	*2*
2. Leadership opportunities	
Opportunities for leadership development	*2*
Empowering others	*1*
Professional confidence	*4*
3. Knowledge frontiers	
New insights	*1*
Insider knowledge	*2*
Reciprocity	*2*
4. Accountability	
Accountability for action	*1*

Perceived disadvantages at the start of the PSLN initiative

Arising themes	Number of responses
1. Priorities	
Value to the school	*6*
Lack of common purpose	*3*
Other priorities	*3*
Lack of direction	*1*
Starting points	*1*
Realistic targets	*1*
Releasing staff	*3*
Time, timings, timescales	
Diaries	*4*
Set up	*4*
Timescales	*3*
Time wasting	*3*
Meetings	*3*
2. Mobility	
Staff mobility	*3*
Lack of engagement	*3*
Personal agendas	*2*
Group dynamics	*2*
Lack of staff	*1*
'Catch up'	*1*
3. Autonomy	
Lack of control	***1***
Compromise	*1*
'Too many chiefs'	*1*
Lack of empowerment	*2*
4. Bureaucracy	
Initiative overload	*3*
Workload	*2*
Paperwork	*2*
Accountability	*2*
Organisational issues	*2*

Additional perceived disadvantages one year into the PSLN initiative

1. Lack of engagement	
Staff turnover	3
Loss of dynamics	7
Lack of ownership	1
Over-ambition	3
Time to network	5
Ownership	1
School purpose	2
Not meeting participant expectations	5
2. Model/structure	
Hierarchy	1
Initiative overload	4
Network model	1
Diaries	4
Organisational issues	2
Limited focus	1
Funding	1
Initial confusion	3

Recurring Themes from an analysis of the PSLN interview transcripts

Advantages at the start of the PSLN	Advantages a year into the PSLN
1. Aspects of sharing	1. Developing relationships
2. Professional support	2. Leadership opportunities
3. Empowerment	3. Extending knowledge frontiers
4. Group Dynamics	4. Accountability
5. Raising standards	
(6. Structure)	
(7. Time to network)	
Disadvantages at the start of the PSLN	Disadvantages a year into the PSLN
1. Priorities	1. Engagement
2. Mobility	(2. Structure)
3. Autonomy	
4. Bureaucracy	

Other collaborative arrangements in which PSLN headteachers participated

Clusters - groups of schools set up by the LA and linked for a number of reasons including geographical location, educational phase, type of school, friendship groups of heads. These were set up originally by the LA, but controlled by the headteachers. They supported mainly management and some aspects of leadership. They were also used as opportunities to access information from the LA to discuss at meetings.

SPAs - newly set up Strategic Planning Areas to address the needs of Extended Services under the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. It was anticipated by the authority that each set of SPA schools would work together to offer a range of extended services within a local area. The organisation of the SPAs had been driven by the LA and mainly determined by geographical location and feeder secondary schools. Although not mentioned by many, each of the respondents belonged to a SPA. The purpose of each group was to work with providers to explore the potential to offer a range of extended services e.g. after school care clubs, extra curricular activities, children's centres, integrated services.

Learning Groups - limited in number and normally facilitated by one interested individual, these groups were concerned with some aspects of research into leadership or pedagogy. They were normally friendship groups or headteachers with a common context e.g. headteachers of small schools, heads with links to NCSL.

PLP Networks - these groups had been formed under the Primary Leadership Programme initiative within the authority. The Lead Adviser for this initiative had promoted networking activities with participating schools. These groups were concerned with developing leadership capacity within schools with a focus on raising standards and they encouraged representation at senior leadership level:

NPQH/LPSH – another set of networking groups formed through initiatives into which participants had involved themselves. These tended to be small groups of heads that had made professional contacts within their training groups on the NPQH or LPSH (national headteacher training) programmes. Some had continued to meet on a fairly regular basis and these fulfilled a social aspect as well as a role in support for leadership and management.

Working Parties, Consortiums and Forums - a number of these existed within the authority, normally to ensure 'best value' for providers and services to schools e.g. School Meals Consortium, SEN Forum etc. Heads involved in these groups remarked on the networking opportunities these offered for dialogue with and support from colleagues on a variety of leadership and management issues over and above the planned focus of the groups:

'Hub' School Networks - a designated 'hub' school providing a number of (funded) services to other schools, performing outreach work, offering expertise and sharing good practice.

Types and numbers of networks accessed by PSLN headteacher respondents

Type	1LB	2LB	3LB	4LB	5LB	6LB	7LB	8LB	9LB	10LB	11LB	12LB	Focus
Cluster	√	√	√		√√	√√	√	√	√	√√√	√	√√√	Support for management
SPA	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	Support for management
Learning Group							√	√					Support for leadership and/or pedagogy
PLP				None currently						√		√	Support for leadership
NPQH/ LPSH			√						√	√			Support for leadership and management
Working Parties/ Consortiums /Forums	√	√	√√										Support for leadership and management/ QA for services to schools
'Hub' School	√										√		Service provider
Total	4	3	5	0	3	3	3	3	3	6	3	5	Total

Researcher position

It is important in any research to consider researcher bias. Therefore, as a final statement in this thesis, I propose to comment on my own position as the researcher and to explore some of my own values as they were before the research took place and as they are now. At the time of this research, I had been in the education profession for over 30 years. Therefore, I held a strong belief in the value of education and in working in partnership with other professionals to drive forward school improvement. I also held a great deal of optimism in the newly appointed Labour Government in the late 1990s for the prioritising of state education and the additional resources and initiatives that were coming into our schools as a result of this.

At the time of the pilot study in the West Midlands in 2004, I was a headteacher of one of the primary schools involved in the Networked Learning Community. I had also held the position of co-leader of that NLC for two years prior to the research. I had initially committed to the Networked Learning Communities initiative because of my belief that networks were a good way of sharing ideas and innovative practices to impact directly in the classroom. I invested time and effort in the early days of the NLC because of this and I believe that I also gained personally and professionally from the experience. However, it is important to state that, by the time the pilot study took place, my views as a network participant had also been affected by some of the inhibitors to networking and negative aspects expressed by other respondents in this thesis. And so, although attempts were made to take an objective view, it would be naïve to presume that my own perceptions expressed in this thesis were not coloured in some respects by my views at the time.

At the start of the main study into the Primary Strategy Learning Network initiative in 2005, I had just been appointed as a Senior Education Adviser in the London borough chosen for the research. Although there were many benefits to this in terms of accessibility and insider knowledge, I am aware that my professional position influenced me in my positive promotion of the PSLN initiative locally. I am also aware that participants may have readily agreed their involvement due to my position within the Authority and that their perceptions of my role also may have affected some of the responses from headteachers interviewed. The best I can do is to state these as facts so that the reader can make his or her own judgements on the findings.

At the end of four years of research into networks and national networking initiatives, I still hold a firm belief in the potential of collaborative working arrangements between schools and I strongly value any opportunities for interactions with like-minded professionals for producing a world class education system for our children.

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