The grace of faith, reparation and healing wounds:

an autoethnographic inquiry into Academy and faith Leadership

by

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Contents

Abstract

Using autoethnography as both methodology and method, this thesis presents an explorative inquiry into the life of a secondary school Catholic Headteacher serving within the Academies programme in England. Situated within a qualitative paradigm with data presented as interpretive truth narrative and journal extracts alongside fictional text and dialogue, the thesis critically and reflexively examines events in the writer's professional life as an Academy leader alongside a personal experience of critical illness whilst in post as an Academy Head, over three years from 2014 to 2017.

Through temporal reflection and reflexive introspection of the self through the lens of the Catholic faith and, specifically, through the charism of Ignatian spirituality, key themes of detachment, power, suffering, and loss are revealed and examined. The formation of an early self that, later, becomes professionally situated within the Academies programme, is charted through a series of vignettes. The growth and development of the professional self is examined alongside the growth and development of the Academies programme but is then reduced, through critical illness, to surrender that self, to detach, withdraw, and become inseparably bound to the spiritual self. The strands of professional and personal self detach and emerge from suffering through a transcendent process of reparation and healing, becoming one resurrected and re-formed self; one spiritual self, rooted deeper in faith.

New perspectives are offered on Catholic school leadership as a spiritual lay vocation, and on the mission and purpose of the Catholic school leader as a selfless embodiment of faith. As a redemptive narrative, it concludes that suffering as a leader, detaching from the trappings of power and position, enables re-birth and spiritual growth in leadership humility, and paves the way to reconstitute a new understanding of both leadership and 'Eldership' in serving the Catholic school.

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To my wonderful, supportive and understanding family, to my dearest friends and to all the souls who have touched my life with beauty and grace, I dedicate this work.

<u>Prologue</u>

I believe one writes because one has to create a world in which one can live. I could not live in any of the worlds offered to me…I had to create a world of my own, like a climate, a country, an atmosphere in which I could breathe, reign and recreate myself when destroyed by living.

Anaïs Nin (1978, p.12)

You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.

Maya Angelou (2012, p.x)

Journal extract:

I have written my story; finally the words came, spilling onto the page; an unstoppable purge of all the twisted, toxic, painful, agonisingly confused and jumbled mess that has existed inside me for too long, blurring the lines between the professional and personal self. The reasons why I could not overcome the struggle to finish it and to write about the first few years of headship might form an interesting inquiry in itself. I believe it has been an incremental process requiring distance, detachment and time, but it has also been difficult to muster the will, the strength and the ability to finally let it go. And through this process, I have discovered a powerful sense of release, a new strength and freedom to now be the leader I believe I am meant to be.

My work has never been a job; my work remains deeply rooted in vocation. I realise now how much I emotionally invest in it. I give it everything; heart and soul, mind, body and spirit. Never have I wanted to leave education and do something else. But I have wanted to run, to run away as far and as fast as possible. I have prayed many times, in despair, to find a way to escape. And now that I have moved on and away, I can reflect on the time it has taken to heal the wounds and to begin to repair the damage to a body wracked by critical illness and a soul almost destroyed by an unexpected, imposed and personally untenable way of working that was, in the end, too unbearable to manage.

It is through this study that, for the first time, I have been able to piece together events of a time that was both professionally intolerable and personally destructive. I pray that I will never have to live through such an experience again.

I invested five years of mind, body and spirit into my first substantive headship, into the organisation and its people; it has taken a long time to begin the process of letting it go but I am now ready to do that.

I needed time to distance myself and to be able to apply some clarity of vision; to explore meaning within the events etched into my memory. I needed to understand. It is only in reaching a sufficient point of almost clinical detachment that I am now able to recall the final stages with some element of objectivity despite the essence of subjectivity that envelops the autoethnographic approach.

I cannot begin to describe how I feel at this moment. But I will attempt to.

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Introduction

In interior life what happens to one is unique. Life histories, like snowflakes, are never of the same design.

Audrey Borenstein (1978, p.30)

As we impart meaning to events by telling them to ourselves, so we are constantly imparting cohesiveness and coherence to our lives by enacting a life story in our actions…we are not just tellers of a story; we are something told, we are a telling.

Charles Guignon (2004, p.126)

I have worked in state-funded secondary schools in London and the south east of England for the past twenty six years, eighteen of which have been spent in leadership roles. I have been a Headteacher of two 'converter' Academy schools preceded by a year as an Acting Principal of a new sponsored City Academy. I offer the grace of significant lived experience of Academy leadership under three political administrations; firstly under the New Labour government (1997-2010) and the early years of the Academies programme (2002-2009), followed by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition (2010-2014) and now the present Conservative administration. Through this leadership journey I have been able to both witness and experience the birth and the evolvement of the Academies programme shaped and influenced by each government.

I have a story to tell, a story that I believe is 'important and worth telling' (Muncey, 2010, p.54); one that I hope might be as compelling to read as it has been to live through. It is a story of faith, leadership, and an experience of critical illness that is contextualised within an arena of politics and power in education and explores the subsequent impact on a school leader when imposed expectations and directives from government lead to conflict, compromised personal values and doubt over the authenticity of leadership from a perspective of deep, personal faith. It charts the impact of a policy direction that initially emerged from one strand of a government agenda that sought to tackle underachievement of children in disadvantaged areas, to then evolve and expand to cover all schools of all designations across the state school spectrum (Chapman, 2016; Miller, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Even before the growth and development of the Multi Academy Trust framework of Academy organisation, the Academies programme was perceived as a political move towards mass decentralisation of England's education system (Galton and MacBeath, 2008).

My journey at the heart of this swell of policy and legislative moves has not been without tension. It has come at great personal cost which, during its most brutal and unforgiving

moments, has been felt both as a professional violation and a toxic infiltration of my very physical being. In congruence, the deterioration of my fight to save the school that I was in charge of from what felt, to me, like a calculated political onslaught to force it into joining a Multi Academy Trust against the wishes of its stakeholders, took place as my corporeal self experienced a rapid and violent onslaught of debilitating illness. Both my school and my body came, it felt, under simultaneous threat of destruction. In seeking to juxtapose these events, I hope to derive deeper meaning and try to make some sense of what happened (Denzin, 2003). Neither the school nor my physical being has been left unscathed. The school, where I was formerly Head, has now assumed its new position as a school 'taken over' by an established Multi Academy Trust (Waters, 2013, p.33); my physical self has now cultivated a new life and a new way of being within a school environment that is certainly affected, but not yet engulfed, by external political forces; a school that is immersed primarily in the essence of spirituality and the Catholic faith; a school where I finally feel at home and, more importantly, at peace.

Despite the darkness that emerges through telling my story, it is my intention to present it with hope and optimism. But to reach those higher planes of peace it describes a journey that, at times, has felt like the antithesis of reconciliation and hope. It documents a personal experience of living and working in despair and with a sense of powerlessness and loss of authenticity, of inner torment and hopelessness; a literal embodiment of what appeared to me at the time, to be a contaminated professional world in state education, one that I felt had become dominated by fear and compliance (Ryan, 2008); a world that had subverted the very essence of my being and manifested itself through my fragile human physicality. It was a world in which I struggled to exist; where it felt almost impossible to practise authentic leadership as a person of faith.

I may have journeyed through the dark night of the soul in both my professional and personal life coming under threat, but I have been blessed with the grace of new life now. I no longer dwell in the same darkness; it is towards the light that I have finally been able to move (Nouwen, 2013; Finlay, 2000). Now with some temporal distance between the pain of the lived experience and the present, I seek to understand introspectively what happened, to analyse the impact of external forces upon me as a person of faith and as a Headteacher and to derive meaning from these events.

Finlay (2000) suggests that the most natural reaction many people have, following painful and difficult experiences, is to bury them away so deeply that they are no longer felt and that this, in turn, becomes a coping mechanism that facilitates a rebuilding of life or returning to normal.

However, he warns against this tendency as threatening one's sense of authenticity in being able to truly recover and rebuild:

> Our emotions are dimensions of our being. To be split off from our own feelings is to be split off from a vital dimension of being. To hide from our own feelings is to be hiding from ourselves. If we are not careful we can learn to hide so well that nobody can find us. Our undealt with, unprocessed emotional pain and loss becomes hidden from our conscious awareness.

(p.67)

This thesis is not only a redemptive narrative; it is also a quest narrative (Frank, 1995); my journey through the process of documenting and writing has been towards a position of finding a new sense of peace and acceptance of who I am as a person of faith, who I am as a Catholic school leader, who I am now inside this body and how to simply be following a period of time in my life when I was simultaneously critically ill and the school that I led had fallen under the threat of takeover. The process of writing this thesis has enabled me to cease hiding from a very dark and difficult time in my personal and professional life; instead to confront it and allow the flood of painful memories to consciously process. In doing so, it has enabled me to feel both spiritually and emotionally healed, able to close a period of life and to understand it, learn from it; above all, to grow from it.

My Catholic faith envelops the ontological frame of this work; what I understand and believe arises from an epistemological framework rooted in Catholicism. Key themes of ministry and service through work; power attributed and power executed; darkness and light; fear; detachment and solitude; suffering, loss, pain and, finally, healing and resurrection emerge and are explored and analysed through the Catholic practice of discernment. Ignatian spirituality provides the lens through which the themes are explored.[1]

I am seeking to understand and make meaning from the subjective world that I inhabit (Denzin, 2003). The focus is the lifeworld of Academy leadership in a Single Academy Trust (SAT) that was targeted for takeover by a Multi Academy Trust (MAT); action that was legitimised by a government vision for school organisation within a particular region. It is presented as my lived reality as the Head of that Academy. Critical and life-changing events can present opportunities for new meaning to emerge (Guignon, 2004; Denzin, 1994). I believe that new insights and

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[1] The Catholic faith is practised through a number of charisms, forms of spirituality and practices that are particular to specific religious orders e.g the Dominican, Salesian, Franciscan, Benedictine orders all practise the Roman Catholic faith but with their own specific emphases, practices and interpretations. Ignatian spirituality stems from the charism of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, known worldwide as the Jesuits. The charism of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary (RJM) and the Order that my present Catholic school was founded by in 1888, was derived from Ignatian spirituality. The Jesuits are considered to be 'brothers' of the Sisters of the RJM.

vision, new ways of seeing and being in the world, are possible to decipher when a life has been taken to the brink of its ontological being. I hope that this study will facilitate new perspectives on faith and leadership to be offered to the academe. As a serving Headteacher that has lived through two simultaneous existential threats: an external threat to my professional position as a Headteacher at the same time as an internal threat to my health and my life, I am in a position to offer unique and original perspectives on living headship and on spiritual growth that determines the nature, the fundamental principles, and the pure blessing of what is means to be a Catholic school leader.

This is a reflexive and introspective study in which the data is provided through the telling of a story of what happened to me and around me, and my perceptions of how I was impacted both personally and professionally. There are no other participants in this research[2] but I will argue that the absence of intersubjectivity does not weaken or render it less valid. What is presented is an account and a theoretical analysis of a personal experience. Personal experiences are felt and understood differently according to the person, their perceptions, their own ontological frame, their cultural context and their belief systems. What I experienced has led to profound changes in the way that I see the world, my profession and my place within that profession, how my life is lived, influenced, guided and shaped by my Catholic faith, and how differently I understand and relate to the external world. I document a series of events that have impacted upon me in a powerful and life-changing way. The use of autoethnography and analysis that is both reflexive and introspective facilitates a search for a deeper epistemology of the professional, personal and faithful self within the field of education and school leadership.

Autoethnography is both method and methodology in this study. I am seeking to make meaning and to understand the impact I felt as the Head of a school that I perceived to be under systematic and sustained threat of takeover. I also seek to understand and make meaning from an experience of acute personal suffering as I was faced simultaneously with an illness that carried me to the space between this life and the next; how this experience and the process of recovery has led me to develop new insights and perspectives on faith and day to day life and how these new perspectives influence my work in Catholic school leadership.

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[2] There are no other participants in the conventional sense in that I have not chosen to adopt more traditional methods such as interviews to collect views of others; however, I have drawn on a range of experiences and interactions that recall and document involvement with others in a fictionalised form. There are other characters, but these are fictional participants.

Autoethnography has enabled me to 'gain insight into the meaning of my own life' (McAdams, 1993, p. 11). Through this research process I have come to know myself more deeply and to reach an understanding and more profound knowledge of myself as a person of faith, as a school leader, and of the field of state education within the Academies programme. Richards (2019) observes how autoethnography helped to 'uncover further layers of complexity in [her] story' (p.280). In this study, autoethnography has helped me to come to terms with a difficult, frightening and complex time in my personal and professional life, to theorise the events and to find new meaning in my lived role as an Academy school leader and the world that I navigate. Through the analysis of the data and the process of reflexive introspection I have learned to peel away my own 'layers of complexity' *(ibid.),* to reveal character traits that I had not hitherto acknowledged; to understand more about my ontological being, my own fears and demons, the value and ministry of my work as both teacher and Headteacher that is framed within vocation. Recalling the time when critical illness overwhelmed me and, reviewing with, what I will argue, a permissible level of objective detachment of a researcher's eye, has enabled me to gain a deeper insight into the meaning and purpose of my life. I have been able to discern through lived experience what it means to traverse from one life to another, carried through faith from near end of life to a re-birth into new life (Nouwen, 2011; Frank, 1991).

The research methods involve a reflexive analysis of a narrative of professional life history, with sequences and events selected and portrayed as I recall now from memory. I am applying a lens that comes from the perspective of the present but is placed over events that have taken place in the past. Worthen (2012) suggests that memory cannot be separated from meaning and that, through the process of remembering, we are able to make some sense of life. I acknowledge that the meaning I seek to derive now comes at a time when there has been separation between the self that lived through the experience and the self that now exists some years later. Therein lies acknowledgment that my recall is interpretive and that time and maturing in both faith and perspective may have altered my perceptive memory. But I aim to present and theorise the detail of a lived experience as an interpreted truth as far as it is possible to do so.

I concede that I have sought to use autoethnography partly as a 'healing practice' (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, p.246), but also as a means to reflect the 'raw and naked' emotion that has been felt and experienced through this journey (*ibid*. p.10). Being critically ill requires healing time but equally, feeling professionally attacked demands a period of healing for forgiveness and then peace to diminish any feelings of anger or bitterness.

Beatty (2000) encourages and urges reflection and narrative to break the silence about the emotional realities of leadership. I use a method of storytelling that interweaves elements of fiction with an authentic and genuine voice. It is my hope that its readers may recognise either some or all of the elements and themes that sections of this story offer. I offer readers a glimpse into my world (Moore, 2012), and I invite readers 'to come close and experience this world' for themselves (Tillman-Healy, 1996, p. 80). But autoethnography as methodology and method is much more than a telling of a story. It is the reflexive analysis, the peeling away of the layers that bind the story and sequences of events together, that makes it a powerful approach to qualitative research and a powerful approach to research presented as a redemptive and quest narrative (Frank, 1995). O'Leary (2018) suggests how:

> Stories can attract, instruct and influence those who hear them. They do this not by communicating truly in an abstract way, or by being didactic, but simply by inviting readers to enter imaginatively into another person's experience. This then allows readers to get in touch with their own personal story, sometimes bringing to the surface not just memories but even aspects of the subconscious. Indeed readers often feel that they are learning as much about their own lives as about the life of the story's protagonist. Such is the power of story.

> (p.46)

The story and how it is reflexively analysed might open paths of consciousness in readers that enable them to connect their own experiences with what they derive from mine; but equally there might be minimal resonance or connectivity. I seek to derive meaning through my use of reflexive analysis, but I also leave it to the reader to form their own interpretations of a lived experience of an 'other'.

This research is offered to those within the education sector as well as those who are interested in education and schools. I cannot assume or influence how readers will respond to the story, but I hope that it will at least touch lives and stir emotions; that readers may gain some insight into the world of Academy leadership and be able to use my documented experience to determine and navigate their own path within the educational leadership sector. It comes at a time when the issue of Catholic schools becoming Academies is the subject of contention and debate amongst the Catholic and academic communities (Buck, 2020; Whittle, 2020; Newsam, 2013).

It is a story of what happened to me as an individual Headteacher and to the school that I was appointed to lead. As Bochner (2016) reflects on an example of his own ethnographic writing: 'my story reaches beyond me. It resonates with other people's lives. It deals with an issue of

universal significance' (p.246). My story might equally 'resonate' *(ibid.)* with others both within and external to the education sector. It is a story of a sensitive nature and offers an insight into the world of Academy leadership and the place it now occupies within education in the public sector. The insights are, I suggest, of immense importance in contributing to the debate on Catholic Academies which, at present, has not been able to draw on a sufficient range of contemporary research; it remains a relatively un-researched area within Catholic education (Buck, 2020; Chapman and Solakangas, 2012). I aim to make a valid, original and scholarly contribution to the body of research on Academies and Catholic school leadership through the analysis of a lived experience and the theoretical perspectives this will, in turn, generate. It is my own 'gift of living testimony' to offer (Ellis, 2006, p.430).

Coles (1989) holds the view that 'the beauty of a good story is its openness' (p.47); I have sought to be open and transparent and to remove the veil that kept all emotions associated with the events hidden and suppressed under a mask of measured professionalism. But I do not wish to remain silent any longer. Gunter (2015) highlights how debate over the issues of significance in our society has been replaced by silence. I adopt autoethnography to both tell and analyse a story that may still be replayed over and over yet hidden, but this study may expose the reader to a story from a very real perspective on education that I believe should not ever be 'shrouded in secrecy' (Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p.25); it is offered as 'a first hand and highly charged account' (*ibid.* p.25) of government-driven and endorsed practices being adopted and accepted within the schools system and the professional and personal impact these had on a leader who sought to lead with values firmly rooted in faith.

Harris (2007) acknowledged that schools are 'powerhouses of emotion' (p.3); human emotions can often be complex and dynamic even under normal everyday circumstances and schools with such large human communities, mixes of ages and personalities, behaviours, attitudes and cultures, can act as greenhouses for emotions to heat and often fester. Shapiro (2009) suggests that 'it is the responsibility of education today to cultivate a culture of peace' (p.10). If a culture of peace is an outcome of this study, then I consider that to be progress towards marrying education leadership not necessarily with faith values but with the universal values often espoused by schools and leaders, in mission statements and school aims and principles[3].

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[3] A recent contentious example of imposed values upon the schools system is the Government's introduction of compulsory British Values; a set of politically constructed values in response to a belief that threats of terror can be curtailed from forming in adulthood if children are taught the importance of British Values in school; all state-funded schools are required to promote and teach British Values. This is a large and very important area to interrogate but not what this thesis is about.

As Ellis and Bochner (2016) profess:

> When you read an autoethnography you become a witness to the narrative context of another person's suffering. Autoethnographers expect their readers to become deeply involved and drawn into the predicaments of their stories.

(p.70)

The readers of this study, I hope, will become involved; they will read about and become a witness to my experiences and also to my personal suffering; they may feel an affiliation with the events that are presented or, equally, they may be left cold by them:

> Sometimes stories fall on deaf ears. People hear and see and walk away. No impact is discernible. At other times the story penetrates to the centre of the receiver and holds the soul in balance. Something has been touched.

Shea (2004, p.93)

It is not my intention, through this study, to recruit readers to a cause; this is not a crusade. It is a practice of presenting what I see as a key issue for Catholic education and, specifically, for the future of school leaders and Catholic school Headteachers; for their work and their well-being. It is perhaps a 'manual', a blueprint for protecting as much as preserving the persons who make up the body of contemporary and future school leaders. For Catholic school leaders the perspectives that emerge on faith and faith in leadership will, I hope, provide new insights into the vocation of Catholic leadership embedded in service, ministry and faith formation.

In acknowledgement of the often-cited criticisms of the chosen methodology (Fraser, 2018; Delamont, 2009; Anderson, 2006; Patai, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988), I have sought to develop and deepen meaning derived from the study, taking it outside of myself and my introspective position as both the researcher and the researched (Fraser, 2018; Richardson, 1997); in this study I am both the 'narrator and the main character of the story' (Ellis, 1995, p.3).

This thesis takes as axiomatic that its starting point is written by a person of deep faith within the Catholic tradition, and I ask readers to allow me the freedom of expression of my Catholic faith. However, its explorative journey is intended to speak equally to others of different faiths and also to those of no faith. I acknowledge that there may be those of other faiths or of no faith that may share similar feelings of professional and personal despair within the field of education leadership, but as this is autoethnography, it is written as my story, from my perspectives on a

lived experience. I invite readers to journey with me through this study; to bear witness to what I present as a lived interpretive truth, but to acknowledge that it is written from the perspective of a person of Catholic faith.

Through the literature associated with the field, I seek first to chart the territory beginning with the establishment of the Academies programme, what I and others interpret that it set out to accomplish and how it transformed into something far greater in scope than its original intention (Chapman, 2016; Millar, 2016; Stewart, 2016); the conception of the role of National Schools Commissioner and the subsequent creation of a new Department for Education leadership role, that of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), to govern and oversee Academies in eight regions of England.   I juxtapose the key policy directions that successive governments from New Labour to the present Conservative leadership have administered. This maps the policy context in which the narrative of my professional life history is situated.

I draw on the implications of key policy directives relating to Academies and to the role of the Headteacher and to the lifeworld of leadership in Academies that continued to stand alone when the preferred model of Academy organisation, promoted by the government through the work of the Regional Schools Commissioners, was that of Multi Academy Trusts. I examine the effects of power and the concepts of fear and survivalism that appeared, to me, to engulf the Academy leadership arena, impacting upon schools and leadership behaviours.

I then focus on faith, Ignatian spirituality and spiritual leadership. I examine a body of literature on Christian and Catholic school leadership and theories of spiritual wisdom and transformation that is often associated with an experience of suffering offered by writers within the Catholic and other Christian faith traditions, applying and using this theoretical underpinning to my own lived experience of Academy leadership and critical life-changing illness in seeking to answer two research questions:

1. To what extent can suffering critical illness as a revelatory experience lead to deeper insights and perspectives into spiritual life, faith practice and school leadership?
2. To what extent am I, as a Catholic school leader, able to practise my vocation and ministry with authenticity and integrity to the mission within the Academies programme?

Part of the thesis is written in the first person; it is my narrative voice as the subject and it is my voice as a researcher that is simultaneously seeking to make meaning through the medium of reflexive analysis (Fraser, 2018; Roberts, 2002). The data is presented as a series of vignettes

chosen deliberately for the purpose of examining the complexities of the self and the context the self is situated within.

The vignettes are mainly presented as narrative, but parts of the story are presented as dialogue; some parts written using the drama technique of 'thought-tracking'[4] as I reflect my thoughts on the dialogue at the same time as engaging in it. My voice is genuine and real but when other actors enter the arena they are presented as nameless characters referenced by professional role. Delamont (2009) argues that autoethnography is almost impossible to write ethically as it is impossible for others in the story to be disguised or protected. I have referred to other characters by role and have fictionalised dialogue between myself and them. These and the excerpts of letters and emails from the Department of Education Officials that underpin the main thrust of events as the story reaches its climax, are also fictionalised but based on actual events. This approach ensures that confidentiality of official documentation and anonymity of characters are maintained.

But narrative, dialogue and fictionalised written communication are not the only forms of data in this study. Interspersed with the story are excerpts from my authentic personal journals kept over the period of three years that this story encompasses and later, from most recent journaling of a changed and reformed professional and faith life. My notes taken at the time these events were happening to me and through my illness add a dimension of gritty rawness that time can neither tame nor soften. The most painful part of the story, when I recall the episodes of acute suffering, and the emotional effects this had on myself and those caring for me, are presented in extracts of written 'method-acting'[5]. I chose to use this format of data presentation as a creative means of transporting myself back to the time when I was suffering illness and, drawing on my journals and my memories, to place myself there again so that what is written is as close to describing the physical and emotional trauma as I could possibly achieve now, some years later. They are not easy sections to read.

My aim has been to interweave the essence of the story with analysis and theoretical underpinning along with critical reflexivity (Bolton, 2014).[6] Arthur et al (2012) refer to research

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[4] 'Thought-tracking' in drama occurs where a character is acting in the moment of the story but temporarily steps outside of the story to share a thought or pass a comment on what is happening with the audience. They are simultaneously in and participating in the dialogue or action at the same time as sharing their thoughts and reflections on the moment.

[5] Method-acting is a drama technique used by actors who are seeking to portray as much realism as possible in their presentation of a character in a moment. An example might be an actor's portrayal of a character that has stayed up all night; the actor will actually stay up all night themselves to ensure their performance is as authentic as possible.

[6] In adopting these methods I am not alone; it has been done by other researchers working within this methodology e.g Ellis (2009; 2008; 2002; 1995; 1991), Muncey (2010), Fraser (2018; 2015; 2013) and a group of autoethnographers that

sometimes having a political aim. Gunter (2001) recommends that the positionality of the researcher is openly stated from the beginning whilst Denzin (1997) suggests that 'a responsible reflexive text announces its politics and ceaselessly interrogates the realities it invokes' (p.225). For me and what I experienced, the political became immensely personal. Like Ellis (2002), I too have come to realise that 'the reverse is just as true' (p.403), and the personal has now become political.

As a new researcher I have had far more than 'an itch or vague discontent with an accepted answer' (Dunleavy, 2003, p.242). I hope this research may help to highlight what I view as a key and problematic issue within education leadership and specifically Catholic Academy leadership today and that it will offer perspectives for a potential way forward for any serving Head that can identify with the feelings I had and the experiences I document. I urge those in Catholic leadership to reflect on this story and the implications for Catholic schools converting to Academies before decisions are taken and it is accepted that the Academies programme is the only way forward for Catholic education in England. Groome (2019), a professor of Religious Education, urges his readers to participate in politics, in 'any way that we can make our voices heard' (p.275). I do not seek to actively participate in politics, but I do seek to have my voice heard. I hope that this thesis may contribute to the process of discernment for Catholic clergy and leaders over the future shape and organisation of Catholic schools.

Since this thesis is embedded in faith and spirituality, I draw on excerpts of scripture throughout the study, excerpts chosen to either reflect Catholic faith values and spiritual practice or to illustrate actions and attributes that are its antithesis. My aim has been to use scripture to underpin a moment of significance or to signpost a Catholic perspective, often exposing how Catholic faith values and beliefs can conflict with values of neoliberal marketisation, bearing each in often sharp and distinct contrast for the reader[7].

Gronn (1996) called for more ethnographic studies to chart the realities of headship, stating that there is a 'lack of sound comparative point of reference against which to map leaders' biographical experiences and activities' (p.31). Arthur (1996) noted that Catholic education had attracted relatively little attention from educational researchers. Since then, the research of prolific academics in the field of Catholic education has prepared the foundations for questioning how a faith leader can remain true to the mission of the church whilst operating in role as an

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use this methodology to specifically share, interrogate and theorise their own personal illness or trauma narratives e.g Defenbaugh (2008), Moore (2012), Corbin (2003).

[7] Biblical references are taken from the *CTS New Catholic Bible*, Standard Edition (2007).

instrument of government education policy (Grace, 2018; 1996; 1995; Lydon, 2018; 2009; Sullivan, 2012; 2000). I hope this study will serve to inspire courage, hope and optimism in other Headteachers who perhaps, like me, have felt at times saturated and overwhelmed by perceived forces of imposed policy; or held tightly in rigid compliance; or obliged to implement a system of espoused values far removed from their own faith and personal values.

Rohr (2001) suggests that the only authority we can offer to other people and their lives is to share what we ourselves have lived and what we know to be true. As living witnesses, it is through this sharing that 'we have earned the right to speak' (p. 122).

I have chosen to share and theorise a deeply personal experience in my life as both a Headteacher and as a human being as I believe it holds meaning, significance and relevance to the Academies issue within Catholic education. As one who has suffered but lived through a professionally and personally traumatic experience as an Academy Head, but who has come through to the other side, I offer unique and original perspectives and invite readers to walk with me and witness my experience; to accompany me in my personal journey. Through reparation and healing I have moved towards personal revelation and transformation to find a way that a Catholic school leader *can* be, both in self and in work, and remain true to the faith and the way of life embodied by Christ.

Literature Review

Context and rationale

As an inquiry into faith and Academy leadership, the selected literature is contextualised within the state education sector in England and, specifically, within the Academies programme. The City Academies programme was established in 2000 with the first three Academies, in Brent, Lambeth and Liverpool, opening to students in 2001 (BBC, 2000). The first Catholic sponsored Academies opened in 2005 but it was not until 2011 that Voluntary Aided Catholic schools began to convert to Academy status by choice (CES, 2020); a movement that has ignited contentious debate, dividing supporters and sceptics alike within Catholic education (Grace, 2011). The literature that underpins the theoretical framework of this research is presented in two distinct parts in this chapter.

Part one presents an overview of policy developments that paved the way to the establishment and development of the City Academies programme following the 1997 election of the New Labour government, drawing on policy critiques that appraise the programme's intentions, outcomes and the manner in which Academies have evolved from first-generation City Academies, to Converter Academies and finally to Multi Academy Trusts and Academy Chains. This maps the policy context upon which Catholic Academies were founded.

Part two centres upon Catholic education, its purpose and mission and on the leadership of Catholic schools. The Catholic schools that have converted to Academies still inhabit the same two worlds as their Voluntary Aided partners in faith, where they navigate the duality of the sacred and secular, but they also exist in the field of education where the two additional dimensions of the sacred and secular pose challenges. As Catholic schools they primarily exist to serve the needs of the poor and to educate children in faith and Catholic values, but they do this set amongst a policy framework whereby they need to remain financially viable and desirable, performing to a standard that secures their foothold within the education market, and to comply with the principles of Academy governance laid down by government (Buck, 2020). The literature charts and assesses the dichotomy often presented to the Catholic Headteacher in their leadership navigation through the complexities of these two, often conflicting, worlds and the inner dimension of the sacred that resides within a wider, secular Academies legislation.

These sections of literature are specifically relevant to the research question posed in this thesis that assesses the extent to which it is possible to practise the vocation and ministry of Catholic school leadership with authenticity and integrity to the mission within the Academies programme.

In Part three I draw upon a body of faith literature that underpins the perspectives and principles within the specific practice and dimension of Ignatian spirituality. Faith resides in a world that is both sacred and secular. Perspectives on living as a person of faith between these two dimensions, on suffering and healing as a sacramental experience within a sacred space that is set apart from the secular world are key to a research process that seeks to establish the extent to which illness can be a revelatory experience that leads to deeper insights of spiritual life and faith practice (Rohr, 2003). In essence, to examine how such an experience can impact the school leader in faith, work and life and how Ignatian spiritual practices can offer a leader a form of spiritual framework for authentic leadership in mission, grounded in deeper insights and attention to the interior movements of the spirit.

This final section of literature is embodied within a chapter that follows the presentation of data through the telling of my story. As my own suffering and transformative process of healing is analysed, I have related my personal illness experience and analysis to literature on suffering, juxtaposing a reflective and introspective analysis of my own illness journey with the illness narratives that touched me the most during this research process. I draw, simultaneously, upon Catholic and Christian literature relating to life's journey. As I make my own meaning, I identify with meaning that other illness sufferers have imparted from their experiences, alongside teaching and wisdom that spiritual authors and theologians have discerned through their own work and lived experiences.

Part One: Mapping the field: the policy journey towards Academies

New Labour's 1997 election manifesto for education, summarised in three distinct words 'Education, education, education' left an optimistic imprint on many in the teaching profession (Beckett, 2007). Now, over twenty years later, it could be argued that the formation, implementation and subsequent swell of policy and reform that began in a key piece of education legislation passed in the Academies Act 2000 heralded what Gray (1997) termed as a discourse of endings. In the same way that the concentration of social and economic changes at a particular point in time can signal the end of an epoch and the beginning of another, the birth of the Academies programme could be seen to have moved state-funded education into a new era. Gray (1997) proposes that when many profound and varied changes happen together, they constitute something new; a new kind of society operating under a changed belief system. Profound changes in state education and belief in what it was for and what it could achieve were rooted in the Academies Act 2000; structural and system changes and associated accountability measures were reframed and decentralisation ==weakening== the power of local education authorities as the Academies were recentralised directly under the power of the Secretary of State of Education (Simon et al., 2019; Benn, 2012). Belief in the Academies programme, arguably, was to believe in a new constitution for state education.

Kuhn (1975) had suggested, prior to the election of the 'New Right' Conservative government in 1979 and subsequent policy reforms rooted in neoliberalism coming to dominate for nearly two decades, that knowledge is contained within an epistemic community with a shared paradigm but that the paradigm shifts 'when that community starts to accept a new way of thinking and defining the world' (p.176). The growth and influence of Academies has, arguably, risen since the conception of the Academies Act under New Labour in 2000, to a position of quasi domination of the state education system, most notably within the secondary sector. But it has not surpassed criticism and has become just as dominant in contention. Ball (2013) suggests that the Academies movement is an embodiment of neoliberalism and discusses how, what at one point in time seems unthinkable, becomes, over time, common sense until the 'policy present becomes a place we no longer recognise' (p.1). It is suggested by Ball (2008) that policy discourses work to privilege certain ideas and to exclude others and that they mobilise truth claims. However, the Academies programme has now occupied a significant space within state education provision for twenty years; if it initially was viewed with suspicion there is arguably now a growing wealth of data evaluating its success and measuring the truth of its worth against its original intentions (Eyles and Machin, 2019).

Jones (2003) viewed Academies as a 're-agenting of education' (p.185). Initially welcomed as an exciting and innovative model, promoted as independent state schools, many newly built and architect-designed with the appearances of powerful and dynamic modern corporate structures most often seen in the financial districts of the city, there was a notable turn towards the new City Academies with rousing curiosity. Berger (2003) noted how architects will often say it is easy to see what is valued in a culture by looking at which structures are built with expense and care. Viewing analytically today, the 'architectural temples of the modern age appear to honour business' (p.46) and indeed many of the recently built schools are award-winning 'architectural temples' (*ibid.)*, the majority being Academies.

The new City Academy buildings equipped with advanced technology, learning zones, open atriums, internal balconies and mezzanines, reflective glass and aesthetic indoor foliage, were initially welcomed as vibrant replacements for many of the ageing and crumbling school buildings sunken away in pockets of deprivation in city, coastal and urban areas where disillusionment and hopelessness prevailed, and standards of achievement were often low (Chapman, 2016). The Academies heralded the dawn of a new era and, the appearance and design of the new Academy buildings commanded attention and embraced the commercial world in ethos, culture and organisation. This provided New Labour with an important and powerful foundation for that 're-agenting' process (Jones, 2003, p.185).

McCall and Lawlor (2000) discuss the rise of what they term 'megatrends' (p.2); the new and permanent influences in education such as corporatisation, privatisation and centralisation through national policies. As Levin (1997) notes, under the Conservative administration there had been and continued to be 'a policy epidemic in education' (p.39), with waves of legislation that became an 'unstable, uneven, unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas permeating and reorienting education' (p.39). Chitty (1997) reflects on what was viewed as the 'privatisation agenda of the New Right' (p.58). The Academies programme carved out a new pathway towards privatisation of England's state schools but as Ball (2008) comments on what often happens in policy formation as new policies add to and overlay old ones, Labour's Academies programme could be viewed as standing on the shoulders of education reform initiatives laid out under the New Right.

The development of the City Academies programme embraced the corporate model but is likened by McCall and Lawlor (2000) to nothing more than encouraging 'window dressing values to be adopted by the new schools' (p.31). It could be viewed as a noble and just cause to seek to tackle engrained underachievement of children in areas of disadvantage and to raise aspiration

(Chapman, 2013), and Ball (2008) concedes how 'innovation, inclusion and regeneration are tied together in the Academies rhetoric' (p.184). Indeed, the first new Academies were built in places where regeneration was desperately needed, and the majority of early Academies were sponsored via willing philanthropic individuals and organisations committed to social justice (Beckett, 2007). But Academies have still been critiqued as a 'policy experiment' (Ball, 2007, p.170), and something that emerged from 'pure political vision rather than empirical evidence' (Ward and Eden, 2009, p.52).

Pring (2000) warned prophetically, against 'those who, in the interests of research or political control, try to change the language of education' (p.24), and Woods (1996) had previously signalled a distrust of what he termed as 'ideologues masquerading as truths' (p. 5). But it was Gorard (2005) who was among the first to unravel the rhetoric of the New Labour's truth claims on Academies being the answer and a way to tackle underachievement and lack of aspiration, when his research into the academic performance of Academies was compared to performance in schools that still fell under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Concerns that performance at GCSE was no better or, in several cases, worse than the predecessor schools, appeared to contradict what the nation had been led to believe and the myth began to be dispelled. Gorard's in-depth analysis looked at factors which contributed to the performance figures including a demographic comparison of the student populations of both predecessor schools and new City Academies that replaced them and found that, in particular, key factors such as deprivation indicators derived from the numbers of children in receipt of free school meals, in schools which had seen improvements in performance actually had enrolled fewer children from deprived wards.

Academies were presented as an innovative response to the discourse of failure of the state school system and the traditional forms of governance (Ball, 2008); but despite the work of Gorard (2009; 2005) highlighting the shortcomings of Academy performance and distorting the rhetoric, the particular discourse around Academies continued to be driven by government, 'accepted uncritically' by many (Atkins and Wallace, 2012, p.170), and was embraced and taken as a strong foundation for further development towards a dominant corporate model by the Coalition when coming to govern in 2010.

New Labour had adopted and maintained a rigid and, arguably, unforgiving standards agenda where the discourse around failure was heralded at every opportunity to name and shame schools that were not reaching the levels of expectation in examination performance and a zero tolerance approach was taken (Chapman and Gunter, 2009; Sammons, 2008). Combative

language adopted by politicians in the early years of the programme, spoke of Headteachers that were not meeting the high stakes accountability measures as needing to be 'taken out' for 'not being up to the job of raising standards in their schools' (Clarke, 2003, n.p); language echoed in later years as a former 'Super-Head' noted that 'failing schools have to be pummelled into shape' (Coates, 2015, p. 36).

Wrigley (2003) suggested that a shame culture has only made life intolerable for teachers in troubled areas and noted how official data confirms the near impossibility for schools in poorer areas, under challenging circumstances, to reach the national average. Ball (2007) termed this as a 'deployment of derision' (p.20) that was used to create 'rhetorical spaces within which to articulate reform' (*ibid.*). Schools, now pitched against one another in competition (Chapman, 2013), felt the full force of market principles in their quest to be popular choices for parents, to be badged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted, to be top of the performance tables in examination results and to maintain a stronghold of domination over the local education sector. Apple (1996) had warned how the consequences of neoliberal market values would create winners and losers in the system. What can now, arguably, be traced is how these market values and principles have influenced the behaviours and attitudes of school leaders. Ryan (2008) proposed how many school leaders were experiencing the sensations of 'outside-in' school leadership, noting:

> [the] influences coming from the outside determine what happens inside the school and could be controlling every move a school leader makes in their professional role.

(p.4)

Ball (1994) had already noted a consequence of New Right reforms in that many schools, even prior to the Academies programme, were changing their practices as marketisation and competition led to a notable shift in the value framework of education. In the decade leading to the birth of the Academies programme, Ball observed how neighbouring schools were ceasing to cooperate with one another and how friendliness amongst institutions was being replaced by suspicion and hostility as they competed for pupils and to be the most popular for parental choice. Commercial rather than educational principles were becoming increasingly dominant. Chapman (2013) noted in his seven-year study of the Academies programme, that 'high stakes accountability mechanisms pervade the system [and] continually push the system towards competition' (p.347).

Galton and MacBeath (2008) suggest that the competitive nature of a market economy brings a need to work harder, more demanding hours and in the face of progressively higher stakes. The

impact is most felt by Headteachers 'who carry on their own shoulders responsibility for the success or failure of their schools' (p.10).

Ball (1995) talks about policy happening *to* professionals; Kidd (2014) underlines how:

> [Teachers] have become accustomed to hearing and absorbing rhetoric about falling standards, unacceptable failure and even cheating. We have been told so many times that we are not worthy of trust that we have begun to turn on each other.
>
> (p.3)

Shapiro (2009) claims that schools have now become nothing more than 'instruments of conformity and passivity' (p. 12), with leaders being given directives, the script and the tools to carry out the task (Tomlinson et al, 1999). Observing the enormity of change that took place in state education during the tenure of the Coalition and the following Conservative administration, Giroux (2012) had perhaps correctly labelled teachers and Heads as 'clerks to the empire' (p.9). National education polices came in droves and had a significant impact upon the work of Headteachers demanding that attention be given to implementation of government defined priorities (Day, 2011).

However, as Academies developed and increased in number, voices of dissent were matched by voices of support. Several academies are highly successful and have consistently been named amongst the top performing schools in the country (Andrews, 2018; Andrews and Perera, 2018; Chapman, 2013). Those who sought to discredit and even demonise Academies (Miller, 2016; Benn, 2012; Beckett, 2007) were matched equally in vehemence with performance data to evidence the claims that reform through Academies was needed at a time when standards across the country, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, were unjustifiably low and that schools could play a significant role in regeneration (Cummings and Dyson, 2007).

As Academies then grew and were encouraged to expand and take over other schools, the emergence of the Multi Academy Trusts and Academy Chains began to dominate the field and signalled a powerful change in how schools and Heads would view one another and the nature of collaborative partnerships. At the same time, the creation of new levels of leadership began to change the shape of school leadership and management hierarchy.

From City Academies to Converters to Multi-Academy Trusts

The interleaving of policy and New Labour education reform continued throughout the Coalition administration (2010-2015) and the development of the Academies programme has, since 2015, been progressed further by the Conservative administration. This suggests that the motives behind the programme are deeper and more complex than simply right or left-wing politics. The Academies programme is equally about regeneration, philanthropy and improving standards and life chances for children, as much as being a political means to decentralise state education away from disparate local authorities and situate it into independent corporate structures governed by central government through the means of tight legislation and funding agreements (ESFA, 2019)

Just as the introduction of Grant Maintained schools that were created by the Conservative Government within the Education Reform Act 1988, met with either interest and optimism, or hostility and suspicion, so the Academies programme has generated similar divisions. State education, as defined by the Education Act 1944, to provide free education for all children could be seen to be undermined by any notion of independence and moving away from the state. Grant Maintained schools in the 1990s had been offered independence and to receive their funding directly devolved from central Government; schools 'granted' more autonomy, less ring-fencing of funds and freedoms to privilege a chosen culture. The status of being Grant Maintained moved the school into the hands of the Governing Body and away from the control of the Local Education Authority. But separating state schools from the Local Education Authority is not solely a right-wing political manoeuvre, as the creation of the Academies programme under the New Labour Government testimonies. Academies under New Labour were perhaps not so radically different to the Grant Maintained schools under the Conservatives. And the way that the Conservatives have progressed the Academies programme that was conceived by New Labour, would seem to suggest that the politics of either party were not so much in opposition to the goal that is rooted in neoliberal ideology, of weakening the positions of Local Education Authorities in England (Benn, 2012).

But what has separated the Academies programme from those prior reform programmes is perhaps the extent to which the legal framework for Academy conversion leads to ultimate, life-long affiliation to a strict, legal framework. An Academy is afforded freedoms, but these are not infinite; the funding agreements, financial operations and schemes of delegation are held with a tight, legal framework controlled by central government (ESFA, 2019). The concept of Academies

as 'Independent state schools' reveals a dichotomy itself, contradicting the notion of independence when the 'independent' Academy is still very much tied to the policies of the state. Perhaps a more fitting term to describe the link between Academies and government would be '*inter*dependent'.

Between the conception of Academies in 2000 through to 2011 there were just 818 Academies open and educating England's children, although not all Academies were housed in new architect-designed buildings. One of the first actions of the Coalition was to amend the rules in terms of which schools could choose to 'convert'. Previously only schools judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted were permitted to apply to become an Academy, but the pace of conversions had slowed as the number of outstanding schools was not high enough for the project to secure impact. Once the government widened the opportunities for schools judged as 'good' to convert, there was a significant increase in applications increasing the perceived legitimisation of the policy.

Apple (1995) had warned that one effect of neoliberal education reform would be to create a 'form of educational apartheid' (p.xxi). Schools now were either an Academy or they were not; Academy status brought with it a financial incentive in the form of a government grant directly paid to the school upon successful conversion, but there were also undertones of elitism. To be given approval to convert was to be formally recognised as good or outstanding, conferring professed freedoms from Local Authority control. However, schools that may also have been good or outstanding but who chose not to convert, were not granted this perceived new advancement of status. An overt separatism, it could be argued, had come to pass.

Chapman (2016) noted that through the Education Act 2010, any obligation to consult with the Local Authority, community, parents or pupils during the application process to convert to an Academy was removed. School leaders and governing bodies held the power to opt into conversion without stakeholder support. Power was also now awarded to the Secretary of State for Education to issue a closure order without consultation for existing schools deemed as failing.

Tomlinson (2004) reflected on how corporate culture is ideological because it is concerned with power and interests that may reflect the manager's values but not necessarily the organisation's realities. With distinct fragmentation now seen within the education system (Ball, 2008), and the significant difference in the number of primary schools that opted to convert to Academy status compared to secondary schools, the growth of Academies in England was largely driven by secondary school Headteachers. They became a dominant group championing the expansion of the model. Lumby (2013) suggests:

The preferences of a dominant group may appear as normal, so every day, to themselves and others that both their dominance and their contestability does not even occur to people.

(p.585)

This raises questions of both compliance and control. Davies et al (2005, p.26) suggest that what the government wanted was 'mechanical compliance'; Dunford (2016) noted how many Headteachers felt constrained to 'follow the line taken by government' (p.25). Many Heads became, as Harris (2012) witnessed: 'quickly on message' (p.101). The political mantra had become one of developing an academised system whereby all state schools would be Academies and therefore free from Local Authority control (Chapman, 2016). If this was the articulated policy direction, then many Heads and governing bodies decided to follow and fall into line.

Arendt (1970) had argued half a century ago that the persistence of unequal and unjust systems is located in the everyday choices that people make to no longer think critically for themselves and that it is often easier and more comfortable to just go along with current majority choices. The rapidity with which secondary and some primary schools sought to convert to Academy status was remarkable in itself, but the rate at which this then signified mass structural change and adoption of corporate models of growth and expansion, new layers of leadership and new channels of accountability led to, I suggest, a dynamic blend of private sector business practices and behaviours interweaved with public sector principles. A conflict of values between what constitutes profit and loss in each sector was inevitable.

The grouping together of Academy schools into Multi Academy Trusts and the creation of private companies forming Academy Chains meant that education had indeed, as foretold by Alexiadou and Brock (1999), become a commodity; a single school standing alone suddenly vulnerable to take-over as the new corporations sought to grow, gaining power in both their size and influence as well as in their balance sheets. Headteachers, once the leading professional educators of their schools, now had to learn a new language, adopting the vocabulary of private sector business, commerce and enterprise. Governing body meetings morphed into Executive Board meetings; Governors became Company Directors; education became a business and the profit and loss lay firmly in both the examination results dictating the league table position and the financial economies of scale. A significant part of the public sector that formally had privileged the care, welfare and support of people had now adopted practices where managerialism, data, financial and commodity growth became the objects of primary concern (Sullivan, 2012).

Many of the larger Multi Academy Trusts and Academy Chains recruited leading figures from business and commerce to chair the Trust Boards. From these industry figures Headteachers would learn and adopt the language and associated practices of the private sector, specifically within expansion and growth strategy (Simon et al., 2019). Ball (2013) noted that within the crucial aspects of the reform process there are not only changes to the way we do things; reforms can actually change the people involved:

> They do not just change what we do, they change who we are, how we think about what we do, how we related to one another, how we decide what is important, what is accepted, what is tolerable. They rework the meaning of professionalism.

(p.7)

In March 2011 there were 391 Multi Academy Trusts in England; by July 2015 there were 846 (Hill, 2015), and by October 2019 there were 1,170 (BESA, 2019). By March 2020 there were 1,508 Multi Academy Trusts in England, the largest of which (United Learning Trust) presently encompasses 72 Academies, educates over 55,000 children across the primary, secondary phases (Gov.UK), and covers a nationwide footprint from Cumbria in the north west of England to Kent in the south east (unitedlearning.org.uk). With the educational landscape dominated by MATs and Chains, the 1,560 remaining Single Academy Trusts (SATs) may struggle to compete or to survive.

Lines of accountability within the Academies framework

The expansion of the Academies programme, according to Simon et al. (2019) had resulted in an unmanageable and unsustainable framework that had initially made all Academies directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education and therefore a different model of devolved accountability was required. The creation of the role of National Schools Commissioner in 2014 and the subsequent conception of eight Regional Schools Commissioner posts established across England, were seen as a way to channel the lines of accountability for Academy performance into a more manageable framework. The rapid expansion of Academy Trusts led to a need to streamline accountability into separate regional areas (Newsam, 2013). The Regional Schools Commissioners were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to oversee the performance of all Academies within their specific region of the country. Dunford (2016) suggested that the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) had become the 'eyes and ears of the DfE' (p.39), Hill (2015) described them operating as a 'shadow inspection regime' (n.p).

The first National Schools Commissioner was in post until 2016 and was tasked to raise standards, manage underperformance and promote the growth of Academies and Academy Sponsors (DfE, 2014). His successor came from the initial pool of Regional Commissioners and the remit of the role, two years after its creation, had widened to not only support the creation of new Academies but also to intervene in failing and 'coasting' Local Authority schools, exercising powers that were to be introduced via a new Education and Adoption Bill (DfE, 2016). However, what had now emerged into the educational landscape was a realisation that not all Academies were performing in line with expectations and meeting the required standards. The Schools Commissioner and his regional teams were therefore tasked with improving the performance of underperforming or 'coasting' Academies and of brokering support from other, more successful Academies, where it was deemed necessary (DfE, 2016). Often the support brokered was a recommendation, sometimes a coercion, to join a Multi Academy Trust.

Gray (1997), in his political critique of the Thatcher and Major Conservative governments suggested that all ideas will have consequences but 'they are rarely, if ever, those that were intended or expected' (p.97). Whereas the perception of failure of Local Authority schools had been used persuasively to argue for the establishment of a fully academised education system (Morgan, 2016), the notion of failure within the Academy system itself had perhaps not been considered. But it is often inevitable that within any system governed by performance measures and floor targets which benchmark participants by a system of averages, there will be an artificial creation of winners and losers (Apple, 1996); schools would either be above average or below; one or the other. Whether schools were Local Authority, Stand-alone Academy, or Academy within a Multi Academy Trust or Chain, only some would be above average, and others would be below. 'Rebrokering' had entered the educational lexicon. By the time that the second National Schools Commissioner had stepped down after two years in post, the remit of the Regional Commissioner teams had widened further with a heightened use of combative language detailing their remit of:

> taking action where academies and free schools are underperforming; intervening in academies where governance is inadequate; deciding on applications from local-authority-maintained schools to convert to academy status; improving underperforming maintained schools by providing them with support from a strong sponsor; encouraging and deciding on applications from sponsors to operate in a region; taking action to improve poorly performing sponsors; advising on proposals for new free schools; advising on whether to cancel, defer or enter into funding agreements with free school projects and deciding on applications to make significant changes to academies and free schools.

> (DfE, 2019)

Part Two:

Catholic schools in the Academies and education market

What will it profit you if you gain the world and lose your very soul?

Matthew 16:26

Grace (2002b) predicted the coming of a new epoch in education and the stark implications this would have for the Catholic school:

> Catholic schools are going to face challenges from a new culture of education which, at its worst, involves the commodification of education, the marketisation of school cultures and processes and the celebration of an ethic of individual and autonomous schools' success, regardless of the fate of other schools. These developments do not articulate easily with Catholic values in education where spiritual and moral culture is given precedence over material success, where education is seen as a service and not a product and where notions of the common good and of the wellbeing of community institutions take precedence over individual self-interest.
>
> (p.7-8)

However, despite these early warnings and the question of whether the integrity of the mission of Catholic education would indeed be compromised by market forces and the adoption of market values, by 2015 the largest and fastest growth in the Multi Academy Trust sector was reported to be Diocesan Trusts (Hill, 2015). Whereas the Catholic Church had initially taken a cautious approach and had largely resisted academisation, almost 25% of all Catholic schools are now Academies (Dodd, 2019).

A statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (1996) made in response to the stirring of market ideology in schools, spoke against the manner in which the logic of market forces poses and 'threatens human dignity' (p.9) and the 'strong Christian tradition of public service' (p.17), stating that education was not a commodity to be offered for sale and, as a public authority, education 'must maintain a critical distance from an ideological view that free markets can do no wrong' (p.21). Nearly 25 years since publication, this declaration of statements of principle appears to be redundant in the current Catholic education climate (Harris, 2019).

The first Catholic sponsored Academy opened in 2005 and, from 2011 when the motion was passed by the Coalition government that any school judged as good or outstanding could choose

to convert to Academy status, the rise in number of Catholic Academies has been significant. In 2010 there were just two Catholic Academies open in England. The Catholic Church had at first been cautious about their schools becoming Academies with some Catholic Bishops concerned that the ethos and characteristics might not be retained and that land would be lost (Harrison, 2011); but a wave of forty Catholic Voluntary Aided schools converted in 2011 and of the 2,122 Catholic schools in England that educate more than 850,000 children, there are now 533 Catholic Academy Trusts (CATs), 82 of which are formed as Multi Academy Trusts with the number of conversions rapidly increasing in individual Dioceses (CES, 2019).

The move to academise Catholic schools has created tension and the Catholic Church in England remains divided in its approach. Of the nineteen Dioceses in England, some have embraced and promoted Academy conversion, some have provoked anger and opposition to plans to force all its schools to academise (Richardson, 2018), and others have refused to embrace any part of the Academies programme and have directed their schools to remain as Voluntary Aided. It has been suggested most will eventually convert as long as the Bishops' Conference for England and Wales continue to view academisation as either an opportunity or an inevitable consequence of reduced Local Authority services, funding arrangements that favour groups of schools and, more importantly, as a way to safeguard the future of Catholic education (Pittam, 2016).

Sullivan (2012) suggests that religious believers can easily find themselves seduced by ideologies in education such as the accolade of academic success and league table positions but also that it is education that can serve to expose ideologies 'where interests and power are covertly protected and promoted under the cloak of apparent rationality' (p.185). But he also warned that even faith can become prey to forms of what he termed 'ideological captivity that distort or contradict its message' (p.185). The pursuit of academisation may have been embraced by certain Catholic Dioceses but at the same time has provoked concern amongst Catholic academics who view making all Catholic schools Academies as unnecessary and disempowering; the contradiction lying in the reality that Catholic Academies and Catholic Academy Trusts are subject to the same level of scrutiny in performance measures, surveillance and intervention by the Department for Education via the Regional Schools Commissioners as community Academies and Trusts. Sullivan (2012) cautioned how religion can become 'blind to its own pathologies and irrational tendencies' (p.185) and ultimately fall into the trap of being 'concerned with institutional survival above all other considerations' (*ibid.).

Newsam (2013) warned of the consequences for Catholic schools that choose to become Academies in the loss of power and autonomy that they have as Voluntary Aided schools by directly handing over decision-making power to the Secretary of State for Education. He viewed the Academies programme as 'totalitarian' (p.4) in facilitating 'all decision-making, other than trivial, to derive from a single source' (p.4).

If, indeed, it is a neoliberal agenda that is dominating schools and education, then it brings to question whether there is any place in faith education for such large corporations such as Academy Trusts; the dominant values of neoliberalism being to promote 'competitive and self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain' (Giroux, 2004, p.106). This is especially pertinent when considering the aim of Catholic education and purpose of Catholic schools as stated by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (1996).

Youdell (2011) suggests that education is shaped and constrained by the prevailing politics of the moment and, because of that, education has become 'fundamentally political' (p.7). However, education has, arguably, always been political. When a certain way of thinking has been dominant over a number of years, the principles and ideals associated with that way of thinking permeate society and culture. Neoliberal ideology has prevailed in the world's most powerful and wealthiest nations for nearly four decades and therefore neoliberal values can be seen to have become entrenched in society and how society is governed. Within neoliberal ideology, it has been the principles and ideas from the private sector that have been embraced. These ideas and ideals have, arguably, been incorporated into the public sector to the extent that there is very little to distinguish now between the public and the private. Education has become increasingly driven by out-puts (Tomsett, 2016). Chapman (2016) suggests that the system is now layered with numerous reform strategies that have left in their wake a 'complex mix of competition and collaboration within a high stakes accountability framework' (p.134). The result of successive governments re-shaping and reforming education, combining policies, overlaying one with another (Ainscow and West, 2006), has, arguably, left schools situated within a fragmented education system that is now partly privatised and partly nationalised (Beckett, 2007).

Chapman (2016) attributes the emergence of Academy Chains as partly responsible for intensifying the market where seeking competitive advantage and domination appears to be a primary focus:

> [They] compete with each other to secure newly converted Academies and schools which have been
> identified as requiring a structural solution (enforced academisation) because of low performance. In
> turn, this increases the size of the chain and adds to its power and sphere of influence within the system.

> (p.142)

In this respect, using structure as a strategy to not only grow an organisation but as a measure to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the school taken over to bring it in line with the policy ideals of the moment, raises the issue of growth and domination in relation to power (Deal, 2005).

All state-funded schools, whether faith or non-denominational, now exist in a single, giant education market where choice and diversity is abundant but the impact of market values driving the system has inevitably created inequality; for those schools that 'lose' the consequences lie in the threat of failure and closure (Tooley, 1999), or 'being taken over by a more successful organisation' (Waters, 2013, p.33). Staufenberg and Dickens (2017) note that over 700 schools had been taken over between 2014 and 2017 following dips in their performance. MacBeath et al. (2007) remark on schools standing on 'the precarious edge between success and failure' (p.1). One legacy of failing is the associated fear that exists alongside it. That sense of fear is often acutely felt in those at the helm of school leadership (Ryan, 2008). The ontological frame of the modern day Headteacher is described succinctly by two experienced Heads. Tomsett (2015) notes how demanding headship has become with 'endless KPI's [sic] which, soviet style, had to improve year on year' (p.193). Morrish (2016) articulates his frustration in feeling compelled to meet externally set targets that impact on his leadership:

> As much as I love my job there are parts I don't enjoy anymore. I've had enough of being judged on how
> well I jump to other people's tunes. The relentless pressure to become outstanding, to come top of the
> league tables, to be in the top 10% for this and top 1% of that. All based on somebody else's tune.

> (p.20)

Shapiro (2009) observed how a fear of failure now constantly hangs over Headteachers; a fear of failing to meet prescribed standards, failing to live up to expectations, failing to keep up with the most successful organisations in a world that is now ferociously competitive and where it appears there is always someone waiting for you to slip and fall (Ehrenreich, 1990). School leaders have become targets, responsible for the success or failure of their schools and, because of this, many report feeling vulnerable in terms of accountability, scrutiny, inspection and each year of student results. Barton and Knights (2017) compare the role of the contemporary Headteacher to that of a manager of a premier league football team whereby the results of one

year can lead to a Headteacher losing their job. The Headteacher carries the weight of responsibility for the success or failure of the school in terms of how well it meets the prescribed performance measures and, in doing so, the Headteacher has been placed at the very centre of schooling (Blackmore and Thomson, 2004). They either play the game or they risk being removed from their post (Gronn, 2003). Observed changes in the way in which Heads carry out their roles could therefore arguably be attributed to, what I term as, professional existential fear.

One such fear stems from the prescribed set of standards and increasingly narrow criteria based on the law of averages that sets an ever-changing benchmark of national averages derived from pitching schools against one another in public examination performance. No Head wishes their school to be below average; but what is deemed as average one year may, according to how well schools have performed nationally, be very different to the next (Kime, 2017). Burton and Bartlett (2009) observed how the construction of Performance Tables has enabled the data to be compiled in different ways to give very different impressions depending on what is deemed as meeting the standards. It is the Headteacher that carries the responsibility for the annual success or failure of the school's position in the league tables; it is the Headteacher that lives under the fear of blame (Inglis, 1989). Reeves (2002) observes:

> You do not need to have a bullet hole in your desk to feel fear and anxiety. School leaders can count on shifting political winds, changing priorities and conflicting counsel.

(p.18)

Thomson (2009) pronounces that headship has become 'a risky business' (p.1). Lepkowska (2014) noted how one poor inspection report could lead to a Headteacher being swiftly removed from post.

The impact of living and leading under such weight of concern year to year can become draining and debilitating (Myatt, 2016); the accountabilities associated with policy expectations as punitive and demoralising (Mintrop and Sunderman, 2009). Ball (2008) suggested that there is within education a 'culture of terror; a regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control' (p.49).

But the impact is also seen in how school leaders function in their roles. Uttley (2018) observes that 'Heads are folk who can so easily spend as much time trying to *keep* their job as actually *doing* their job' (p.138). MacBeath et al. (2007) noted how school leaders live under a 'pressure to perform and critically to be seen performing' (p.4). But when the underlying sense of security is threatened, what replaces it and becomes the more dominant force, is fear. Arguably, when

fear is present, it will affect the way that a leader behaves and performs in role and that, in turn, has a direct impact on the community:

> The leadership life is influenced by fear of one kind or another. Leadership fear takes many guises: fear of appearing weak, fear of failure, fear of change or not changing, fear of being judged and criticised. Many have a fear of losing their career identity. Fear is a potent emotion. It can erect barriers that separate the leader from the school community.

<div align="right">Ackermann and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002, pp. 30-31)</div>

Shapiro (2009) observed how fear can be corrosive to relationships. But as Beatty (2000) notes, relationships are central to the lived reality of children and staff in schools:

> Schools run on love; of the kids, the subject, the work, the hope, the possibilities, the smiles of satisfaction, the looks of appreciation, the little things that keep teachers and students and leaders going.

<div align="right">(p.336)</div>

It is relationships characterised by warmth and trust that provide the energy and life-force of day-to-day life and human exchange within schools (Robinson, 2011). It is relationships and, moreover, authentic relationships in faith, that both underpin and characterise the distinctive nature of a Catholic school.

The direct impact of living and working within a culture where fear not only exists but engulfs is seen in how leaders behave and operate (Tomsett, 2016). Denzin (1992) referred to the concept of leadership masks: 'masks dropping, new masks being put on' (p.27) and how 'faces appeared to merge into new faces' (p.27). Gee (1999) observed how leaders were at risk of being drawn into shapeshifting, being ready to change and metamorphose to fit in and follow the culture of the moment. Perhaps the most wry description of the breed of leader that had risen from the Academies programme and creation of chains and Multi Academy Trusts is suggested by a former Headteacher who had observed and experienced the new reality:

> Sharp, pin-stripe suit, designer leather shoes and a slim, elegant briefcase are all signs of the corporate executive style of Headteacher. The area surrounding these individuals is one of unshakeable self-belief and a daunting self-confidence. These days such a Headteacher is often found in the Academy chain and he has a clear map to follow when it comes to the transformation of the school.

<div align="right">Harris (2012, p.99)</div>

It was not only in how Heads were taking purposeful decisions that would secure their own position but also that of their school within the new education hierarchy that has led to what Gray et al. (1999) described as tactical approaches to tackle change, and the manner in which Heads have been observed to take a different approach to how they lead and manage the

people within their school communities. Coates (2015) notes how easy it has become for Heads to adopt a harsher management style in order to meet the required standards, to be 'ruthless and apply pressure at the merest hint of incompetence and failure' (p.161). For Catholic school leaders this approach is the antithesis of the call to preserve human dignity.

But as Ball (2001) has observed, the consequences of being concerned with image and where the organisation sits in the hierarchical table of success, can lead to a fabrication that will only serve to threaten or damage our authentic selves. To do so places a Headteacher at risk of compromising their integrity (Ryan, 2008), the preservation of which is a fundamental requirement of Catholic leadership.

Waters (2013) remarked on what he saw as a distinct difference in outlook between the 'new and old players on the pitch' (p.87). Although his reference was made in terms of the 'new players' being the Academy Trusts and Chains, the same comment could be applied to Headteachers of Catholic schools. As 'old players', Catholic Headteachers are required to maintain the traditions of the faith and carry out their roles adhering to faith principles and leadership inspired by gospel values; but they do this now on a new playing field, navigating and finding their foothold on new terrain.

The body of research on Academies, Multi Academy Trusts and Chains that is fiercely critical of the policy could, arguably, lead Catholic clergy and educators to ponder whether there should even be a place for Catholic schools within the Academies programme. However, it cannot be contested that several Catholic Academy Trusts that have been established within the last decade have been successful in navigating their way through the field, maintaining a position of strength in outcomes for children and commanding consistently high places within the national league tables (Dodd, 2015). Whether they do this whilst managing to successfully preserve the charism and be wholly true to Catholic faith principles at all levels is a key issue for future research.

Reeves (2002) noted the importance for education leaders to focus on their core values. When the playing field becomes a place that feels unfamiliar, therein lies the source of immense conflict for the Catholic Head to be able to deliver on government education policy but do so in a way that does not compromise or override the values of the Catholic faith and the mission of Catholic education.

Catholic Headteachers are reminded by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) that their lives must be marked by the exercise of a personal vocation in the church and not simply by the exercise of a profession. The concept of vocation is central to the life of the Catholic Headteacher and they are encouraged to enter deeply into their vocation and role in

supporting the formation of young people. Vocation to a Catholic leader not only encompasses the mission of the church but also envelops the very being of the person. St. Paul asked that Christians 'lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' (Ephesians 4:1). For the Catholic faith, the role of the Headteacher is a unique vocation in that it amalgamates work, prayer, relationship and a Christian life in service to the church (Jamison, 2014).

In today's market-driven education arena, the bigger question for Catholic school leaders is how to deliver the outcomes that are expected by the state as well as those of a church that expects much more than academic results. It leads to the question of mission and how mission and the spiritual formation of children can sit in compatible companionship alongside these pressures to perform (Friel, 2014).

Catholic school leadership in the education market

I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Psalm 16:8

The Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) explicitly identifies the mission and purpose of the Catholic school:

> There is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom. One of the most significant elements of its educational project: the synthesis between culture and faith. Indeed, knowledge set in the context of faith becomes wisdom and life vision.[8]

(p. 14)

It cautions against the 'noticeable tendency to reduce education to its purely technical and practical aspects' (p. 10). The Congregation later encouraged Catholic Heads, through the leadership of their schools, to 'go beyond knowledge and educate people to think, evaluating facts in the light of values' (2013, p.66), and then in open criticism of the neoliberal mechanisms entering into the arena of education it reminds Catholic Heads that 'what is taught is not neutral and neither is the way of teaching it' (p.64).

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[8]In this thesis the claim that knowledge that is ground within faith is intrinsically linked to wisdom and life vision is a central theme that I will return to later in the chapter on faith and revelation.

Grace (1996) argues that a most difficult task for Headteachers is to navigate the tension between Catholic values and the influence of market values on education. Casson (2013) notes how faith schools appear now to belong to a different age, but the critical assumptions here lie in how the discourse of modern-day headship is distinctly different to the discourse of the sacred (Grace, 2002a). Richardson (2018) proposes the discourse of a Catholic Headteacher to be primarily theological where the motivation behind their work is primarily religious and the formation of young people in faith forms the essence of their mission. Lydon (2018) references the 'current secular milieu' and that 'the most important commitment of any school leader is his or her witness to the Catholic faith education' (p.168). But the secular agenda has proceeded at such a pace, arguably at a faster rate since the conception of the Academies programme, moreover in how it has grown, developed and shaped a new educational landscape where it is the Multi Academy Trusts and Academy Chains that have commanded a significant market share and now, occupy an influential position as instruments of policy too (Whittaker, 2016). The individuality of schools and school cultures has been subsumed into what could be seen to now resemble corporate brands of education (Chapman, 2016).

According to Arthur (2013), market principles in education have put greater distance between policy, practice and the principles of church teaching. The principle neoliberal values of the market appear to directly contradict the Catholic values of equality and social justice (Gleeson, 2015). Grace (2002) contextualises the tensions for the Catholic school existing in a market of education:

> Market values and practices in education appear to be at odds with some of the foundational values of Catholic education mission. If a market culture in education encourages the pursuit of material interests, what becomes of a Catholic school's prime commitment to religious, spiritual and moral interests? If calculation of personal advantage is necessary for survival in the market how can Catholic schools remain faithful to values of solidarity and community? If schools in a market economy in education must show good company results in academic success and growing social status, what becomes of the Catholic school principle of preferential option for the poor?....Christian culture is aware of the injunction to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.
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> Grace (2002a, p.180-181)

The mission of Catholic education is embodied within the search for the ==common good and the call to human flourishing== and to ensure that the preferential treatment of the poor is safeguarded. This mission encompasses values that stem directly from the Catholic interpretations of the gospels of Jesus Christ through the practice of compassion, gentleness,

justice, integrity, simplicity, humility, love, forgiveness, hope and offering a preferential option for the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable in society (Friel, 2016).

Nuzzi (2018) cautions the impact on Catholic education now that schools exist in, what he terms, a 'balkanised educational landscape' (p.15). But this is not a new observation. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) reference the emergence of schools that had developed a balkanised culture which they directly attributed to competition between groups, and Hargreaves (1994) discussed what he observed as a 'balkanisation of teaching' emerging through the decade (p.252). But, to allow competition to affect such a state of perceived ontological being, pitches against the Catholic principles of universality, community and collegiality. Community is indeed a key feature of the Catholic faith (Casson, 2013), as 'it is through relations with others that the human being develops as a person' (p.117).

As the Catholic Church is one body, one faith, Catholic schools are not seen as separate or unique entities. Despite the foundations of the Catholic faith being understood and interpreted within the different charisms of multiple religious orders and congregations, for its education, it is the common command and teachings of the papal magisterium through the Bishops' Conference that guide and govern the universality of the Catholic education mission.

But more than unpicking and evaluating the impact of school groupings, structures and systems, the question arises of what has happened to education and perhaps more importantly, to those who lead within it; how school leaders may become either consciously or unconsciously complicit in delivering policy through practice. McCall and Lawlor (2000) suggest that standards are set in the values and circumstances of a specific time. The values of the market and the emphasis on market-driven mechanisms to drive competition amongst providers and choice amongst customers and consumers can be traced back to the 1980s (Finkelstein and Grubb, 2000). Brighouse (2016) labels this as a time that education first entered an age of markets and managerialism.

Those who support markets speak of the positives that surround the notions of choice, flexibility, and efficiency and how the creation of competition drives up standards and improves results, but equally the voices that speak against education being a marketplace adopting market principles, values and behaviours warn of inequality, loss of ethical values and fraudulent activities that may be introduced (Finkelstein and Grubb, 2000). The consequences of this provide an uncomfortable reality for Catholic schools and moreover for Catholic Heads to exist within and carry out the mission of Catholic education.

Ranson (1988) suggested that the market is 'formally neutral but substantially interested. Within the marketplace all are free and equal, only differentiated by their capacity to calculate their self-interest' (p.15). What has slowly emerged over the last few decades and a by-product of marketisation is a culture that Ball (2008) suggests is a new paradigm in policy making, a tangible shift in a belief system whereby 'schools, colleges and universities are being inducted into a culture of self- interest manifest in terms of survivalism' (p.45). Giroux (2005) likened the professional training for school leadership to a brand of 'corporate public pedagogy' (p.4) which, in turn, generated and brought together 'a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain' (p.4).[9]

What is and has been observable, certainly since the growth and domination of the Academies programme and the creation of new corporate groups of schools, is a distinctly different genre of leadership behaviours and principles adopted by a number of Headteachers and which, I suggest, can be directly attributed to the effects of the market. Youdell (2011) observed that education and those who educate have been changed by marketisation through the Academies agenda. Whereas education was often seen as a collective good, it has been transformed into what now resembles a business commodity where Strom (2010) noted that education is now largely about applying business strategies and discipline to public schools and has, consequently, produced 'a crop of new kinds of leaders adopting new kinds of business principles in managing their schools, chains or trusts, a new kind of self-interested individual' (Youdell, 2011, p.12).

The implications for Catholic school leaders in navigating this new corporate world of education are paramount:

> A school is not a business. It has a different mandate, relies on different methods, deploys different resources and aims for different outcomes. The world of work that surrounds a school will inevitably impinge upon its practices, offering both resistance and distractions. School leaders need discernment in distinguishing those features of the world of work that support their school, and from those that undermine it.
>
> Sullivan (2000, p.xi)

Shapiro (2009) analysed the impact of the new emerging culture of education leadership and questioned whether Headteachers were still able and moreover *willing* to serve as moral leaders in their schools, questioning whether they had simply become 'functionaries promulgating

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[9] In England the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was introduced by the newly elected Labour Government in 1997 and then became mandatory for all new Headteachers to either hold the qualification or be working towards it.

government-developed education policy' (p.78). Strike (2007) noted the consequences of leaders who look out for their own interests rather than those of the school and its children suggesting that a common result is seen in an erosion of moral authority.

Sergiovanni (2007) critiques leadership theory that assumes that we are 'driven by a desire to maximise self-interest' (p.40) and that we are continually 'calculating the costs and benefits of our options, choosing the one that makes us winners or keeps us from losing.' (p.40). But these leadership attributes are by no means new to the arena of leadership theory and observed leadership behaviours and principles. Gronn (1996) had already noted that since the 1980s age of markets and managerialism (Brighouse, 2016), that there had been a 'burgeoning interest in narcissistic leaders [displaying] grandiose, self-importance, fantasies of unlimited success, power and brilliance' (p.79). Holmes and Redmond (2006) comment on how the modern self can be vain and narcissistic and adopt almost possessive qualities.

If that is characteristic of modern-day leadership then for a Catholic school leader this becomes increasingly problematic. Gunter (2001) noted how Headteachers continually experience contradiction and dilemma in carrying out their roles. The perception of narcissism infiltrating school leadership behaviours directly contradicts the Catholic mission which places the leadership self in a position of fundamentally offering *selfless* service. Authentic leadership is grounded in stewardship (Block, 1993) but it has been argued that the concept of servant leadership has virtually disappeared from the mainstream conversation on leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007). Dunford (2016) suggests that for servant leaders, 'leadership is not about power or self-importance but about making a difference by empowering others' (p.154); Hathaway (2004) notes that 'position begins with servanthood' (p. 23).

The Catholic definition of leadership is fundamentally grounded in the concept of service. Grace (2000) documents the church's mission as: education in the faith, education for the common good and education for service. The ministry of Jesus was centred upon servanthood and not on domination or control (Casson et al, 2017). Greenleaf (1977) had stated four decades ago, before the rise of a dominating modern neoliberal ideology, that a great leader is a servant first. He equated the concept of servant leadership with enhancing one's legitimacy to lead. Harris et al. (2003) argue that servant leadership is premised upon 'providing purpose for others and in giving certainty and direction' (p.20). Catholic Headteachers are charged with being primarily in service to their school community, and to the Diocesan Bishops who have responsibility to guard and guide the education of Catholic schools within their remit and, in doing so, Headteachers are carrying out their ultimate mission of service to the Church.

The mission of Catholic school leadership is focused on the good of human beings in all aspects of their lives (Sullivan, 2001), and service lies very much at its heart. For Christian leaders it is the act of service that becomes the most rewarding of all the leadership tasks (Kouzes and Posner, 1993). The work of a Catholic school leader in service 'is not degrading and does not lead to loss of power and authority' (Nsiah and Walker, 2013, p.16). In privileging service, it moreover enhances an authority to lead.

Lydon (2018) attributes the embracing of market values to an 'enveloping secularism' (p.x) that has simultaneously grown alongside what he terms as an 'expansionist marketising of education marked by an enhanced focus on measurable outcomes and performativity' (*ibid.*). He warns that the witness of the Catholic teacher is now all the more important within this modern culture of education. The growth of secularisation appears to deny the importance and validity of the religious and, in the space between what can be viewed as two polar opposite educational paradigms, lies a struggle for cultural power (Grace, 2002). The market values contained within the neoliberal agenda that has engulfed education are not always concurrent with the values of the gospel or indeed with anyone sharing a critique of neoliberalism. Its hegemony can sometimes appear to overtly militate *against* gospel values which, in turn, creates an immense struggle for Catholic school leaders (Gleeson, 2015).

The Gospel according to St. Matthew tells of Jesus warning his disciples of the impossibility of serving two masters:

> No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.
>
> Matthew 6:24

If the education market, through the Academies programme, has encouraged opportunities to grow, expand, to win or dominate in the market, with leaders seeking power, prestige, financial reward, recognition and praise, where can a faith leader reside and remain authentic to the Catholic mission? The strain is clearly felt between the push of neoliberal ideology, the climate and landscape in which Catholic schools are compelled to reside, and the pull towards the Church, its teachings and remaining true to the faith. McKinney (2006) suggests that problems will always exist when liberal democracy encounters faith-based schools that do not align with the principles of liberal democracy and the goal of rational autonomy. There is an ontological gulf between them as well as an entirely different epistemology; that of the faith school being

more grounded in a theological epistemology as opposed to what he terms as the 'rational epistemology of a secular society' (p. 110).

For the Catholic Headteacher caught between the push and the pull of two 'masters' it can often be a continuous struggle to maintain authentic Catholic leadership grounded in integrity and untainted by the fallout of a market-driven education system. Whether blame for this struggle can be laid at the foot of the Academies programme remains to be contested. The Academies programme exists within a society dominated by neoliberal ideology, yet the Catholic faith and its schools co-exist in that same, contested space. Ultimately the answer may lie in the personal strength and faith of Catholic leaders and their own interpretation of the mission; in their personal understanding of the self and the extent to which they are able, not only to lead, but to serve.

Part Three:

Ignatian spirituality and the vocation of Catholic school leadership

We must obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:29

To juxtapose religion and corporation arguably, creates a risk of polarisation between authentic mission and market principles. Yet the company of the Jesuits first conceived in 1534[10], a vision of a group of ten men inspired by a charismatic leader in Ignatius of Loyola has, nearly five centuries later, become one the most influential and successful global religious companies in history (Lowney, 2003). Despite this success, the path of the Jesuits has not been without controversy. From the very first years of their humble beginnings, Jesuits have been admired and reviled in equal measures (Dalton, 2020; O'Malley, 2014).

The Society of Jesus was formed at a time of immense political and social unrest. The Reformation and a growing and rising secularism increasingly threatened to weaken the stronghold of the sacred domination of Catholicism and papal authority in 16th century Europe. Whilst it may not have been the original plan of Ignatius and his followers to assume the task of leading a 'counter-reformation', their pledge of allegiance to the Pope and to obey papal authority, afforded the early Jesuits a position of influence that often accompanies those who hold the favour of the powerful (Edwards, 1985). In fragile times for Catholicism across Europe, the Jesuits were viewed as the faith's strongest defence against the growing force of the Reformation (O'Malley, 2014).

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[10] The Society of Jesus was formally recognised and approved by Pope Paul III in 1540.

It was in the field of education where the Jesuits excelled. Despite their other pursuits and accolades, as confessors to a plethora of rulers across the world, from the four Catholic powers of Spain, Portugal, France and Italy, to the Emperors of China and India and the Japanese Shogun, their exploration and mapping of uncharted lands and territories, anthropological discoveries and numerous publications, what has secured a long-lasting impact and longevity for the order are the hundreds of schools and colleges they established across the globe (Lowney, 2003). Within the first decade of the order's existence the Jesuits had set up more than 30 colleges; by their first centenary, they had established 700 secondary schools and colleges across five continents. Today, almost 500 years after the Society of Jesus was established, the Jesuit charism is alive and thriving in what has become the largest network of secondary and higher education institutions in the world; 3,730 schools in the global Jesuit network span across 70 countries within 5 continents and educate over 2.5 million students. In this respect the notion of a global Catholic corporation in the field of education is by no means new. The success of the Jesuit company arguably demonstrates that religion and corporation can co-exist without dilution of charism and mission. But Pollard (2006) asks: 'does God fit into running a business?' (p.xix). The Jesuit way is to find God in all things, but it is questionable whether God can be found at intersection of faith and corporation.

The Society of Jesus, as a Roman Catholic religious order, has remained uniquely placed in the history of the church. From its earliest days of conception, the Jesuits were unlike any other religious order; they were set apart from the other mendicant and traditional orders in both identity and mission and in their methods of practice. It is perhaps through their difference that they aroused suspicion and such depth of opposition amongst both Catholics and Protestants alike (Edwards, 1985). In many ways the Jesuits were like other religious orders; they pronounced vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, administered the sacraments and preached the gospel, and they travelled as missionaries to bring the gospel to distant lands and indigenous peoples. But they lived a very different life. They did not structure their day around times of prayer, placing their mission of preaching and hearing confessions above the practice of observing the canonical Offices. They did not wear distinctive religious habits, they retained their family names, they did not fast as penance; nothing was to take them away from their work. Their governance framework was unlike any other religious order in that they elected a Superior General for a lifetime rather than a term of office. Theirs was a ground-breaking and somewhat controversial way for a religious order to operate (Dalton, 2020).

Their 'way of proceeding' (Fleming, 2008) led the Jesuits into conflict with other orders. O'Malley (2014) references the 'decades [of] being locked in raging debate with the Dominicans, denouncing one another's doctrines as dangerous or heretical' (p.36). Both sought to condemn the

other's theology: the Jesuits accused the Dominicans of being akin to Calvinists and the Dominicans countered, accusing the Jesuits of being dangerously Pelagian and 'injected with heresy' (Barry and Doherty, 2002, p.35).

History has taught us for centuries that mistrust, and suspicion are stirred when change occurs, when something new or different arrives; when innovative ideas and ways of proceeding buck the trend or appear to shake the foundations of traditional strongholds, especially when the new ideas and ways appear to grow, propagating success and proliferating influence, others may seek to denounce or discredit (Barry and Doherty, 2002). The Jesuits were counter-cultural on many levels (Byron and Connor, 2016). They were viewed as radical and dangerous and as they grew in number, stature and influence and their faith practice and activity spread around the world, it is, arguably, not surprising that they came to be both feared and revered. Their closeness to the political decision-making of the monarchs earned them a 'reputation as political meddlers and schemers' (O'Malley, 2014, p.28); Conversely, they were also appreciated, as both confessors and confidantes, in their ability to share some influence over political decision-making at a tumultuous time from a Christian perspective.

Education embodied Jesuit mission and formed their identity. They knew that they needed to be educated missionaries and to preach a gospel that defended the Catholic faith and refuted the rising protestant ideas around the world; they also realised they would need to secure a future succession of new missionaries and recruits for the order to protect its longevity. The Jesuits were noted by the rich and the powerful for their erudition. The patronage of wealthy nobility afforded them the opportunities to set up schools and colleges and in doing so they rapidly became an order rich in property around the world. No religious order had ever operated schools and colleges in such a systemic way (O'Malley, 2014). It was in the founding of schools under patronage that led the Jesuits to be among the first to operate schools for the lay community as well as the first to offer places to girls as well as boys. Their profile as a religious order became inimitably distinctive.

A Jesuit mission for education is to nurture 'men and women for others' and to emphasise the wholeness of the person in mind, body and spirit, fostering not only intellectual development but moral and spiritual growth. Advancing the Catholic faith through education, service and justice are not exclusive to the Jesuit charism and the Jesuits were by no means unique in establishing a Catholic teaching mission. But they are certainly the largest religious company in the world to have made education its primary mission. A Jesuit education encourages students to think for themselves, it cares for and nurtures the whole person to be ready, flexible and adaptable to respond to their own personal calling in the world. Jesuits believe that each student already comes

to education with experience; it encourages students to reflect on that experience and to continue to experience the world through formal learning and practical projects in service. They promote a broad education in order to give students a wide basis of knowledge from which they can then discern their own gifts, strengths and pathway to follow in the world:

> They have understood that combining the liberal arts, the natural and social sciences, the performing arts, and other branches of knowledge is a powerful means to develop leaders who influence and transform society.

> Gibson (2019) n.p

Students are encouraged to find God in all things they experience. A Jesuit education aims to show students that there is joy to be found in learning and discovery and in using their education for serving the will of God (Moll, 2010).

Jesuits strive for excellence and embed the spirit of 'Magis'[11] into their schools; education is a call to strive for human excellence. Part of the success of the Jesuits across the world has been their ability to adapt and fit in with the culture of the place and the time (Edwards, 1985); the Jesuits have shown a sensitive respect for the culture and traditions in each place they have founded a school and have always sought to integrate holistic approaches to the teaching of academic subjects, exploring facts, asking questions, reflecting on insights, investigating problems and injustices so that students are able to learn how each subject deepens their knowledge of what it means to be human and how they can contribute to progress towards a fairer and more just world (Gibson, 2019). Ignatian pedagogy teaches students how to be both contemplative and active in the world (Spitzer, 2000).

It was through the dimension of schooling that the Jesuits were drawn into secular culture that was unprecedented for any religious order (O'Malley, 2014). Over a third of their company membership was made up of lay people. In this way the Society of Jesus could be viewed as having forged a bridge at the intersection of the sacred and the secular. To this day, the Jesuits live in community among the people, they work with the people, they travel to the people; it is this that makes them distinctively approachable as religious, almost homogenous as one body with those they seek to reach. This can have a profound effect on the lay faith community. To work alongside the religious can strengthen lay faith practice, enabling the lay to embrace and experience a deeper spirituality in their own lives.

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[11] Magis is Latin for 'more' or 'greater'. The Jesuit motto is translated as 'for the greater glory of God' which encompasses the spirit of Magis; seeking to do more, to be more, to accomplish more for God in the service of others.

Ignatius himself came to faith from secular beginnings. At the conception of the early Society of Jesus, Ignatius was not ordained and not a learned scholar or theologian. He was an accomplished solider, courtier and member of a noble family. He had come to faith as a grown man who had lived a somewhat hedonistic life of sin; one in which he had killed, and become engulfed in the trappings of ego, the very antithesis of the humility he was to show following his conversion to faith. Finding God through a near-death experience, at a point where he was reduced and incapacitated, awakened in him a spirit of faith and a vision that would go on to inspire generations. The charism of Ignatian spirituality has been adopted, practised and rooted in the lives of countless followers across the world, both religious and lay, both male and female (Fullam, 1999).

The Jesuits built their foundations on the model of discipleship of the very first followers of Jesus and it is clear where Jesuit practice and influence has been modelled on the person and the ministry of Christ. Jesus was a controversial figure who inspired both devotion and hatred in equal measures. Jesus broke away from expected traditions, behaviours and practices of his time, drawing criticism from the traditionalists, religious leaders and those in power. Jesus lived and walked with humble men and inspired a following of devoted women.

Jesus did not care for hierarchy. As the Franciscan Richard Rohr (2001) states:

> Jesus preaches a life of simplicity and non-violence that is simply outside the system of power, money and control. More than directly fighting the system he ignores it and builds an alternative worldview where power, prestige and possessions are not sought or even admired.

> (p.49)

Jesus is referred to as 'teacher' more than forty times across the four gospels. For the Jesuits to lead in the field of education across the world assimilates them with Jesus in harnessing the power of education to both transform and transcend.

The Jesuits forged a path for bringing the sacred and the secular together. Their ability to reach people and their tenacity in moving against the tide, assimilates them with the life and mission of Jesus. Like Christ they were prepared to be nomadic, to travel wherever they were sent. But it was mainly through the channel of education that has enabled them, after nearly 500 years, to still be practising a missionary faith, to remain secure in number[12] and to still be forming a bridge between the religious and the lay. The Jesuits fully integrated lay people into their communities in apostolic work. Ignatius had understood that God was at work in the world; he was not cloistered,

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[12] There are more than 16,000 members of the Society of Jesus across the world (Jesuit.global).

and there was, from the earliest days of their practice, an acceptance and welcoming of the lay in ministry. What set them further apart for a religious order of men, was their embracing of women working alongside men in lay ministry. Their respect for and inclusion of the laity has become a distinctive hallmark of the Society:

> [t]he laity have something to say; they feel themselves an integral part of the mission of the Company; they are waiting for the fulfillment of many expectations in their lives and in their mission in the Church and in the world.

> Kolvenbach (1995)

The charism of Ignatius has inspired generations of Catholic women, both lay and religious, to establish confraternities and female congregations rooted in Ignatian spirituality across the world, travelling and working in mission, building and leading schools and colleges, administering to the poor and bringing the gospel to communities across the globe. The Ignatian charism can be said to have many congregations alongside the Society of Jesus. Perhaps the openness to working with confraternities is rooted in the humble beginnings of the Society of Jesus as a confraternity itself (Fullam, 1999). In Ignatius, an ordinary, fallible man of sin, we recognise ourselves. His saintliness does not seem too far out of reach to the lay person. We revere him because we might identify with his own journey towards faith and conversion; his devotion and discipleship, his human imperfection and his active place in living mission, leads us to imagine that we might just be able to be like him. In this respect the charism of Ignatius is both alluring and invitational.

Ignatian spirituality: an active and contemplative life in the ministry of Catholic leadership

> Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world. Be in the world, but not of it.

> Charlotte Ostermann (2014, p.77)

Seven principles underlying the practice of Ignatian spirituality have had a powerfully transformational effect on me as a Catholic school leader; the fusion of life and work through the medium of contemplative activity, where living and breathing the charism crosses the boundaries, blurring the lines, between the personal and professional self. In fully embracing Ignatian spirituality there is no distinction between the person outside and the person within the school. Interiority of the charism leads me not only to *practise* a deeper authentic leadership but also, I

believe, to *be* a more authentic leader. The Spiritual Exercises[13], the daily Examen[14], seeking freedom from attachments, responding to the call of Magis, the prayerful Colloquy[15], discernment and the recognition of the spirit moving at times of consolation and desolation, together can facilitate a leadership rooted in wisdom, integrity and authenticity.

Ignatian spirituality provides more than a methodological framework for leadership. Its principles address more than functional leadership, rather they encompass the *whole* life of the spiritual leader. It requires a deeply personal response that stems from the practice rooted in a profound knowledge of the self; the link between self-knowledge, self-management and leadership has found increasing endorsement in research (Lowney, 2003). Through the Exercises the leader becomes highly sensitive to the movement of the spirit, whether good or evil, and provides ways that these movements can be interpreted, discerned and acted upon (O'Leary, 2018). It is by no means easy. Completion of the full exercises demands 30 days of withdrawal from daily life into complete surrender to solitude whereby the participant undergoes a challenging and often uncomfortable process of deconstruction of the self in order to build solid foundations of a self, shaped within the Jesuit pillars of self-awareness, ingenuity, love and heroism (Lowney, 2003). The intended outcome is what Manney (2018) describes as:

> a subtly different way of being in the world; it is like an attitude, something like a reflective engagement in life. In Ignatian circles this is called being a contemplative in action. Contemplative in action is a kind of watchfulness, a sensitivity to the spiritual currents while I am engaged in whatever I am doing.

(p.167)

The continued daily practice of the Examen underpins the foundation of a life rooted in Ignatian spirituality. Its five essential steps: thanksgiving, asking God for the grace to see, reviewing the day acknowledging where God's presence was felt in each moment and where I have failed to

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[13] The *Spiritual Exercises,* first published in 1548*,* is a compilation of meditations, prayers, and other contemplative practices composed by St Ignatius Loyola writing about emotions, feelings of gratitude or despair, consolation or sadness that he felt in everyday life. The *Spiritual Exercises* is a handbook, used by the Jesuits and those who practise Ignatian spirituality, that accompanies and guides people through a deep process of reflection. The goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to help people develop self-awareness, attentiveness, openness, and responsiveness to God (Jesuits.global).

[14] The Examen is part of the Spiritual Exercises that is practised every day by the Jesuits and those who follow Ignatian spirituality. It is a prayerful reflection on the events of the day that enables a person find where God has been present and to discern his will.

[15] The Colloquy in Jesuit practice is embedded in the Examen in which the participant will converse intimately with God often but not exclusively at the end of a prayer period. In the colloquy, we speak and listen as the Spirit moves us (O'Brien, 2011).

recognise the movement of the spirit, the request for forgiveness and a resolution to move forward in grace, together provide a structure for prayer but also the practice of self-awareness and a growing closeness in my relationship with God (Gioia, 2018). Through the Examen, I can recognise where I am still beleaguered by attachments that prevent me from being a truly authentic servant in the Lord, where I have succumbed or been seduced by the trappings of ego, self-interest, power and position, where my human fallibility prevents me from truly following the model of Jesus. Caltigrone (1988) roots the role of the Catholic Head as a representation of Christ, therefore that Head 'must be contemplative, liberating and visionary' (p.82).

Detachment, solitude, disengagement and indifference as Ignatian attributes might conjure images of negativity and loneliness, a pathological coldness and failure to care. However, in Ignatian spirituality it is felt that the more detached one is from 'disordered affections' (Byron and Connor, p.2), the freer one becomes (Martin, 2012); it is in being free that leadership can be fearless, generous, selfless, open to new ideas and opportunities, purposeful and, above all, authentic to the mission (Nouwen, 2013; Lowney, 2003; O'Donohue, 1997).

It is perhaps contrary to Ignatian spirituality that a preference for detachment also encompasses detachment from the very organisation itself. For the school leader this presents a challenging point of bifurcation: in leading a Catholic school, the Head pledges allegiance, commitment and loyalty to the school as an organisation and to a community within a wider community of faith but Ignatian spiritualty decrees that the Head must not grow attached to the school as any form of attachment is endangered by a formation of unhealthy fixation. O'Donohue (1997) captures the essence of leadership wisdom: 'You should never belong fully to something that is outside yourself. You should never belong totally to any cause or system' (p.181). To live and lead with an authentic wisdom is therefore to live and lead in close relationship and attachment to God alone (Groome, 2019).

Ignatian prayer is rooted in open and honest conversation with God; Jesus as the bridge between God and humanity is welcomed as an everyday companion (Lonsdale, 2000). Through my practice of the Colloquy, I can speak openly and freely with Jesus, laying bare the truth of my troubles, inner conflicts and leadership dilemmas; I can be the authentic me and humbly acknowledge my failings without fear or loss of efficacy. In my detachment and quiet solitude, I am not alone:

> Life changed for me the moment I discovered that I could speak to God in my heart, knowing that he was there and was listening....[it] gave me a deep sense of not being alone any more

(Gioia, 2018, p.4-5)

Catholic school leadership is framed within a vision of excellence; the call to human flourishing defines its purpose in education. For the way of Ignatius, the aspiration for excellence is encompassed in the theme of the Magis – the 'stretch and the reach, the extra effort' (Byron and Connor, 2018, p.8), the vision that every teacher in every school will be outstanding and therefore deliver an outstanding education. The Magis is understood as more than ambition. Ambition, arguably, roots a mission for excellence in either a self or a market. Ambition cohabits with success and success is measured by position, assessed against an 'other'. Magis, as an ambition for excellence, resides more in the spirit; it is characterised by a restlessness to always seek to *do* more and to *be* more (Byron and Connor, 2016; Lowney, 2003), but not for the greater glory of the self, moreover for the greater glory of God. Magis captures the essence of selflessness and service.

The most difficult aspects of being a Headteacher are often navigating conflicting priorities, serving multiple masters, managing and meeting external expectations and handling uncertainty. But being a leader of a Catholic school requires much more than knowledge, professional competency, political and moral astuteness. To lead a Catholic school requires competency in faith leadership (McDermott, 1986). This presents additional challenges calling into question whether the attributes of lay faith leadership lie solely within the intrinsic spirituality of the leader or can equally be acquired or learned. As the Jesuits formed a bridge between the religious and the lay through the embracing and practise of Ignatian spirituality, the faith leader is often the bridge between the faith school community and God (Buetow, 1988). This requires a depth not only of theological knowledge and understanding and an ability to share and inspire the community in the vision of the charism and the church, but an integrity of personal faith practice, an embodiment of witness (Drahmann and Stenger, 1989). It is here that Ignatian spirituality can offer a lay faith leader a pathway to centre their leadership practice on the will of God, to be led by the spirit, not the human will or whim.

In meditating on a daily Examen, I can begin to sense the movement of the spirit. Integrated with an awareness of self, an honesty before God in recognising the push and the pull of what I am feeling (Silf, 2010). Breathing in anger or frustration but breathing out a sense of peace and reconciliation, the Ignatian practice of discernment of spirits and recognition of the polar states of consolation and desolation, are perhaps the most practical, critical tools for the Catholic Head. To be able to discern the movement of spirit as stemming either from good or bad, to distinguish a course of action as selfless or selfish, to settle into a decision feeling a strong sense of peace and consolation; for me, it is a form of spiritual anchor.

Methodology

Autoethnography as Methodology: a rationale

Anthropology that does not break your heart is not worth doing.

Ruth Behar (1996, p.177)

Woods (1996) describes ethnography as 'an act of faith' (p.7). Ellis and Bochner (2016) refer to autoethnography as 'a healing practice' (p.246). It is true to say that, at the beginning of the research process, I did not fully appreciate the rich depths that autoethnography allowed me to reach in terms of my memory, my interpretation and my now, much clearer understanding of this period of lived experience. As one is living a moment which is both so intolerable and untenable, it calls into question whether the felt experience is simply a subjective emotion, a formed view, or whether, as Malaquais (1991) asserts: 'the only time I know that something is true is at the moment I discover it in the act of writing' (p.64). My story presents a truth, a real, documented, lived experience. Cooper (1998) suggests that all truths are man-made products. But I do not wish to claim my proffered truth as being anything other than (wo)man-made because I openly write in an interpretive paradigm.

I first encountered autoethnography during the process of study for this doctorate. After I had become ill and was making my journey towards recovery, all I was able to do for some time was sit but after a while, as I was gradually weaned off my medication, I began to read. I read literature that resonated with the moment I was in at that time. I identified with the essays of Anaïs Nin (1978); her reflections on events of her own life and how writing enabled her to write her way out of dark places that she found intolerable. I credit these essays with later feeling compelled to write my own story; to write my way out of the darkness, writing myself back into living[16]. I read Carolyn Ellis' (1995) painful account of the chronic illness of her partner that she was both witness to and part of as his carer; I read the work of Arthur Frank (1995; 1991) and his deeply moving personal accounts of critical illness and recovery. I was drawn, with a certain fascination for a time, to autoethnographic illness narratives (Richards, 2019; Moore, 2012; Defenbaugh, 2008; Corbin, 2003). Reading these made me feel a sense of belonging to a community of critical illness sufferers, finding comfort and solidarity in shared experiences.

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[16] Anaïs Nin is probably best known for her writing of erotic fiction; but she was also the author of several essays in which she sought to make meaning out of her own life as a female, as a writer and of the age that she lived and worked within. Through her writing, it is possible to journey with her through her personal agonies and interpretations of her own life events. These essays reached me deeply at a time when I was at my lowest in critical illness and suffering.

Discovering autoethnography at this critical time of my life felt like a gift. It offered an approach to research that could facilitate a possible way to understand and make some sense of a frightening, isolating and threatening experience to both my professional and physical selves. I could situate myself *(auto)* in my professional and personal lived world *(ethno)* and tell the story of what happened *(graphy).* To then engage in a reflexive process of moving 'from the "outer" to the "inner", from the "other" to the "self", from the "objective" to the "subjective" that has characterised the growth of autoethnography' (Fraser, 2013, p.48), in analysing the story as the data for this research, has taken me to a different plane of enlightened existence and a new and very different realm of spiritual peace.

Once I had recovered sufficiently to be able to resume my doctoral studies, I considered other methodological approaches that I could have followed. I could have constructed this research as an empirical study, framing research questions borne out of my own experience as a Headteacher of a school under threat of takeover, to survey and then interview other Headteachers that may have experienced similar circumstances. I could have abandoned all connections between the self and the research, choosing to keep a very painful and personal story hidden (Finlay, 2000), and instead have conducted a discourse analysis of Academy policy and government promotion of Multi Academy Trusts. I considered researching Headteacher behaviour in relation to Academy leadership and the new emerging hierarchies of power and autonomy. But as I began to write and my reading, which slowly withdrew away from painful and personal truth narratives of critical illness, to a yearning for scripture and interpretations of Ignatian spirituality and Catholic faith, I would always return to autoethnography as a vehicle to examine, interpret and understand what had happened to me (Jago, 2002).

For a time I considered sharing my story with peer Headteachers and asking them to document their own personal and professional response to my narrative, thereby weaving a strand of intersubjectivity to the research process. Anderson (2006), in his critique of autoethnography, advocates that it is essential to engage in dialogue with others as part of the research process. But none of these alternative methodologies and methods satisfied my intrinsic desire to discover meaning out of this unique and distinctive experience that both touched and almost took my life. Other Headteachers might recognise aspects of my story; professional events that I describe might resonate with some, but the professional story is only part of the lived whole. At the heart of this thesis lies a quest to find meaning from a deeply personal experience of physical suffering as well as a professional crisis whilst serving as an Academy Headteacher and it is the insights and perspectives on life, faith and Catholic school leadership that emerge from this that enable me to offer a personal truth. No other methodology, it seemed to me, would be as

versatile in affording me the space to write about such personal experience and to use this to engender meaning and theory (Fraser, 2015). It is autoethnography that affords me the freedom to write so openly, to tell my story and to situate the story as the data to then analyse, interrogate and draw meaning from.

In autoethnography the researcher is situated at the core of the research process and is therefore both the subject and the object; the person carrying out the inquiry at the same time as the participant who is under inquiry (Ngunjiri et al, 2010). The story is personal, so the self *is* and *has* to be at the heart of the research process:

> As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller.
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> Ellis (2009, p.13)

Like Fraser (2013) I was 'fully aware of certain critical rejoinders to the pursuit of autoethnography within more traditional academic confines' (p.3) and soon came to realise that autoethnography is not a straightforward methodology to grapple with as an education researcher-practitioner. I have stumbled more than once into the realm of self-indulgence (Delamont, 2009; Sparkes, 2002); the work being in danger of narcissistic emphasis (Coffey, 1999), or simply 'self-absorbed' (Atkinson, 2006, p. 403). I have doubted the academic scholarship of my work as being no more than a story. As Josselson (1993) notes:

> What is a good story? Is just a good story enough? What must be added to a story to make it scholarship? How do we derive concepts from stories and then use these concepts to understand people?
>
> (p. xi)

I argue that scholarship in the social sciences does not have to be wholly scientific in its approach; scientific inquiry as a methodological approach may dominate the field but to view scientific inquiry as the only credible means of investigating and understanding the world is to ignore the complexity of the human condition situated in their personal, social and professional context. The scientific credibility of autoethnography has been questioned (Anderson, 2006; Holt 2003), but the depth it offers to explore and theorise issues of immense sensitivity make it a unique, innovative and powerful research methodology that can lead to far deeper insights of the self, the context and social understanding (Ellis, 2009). We learn more about the world through studying the world; we learn about people by studying the human experience and the socio-cultural context (Chang, 2008). It is the intersection of the personal and the societal within

autoethnography as a research methodology and method that offers a way into deeper understanding, providing social science with a new and different, valid and credible epistemology (Laslett, 1999).

Clough (2002) argues the importance of a story as a means of truth telling: 'As a means of educational report, stories can provide a means by which those truths, which otherwise cannot be told, are uncovered' (p.8). Arguably the merits of storytelling are celebrated more in narratives of spiritual and cultural wisdom; to a person of faith the medium of storytelling is appealing. But can story alone as data have sufficient scholarly credibility? A story is told from the perspective of the narrator. I am the narrator and a central character in the plot. The data from the story is then wholly subjective and emphasises my own interpretations and perspectives on the events I describe. The 'I' is openly privileged so wherein lies an objective truth in a work that seeks to make a scholarly contribution to social science when the 'I' stems from personal, biased perceptions? This is further compounded by my use of fiction; characters and dialogue are fictionalised in order to protect identity and maintain confidentiality, but I acknowledge that fiction based on truth cannot, by its fictionalised state, ever be wholly true. I claim a truth that is valid, but I cannot and do not claim an unbiased, unequivocal, whole truth. Autoethnography enables a researcher to find meaning in a truth that is deep-rooted in personal, human experience. In my story, that meaning is discovered in a place of frailty and vulnerability, not often revealed or spoken of in the life and work of a Headteacher; frailty and vulnerability have no place in the dominant lexicon of school leadership. Reaching the heart of sensitive and unspoken truths is perhaps too uncomfortable and raw but I argue that the scholastic world is far richer when accepting and welcoming an epistemological nexus that truth is there to be discovered and new learning can emerge from the autoethnographic voice.

As an early-career researching practitioner, I was concerned about the validity of the data centred solely on the self (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), and whether the work had any scholarly credibility and rigour (Holt, 2003). But the more I wrote myself into the thesis and engaged in the reflexive and introspective analysis of the story, I drew out deeper and, what I proffer to be, significant perspectives on life and Catholic leadership. I began to understand that silence over issues of significance will not take us forward in scholarly life. As Frank (1995) suggests: 'The more that is told, the more we are made conscious of remaining on the edge of a silence. How much remains that can never be told is unknown' (p. 138).

Autoethnography, despite being a research methodology for over forty years, is still disputed and contentious, having been described as 'woolly-minded and flabby prose masquerading as

academic proof and narrative' (Fraser, 2015, p.31). Yet it is powerful in its revelatory capacity to reach depths of self-discovery that I could not have reached employing a more conventional qualitative or mixed methods methodology. It is 'methodologically legitimate' (Clough, 2002, p.8) in the open and free capacity it offers to social science inquiry. The postmodern research movement has raised doubts about the privilege of any single method for obtaining knowledge about the social world. If this is to be true then the question of any single method of obtaining authoritative knowledge of the self within the social world also becomes doubtful. Pelias (2004) questions: 'Why must we work under an epistemology of "not that"; why do only certain forms of discourse count as knowledge?' (p.11). Like Pelias, I came to realise that I, too, experienced the:

> desire to write from the heart, to put on display a researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings himself forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative and sensuously poetic voice that can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study.

> (p.1)

Tierney (1998) suggests that 'autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized [sic.] those of us at the borders' (p. 66). I certainly felt as if my professional life had moved to the periphery not only through managing critical illness and being unable to fulfil my professional role, but also I felt my role as a Headteacher was slowly being marginalised by what I perceived to be a new discourse surrounding Academy leadership; one that privileged new hierarchies in which the sole Headteacher position was ebbing away, replaced by new positions of Chief Executives, Executive Heads, Heads of School and Directors of Learning.

In taking an autoethnographic approach, I was able to find a 'representational space' (*ibid.*) in which I could write a truth narrative and reclaim an understanding of myself situated in my ever-changing professional world.

As an autoethnographer, I am a 'bricoleur' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.5), interpreting lived experiences, piecing together the chains of events, documenting my professional and personal life in congruence, assimilating meaning (Denzin, 1994, p.501); I have become 'part of what I am studying' (Butz and Besio, 2009, p.1660), exploring an ontological frame of experience as an attack, an onslaught whose outcomes impacted on both my professional work and my personal physical health. Spry (2001) states that the autoethnographic researcher is 'the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns' (p.711). Yet while I was living

through this period of my life, events that happened as single units or multiple entities were not of my choosing and each separate one, when viewed as itself, perhaps not that remarkable. It has been via the process of piecing them together, of journaling the journey that I have come to realise how powerful and significant this story could be. Vickers (2007), in her disturbing autoethnography of workplace bullying, wrote with a focus upon truth narrative whereby events happening in isolation could easily be dismissed but when brought together in sequence became a bearing of witness that unearthed the darker aspects of the organisational life of which she was part. When I re-read the journals that I scribed during illness and in dark times of professional and personal despair, I was moved profoundly by the rawness in the writing, from the hand of one who was frightened by suffering and whose writings assumed a role of companion; an accompanist to the suffering.

Similarly, in writing the story that encompasses the data in this thesis I found, like Richards (2019), in her account of her own illness narrative, that I could not stop. Finding a methodology that enabled me to write freely and openly, to literally 'bleed onto the academic page without being cleaned up – or erased – by dominant doctrine' (Defenbaugh, 2008, p.1422), as autoethnography permits, has enabled me to find a new sense of freedom and to close a difficult and painful chapter in my life and life's work, liberated and more enlightened to journey forward. I could determine, from piecing together the journal extracts and recalling the events in writing my story, that there was a potentially powerful narrative evolving. At that moment the power of autoethnography as a revelatory methodology was heightened and I could relate to Nouwen's (2013) suggestion: 'a journey makes perfect sense only when one looks back over its course' (p.xvi), perhaps a fitting way to view my life now, having journeyed and cultivated a new way of being in living my life in faith.

I acknowledge that the fallibility of my human memory and recall may affect the presentation of an espoused truth, particularly as those memories I write about are so emotive and painful and transport me back to a tormented and frightening time in my personal and professional life and also to a time when my thoughts, judgements and interpretations were clouded and affected by the dense fog of prescription opiate and morphine dependency. My memories are 'wounds always ready to bleed again' (Pelias, 2004, p.54). As a researcher I am aware of the danger of academic work being clouded by over-subjectivity as I seek to detach from the story and view it through a critical and more objective lens in the challenge of the reflexive process. As more time has passed, I have found I am more able to find temporal detachment.

Carr (1998), in discussing fallibilism, suggested that 'none of our beliefs are certain' and that 'we can always be mistaken' (p.28). Our views are too susceptible to error for us to ever be arrogantly proclaiming ourselves to have the truth or to know with any certainty. I accept that the circumstances I lived in at the time of the events I describe were very different to the time and circumstances I live in now; my human memory is therefore fallible; my beliefs and my recollections are as true as I am able to present them. I acknowledge that I am remembering now, here in the present, a healthier but not yet fully healed version of myself; I am therefore *re*-presenting events filtered through my retrospective narrative and analysis of what I was experiencing at the time (Merrill and West, 2009), but *what* I am remembering is in the past; it is a recent past, but perspective, detail and context, chronology, behaviours – both my own and that of the other actors in the story - are always subject to 'temporal transition' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2006, p.479).

Mine, like many, is not a life untouched. This research has been prompted by an 'emotional epiphany' (Ellis and Bochner, 2016, p.50) that has affected me deeply. It is a physical existence that has been punctured by life-changing and life-limiting illness. It is a professional life that I feel has been violated by an almighty weight of ideological forces stemming from what I perceived as a group of power-wielding elite that has led to the choice I made to remove myself from a type and brand of education that I could no longer tolerate. Like Bochner (*ibid.*) I too felt 'as if I were being held hostage to a professional identity I no longer wanted to claim' (p.34).

Both 'attacks' happened simultaneously; one clinical attack on my body and the other a clinical attack on the school where I was Head. I was both the witness watching over the sequence of events (Behar, 1996), and the protagonist living and breathing the experiences.

> Sooner or later life brings each of us uninterrupted and/or unwanted darkness, sadness, frustration and loss. These moments leave their mark on us, our bodies are tattooed by them. Epiphanies often bring us to a decisive moment in which we may feel as if we're standing on a sheer existential cliff.
>
> Ellis and Bochner (2016, p.88)

My body and my psyche are marked, 'tattooed' (*ibid.*) by my lived experience; the physical scars of invasive surgery, the breathlessness and rapid onset of overwhelming tiredness that still sometimes envelop me, serve as reminders of a dark time; the recall and replay in my mind of scenes of professional life at that time, still leave me wary, watchful and suspicious should similar events reoccur in my new professional life as a leader of a Catholic school.

Butz and Besio (2009) discuss autoethnography in terms of researchers using themselves as their own primary research subjects stemming from a need or wish to understand an aspect of the

world in which they are both 'involved in and exceeded by' (p.1665). Events and what I describe in this research may, arguably, not be commonplace. I use autoethnography to communicate often intangible and complex feelings and experiences that 'cannot be told in conventional ways' (Muncey, 2010, p.2). It is personal experience narrative (Denzin, 1989); a narrative of self (Richardson, 1994); it details what I know happened and how I know, and it transports both myself as the researcher and the researched back to 'living in each moment' (Hertz, 1997, p.viii). This is not, as Van Maanen (1988) has warned, an autoethnography 'at risk of becoming a confessional tale' (p.96). It is, however, an autoethnography that touches upon a subject that could be termed as uncomfortable, even undiscussable within the Academy leadership lexicon.

Kemmis (1991) talks about first person research which is described as both subjective and objective in the sense that the researcher treats herself as both subject *and* object in a process of critical reflection and self-reflection. I make no objective truth claims in this research. I openly acknowledge its subjectivity. Foley (2002) asserts that 'most autoethnographies are openly subjective and that the author is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving, multiple self' (p.474).

> We are observers and participants of our own experiences. You cannot separate who you are from what you do. Subjectivity does not infect your work; it enhances it. Official stories can be at odds with individual stories.
>
> Muncey (2010, p.8)

As a form of self-narrative, I deliberately place myself within the social, professional and personal context and seek to undertake a form of 'identity work' (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.9). DeNora (2000) suggests that identity is 'a presentation of self to self; the ability to mobilise and hold on to a coherent image of who one knows one is' (p.63). This brings into question whether the madness I perceived to be happening all around me was actually not mad at all and that the madness was mine. Was it just me that could not accept the new world that my professional role had become consumed by? It was my body wracked with clinical dysfunction and requiring me to fight back; it was my decision to resist the inevitable consumption of the takeover of my school by what I envisaged as a hungry Multi Academy Trust. I question where my own horizons of significance lie and why and how I have come to see each event in a certain way (Taylor, 1989).

As well as acknowledgment of its subjectivity, I also do not claim any form of non-bias. I do not believe there can ever be an unbiased representation of a lived experience. Phillips and Pugh (2005) assert that there is 'no such thing as unbiased observation. Every act of observation we make is a function of what we have seen or otherwise experienced in the past' (p.50).

Spry (2001) describes the human experience as 'chaotic, messy, requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods' (p.727). As a methodological tool, autoethnography enables the text and the person to become whole, not seen as separate. Events I have selected to present in this study are representational of the 'chaos', the 'messiness' that consumed my professional life as well as the inner 'mess' that took over my physical and psychological being (Frank, 1995). I use autoethnography to chart my story and reflexively analyse myself and my story. Merrill and West (2009) state that storytelling has been 'an important dimension of human communication in all societies, serving to generate and pass on meaning and guidance in what could be a chaotic, brutish and unpredictable world' (p.17).

> We are all, it seems, biographers now and want to tell our stories. The self and experience become a sort of reflexive life project, a focus for reworking who we are. New opportunities for self-definition co-exist with deep-seated anxieties and existential doubt about our capacity to cope.
>
> Merrill and West (2009, pp.1-2)

But I do not seek to present a biography of a moment of life lived; neither do I seek to 'rework' who I am. In a sense, living through the episodes described in this research has already achieved this as the person I am now is no longer suffering deep-seated anxieties or existential doubt (Denzin, 1997). I accept that, as many others, my 'self' is still a 'multiple, constructed self that is always becoming and never quite fixed' (Foley, 2002, p.473), but the person I am now is one that has found a new way to live and to be. Pillow (2003) spoke of the ability of humans to reflect on the past for the future, seeing it as a long, intellectual history and heritage growing out of Enlightenment belief in the ability of man to reason. I adopt this methodology as a way to both document a personal and professional transformation, to use it as a 'continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness' (Callaway, 1992, p.33), and to offer a sense of hope to other practitioners who are, perhaps, experiencing similar 'dark and bitter times' (Denzin, 2003, p.257).

Cheek (2000) points out that postmodern thought emphasises reality as plural; there are multiple realities. I accept that the 'realities' I present in this research are, to a certain extent, constructed; I have constructed a model of these experiences to enable me to make sense of my world, but I also use this as a platform upon which to suggest that, as a lived experience, it was real; both frightening and real to me and to those around me.

> A key debate within much biographical research is realism versus constructivism in the study of lives. Realism holds that there is an objective knowledge of reality, that stories reflect a lived reality. Life stories

commonly refer to real events and experiences and often tellers may be the only witnesses to such happenings. How these events are perceived and selected and placed within understandings of the individual life – by metaphor or myth are necessary aspects of analysis.

<div align="right">Roberts (2002, pp. 7-8)</div>

I use the opportunity to tell a story, true and real to the one who lived it and true to those who both witnessed it and lived it alongside me. In writing, it has taken me to places that were scary, painful and frightening but it has been an important quest to find meaning and, in doing so, I have found the process to be surprisingly empowering (Defenbaugh, 2008).

Roberts (2002) suggests that 'Individuals act according to the meanings through which they make sense of their social existence' (p.6). I seek, through this methodology, to find meaning in what took place and how it has now defined my new social and professional self. I use the medium of storytelling as a way to expose, understand and explain 'un-interrogated yet oppressive scripts' (Merrill and West, 2009, p.68) of what has happened in relation to the evolving Academies agenda. I chose to tell a story through autoethnography as an accessible genre; storytelling that is used in countless ages to communicate and instil historical wisdom but also as a paradoxical approach to what is often seen in childhood as a means of safe escapism; yet, through this lived experience, it had adopted a more nightmarish character.

Storytelling is one of the oldest worldwide traditions with an infinite variety of wisdoms and techniques. Storytellers have always filled the roles of spiritual leaders, historians and tradition-bearers. Scientists with their desire for objectivity have tended to silence the storyteller.

<div align="right">Muncey (2010, p.79)</div>

Like Defenbaugh (2008), in creating her own illness narrative through autoethnography I have found 'the means to tell my story, to bleed over the pages and speak out against the silence' (p.1406). I am grateful to have found autoethnography; and now, through this methodology, to have found my place as a new researcher-practitioner.

Autoethnography as Method

I have examined and sought to defend my use of autoethnography as methodology; I now seek to claim its appropriateness as method. In doing so I turn to the '-graphy' – the writing up and sharing of my material and data. As I suggested earlier, I have chosen to present fictionalised accounts of life experience to find resonance with my readers.

The data for this thesis is a story, a truth and a quest narrative (Frank, 1995), written from my own perspectives of personal and professional life and presented as a series of vignettes in four parts:

1. Debut
2. Ministry and headship in a changing education landscape
3. Suffering and a de-professionalised self
4. Re-formation

Each part encompasses a period of my life. Early life and what I view as my formation from childhood through to my work, first as a teacher then middle manager, is presented as a series of vignettes located in Appendix A. These are included although do not form part of the main body of the thesis, as they lay the ground for the vignettes that document my first step into the Academies programme and the subsequent series of events upon which this thesis seeks to explore and theorise.

Some sections of the vignettes are presented as narrative text in the form of descriptive prose. These are presented in boxed vignettes and provide intended snapshots of my life and certain events that I perceive as central to the story. Some of the boxed vignettes contain dialogue and some do not; some are pure narrative, some a mix of narrative and dialogue; some blend dialogue and thought-tracking. Past tense is used to tell the story as narrative, but present tense is used for dialogue and thought-tracking comments on the dialogue or action.

Muncey (2005) proposes that various sources of data are privileged in the use of autoethnography, for they add richness to autoethnographic stories. I have therefore adopted various genres of story presentation: narrative prose, dialogue, thought-tracking and journal extracts.

In acknowledgement of the ethical dimension of this work, I do not use interviews, or email, or real interactions. I am telling of encounters with the world through fiction by way of protecting identity and to ensure that the ethical considerations are maintained and respected. Dialogue

between myself and the fictional characters depicted by role in order to protect identity, is presented as a drama script and is italicised and the elements of thought-tracking that are interwoven at times in the script, are italicised and emboldened and presented in square brackets to distinguish the thought-tracking from the spoken dialogue.

The fictionalised characters are based on people performing in role: there are other Headteachers; Executive Headteachers, Chief Executive Officers and Directors, a Trust Chair, a Department of Education Official and an associated Project Officer; there are teachers; a line manager, there are students, colleagues and friends. These are not identifiable as real people; they are fictional representations of professional and other roles within the differing layers of state education.

The characters represented in the story are fictionalised actors playing a professional role and the dialogue I engage in with them is fictionalised although based on true events. Clough (2002) advocates this method as a means of protecting anonymity but, at the same time, not reducing the impact of the representation of what has taken place in real terms:

> The fictionalisation of educational experience offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without striping away the rawness of real happenings.

(p.8)

The fictional element comes from the representation of characters and my dialogue with them. But the narrative sections, the journal extracts, and the thought-tracking reflections-on-action are where my voice is real. The only characters portrayed as real are myself, my mother and my father who were my primary carers during my illness and recovery.

The excerpts I have chosen that come directly from my personal journals are presented in a different boxed format. It has been my intention to signpost clearly to the reader the different forms and categories of data presented in each section – text, script and dialogue, thought-tracking, method-acting and journal. I adopted a textual form of method-acting during which I sought to transport myself in memory back to the moments when I was critically and ill and the period I spent in recovery. These moments are defined as distinctive forms of data written in the present tense and are commentaries on what I was feeling and experiencing.

I do not engage in reflexive analysis after every vignette as I felt it was important to tell the story as a whole, to let it flow uninterrupted, telling and revealing a part of a life history as one

distinctive and transformational episode of interlinked and congruous events. I did not wish for the power of the story to be diluted or disjointed by pausing to analyse the data after each vignette. The depth of analysis is placed after the fourth vignette and the epilogue to the story which brings the reader to the present time, providing a snapshot of my life's work in leading a Catholic Convent school with a unique and special Ignatian charism.

In adopting a reflexive and introspective method of analysis, I observe myself, my actions and reactions, my behaviours and attitudes, my feelings and emotional responses, my fears and anxieties, my moments of triumph as well as times of loss and despair. I am introspectively 'thinking about my thinking' (Ellis, 2008, p.854). This enables me to identify and draw out the key themes and threads of this thesis and to make meaning. The lens of the Catholic faith grounds the analysis in a Catholic perspective with reference to the practice of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

The presentation of data and analysis is by no means conventional and does not seek to follow traditional presentation within a conventional research format. I am telling, through the data, a real and raw story of human experience. It is, in many respects, akin to a human drama, therefore could be viewed as an autoethnographic art form. As a former performing artist and as a musician, autoethnography offers a resonant means of communicating my story and analysing it in a format akin to a form of art. Clough (2002) argues:

> in the visual arts, form and content are inseparable: the strength of the subject is wholly continuous with the form through which it is communicated. Should we expect any less of a research which is essentially about human experience? The separation of 'data' and 'analysis' troubles me and it seems to me that in life-history work it is almost a contradiction in terms to 'give' a life history and then analyse it when it should be seamlessly self-analytical.

(p.15)

The data and the following reflexive analysis are presented as interwoven; I seek to privilege them equally. In doing so, the reflexive mission of autoethnography is accomplished through re-visiting, examining and interweaving moments of the story throughout the analysis.

My story moves between narrative, presentation of dialogue and thought-tracking as both dramatic and literary devices. The extracts of journals are interwoven between presentations of narrative and dialogue. Ellis and Bochner (2016) maintain that our lives are rooted in narratives and that it is narrative that keeps us alive; stories give meaning to our existence. Van Manen (1991) views storytelling as a form of everyday theorising that enables the teller to bring

experience into language. I am offering readers, through this study, a view of the world I once inhabited, inviting others to view this world through my own construction and interpretation of it (Crotty, 2003). Clough (2002) discusses and justifies his use of the five stories he includes in his book:

> they are stories which could be true and they derive from real events and feelings and conversations, but they are ultimately fictions or versions of the truth which are woven from an amalgam of raw data, real details. Stories are further important to research in educational settings because they allow the report of those experiences which might otherwise not be made public by other traditional tools of the trade.

> (p.9)

I use dialogue to script key and poignant moments in my story but also to move the narrative along temporally. Stories can lose their pungency when the reader is presented with pages and pages of pure description and for this story to evoke the intensity of emotion and the, at times, frightening absurdity of what I perceived to be happening all around me, I wanted to fully engage the reader to also live the experiences in their imagination rather than from a passive observer's viewpoint. The power of dialogue is its inherent ability to enable the reader to seemingly observe the conversation in the moment rather than read a passive account of something that happened in the past. Ellis (1995) uses dialogue as an alternative to long passages of description as it enhances the movement of the action: 'Converting general description into conversation showed the reader succinctly what had taken place' (p.314).

I begin my story with a presentation of brief tableaux of early student and then professional life. Bolton (2014) suggests: 'No detail is too trivial or insignificant to write, think and talk about' (p.69). Its purpose: to offer an interpretation of self and early formation of an identity of self-perceived separateness, of a dutiful and conformist self that would only conform so far; of a life commanded and directed by rigidity and routine and goal setting and meeting expectations; but then a life broken free of imposed frameworks and replaced by chosen or adopted ones. Through these early snapshots of life history, I am 'painting pictures in words' (Woods, 1996, p.133).

> Who we are, what we stand for and why, are integrated with how we act: near impossible to perceive since we are right inside ourselves and our lives and cannot get outside ourselves to gain an objective view. So we tell and write stories to take some of these incidents outside of ourselves, to understand our actions, deep-seated beliefs, ethics, ethical values, emotions, sense of professional identity, and the way we relate to colleagues, our political, social and cultural world and it to us.

> Bolton (2014, p.70)

I have inserted these tableaux as a means of understanding the shape of my own personal, spiritual and professional formation, which I felt was important in order to understand and make meaning from the later *re*-formation of my personal, spiritual and professional self.

I chart a selection of events that punctuated milestone moments in my early professional life as a teacher, each chosen because it offers some insight into the character and values of a future school leader in formation. Bolton (2014) suggested that 'our personal values and theories are always embedded in any story we narrate. Reflexivity is focusing a critical lens upon the story to discover our values' (p.67).

Piecing together extracts of events has revealed character traits that were there all along, identifiable and grounded in principles and practice in a range of unrelated situations. Butler (2002) spoke of the modernist artists seeing themselves as divorced from and marginal to the society they live in. A recurring theme borne out of the chain of events referred to in my story is how I always imposed a form of self-marginalisation within my own social and professional world, there is a clear thread of detachment and a preference for living on the periphery which I interrogate in my analysis. I attribute this to my own artistic tendencies towards being more comfortable in the margins of my lifeworld.

In seeking to understand my professional and personal self as I journeyed up through the ranks in teaching, I have laid the ground for reflexive and introspective analysis of the re-formation of the self during and after the critical point of the story, the three year period between 2014 and 2017. It is this period that situates most of the data, the period when two difficult and traumatic life events took hold of my personal and professional lives simultaneously. Here, readers will see me at my most vulnerable.

Patai (1994) states that 'we do not escape from the consequences of our positions by talking about them endlessly' (p.70). It is not my intention to just talk about what happened. It is not 'catharsis' that I seek (Pillow, 2003, p.175); neither is it therapy. It is through the analysis of the events, the sequence, the timing, actions and reactions, the thoughts, the language both written and spoken that provides a window towards understanding and revelation of new meaning.

Autoethnography and spirituality: a personal reflection

When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me.

When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God.

When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation

that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me.

When I have been plunged into complete solitude, if I pray, I am never totally alone.

Pope Benedict XVI (2007, p.33)

Autoethnography has, for me, been a journey of deep and liberating discovery. Now in the middle age of my life, having navigated a half- life[17] characterised by fulfilling multiple roles with multi-faceted expectations and at times, a tumultuous professional passage, I have also faced and fought my own mortality to come through, what I perceive, as a form of spiritual re-birth lifting me far beyond the realm of my former selves.

I am able to see now *why* I am the person I am; what has shaped and moulded me into the person and the spirit I am now and how, all along, there were signs that this person, this self-segregating 'misfit' with specific traits, principles, instincts was there bubbling beneath a skin not yet matured but waiting to emerge. The common thread binding everything together has always been my deep connection with my faith. It has never left me. It has been stronger at certain times than others and I have been as guilty as many Catholics of neglecting my faith practice at certain isolated periods in my life; but faith has never deserted me. Throughout my life in happiness and periods of calm, as well as 'during times of hardship', faith has always been 'an anchor' (Martin, 2012, p. 31).

Faith has guided me, accompanied me, educated me, enabled me, uplifted me, regulated me, prevented me; it has, above all else, given me, over the years towards maturity, what I understand to be, the precious gift of discernment[18]. It is discernment that I have come to view as the most powerful compass in navigating the way that has brought me to overcome the

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[17] In using this term I seek to juxtapose the physical half of a life lived in reaching middle age alongside the philosophical metaphor of a life half lived and not yet fully actualised.

[18] Discernment is central to Catholic practice and stems from devotional Bible reading, prayer, silence and solitude and spiritual direction: 'Discernment allows us to see through the appearance of things to their deeper meaning. Perceiving, seeing through, understanding and being aware of God's presence are what is meant by discernment' (Nouwen, 2013, p.6).

adversity I have thus far faced and to become the person, the spirit and the professional that I am today.

> Discernment is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality. It begins with awareness, of noticing. Then come the questioning and interpretation. Ultimately we are asking 'where is God in all of this?' and 'How is God communicating with me here?' We do not need extraordinary experiences in order to discern. All that is required on our side is attentiveness and prayerful reflection.

O'Leary (2018, p.125)

Discernment has enabled me to 'see through the appearance of things' to their deeper meaning (Nouwen, 2013, p.6).

Autoethnography, as both methodology and method, has therefore been a pathway to new personal and spiritual enlightenment. It has provided a vessel for me to tell my story, not constricted by rules or rigid conventions. Pelias (2004) wrote with a sensitive and raw honesty about finding a way to tell stories of immense importance using alternative means but means that were just as authentic in carving their place in the academe:

> As I go about my business of just living, and of doing my job in the academy, I never want to hurt or be hurt, but too often I've watched claims of truth try to triumph over compassion, try to crush alternative possibilities, and try to silence minority voices.

(p.1)

In this next section I invite the reader to accompany me through a series of vignettes taken from key moments in my life, my work and my battle with acute illness, as I utilise a form of reflexive analysis and introspection to derive some interpreted meaning (Ellis, 1991). Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) discuss the power of writing 'fragmented autoethnographic vignettes that facilitate a revisiting and retelling of specific emotionally memorable events in a life' (p.66). The power in this method, I suggest, is in the portrayal of the real. The vignettes present episodes of realism, of truth; the fictional elements within the vignettes only masking the identity of other characters. My voice and my character presenting, narrating, recalling and speaking, drive the story forward through the selected episodes of my life that hold significance of personal meaning. I hope that, in turn, the personal meaning I draw will enable others to draw upon.[19]

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[19] The interiority that is captured may come at the expense of objectivity, but I claim the value of the interior approach as the deeply personal and spiritual dimension of this work renders objectivity both difficult and problematic and, arguably, inappropriate within the chosen methodology.

It is through these chosen vignettes that I 'ask readers to relive the experience through [my] writer's or performer's eyes' (Denzin, 2000, p.905).

The profound effect this methodology and research process has had on me as a person and a professional educator has been astonishing. I have come to view autoethnography more as a form of spiritual salvation than simply a postmodern research methodology. It has become a vehicle that has aided both a physiological and psychological recovery from a moment of personal and professional torture. Anaïs Nin's sensitivity in describing the process of writing resonates with my belief in its power to both heal and harmonise:

> We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection…We write to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth…We write to expand our world when we feel strangled, or constricted, or lonely…When I don't write I feel my world shrinking. I feel I lose my fire and my colour.

> (Nin, 1978, p.13)

As a child I loved stories and storytelling; often disappearing for hours to a quiet place of aloneness and writing about people, places and characters; family holidays were timelessly captured in journals so as never to forget any detail of a long-anticipated experience. Storytelling as a child enabled me to make sense of happenings, to attach meaning and coherence to who I was, where I belonged and where my life's journey might take me (Guignon, 2004). I wrote stories, I wrote to God in childlike prayer compositions, and I found a powerful means of wordless expression in composing music. Worthen (2012) suggested that we are shaped into the people we become through stories: 'a story is a representation of change: this is the way things are; this is the path that leads out of it; this is the new place where the path arrives' (p.6).

The power of autoethnography as a passage of storytelling allows me now to tell a story *about* my story (Scott, 2012). An autoethnography of a professional world can provide first hand and highly charged accounts of topics that might never be spoken of. O'Leary (2018) suggests that we have become more aware of the potential of story to be a 'carrier of revelation' (p.45).

This story has a deep resonance of meaning to me as a person and as a professional working in a field that I believe I was born to and that I believe is my vocation in service to my faith. Readers of this story will inevitably become, as Ellis and Bochner (2016) suggest, 'a witness to the narrative context of another person's suffering, drawn into the predicaments of the story' (p.70). It may evoke an emotional reaction in the reader; for some it may be as painful to read as it has been, at times, to write and certainly to live through (Moore, 2012). But it is easier to impart it in a story.

Vignettes

Data in the following section charts my leadership journey from my first role as a senior leader in a new City Academy. The story that pre-empts this and located in the Appendix is a series of vignettes that locate the formation of self from childhood and situate the self in the teaching profession through early career, middle and then entry into senior leadership. The vignettes here in this section focus solely on my experiences of working as a Vice Principal, Acting Principal and Headteacher of a City Academy and a standalone Academy in the community school sector.

Part 1: Debut

Twelve candidates, two Vice Principal positions, eleven men in sharp, tailored suits; and me.

It was the opportunity of a lifetime. The school wasn't even built yet. It was a conception, a vision of a billionaire sponsor and a county council who were determined to close a coastal school that had been deemed to be failing for many years and to transport its lost children and some of its jaded staff into a £40 million award-winning architectural phenomenon. An enticing vision for a passionate educationalist to engage in free and creative thinking and planning, to establish a new philosophy of education and to have the financial backing, resources and freedom to implement it. I was wringing my hands in desperate anticipation of being a part of this new City Academy coastal and urban regeneration project.

Everyone knew how challenging the closing school was; the children would be the same; their parents would be the same; the same social atrocities of inequality and extremes of poverty were still there in that neglected coastal community.

But I felt a calling to go there. I didn't hesitate. My application flowed freely as I wrote about my experience and my preparation for Deputy Headship, my ideas for a future curriculum design and an innovative approach to structuring a school day. The Sponsor had outlined that he wanted the same opportunities for these children that privileged children from independent schools received. I used my own experiences of being educated in an independent school to link to what could be provided for the children. My vision was accepted. The sole female[20] at the selection process was chosen. I was appointed to be the first Vice Principal and within a few months would be installed at a computer in a tiny office in a backstreet of a poor and struggling coastal town, my desk just inches away from the Principal's desk and joined only by a PA and a

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[20] It is not my intention in this study to explore meaning through a feminist lens. I use terms that might be construed as making a comment from a feminist perspective, but this is purely for the purpose of depicting a lived reality of events at the time.

Financial Director. We as a team of four set to work. We had nine months to plan and open a new school.

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The Principal was like no other Head I had ever known or worked for. There was no sense of subordination in our working relationship. Although he was my leader, he was not interested in his own elevation. Instead, he elevated me. He never told me what to do. He indicated what needed to be achieved and then left me to find the best solution. He would watch over and view the intermediate results of whatever I shared with him as work in progress with thoughtful and reflective consideration. He would pronounce his verdict, guide and support then get back to his own work. I remember how he injected the most powerful surge of professional exhilaration through me with his excited response to my idea of how to organise the school day so that only one year group was ever on break or lunch at the same time. He reacted with an outburst of such emphatic excitement as if I had made the most ground-breaking discovery in the history of school timetabling!

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The children from that once glorious but now neglected coastal town took my heart with them the moment they entered their new, shiny school. The awe and wonder in their faces as they looked up to a roof made entirely of glass and as they drank in the enormity and the modernity of their new surroundings; the effect was poignant and moving.

As their Vice Principal, I soon became a figure not only of educational authority over them, but also a maternal one. It was there that the notion of 'tough love' developed in my leadership repertoire.

But while I grew in leadership stature, the Principal was declining rapidly, gripped by the cruellest of diseases, unknowingly for a while, before descending into its clutches.

Just seven months after opening the new City Academy, the Principal passed away.

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It took a catastrophic event to pull the disparate community together. Even the most hardened of the anti-Academy collegiate shared in the grief of our new community.

There never was such strength in dignified unity as during the weeks following the death of the Principal.

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At times of crisis a community leans. Swiftly appointed by the Academy's Sponsor as Acting Principal, I certainly felt the full leaning weight of over 1000 people seeking emotional safety and reassurance and, cautiously, we got used to a new level of re-cultivated 'normal'. Like a family reconstituting their union and purpose following the loss of a loved one, we were subconsciously readjusting, nervous about how to behave even in covering the usual routines of the day. Everything we did, we were doing for the first time again but now in a new era where our former foundations and security had been dismantled.

I lived with a permanent knot inside my soul. There were moments when I felt scared, incompetent and entirely illegitimate in this role. How did I know how to run a school? No one was there to tell me what to do. I had only been a Deputy for what felt like five minutes and now this! I wanted to run, to tell everyone I couldn't do it, to leave me alone, stop coming to me and dumping all their problems onto me. How was I supposed to know the answers to their issues? What was I supposed to do with all that?

I went home every night feeling like I had been stung all over my physical and emotional being. I couldn't let go. The enormity of the burden of responsibility weighed down on every moment of the day and night.

But I ploughed on. I had a job to do. I recalled the last words the Principal had said to me before he died:

Principal: Always walk around with your eyes open. See everything. Notice everything. You must tell people what you are not happy with. You must finish our project.

I had made a solemn promise to the Principal that afternoon that was to be his last. Along with two close colleagues, I had visited him in hospital. He died that same night. My sense of duty and service was to prevail even in the darkest and loneliest moments.

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Sponsor's PA: We are interviewing for the Principal post next week.

It was a few weeks after the Principal's funeral. We had closed the school that day so that members of the school community could attend if they wanted to. Nearly everyone did.

It never felt right to see prospective new Principals looking around the school. We viewed them all with suspicion despite their vast leadership experience and impressive credentials. No one seemed to fit.

Sponsor: We would like you to continue for the time being as Acting Principal. After three rounds of interviews none of the candidates are suitable.

I remained in post as Acting Principal for eleven months.

Then a new Principal arrived; a 'Super-Head'. And everything changed. It was gradual at first, subtle nuances that indicated the beginning of a new and very different chapter for the school. People started to behave differently. Conversations took place in new circles now, between certain colleagues that had positioned themselves to be close to the new Principal and decisions were taken behind closed doors over matters that formerly would have been tabled for discussion as a leadership team. Whispers, covert huddles of groups in corners, knowing looks shot across the boardroom manifested into overt, hostile practices. Eye-rolling, sardonic criticism, less confident colleagues trembling in fear when required to speak at meetings, scared of being interrupted, attacked and shouted down.

The air had become stagnant with toxic oppression and the thick stench of aftershave. No smiles, no warmth, no comradery; just cold, corporate, managerial transactions. I watched colleagues around the leadership table visibly retreat. Heads would either go down or would join in with the daily ritual of mockings and metaphoric floggings of staff. Language became spiteful and vitriolic not only about other schools and Heads but about the people within the school community. It was as if the school was devouring itself. A culture of fear had set in and, looking back, it was fascinating how quickly that terror began to rule.

I watched in horror as the school I was part of creating, in response to a dream of transformation and regeneration of a vulnerable community, was turning on itself. I looked around the leadership table and no longer recognised any of the faces, so disfigured had they become.

It was time to let go. My work here was done. I had steered the ship as best I could, but I had to hand it over now and withdraw. This type of City Academy was not what I believed in or had signed up to. And I did not belong under its new chain of command.

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Part 2: Ministry and Headship in a changing educational landscape

My new PA: Out with the old, a new broom has arrived!

A new headship of a school that was ripe for modernisation and change. But trying to shift a long-established school culture into a new chapter is back- breaking work.

Head of Year: It's not the children.

Deputy Head: It's the staff.

Governor: It's not the staff, it's the buildings.

Bursar: It's the buildings and the budget.

Me: It's the politics.

There was a distinct change of atmosphere in education.

The rapid changes we were facing under the new Coalition government were reaping down on flinching Heads like a swiping scythe. It was as if an air of desperation had set in amongst school leaders during the Coalition's term of office. Ever-changing goalposts, sudden announcements on what would and would not be counted in the league tables, every step forward knocked three steps back; it was a bizarre game between the Department for Education and the newly formed school improvement organisations that preached strategy and made suggestions about implementation of policy in order to meet the latest measures. Every action by school leaders to secure their place in the performance measures would appear to be scuppered by a sudden change in policy.

School leaders were accused of gaming the system and finding every possible way to ratchet up results and improve league table positions so as to avoid the gaze of the inspectorate and the career-destroying serious weaknesses or inadequate category. With the Ofsted 'satisfactory' judgement now long gone and replaced with a disparaging 'required to improve' label, that, for many governing bodies, was enough to remove and replace their Headteacher. Fear had set into the profession.

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I had not given enough attention to what was happening around me. I had not paid enough attention to the changing political wind. At first, I was dismissive of what I noticed happening in other schools. I attended Headteacher meetings under duress as I would much rather have been back in my school; I hated being away from there.

But a change in air there most definitely was.

What had once been a collegiate meeting of equals, each Head there as a Headteacher of a school determined to do the best for their children and staff, had now, almost overnight, appeared to shift into a new hierarchy. Some were there now in role as an 'Executive' Headteacher. Having a damning Ofsted judgement now translated as having a weak Headteacher therefore another stronger and more successful Headteacher would be given 'executive leadership' over that Head.

[I am intrigued. Who are these new elevated types? What do they do? How can they leave their own school for half the week and move into another without something going awry in their home school? I have enough on my plate with one school, so I cannot conceive how I would ever be able to run two or more schools. And what about the children? What effect does it have on them to lose their Headteacher for half the week? What about the children in the school being supported? How do they know who this new Executive Head is? How do the Executives actually do this? Is there a job description?][21]

I noted a distinct change in Headteachers' behaviour. And it was not subtle.

Suddenly Executive leaders wanted to know if they had different voting rights to non-Executive Headteachers.

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The changes did not stop.

Gradually over the space of months, Executive Heads assumed more schools and more responsibilities, and a new language started to enter the education leadership lexicon. Those with expanding Trusts were now entitled 'Chief Executive Officer' or 'CEO'. The boards outside schools were changed to reflect new names of Trusts and listing the name of the CEO positioned above the name of the Head of School.

[What does a CEO actually do?]

Secondary specialist Headteachers like me were suddenly presiding over primary schools that had been branded as failing. I could not fathom what that was about.

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[21] The sections of text in brackets and set in bold type distinguish my thought-tracking from the narrative. Here and thereafter in these sections I am internally commenting and sharing my thoughts of the narrative and descriptions of what was happening.

[What if I was put in charge of a primary school?]

[I wouldn't know where to begin!]

[How do these secondary school Executive Heads and CEOs know how to run a primary school?][22]

I watched these people with curious interest. I studied their body language. I noted how the dialogue was beginning to adopt a more corporate tone.

I was bemused and fascinated by this new ranking order in school leadership. All I had ever wanted to be, after I had taken my first steps into middle management, was a Headteacher. I recalled fondly the ladder conversation in the staffroom and how, back then, the Headteacher position was seen as the pinnacle of a career in school teaching. Not any longer!

[The ladder has grown an extension; a few more rungs have been added.]

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It was not long before half the Heads around the meeting table had an Executive title of some sort.

[What is this new air I am breathing?]

[An air of suspicion; an air of mistrust.]

There suddenly emerged another new layer of leadership; the 'Head of School'.

[How does a Head of School differ to a Headteacher? The Headteacher was always the Head of their school. What is this new layer in an overcrowded top-down kind of 'system leadership'?]

[It appears to fall some way between the role of a Deputy and a Headteacher. Or is it now that Deputy Heads run the schools day to day and the Executive or CEO flits in and out doing whatever Executives and CEOs do?]

The local and regional Heads' meetings suddenly encompassed Heads of School, Headteachers, of which I was one of the last remaining few, Executive Heads and Chief Executive Officers.

I began to withdraw once again, echoes of a past as an undergraduate when I would watch and listen, observe behaviour and inquisitively theorise over this new 'pecking order' of power. I

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[22] The thought-tracking in this part of the story is presented in separate lines of text to show the inner dialogue I was having with myself.

noted how some Executives and CEOs adopted an almost passive-aggressive posture and aloof self-importance.

[My Granny would have called this 'peacocking'.]

Where one sat around the meeting table was of strategic importance and it was a fascinating display of power and distribution. The Head of School would often sit at the right hand of the CEO, assuming one of two positions: that of entitlement or looking completely panic-stricken and not daring to say a word. I felt as if there was no longer a place for a Headteacher of a single school standing alone in this new world. It was suddenly a lonely place running a standalone Academy. I felt nudged out, pushed down the ranking order of respect by the sheer volume of egos that now soaked up all the air in the room.

I started to become irritated and aggrieved. It began to strike me that very few people around the table had been through any kind of rigorous selection process to earn their position. In this new world, Heads of School positions were handed on a plate to an up and coming Deputy Head; Chief Executive positions were often a product of self-elevation when a Headteacher decided to fit in and follow the new world, leading several schools and converting their home school into a Multi Academy Trust.

[How can any of these people actually feel legitimate in role?]

*****

I watched my former colleagues, once equals, begin to change, to shift their shape as if they had been consumed by an enigmatic force that had infiltrated their leadership personas and ejected them into a new harder exterior, with tougher edges, a guarded humour, smiles and occasional laughter that were never quite genuine, darting eyes moving rapidly from side to side, watching, reading their competitors' behaviours, mirroring one another in their posturing. Their frames had shifted into a new reality. It was not my reality or one that I wished or felt compelled to share.

So I withdrew, stopped going to these meetings whenever I could and went back to my school to face the challenges and the new shadows that were slowly creeping over us.

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CEO: Our Trust Chair would like to take you out to lunch next Thursday.

[People like me don't go out to lunch! Heads like me are in the dining hall on duty, eyeballing any child who dares to not put their litter in the bin.]

I was taken aback by this sudden invitation, or was it that it felt like a summons? I was curious about what a millionaire business guru, who had been placed into a local school as the Chair of its newly formed Multi Academy Trust, would want with someone like me. I decided to accept.

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Trust Chair: I've heard a lot about you. I'm impressed. You've got a great school there. Our current CEO won't be here forever; he'll retire in a few years. Play your cards right and you could be his successor. I'm not saying that's a definite but you'll certainly be considered for the role. Think how much better it would be if we joined forces, if your school joined our Trust. Of course, it's the children who will benefit the most.

[It takes until pudding to get to the point. Until now the talk has been small and social, lulling me into a false sense of security I now realise.]

I was being played and I didn't like it. But I listened politely to each spun line of expertly crafted business strategy as I was sounded out to ascertain if I would be receptive to a 'mergers and acquisitions' deal.

[When did education morph into something so hideous?]

I was sitting in a business lunch talking about a prospective business deal where essentially my school would be willingly handed over to a new corporation posing as a school but steadfastly looking around to see which single schools standing alone in this dangerous new territory could be ripe for takeover.

How little did this business person know me? I stopped listening and eyed her with curiosity as she changed tactics, and as, occasionally, the CEO would chip in with another layer of what they clearly both felt would be the persuasive decider in clinching the deal.

[You have no idea who you are talking to. You think everyone in education is like you now. But they aren't. You have no place testing me out, inviting me here to ensnare me in your corporate clutches. I will never sell my school down the river. I have no interest in being a CEO and certainly no interest in being bribed with an offer. I just want to be a Headteacher. What's wrong with that?]

[Go away and get your thieving hands off my school!]

[I actually want to throw my butter knife at you both right now!]

If only they knew the thoughts behind my expressionless eyes that lunchtime.

*****

A call from the CEO came a few days after the lunch. How did I think it went? Would I consider the proposal? Would I like to arrange a meeting to hold further 'exploratory talks'?

Me: No thank you. It is an interesting offer but not the path that we are intent on pursuing at this stage. We'll continue as we are as a standalone Academy. Thank you for considering us though and thank you for a delicious lunch.

CEO: Well don't rule it out and stand alone for too long. You won't be able to anyway…..

The parting words were like a haunting prophecy.

[Do I detect a subtle undertone of menace in the choice of language?]

I did not see much of them for a while after that. I did hear that they had made a successful bid to take over two primary schools that had failed their Ofsted inspections.

[Perhaps that will keep them busy now? Perhaps they will leave us alone?]

*****

It was happening everywhere it seemed. One by one the primary schools were being downgraded in their inspections and then swallowed up by these new corporate giants. If I had ever wondered what a CEO does in their role, I could hypothesise that a significant amount of time was spent on surveying the landscape and engaging in formulating a growth strategy. I read everything avidly in the education press. I closely followed policy developments and kept my ear firmly to the ground in the locality. I had to be fully conversant with how things were developing so I could be ready to decide our next defensive move.

It seemed a long time ago that schools were schools, places of learning and children and staff working together collegiately, Heads telephoning one another to chat through an issue. None of that happened anymore. A Head wouldn't dream of ringing another Head to share a confidence or a problem as it might be used against them. In fact, there were not many standalone, traditional Headteachers left.

[You simply can't trust anyone anymore].

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Headteacher 4: Can I pop over to see you?

Me: Of course! Come for a cup of tea next week. It's been ages since we caught up.

Headteacher 4: I've been thinking about what is starting to happen in our area and who my school should go with.

[Why is she talking about 'going' with anyone? Do we now exist in a strange kind of 'dating world' for schools? Dear God! What is really happening now?]

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Headteacher 4: I've received an offer to join a Multi Academy Trust, one of the well-known ones. I've looked carefully at the Trust set-up and how everything is organised there, and I know people think it's really corporate and cold but they get excellent results and all their schools are either good or outstanding. They are looking to expand into this area…...

[Is there no escape? No respite? Does anyone actually have an eye on the day to day running of their schools anymore or are leaders now primarily focused on structures and takeovers?]

I found myself becoming increasingly nervous and anxious about my professional world.

Half an hour of the hard sell then she got to the point. She was taking her school into the biggest, most successful and also the most notably government-revered Multi Academy Trusts in the county and she had been sent to meet with me to try to recruit my school too.

Me: What have they offered you?

[I think my blunt question has taken her well-rehearsed, persuasive soliloquy by surprise.]

She hesitated then conceded that if she agreed to take her school into the Trust and, in effect, create a new regional hub for the Trust to expand into, she would be elevated to an Executive leadership role, working above all the Heads of other schools within the hub.

I smiled and nodded slowly. It all made sense now. In order to expand and create a hub, it was secondary school budgets that were needed. Primary school funding was small-fry but a secondary school would enable further expansion and takeovers of primary schools.

[It's suddenly very chilly in here.]

*****

The wolves continued to prey. Another call from another Chief Executive; a different Multi Academy Trust this time. Could he come to visit me? Would it be ok to bring his team too? It was just to talk to me about what they could offer my school. Ambushed. One by one they delivered their speeches: the CEO, the Financial Director, the Director of this and Director of that. New

titles I did not recognise. They 'gave' me a week to consider their proposal and to discuss with my Governing Body. Then they would be back in touch.

[I am not going to be able to fight off the predators; they have been given authority to scout for new blood].

[The DfE officials have now decreed that every school in this region will become an Academy. And every Academy will then be placed into a Multi Academy Trust. One way. One mission. One model of education. Schools like mine are a problem. We don't fit the model. We need to be made the same. We need to comply with policy.]

[And if we refuse…?]

<div align="center">*****</div>

One by one, the schools that were left were swallowed up by the new corporate giants. The CEOs prowled around looking for the next rich picking. It was only a matter of time before mine was forced to go too.

<div align="center">*****</div>

Journal extract:

The sharks are circling closer. We are now the last remaining standalone secondary Academy in the region. The increasing pressure to conform. We have said a polite "No thanks," to the numerous CEOs of Trusts that have come with their polished but vacuous sales pitches. In my heart and in my spirit, I do not believe in this vision. It feels dangerous now. Every day seems to grow more sinister. It's only a matter of time. To resist may be futile.

<div align="center">*****</div>

Part 3: Suffering and a de-professionalised self

Often too, at times, our own light goes out.

Albert Schweitzer (1956, p.68)

My story has been incomplete for a large part of this reflective journey. To continue to omit this part is to render the work unfinished, incomplete. Committing to searching for a truth, it is not possible to wholly understand and make sense and meaning of my distinctive personal and professional lives as separate entities, for they are intertwined, inseparable. Without telling the story of suffering, it lacks the rawness of an integrity that proclaims an ontological truth about an experience lived and suffered. It complements the narrative. Without it, what is my story for? What purpose does it serve other than to be another tale of some Headteacher somewhere, working to navigate imposed change and eventually defeated by 'the system' and, who I term, its 'operative agents'.

Frank (1995) terms the writing and sharing of illness narratives as 'quest stories':

> Quest stories meet suffering head on; they accept illness and seek to use it. The quest is defined by the ill person's belief that something is to be gained through the experience. The quest narrative affords the ill person a voice as teller of her own story, because only in quest stories does the teller have a story to tell. The quest narrative affords the ill their most distinctive voice.

(p.115)

This part of my story has been painful to write because I am not yet fully recovered or 'free' – I may never be. My status remains in 'recovery' so there is not yet that same level of detachment that I now feel having removed myself from the toxic professional environment that I perceived to be threatening my very existence. My body, my physical being, is still not wholly mine (Frank, 1991); it is still living and functioning but remains partially dependent on man-made chemical remedies keeping 'the beast' at bay (Moore, 2012); still enduring quarterly checks under the clinical intrusion of the scanner's rays. My body is 'managed' but it 'remembers and re-experiences the pain, hope and tears. My body writes the narrative and relives it' (Defenbaugh, 2008, p.1422).

I can talk about it now without *needing* to talk about it. The scar tissue etched into my torso is replicated on my psyche. My suffering is literally and visibly imprinted onto the body. Frank (1995) references the 'remission society' (p.8) as people who may have been critically ill years

ago but who can still describe in exquisite detail: 'Scars on the body, ever present reminders even though an illness history might be invisible to others now' (*ibid*.).

The open wounds have healed over but the scars will always remain, fixed for an eternity. My spoiled, 'deviant body' is hidden away now (Richards, 2019, p.277); the stigma on its surface is covered, not exposed to anyone's glimpses or stares (Frank, 1995). The mirror reflects disfigured, taut lumps of skin sewn together too tightly, scars from breast to navel, visible and omnipresent, remnants of a body broken and a body almost given up. It is not a body that I want anyone to see.

This next section of data is an uneasy part of the story but its 'uncomfortable quality is all the more reason [it has] to be told' (Frank, 1995, p.58). Perhaps it is true that 'the wound continues to live in the scar' (Pelias, 2004, p.58).

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It was in the autumn when I started to feel unfamiliar, different sensations. Words are not sufficient to describe or to conjure the essence of the physical shift in my being. I was heavy, yet rapidly losing weight. At first it was subtle; no more than a slight loosening of a waistband, nothing dramatic; nothing that a good rest wouldn't remedy.

Yet as I grew heavier, my weight grew lighter. And I was tired, so tired, yet my brain was in a constant state of hyper-cognitive function. My appetite was diminishing yet I was hungry for resolution. I felt danger all around my professional self. I sensed the threats creeping around my school, like thorny briars etching up its walls rendering it into a state of startled impotence, powerless to move against the approaching wave of the new legislation. I didn't feel safe. Not even sleep offered respite.

Then it was Christmas. I have always loved Christmas, despite complaining about the work it generates for the one who does all the hosting.

It happened on that Christmas Day. Standing in the kitchen, preparing the usual festive family fare, I was suddenly engulfed by weakness, sapping every shred of energy. Near to collapse, I called out. I couldn't do it. Supported each side, I climbed the stairs. Exhaustion brought oblivion in hours of sleep. When I eventually woke it was dark and the house was cloaked in silence.

The next few days passed in a haze, waiting for the GP surgery to open after the festive break. Stepping into the consulting room signified the first step into a horror story. Climbing onto the carousel, round and round, to never dismount.

Method-acting:

Tests; waiting; results, referral; waiting; consultation, scans; waiting; x-rays, decisions; waiting; hospital admission; waiting; agony, fear, isolation, loneliness, desolation, longing; waiting; trepidation, hopelessness, despair, emergency, slipping away, ebbing light…..darkness….mortality.[23]

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An email arrived from the DfE Official's office, from someone with a title of 'Project Officer'.

[A Project Officer – an official who works on projects. Converting an entire region's schools into a new structural model of education is considered to be a 'project'.]

Three officials would soon visit my school.

Project officer: This is <u>not</u> an inspection but an <u>informal</u> visit to see what support could be offered to help the school improve.

The team would comprise a former school inspector along with two administrating project officers with no background in teaching or school management experience.

Project officer: We would like you to plan a schedule for us to visit lessons and to interview various staff and students and we will also require the latest performance data to be sent a week before the visit. Just GCSE data on the current year group waiting to sit their qualifications; only the GCSE data.

[Not performance information on any of the other seven hundred children receiving their education in the school at the time then?].

[Is this <u>really</u> not an inspection?]

The day came and went. It felt uneasy. There was clearly an agenda and an elephant in the room so large it practically suffocated any real conversation and obscured the truth of what this visit was about and where it was heading.

Project Officer: We have a positive feeling about what is going on in this school.

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[23] I have chosen to insert some method-acting here to re-visit the swell of emotions I felt and to depict the feeling of being trapped helplessly in a carousel of medical tests, diagnostics and clinical intervention, punctuated by the anxious waiting that follow each stage of the treatment journey.

It was at the feedback meeting at the end of the day. There swiftly followed four points for development; none were a surprise.

Project officer: We're here in a supportive capacity but one of the outcomes of this visit could be for us to broker support from a MAT if you are found to be struggling in any area.

[The first blow applied with acute precision]

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

A letter arrived. It was addressed to the Chair of Governors, not to the Headteacher.

[Am I no longer significant? Is the role of Headteacher being phased out?]

[Why is the Official writing to a lay person, a volunteer and not the Head charged with leading and managing the school?]

I could not fathom how bizarre my professional world was becoming. It was now inhabited by non-elected officials who had no teaching or school management experience but they possessed this false legitimacy to pass judgement and the power to dictate what would happen to a school and its community. Was it not right and proper, and professionally respectful that such a letter should be written to the Headteacher?

[Or is it that the Headteacher is the problem?]

[Am I in the way? Am I an obstruction?]

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

DfE Official: I am writing to summarise my expectations. As you are aware, the visit was triggered as a result of my concerns about the recent KS4 outcomes. The focus of the visit was to provide me with more information regarding the performance of the school.

[No, I was not aware that this was the reason. When the first contact from your team was made there was no mention of concerns. It was billed as an informal visit in a supportive capacity. Now you tell me it was due to you having concerns. Please be honest and transparent.]

DfE Official: The school's overall Progress scores were negatively affected by the large number of students who were not following the full Ebacc curriculum. Insufficient numbers of pupils study three subjects from the Ebacc qualifications (sciences, computer sciences, geography, history or languages).

[True. But my school is an Arts College. And the Ebacc is not a statutory curriculum. But the way that the government now judge schools in the new progress measures in effect make it compulsory by the back door; if an insufficient number of children do not study languages, humanities and sciences together, the school's overall results go down.]

[My school's diverse and creative arts curriculum does not fit the model expected by the DfE.]

It seemed ironic that the visiting officers had singled out the 'outstanding arts offer' in their verbal feedback but here, in this letter, it was the arts curriculum being blamed for negatively affecting the performance measure.

DfE Official: My expectations now are as follows - provide me with an updated action plan; review the existing curriculum offer to determine how students can be enabled to improve Progress scores; reply to confirm the action you are taking within 10 working days.

[Astonishing language; barking and bullish. Issuing orders.]

[Orders addressed to the Chair of Governors – not to the Headteacher.]

The letter signed off with what I had come to expect, the same script I had been listening to for months.

DfE Official: I will ask my team to arrange a follow-up visit to assess the progress you have made in improving your performance. In addition, I would welcome your thoughts on joining a Multi Academy Trust.

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A week later; another official letter. Again, addressed to the Chair of the Governing Body and entitled 'How we will support the school in response to it meeting the coasting definition.'

[We are now 'coasting' as well as 'failing'.]

[More combative language steeped in dark and threatening undertones.]

DfE Official: The Secretary of State has the power to take formal action in a coasting school.[24] This could include re-brokering an Academy to a new sponsor or Multi Academy Trust.

A response was required within 15 days.

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[24] In 2016 the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) were given new powers to convert all inadequate schools to academy status and decide the fate of all coasting schools. These new legal powers greatly expanded the number of schools that the RSCs have responsibilities for and so greatly increased the number on the receiving end of visits from school advisers that were seen as duplicating the work of Ofsted's inspectors (George, 2018).

We now had two letters with different kinds of threats to respond to within a set number of days.

[A final signing off.]

DfE Official: I am sending a copy of this letter to Ofsted.

[Is there no let up? Is this a carefully coordinated ambush?]

10 days later an email from the Project Officer:

Project Officer: I just wanted to remind you that we are still waiting on your coasting and expectation responses which are due.

[But they are not due for another 5 days!]

The following day another email.

Project Officer: I called the school today to follow up on my email from yesterday. Please call me so I know when to expect your coasting response.

<div align="center">*****</div>

Method-acting:

My mother watches me as I return home. I shuffle across the kitchen and fall onto the sofa; I am exhausted. Her eyes are pleading, imploring. My mother is crying. Stop working now, just stop; stop trying to carry on. Stop going into school. You are ill. Accept it. Let the work go now. It's time.

I note the anguish in her eyes and I know what I have to do.

Just not yet. I am not quite ready yet. The school is in too much danger. I cannot stop now.

<div align="center">*****</div>

I had continued to work as long as I could. But I didn't look like me anymore. My clothes hung from my frail and skeletal frame, my teeth suddenly looked too big for my face. My eyes were sunken into hollows, my hair was thin and wispy. My legs struggled to support my body and I had to keep sitting, always sitting. I just could not eat. My body rejected all sustenance other than apples and ginger tea. I was medicated quite heavily now, no longer able to drive but being driven into school by a kind local colleague who collected me cheerily each morning and never made any comment about the huddled exhausted, emaciated figure she drove home early each day.

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But I could not go on. It ended one morning whilst interviewing candidates for a new post. My head went down and was thankfully caught by the swift reflex action of a colleague before it smashed onto the corner of the table. I was gathered up, shepherded slowly out of the building, senior staff flanking the corridors, eyes lowered, heads down, hushed whispers, clearing the way as quickly and stealthily as possible so as not to cause any disturbance to the unsuspecting children safely ensconced in lessons.

I remember the doctor coming. I can vaguely recollect the first injection of morphine, flooding my veins and enveloping me in a sense of artificial, chemically-induced peace, temporarily relieved of suffering. The prescribed oral opiates I had been taking just did not take the pain away anymore. I was moving into a different league now. I was disappearing.

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The deterioration was rapid.

The doctor came again and my breathing grew more and more shallow.

Frantic phone calls, raised voices, ambulance, blue light, screaming siren.

I could still hear but only through a distant muffled fog. Oxygen mask, needles, heart monitor. I drifted in and out of consciousness; but I wasn't there anymore. I was detaching from my own physical being.

My body, a lump of broken matter. I was still inside it; tormented, trapped. I was present but simultaneously aloof. Removed.

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The next official letter arrived:

DfE Official: It remains my expectation that the school joins a Multi Academy Trust. I would like you to meet with the Chair and CEO of your neighbouring Trust and for you to thoroughly consider this merger before I make my final decision.

That was it. The knell signalling the end; it was done. Project completed.

[Mission accomplished]

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Method-acting:

It starts with a tingling feeling in the feet. It slowly creeps up through the calves, warming, comforting as it travels. It gathers pace and momentum and by the time it reaches the abdomen it literally flies at such speed, engulfing the organs, drenching, extinguishing the pain, flushing it away, lifting the body high to a weightless oblivion; upwards, floating, commanding uncontested surrender to a deep and comatose sleep.

I have no sense of time. Is it day or night? My life is punctuated by doses of morphine.

I can feel myself slipping further and further away.

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I can't open my eyes. I can hear but I can't see.

I can't feel my body. I can't move. Where am I?

What time is it? What day is it?

I am so thirsty but I can't lift my head to sip the water.

I have no strength.

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I awake from surgery and I can hear my mother's voice. I feel momentarily soothed. My father stands alongside my hospital bed. He is unsure where to place himself. My body is covered in tubes and lines hooked to machines. There is a constant bleeping sound. My father looks stiff and uncomfortable but he is there, transmitting a sense of safety. He touches my forehead awkwardly. No one knows how to touch me anymore.

You can't hold my hand – there's a needle in it – my life line.

You can't pat my arms – they're bruised, purple and tender.

You don't want to stroke my face – the cheekbones are hollow, my skin is like tissue paper.

Don't lift the covers and see my body – it's disfigured. Ugly. Broken.

The nurse comes. I am injected again, carried away into another peaceful oblivion.

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So began months of painfully slow recovery. Completely dependent on round-the-clock care, I couldn't do anything for myself. Simple actions like taking a shower were no longer possible alone. My mother resumed her maternal role of bathing my vulnerable, frail and weak body each day. No one else but my mother would see what I had become underneath my loosely hanging garments.

My body had been ravaged by starvation; my ribs protruded, my back sharply defined; bones of shoulder blades barely covered by skin. Sixty six pounds of body mass gone.

I was bound by a strict programme of weight recovery, gagging five times a day on revolting, tepid high-calorie milkshakes usually given to sufferers of anorexia.

My father fed me soup.

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Journal extract:

I am disfigured. I am nothing but bones and skin. My wound is infected and weeping as my heart is bleeding. This savage illness. It has me in its vice-like grip. I hate myself. What has *happened* to me?

I am nothing. I am no one. And I cannot find God.

Where are you?

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Journal extract:

I spend my afternoons lying on my bed; I am motionless, floating; I have no strength other than to lie still and watch the sky. I watch every cloud formation, shifting, changing, flowing forwards away from my frame of vision, carried away with the wind. I'm struck by the colours of dappled winter skies; they are so vibrant but then ethereal in their shades of soft blue, delicate pinks, golden, fading colour. My bedroom window is my frame of visual reference. It is still and peaceful. Silent afternoons spent gazing in wonder at the sky until the medication takes hold and lifts me away. Sleep and awakening are framed in images of the afternoon sky.

I feel a longing to float upwards into the sky. Take my body, sky, carry me into your beauty, take this pain and soothe it away with your gentle colours; swallow me into your fading light. Make me go away… lift me into your kaleidoscope of colour. I see the beauty of all creation in the sky.

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Journal extract:

I need to go away. I cannot get well here. I need to be alone away from all these people who keep calling. They are well-meaning but they don't understand that I need to be alone. I don't need watching over all day. I'm cross and agitated. I'm irritable with everyone.

I have found a healing spa specialising in regaining wellbeing post-surgery. But it's far away. It's expensive but what's the price of regaining my health and strength? I rang and spoke to a kind lady, explained my illness and my need to progress my recovery. She kept referring to juices and therapy sessions. But I want to get well and strong. I don't want therapy or to be fed juices!

I shared the plan with my family but they brought me back with a hard hitting thud of reality. I can barely make it to the front door - how then do I envisage travelling 250 miles?

I feel alone, broken and desperate. How long will I be like this? Why can't I have my life back? No one understands. I wish everyone would go away and leave me alone!

*****

Method-acting:

It is the week of the annual school production. I should be there. I am always there, every night and at each matinee performance. But I am not there.

I have received a card from the student cast. They are sending me get well wishes and thanking me for supporting the production. But I am not there, how can I support them? They have each signed it and written a personal message. I can feel their excitement. I feel wretched; tears are pricking my eyes. I start to plan; it always feels better to have plan. I am planning how I can be there, how I can travel to school and surprise them. I feel better already. I'm excited to share the plan with my friends. I send a text message to one; their response deflates me. How can I think of travelling all that way? I cannot even walk properly. I have barely enough strength to sit upright in a chair all day. What am I thinking of?

But I seek to persuade. I can have a wheelchair; we have a wheelchair at school for those who are sick or injured.

NO! You can't let anyone see you like this. You're the Head. You can't be seen as weak. You cannot, must not let people see you as you are now.

Why?

You will shock and upset people. The sight of you. The children cannot and should not remember you like this. They have to remember you as strong, as a leader, as the Head. You will go back there when you're strong. For now you cannot contemplate it. Let it go.

I look in the mirror. My friend is right.

I accept this verdict with a heavy, reluctant spirit.

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I slept or I sat. Weeks passed as I slept then sat and read a little. Visitors came to call. My Priest became my lifeline, drawing me into a new reality, awakening a new life in faith. He had administered the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and now accompanied me through my healing. He came every Sunday morning to bring me the Lord in Holy Communion and to share reflections on the scriptures and we prayed together. I was greatly comforted by this and the acts of kindness of people in my community.

562 cards had been handmade or written by the children in my school. Get-well wishes; 'missing you' sentiments; some sharing news of their accomplishments in letters. People came with presents: flowers, healing oils and candles, books.

The kindness of people and the healing presence of the Lord were beckoning me to wellness.

Slowly, gradually, I came back.

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Re-formation

> We *need* the struggle. It's the struggle that gets the circulation going in our wings. If you cut short the struggle we will never fly.

<div style="text-align: right">Margaret Silf (2017, p.134)</div>

Journal extract:

It is often misunderstood that loneliness and solitude are not the same. Religious life requires some solitude, even in community there is withdrawal and retreat. Retreat as a concept has become immensely important for educators, particularly for education leaders. To retreat holds connotations of drawing back, shrinking away from, withdrawing, removing; retreat from the world collectively as a group or alone; silent retreat living in community with others or a complete and holistic retreat into a singleness, solitary solitude. To retreat into solitude can be the most powerful and spiritual nourishment; it is silence that feeds the soul. Spending silent time clears the mind of clutter. The mind clear of everyday distraction, demands, pressures and interruptions is a mind that creates open spaces for contemplation, time spent in the presence of the Lord is the gentlest, lifting of the mist through which our eyes struggle to see every day. Clarity that accompanies contemplative practice sweeps away the haze and leads to the ability to be able to truly discern.

There is wisdom in discernment, borne of contemplation. Decisions made in haste, conclusions drawn too soon in an absence of facts, judgements made under frustration or impetuousness are not generally wise decisions. At a time when the contemporary age is filled with a multitude of stressors, unknown factors, uncharted variables, an absence of stability and knowing, a growth of power-wielding, self-interested societies, there is a conspicuous absence of wisdom. Time spent in solitude is arguably a must, a necessity for all those who, by role and definition, are required to discern wisdom in decision-making.

I love and appreciate the times I am able to spend in solitude. As a Headteacher that is never possible during a working day in a busy inner-city school. But it is possible at home. My home has become a haven. I appreciate every facet of my home more than I ever did. I thank God for my home and the immense peace and contentment it brings me. Whenever I can, I retreat into a silent solitude in my home. By the grace of its rural location, silence is possible. Just the gentle sounds of nature, birdsong, the occasional engine or clumping of horse hooves break the silent cells of time. In silence I listen to that inner voice. I listen to God. I need that sense of silence, of solitude, just to hear. There are times when I cannot hear but I am overwhelmed with a warm

sense of peace and tranquillity envelops my being. I feel comfort in these moments. I am flooded with gratitude that perhaps can only be borne out of suffering and despair.

In my dark period, in illness, in professional despair, I never experienced peace. I was emotionally tormented. Physical peace was induced by paralysing opiate medication. It was illusory peace. Now in this second life, peace is God-filled and God-given. In solitude there is no pretence. There is no image to uphold, no meaningless interaction or transaction, no role to play, nothing. It is just me and my own company. My companion in solitude is the Lord. I understand now why Jesus often sought to be alone in his ministry. Solitude, spending time focused on prayer in the company of the Lord; that is real soul-fuel. To glean the strength to carry out a mission, to undertake a meaningful ministry, relies on a full tank of soul-fuel. Too often leaders run on empty. I made that mistake many times and my leadership and decision making were the poorer for it.

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Journal extract:

I am musing on power. Wherein lies the *real* power? Power-wielding; power possessing. Power assigned; power holding. Power over, power to; human power; divine power – can they intertwine?

There is a weakness in power and a strength in power. The deepest power lies in raw vulnerability. Is it Insight – second sight? Borne from surrender. Meekness.

Why do we run from vulnerability? Why is vulnerability seen as weakness? Vulnerability and brokenness are held within meekness. Meekness is never weakness. Meekness generates a new and different kind of power. It is not a power associated with position or domination, of force or fear or coercion. It is the power of wisdom. Is there a visceral power in wisdom that can be borne of suffering? There is power in release, in letting go; a power that comes from refusing to subscribe to any form of wielded power. There is power in simplicity; power that disarms and disables. There is power in dis-ability.

Everything has turned upside down. Nothing is the same anymore.

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Journal extract:

A preference for detachment has shaped my life for as long as I can remember. I have relied upon the ability to detach in order to carve out moments of solitude. Never get too close; hold back with a view of everything, stay on the periphery. Look ahead and around. Join in but never be at the centre. Participate but leave room to withdraw; notice the exits.

Detachment is my shield, a protective garment for the soul. People have an immense capacity to hurt and maim; to dominate, control; to dictate, to influence, to manipulate. We all hold these shades of darkness in our souls but I never want to wield power over another person and I want to protect myself from enabling another to wield power over me. So I detach.

But in detaching I can find depths of soul; detachment creates a space between my emotional human frailty and my spiritual growth. And it is there that room is made to simply spend time with the Lord.

I naturally detach now; from places, people, situations, roles, responsibilities. No longer a sense of guilt or duty to do this, compelled to do that; no longer controlled. Comfort in the presence of detachment disarms fear and prevents it from entering my life.

And where fear cannot find its way in, there is no act of violence, real or symbolic, that can be inflicted upon me that will lead to feeling disarmed or dethroned, bitter or mistreated. I am unafraid.

I do not have a kingdom or a throne. I am nothing more than a humble servant. I give my life to the Lord. I breathe in God and the Spirit dwells within me.

A quiet acceptance that what will be, will be God's *will* to be.

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Epilogue

Method-acting:

I rise early at 4.30 am. I leave my house in darkness. The silence and the air are exquisitely clear and fresh. The pre-dawn sky is black and peppered with stars. I look up and look forward. The village is silent and sleeping. I walk alone through the darkness but I am not alone; the Lord is with me. There is peace and calm, a sense of infinite, open space as the train moves through the countryside. The light is forming now. The colours! The sky is captivating. The hazy mist floating, suspended above the fields. I am distracted from my work and enraptured by this ethereal beauty. It is a gift; it is God's gift of this day and to begin this day with such grace and beauty is a blessing. I am filled with gratitude.

The city approaches and the air has changed. The landscape is no longer open, every space is taken. The pace quickens; people hurry away from the train, human shapes scattering and scurrying up and down the steps, across the concourse, through the barriers, out to the streets, a human swarm. But I hold back. I cannot walk that quickly anymore. I move at my pace; gentle but steady.

I am squashed inside a tube train but it isn't for long. Others will leave soon and I will continue on up the line. I exit the station breathing an air thick with tobacco smoke. The streets are littered; the traffic speeds aggressively; horns are sounding, drivers are angry. Everything goes by so fast but I am moving slowly and steadily. I could easily feel intimidated but I don't. I am not alone.

I reach the High Street. The air has changed again. Not only tobacco fused with exhaust fumes but peppered with the stench of cannabis smoke. It lingers. I see some of my students walking to school. They see me and wave and shout across the road unselfconsciously: 'Good morning, Miss!' I smile and wave back. As I near my new school I gather in more students. A sea of blue uniforms merge to join the parade into the school road, talking, laughing, sharing, oblivious, or just de-sensitised to deprivation and danger, the streets once renowned for their violence.

I enter the gates, up the steps. The doors open and I breathe in the presence of the Lord. The spirit is tangible. A tranquil peace and harmony, safety, a community enclosed within the walls and gardens. This is now where I serve. This is my ministry. It isn't work; it is the centre of my vocation. God made me well again and He brought me here to this place of beauty and unique spirituality. There is nowhere else on God's earth that I would rather be.

Faith and Revelation: suffering, healing and reparation

I use a lens of Ignatian spirituality to reflexively analyse the story that has formed the data for this study[25]. The charism of the Catholic school that I now lead is rooted in the Jesuit tradition that is founded upon the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola: 'seeing God in all things' (Hughes, 1985, p.47). Assuming that God is always present and active in our lives (Fleming, 2008), the charism defines its members as 'contemplatives in action' (Martin, 2012; Fleming, 2008; Lowney, 2003), those who reflect and practice a deep and rich inner contemplation as well as reaching out to others in order to carry out God's wishes and to do His work. God calls, and Ignatian followers respond (Fleming, 2008). Life and astute decision-making are rooted in the spiritual practice of discernment which leads to a deepening spiritual wisdom and interpretation of feelings, free from attachments and from the pursuit of self.

I note a parity between myself, my life and faith journey with that of the particular journey of St. Ignatius. Being born to second life following a period of acute suffering, finding God through that suffering in a new and deeper relationship, living more as an instrument of God, detached and contemplative, feeding the soul through periods of retreat, silence and solitude, neither drawn into nor harnessed by power or falsity, aware of a truer self and a letting-go of past attachments; this sequence of events resonates with some of the life events that are known about St. Ignatius and his transformative path to a second life.

Through this analysis and, adopting a researcher's critical eye, I seek to examine the nuances of the data, to interrogate the self, to take myself on. The process has not been easy as confirmed by the Jesuit, John Powell (1985): 'Engaging in self-reflection and introspection is hard: we have to make a real effort to get out of ourselves, to unshackle ourselves' (p.89).

I aim to reach a certain level of intersubjectivity by seeking to engage in intersubjectivity with myself; to study my inner self with an external objective eye as far as autoethnography will allow; to peel away the layers of the narrative, the dialogue, the thought-tracking and method-acting and to reach a deeper insight into my human, fallible self. I seek to expose the complexities of character traits, thought patterns, actions and reactions between two halves of life from what I see as my first half of life, of personal formation and my life in the ministry of

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[25]Fleming (2008) describes Ignatian spirituality as a 'spiritual "way of proceeding" that offers a vision of life, an understanding of God, a reflective approach to living, a contemplative form of praying, a reverential attitude to our world and an expectation of finding God daily' (p.vii)

teaching and school leadership, through to what I view as my second half of life beginning with my period of acute suffering leading to a re-formation of self (Rohr, 2012).

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

Part One: Debut

My managerial journey was not always straightforward and the data reveals more time spent out of my comfort zone and out of my depth. I had felt inadequate and sometimes fraudulent in role as a senior leader and very much on the steepest of learning curves. But every challenge was one of essential learning and preparation.

Wolterstorff (2002) suggests that there is a uniqueness in human existence in how 'human beings enter the world at a certain point in history' and that 'world situations into which they enter then becomes their own world situation, in the sense that it shapes them and they shape it. They enter culture that is at a certain point in its development' (p.93). I entered senior leadership just after the birth of the City Academies programme. Prior to my appointment, I had been untouched by it; there were only two Academies then in my resident county.

But the feeling that I was outgrowing my first senior leadership position spurred me on to see what opportunities for deputy headships there were at the time. When I saw the advertisement for a Vice Principal of a new City Academy, I was struck by the visually polished, artistic imagery presented in high resonance and gloss. I was sold on the Academies programme, drawn towards it.

Gewirtz et al. (2004) refer to political spin as being ubiquitous. I was wholly affected by the spin of the Academies programme; a chance to create an education underpinned by a philosophy that resonated with every value I could connect with. I was interested in the opportunity to design a curriculum that would enable children to learn about culture, languages and the arts. My heart burned and I felt certain that this was where I wanted to be. Reviewing this time through an Ignatian lens, reveals a level of spiritual immaturity, that I was immediately impressed and enticed by visual images, artist impressions, 'ubiquitous spin' (*ibid*.); my ego leading me to apply so that I could be a part of this new project; probably more about *me* and *my* ambition and career success than about altruism, service and philanthropic regeneration.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

My data exposes irony in how I had made earlier reference to the 'career ladder'; there is irony too in how roles opened up to me without my actively seeking them. External circumstances led me towards early-career subject leadership and it was an external crisis that led to an opportunity to take over as an early-career Acting Principal following the death of the Principal at the coastal Academy. I see God moving in my life at pivotal moments, opening pathways pointing the way. I was open to these at the time but not yet spiritually mature to recognise and understand the movement of the Spirit.

The data here reveals fear entering my professional life for the first time; fear of failing, inadequacy, of legitimacy, of a self-perceived lack of credentials, fear of letting people down; fear about my own feelings of fear itself. Fear had never haunted me earlier in my life when I had faced the potentially catastrophic failure to reach the standards of a performing musician; that time was not engulfed by fear, only by relief and a sense of freedom. But fear now dominated my personal and inner discourse, that the prospect of confronting failure on what I saw as my life's true path, would be crushing and unpalatable. I did not fear changing my life's path away from musicianship towards teaching because performing was not my vocation; the only apprehension I felt at that time of life-changing decision-making was that I would be a disappointment to my family. But I certainly did fear *failing* in teaching and leadership as that was the path I had chosen to follow, who I felt I was meant to be. The profession had come to define my very existence. To therefore potentially fail as a *person*, created a space where egocentric fear resided.

My faith leads me to understand where the strength and drive to continue and fulfil my duty came from; faith extinguishes my fear. At key times of hardship and challenge that I reference throughout my data, it is faith that has been the carrier of personal strength and resilience. I place my faith in God and myself in God's hands; doubt and fear are slowly reduced, dismantled, then overcome.

The sense of duty that I felt to the coastal Academy, loyalty to the late Principal and his final words to me: 'You must finish our project' handed me a sense of shared stewardship of the school. His treatment of me as his deputy always left me with a sense of being valued and included; although he held status, nationally recognised as a 'Hero-Head', the leadership of the school was never just about him. His words propelled me forward and the trust placed in me by the Sponsor and the faith placed in me by the school community ignited a new confidence in myself in role as a first-time Headteacher.

This confidence later formed the impetus to take the leap of faith to close the chapter on my time at the coastal Academy. Alongside the growth of confident leadership was a developing stoicism, cementing my own personal leadership values and education philosophy. When I felt that my values did not align with those of the newly appointed Principal, I began to feel increasingly unsettled. I was dispirited by what had happened to the philanthropic project that I had felt some ownership of and I was disappointed that the promise of the Academies programme had not turned out in the way that I had hoped and understood it to be.

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Who cares for the carer? Who coaches the coach? Who counsels the counsellor?

John West-Burnham (2009, p.82).

I had never experienced mortality in the workplace before; I felt that somehow death and grief did not belong in professional life. Numbness and shock enveloped me. The school, in its grief-stricken state, was a living 'powerhouse of emotion' (Harris, 2007, p.3). I had felt blessed to be in a job that I still could not actually believe was mine. I was exhilarated and raised up higher than I could imagine, overwhelmed with gratitude to be a part of this important social and life-changing project. But then it all suddenly crashed down around me and revealed a fascinating dualism: the beauty and openness of human nature in the aftermath of shock or suffering juxtaposed in stark contrast to, what felt like, an unforgiving set of impossible expectations that the school still had to meet in this new ontological era of business-oriented Academy education.

Whilst the school community sought to come to terms with the shock of sudden loss of its leader, the pressure to deliver on results did not cease or lessen. Assuming the leadership role and, alongside it, the responsibility, revealed to me the true weight of the burden that the education system places on its school leaders. West-Burnham (2009) posed the question of why in education, so much is placed on the value of one person, why the Head carries the weight of the organisation and its performance on a single pair of shoulders. I watched as the work took a serious toll on the Principal and his wellbeing. He assumed a position of power and authority, exuding invincibility in how he delivered his mission. Yet he was not immune to physical exhaustion and emotional vulnerability as a leader (Ackermann and Ostrowski, 2002). Hargreaves (2005) had warned of the consequences of a 'leadership that drains its leaders through multiple demands, overwork or excessive expectations' (p.183); it would never be a leadership that would survive.

I understand now why God placed me there and especially so at that time. I was there to flow and to heal (Rohr, 2016). It felt as if people needed to feel safe, secure, together, unified and united in mission. I can now discern the spirit of my faith that guided me and each decision made. It was strength, courage and conviction that carried me in faith. 'Faith gives people the strength to deal with life as it truly is' (O' Reilly, 20019, p.9). At the time I was unaware of the Spirit moving within me; my spiritual recognition then was shallow and confined to an operational, mechanical, immature faith practice.

<div align="center">*****</div>

> If we "sit in the company of mockers" (Psalm 1:1), we will become like them
>
> Timothy Keller (2017, p.95)

It is astonishing how quickly one person can ignite a depth of change in a short space of time; how quickly a culture can shift. I had underestimated the power placed in the hands of the person at the top of an organisation and how it affects others (Peck, 2018). I learned a lot about power and politics in the few months following the arrival of the new Principal. I learned about the ability of power to affect change on people surrounding the centre of power; people who are both touched and influenced and sometimes seduced by it (Pfeffer, 1994). But I too had been seduced by the power of an image and a vision of the Academies programme. I was not free from the trappings of temptation.

I perceived at the time that the vision and the mission of the late Principal that I had felt so protective of, was being dismantled and replaced. It felt unbearable to witness what I viewed as 'political manoeuvring, dishonest and destructive' leadership behaviours (Deal, 2005, p.112), and when other leaders, my colleagues, appeared to turn upon one another in a bid to win the admiration of the new Principal, my position felt untenable. I saw fear replacing comradery, a climate of suspicion that quickly destroyed the energy that once flowed within the senior team (Tomsett, 2015). I felt unable to be the authentic version of myself in that environment and I found it deeply distressing:

> I think of Christians in business and public life who face the challenge of living for Jesus where he has placed them, but wonder if they might be better off keeping their faith quiet, lest they incur the wrath of those they work with or serve.
>
> Peck (2018, p.8)

Sokolow and Houston (2008) suggest that real power lies in one's ability to make choices. In exercising my choice to move on from the City Academy, I was able to find relief from what I perceived to be an oppressive, overbearing power. I saw the difference between exercising power *over* and power *to* (Sergiovanni, 2001). The power *over* me felt like a power of control and manipulation; but the power *to* make a decision to leave was a facilitative form of power, a positive and 'empowering' power in securing the next steps on my leadership journey. At that time I was not ready to accept my situation as anything other than oppressive and unfair. I hooked all my disappointment onto the Academies programme. Carrying out the wishes of the late Principal had given me a sense of purpose and it became a year of healing work into which I could channel my own sense of loss, grief and sadness. Part of the fear that I had felt in being appointed to take over in the role of Acting Principal was that I was going to be a poor substitute for him; it had become more about me, about the self and my own sense of legitimacy and position than about the self in altruistic service. This fear seemed to be confirmed when the new Principal was appointed and I was consigned to my former status as Vice Principal. This sense of relegation was expounded by the fact that I could not even return to my former role; I had given that away to another Vice Principal when I became the Acting Head. The role I was given when I returned to the Vice Principal position was a lesser role; it had less power and influence. I was driven by a bruised ego and my own sense of self-importance.

I was disempowered; dethroned; reduced. As others assumed new positions of power and influence under the new Principal's leadership, I felt pushed out, unimportant, dispensable. The way that I write about the 'manoeuvring into position' of the other senior leaders, the changes noted in others' behaviour and attitudes, is steeped in negativity and 'othering'; I was repulsed by what I perceived to be happening. I saw the faces of other leaders being 'disfigured' - a term to reference how unrecognisable they had become to me but also a term taken from Old Testament scripture prophesying Christ's face as disfigured and unrecognisable from the violence at his crucifixion (Isaiah 52:14). But these perceptions were borne out of my own sense of inadequacy and loss of power and status; my own feelings that violence had been committed towards me. In my mind, it was not *me* that was disfigured by it, it was the others who had become disfigured by their actions and their seeming indifference now towards me.

The air in the Boardroom is referenced as being 'stagnant with oppression and the thick stench of aftershave' (p.67), not in the sense of a feminist comment on the gender make-up of the team, but more to depict an air that was difficult for me to breathe, an air that, to me, was not clean or pure but toxified by unpleasant and overpowering odours representing attitudes and behaviours that were harsh, brutal and unforgiving. The stench of conflicting perfumes

metaphorically references the competing personas around the leadership table. In feeling repulsed by this perception, I was again 'othering' and setting myself apart and I sought to retreat, a pattern so often evident in my own behaviour when I am faced with something contradictory to my own values. But analysing my responses and behaviour at this point, it was *me* that was projecting blame and responsibility onto others through my own pursuit of the self; of self-protection and self-preservation. In reacting to my demotion through projecting negativity onto others, I can see how I had become seduced by power, and attached to status, recognition and influence. Because I had succeeded in my year as appointed Acting Principal, I had assumed a self-appointed ownership of this role. When that image was dispelled and I had to confront a new reality, one in which I was not so important or powerful, or admired, I reacted in a way to discredit those that had assumed a status and power that I no longer held. In this way, all I had come to view as distasteful about my profession, I had actually personified. I had become an 'idolater of status and power' (Hughes, 1985, p.65).

I was clearly unaware at the time of how far I had moved away from the roots of my faith. It was easy to hook the weight of blame onto other people or to the Academies programme; to project the unhappiness I felt about my own loss of self-importance to an 'other'. The simple act of holding oneself in high esteem constitutes a barrier to receiving God's grace (Wetta, 2017), to the emptying of the self that is required to make room for the Spirit to move within the self.

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Part Two: Ministry and Headship in a changing educational landscape

I question whether I took the decision to apply for a substantive headship as a means of re-establishing and reaffirming my own sense of worth. I had been disempowered and therefore my instinct at the time was to re-empower. Being appointed to a substantive headship awarded me status once again and I felt vindicated, legitimised with status resumed. Through the physical distance I could now put between myself and the City Academy experience that had 'wronged' me I was able to emotionally distance myself and overlay a new self-constructed inner narrative in which I was worthy again; there *was* a place for me in Academy leadership. I *was* good enough to be an Academy Head. I was still driven by a search for power and status; there was no humility in my quest to secure another headship, it was an ego-driven mission rather than one undertaken with an Ignatian humble heart.

Negative feelings towards the Academies programme were set aside and I had constructed a new inner narrative that now overlooked the feelings of rejection, demotion, inadequacy and

loss of status that I had wrapped up as being part of the Academies programme and, instead, reconciled me to be an authentic Head with an important place within it. As it was a different type of Academy; not a Sponsored Academy where I had to live out someone else's vision, but a Converter Academy, there would be space to develop and implement *my* vision and, through my appointment by the Trust Board of this Single Academy Trust, I was awarded power and legitimacy to do this. I felt comforted in a sense of ownership and through being in control again. The data privileges the 'I' and the 'me'; suddenly the Academies programme was no longer the villainous enigma responsible for my former demise. I was conveniently forgetful of how negatively I had come to view it and, instead, was reconciled because I was awarded a new place of authority within it.

It was a fictional narrative in my inner dialogue that I constructed at the time but it is also a revealing one as it demonstrates how power and influence, position and status had become my own personal mission; how far away I had travelled from my early mission as a serving teacher.

An interesting binary is revealed here: the further I had travelled up the career ladder, the more distance I had created between what I now understand to be my true self and my leadership self; the pursuit of achievement and recognition that I had appeared to shy away from as a child, was overpowering the persona that once preferred peace and solitude and did not care for the spotlight. Now in my career, I was wholly driven by ego and this created a widening gulf between my differing selves. Echoes of my earlier life when I can see how my pursuit of musical training distanced me from the sense of normal life I had lived growing up, a pursuit of achievement and recognition can be seen again at this career point. Moving further up in achievement can therefore, arguably, lead to moving further away from the root of who a person truly is.

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I revelled in headship, but I made a serious error. In being so preoccupied with my own ego, putting my stamp of influence on my school, announcing my arrival with a series of sweeping changes to structure, buildings, even the school uniform, encapsulated perfectly by the remark made by my PA referring to me as the 'new broom', I misread and misunderstood the politics of state education under the Coalition government. I failed to acknowledge that my school was still part of a wider culture where performativity and fulfilling the required standards prescribed by the state were a prerequisite for success. I was too focused on re-culturing the inner life of the school, that I ignored the exterior world and failed to establish the prescribed curriculum that would afford the school a respectable position in the league tables. I failed to understand the world that I now resided in. I did not implement the prescribed curriculum because I did not

agree with it. I thought I possessed the power to shape the school's curriculum around the core subjects and the arts. I misunderstood my authority and autonomy as a Head. I may have been awarded power and status through my appointment, but I was not awarded total autonomy and power as a Head of a state-funded school that was subject to the same performance measures as all other schools. I was not awarded the power to privilege certain subjects just because the school specialised in the arts and because I was a musician. My leadership life as an early-career Headteacher was immersed in hubris and an arrogance that would have no place in the contemplative world of Ignatian ministry.

When my school's lower-than-average performance in the league tables attracted interest from government officials, my immediate instinct was to feel outraged, then to fight back through seeking to discredit and undermine the methodology used to calculate results and to seek to exempt my school from this methodology because I believed that the arts could legitimately be privileged through its arts college designation. I was seeking to separate my school from the world it was part of; just as I had always sought to separate myself from the mainstream, to be on the periphery of the crowd, I was now seeking to separate my school in the same way. The data suggests that I had come to view my school as an embodiment of me. Throughout my life there are threads revealed of similar patterns of behaviour, seeking separation and detachment, withdrawal or retreat, whenever I faced a challenge that left me feeling uncertain or anything that threatened my sense of stability and control. I had hubristically come to view the school as an extension of me (Brighouse, 2015), and I reacted with hostility to my power and authority being scrutinised. It was foolish and arrogant to assume that power awarded to me by appointed status was a power that could not be undermined by an authority higher than myself.

Examining this through a lens of Ignatian spirituality, there is no greater power than that of the omnipotent God; there is no will of man that can overpower the will of God. If this is indeed so, then the reactions of man need not stir such depth of feeling. I would be berated by the words of St. Paul for being consumed by power and status: 'a false God' (1 Cor: 10), and through my attachment to this form of idolatry:

> If we are to be free then we must not be enslaved. If my life is determined and regulated in all its details by my desire for wealth, then I become a slave of the wealth and desire, subordinating every other desire and value of my life to this predominant desire… if I become so enamoured of my power to control others or of my own self-importance that I subordinate every other desire and value to it, then I am enslaved by those attachments.
>
> Hughes (1985, p.61)

I question whether my distaste towards Headteacher colleagues who appeared to embrace the new emerging Multi Academy Trust structures and who elevated to higher positions of power and authority, stemmed from my own insecurity and concern that I was being left behind. The thought-tracking in my data at this point reveals an inner dialogue where I am seeking to interpret a way to reconcile with myself what was happening, and this reveals insecurities and my lack of confidence in potentially overseeing a primary school when I had no knowledge or experience of leading primary education. Burying my insecurities and siding with the children who, I convinced myself, were being disadvantaged because they might lose their Headteacher to other schools under the Multi Academy Trust structure and feeling aggrieved that I had reached the pinnacle of my career in becoming a Headteacher only to then feel the familiar sense of demotion as other roles were created and elevated above mine in the hierarchy of the state education system, emerges hubristically through the data.

Finding myself in role as the last remaining Head of a Single Academy Trust in my region and, being subject to the interest of what I perceived to be the power-grabbing predators, threatened my security. It wasn't just about my school being taken over; it was about *me* not wanting to lose *my* power and autonomy. My reaction was fear and fight as well as fear and flight. I retreated again, stopped attending meetings and therefore I could shut out the external world and withdraw to my 'kingdom'.

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Acts of comparison are frequently evident in how I describe Headteacher interactions. I had noted how the language amongst fellow Heads was changing and how colleagues were changing their behaviours and language towards one another perhaps as an egocentric consequence of comparing:

> People tend to compare themselves with other people. Our worldview tends to lend itself to across the board envy, competition and comparison. No wonder so many people are anxious. The ego only knows itself through comparisons. Comparing is a losing game. Our reference points are always changing. We are building on sand.
>
> Rohr (1996, p.57)

But in faith, trust is placed entirely in the will of God. It is to God and the scriptures that Catholic leaders look for guidance and the wisdom to discern the right path. That is not to say that faith

school leaders should become immune to or ignorant of what surrounds them in their mission, rather that they should be mindful of the negative consequences that can arise from trusting in courses of action that are rooted in simply following the popular actions of the time.

The new model of education was quickly becoming the dominant model and dominated the thinking and actions of Heads working within it. Richards (2019) notes how 'when one is not part of the dominant group, one can easily become subordinated to their narratives' (p.282). At the moment that my Headteacher colleague revealed her thinking over which Academy Trust to join, notably considering the offered personal benefits to her career, this 'subordination' was clearly evident. The assumptions made at the business lunch that I would be persuaded to take my school into the Multi Academy Trust on the strength of a possible future career as a CEO myself, indicates how consensus can lead to an expectation that members of a particular group within a particular field will all think in similar ways.

The Multi Academy Trust model of education as envisioned by the government and then promoted by the Regional Commissioner teams, gradually began to dominate the social space, influencing the Headteachers within it to either adopt the same thinking or compel them to accept and adapt to the new agenda.

> Sometimes we see consensus as sufficient backing for a value. If a community collectively considers that something is to be done in a certain way, often, that will be sufficient reason for doing it this way. Norms get established within a community and a community comes to expect conformity to its norms.
>
> Haydon (2007, p.14)

I struggled to understand why those around me seemed to accept and participate in this change without question. I was uneasy and mistrustful. Silf (2017) suggests that 'popular opinion doesn't always lead to the wisest choices' (p.76). For me, a deeper question was forming and that was why, if my Headteacher colleagues were ready and willing to accept the new model and comply and conform, was I so passionately against it?

The move to fully academise a region and then place every Academy into a Multi Academy Trust could be viewed as an example of a government exercising its power over schools and school leaders through structure. Pfeffer (1994) suggests that power and structure are linked and that 'structural changes are often undertaken as one of the more important strategies for exercising power' (p.267). A new structure requires schools to *re*-structure its systems and its people. In using a re-structure to empower the Headteachers to become CEOs and Executive Headteachers, there lies a deeper consequence of the disempowering of other Headteachers who would

become subordinated to a lower level of power and decision-making. Herein lies the sense of *mistrust* in the new structure of Trusts.

I wrote the first journal entry presented in this section at a time when I was feeling threatened, defeated and morale was low. The language I used to depict this feeling personified the CEOs as predators: first wolves, then sharks. I felt as if my school was prey.

Assessing the natural human reaction to fight or flee, I chose to stay and fight, moving towards the danger that I perceived but not yet understanding that to do this, facilitates the emergence of a subtle wisdom (Maurer, 1996). I suspected that there may be another strategy in process that would force the merger of the school into a larger Trust. But I did not know what this process could be. It was that sense of not knowing, being forced to wait, that made it feel all the more sinister and dark. Dorrell (2015) speaks of the 'ever extending tentacles of power' (p.1) attached to the Department for Education. English and Bolton (2016) reference how the interests of those who are in power, those who dominate in their ideas, will always be to preserve their hegemony. My fear as the Head of the last remaining standalone Academy in the region, was that there would soon be nothing more I could do from my position within the educational hierarchy, to prevent this from happening. Despite this, I did move towards the danger and, in doing so, endured the consequences.

The constructed narrative was that the school was failing to meet expectations and that its curriculum needed to be changed in order to place sufficient weight upon the English Baccalaureate subjects and less on the creative subjects. Measures used to judge the level of a school's success are able to strengthen a narrative of success or failure, thus awarding power to those applying the measures to take political control over what is taught (Pring, 2004). The government, in placing higher value on academic, language and humanity subjects, over and above the value of creative and practical subjects, had privileged a particular model of curriculum that it expected all schools to implement. When a school did not conform to this model it could easily be construed that the school was failing. Mulford (2003) noted how 'procedural illusions of effectiveness are used especially for accountability and can be employed to maintain the myth of education and function to legitimise it to the outside world' (p.3). In this case, a narrative was arguably being created to legitimise the school being forced into joining a Multi Academy Trust.

In no longer communicating with Headteachers directly and instead writing to the Chair of Governors, there lies a subtle application of, what I suggest to be, a 'symbolic undermining' of a Headteacher's authority. Sullivan (2000) suggests that alienation is a typical response to coercive

power. I was not following expectations; I was seeking to fight back; I was a 'non-conforming other' (Richards, 2019, p.282). Ceasing direct communication with me subordinated me to a position of less power and legitimacy to argue or reason. I was being placed below the Chair of Governors in the leadership hierarchy; an example of how 'structure can be used to divide or conquer the opposition' (Pfeffer, 1994, p.267).

Piecing together the series of events leading to this point reveals a strong set of evidence of power applied in a systematic format to realise a vision for the organisation of schooling within a single region. Within three years all the region's secondary schools had either started a Multi Academy Trust, willingly joined an already established Trust or, as the case of my school indicates, were instructed to join. What provides an interesting set of data to analyse is *how* that instruction was revealed gradually and systematically through a chronological series of interactions between the school and the Project Officers. At first, the intentions were hidden and the visit to the school was portrayed within a spirit of support; data was gathered on the school and used to construct a narrative of failure to comply with prescribed government curricular expectations; formal letters of instruction then set out the expected actions; the cessation of all communication with the Headteacher in effect removed the authority of the Headteacher and displaced the necessity of this role; the legislation around 'coasting' schools that had been introduced at the time was used in addition to the curricular expectations and performance measures to create a picture of failure on several accounts. This then legitimised the enforcement and removed all possibility of the school being able to remain in its current state of being as a stand-alone Academy. At first, a gentle coercion delivered through persuasive expositions from different Trust CEOs, but, with passing time and the absence of compliance, was then revealed through a change of language, a specific set of actions chosen to discredit the school and, ultimately, in direct instruction. There were rules I had no access to or power to influence. The intentions of the Academisation project were set, the cause of the struggle I experienced was legitimised if it resulted in the desired outcome, and any alternative solution was excluded.

Craig (2017) suggests that it is neoliberalism that has facilitated 'more directive and punitive management, pressure to conform to targets and penalties for not doing so' (p.189), and warned that 'the move towards Multi Academy Trusts may well exacerbate this trend' (p.189). As a Headteacher that did not conform to the vision for the region, I was obstructing the full realisation of the regional Academisation project. Rohr (1996) offers a theory of the potential consequences of not working in compliance with a system:

> When you're working outside the system, when you work for peace, you will not be admired inside the
> system. In fact you will look dangerous, subversive, unpatriotic and all the other things that people's fears
> will create.

<div align="right">(p. 140)</div>

Pope Francis (2019) speaks of a 'desire to dominate, lack of dialogue and transparency' as being 'the terrain on which corruption thrives' (p.36). Evidence suggests there was a strong element of domination in the process of securing compliance however, to assess this as corrupt, cannot be qualified other than in a personal perception of a lived experience and of a self that was becoming increasingly unwell and desperate, with a spirit not yet re-formed. As a Catholic Headteacher, the issue of domination is felt all the more keenly as Munroe (2018) explains: 'God never gave people the authority to dominate one another' (p.21). In accepting domination I would therefore be accepting an authority over and above what I believed in. But I was still not yet able to let go of my attachment to power and authority, to the trappings of my position; I was still not able to penetrate the core of my professional distress. As a Catholic, it is easy to construct a moral platform to stand upon and gaze with distaste at what is happening beneath. I viewed what was happening as corrupt but I too was seeking to control the situation and maintain my position; my own 'desire to dominate' (Pope Francis, 2019) could lead me to behave with just as much power-driven corruption.

I interpret the language and actions taken by the State as aggressive and hostile. But I was increasingly exhausted and becoming seriously unwell. I viewed my environment as toxic, but I too was physically toxic at this time. I looked at the world and viewed it as contaminated and dangerous because I was an embodiment of these very feelings.

Walsh (1999, p.71) suggests:

> our emotions colour our perceptions, mould our motives and direct our lives. What we feel within
> ourselves we find reflected in the world. If we feel angry, we look out on a hostile world; if we feel fearful
> we find threats everywhere.

<div align="right">(p.71)</div>

It was a time of immense stress and pressure. But, as Frank (1991) observes: 'ill persons only have enough energy for gentleness' (p.85). The increasing stress and pressure that I felt clearly impacted on a rapidly deteriorating health. McCall and Lawlor (2000) suggest that the effects of being in a stress-related state can exacerbate acute biological responses, including 'denigrating oneself to a point of total despair' (p.111). The sheer stress of the job alone can often lead a Headteacher into illness (Craig, 2017); but this was far more than stress. My physical body felt

under ambush and was critically ill; my professional body felt, at the same time, that it was slowly being stripped of all authority and de-professionalised (Gunter, 2015).

My reactions to increased pressure from invitations from MAT leaders and the intense scrutiny my school was subjected to by the Government officials, brought out the fight in me. I reconciled the fight to being borne of duty to protect the school; interrogating the data reveals that narrative as being only partly true. I was fighting for *self*-preservation as much as for the preservation of my school. Once again, the language used in the data is steeped in negativity and othering. Anger is directed towards the actors at the business lunch and a revelation of frustration that being a Headteacher was no longer the top of the ladder. The MAT chiefs are demonised and depicted as predators. The data reveals an insecure self that withdraws from the community of schools, losing trust in surrounding Heads, questioning motives, placing myself on a moral pedestal but equally feeling more insecure and isolated.

The metaphor of the wolves 'scouting for new blood' personifies the MAT chiefs as hungry predators, circling and waiting to attack and devour the school, legitimised by the Government officials in this action. There follows a submission that I was losing power and not able to resist. The journal extract that re-draws the MAT chiefs as 'sharks', further depicts my interpretation of predatory behaviours; I felt surrounded, in danger and doubtful of my ability. The tone of the writing in this section moves from combative language, angry, hostile, suspicious and blaming, postulating against the system, then becomes suddenly fearful, insecure and doubtful, timid and unsure.

In defensive reaction, I blame everything and everyone connected with MATs as being about themselves, vying for position, seeking more power from expansion, looking to make deals and mergers for their own gain. In my eyes at the time, it was all about them; but, equally, it was all about me.

Whether the prolonged period of stress, anxiety and fear that I felt during this period was a contributory factor to my falling ill, is impossible to determine. My faith leads me to ascertain that critical illness was my wake-up call from God; to open my eyes, to suffer, to return me to my roots, to rediscover and connect to my true self and, to finally see.

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Part Three: Suffering and a de-professionalised self

For it is when I am weak that I am strong

2 Corinthians 12:10

The data presents a story of the suffering self, a body attacked and taken over by critical illness juxtaposed alongside a story of a metaphorical attack, of perceived calculated pressure leading to a hostile takeover of the school. The suffering self and the suffering school are depicted here as one; the portrayal of the school being an extension of the self's bodily submission. The theme of surrender is most poignant in this section; surrender on a multitude of levels.

The interplay between what the personal self and the professional self endured, reveals a diminishing personal self no longer able to fight in role as the professional self, a personal self that was taken to the edge of life through critical illness but later, a personal self that gradually emerges into a new persona of professional self and a new way of being in the world. Kleinman (1988) identified how illness can lead to profound changes to how life is lived when death has been faced:

> Nothing so concentrates experience and changes the central conditions of living as serious illness. Chronic illness teaches us about death. Illness narratives edify us about how life problems are created, controlled, made meaningful. We can envision in chronic illness and its therapy a symbolic bridge that connects body, self and society.

(p. xiii)

In Frank's (1991) graphically raw account of his experiences in critical illness, he speaks of irony in the word 'patient' – in suddenly becoming a patient and entering into the domain of medicine - tests, appointments, treatment, consultation - continuous waiting soon dominates the person's life. To wait is to demand patience. Nowakowski (2016) speaks of critical illness as being a teacher, teaching *the* patient to *be* patient. Waiting for a medical judgement was not only the dominant force in my personal life at this time; in waiting for the next move against my school, waiting overshadowed my professional life too.

The method-acting inserted towards the beginning of this section of data, set alongside further narrative of the school under scrutiny, presents a dualistic irony, of the endless waiting that an ill person is forced to endure, to literally *be* 'patient' whilst in role as '*the* patient', whilst at the

same time the rapidity of the action against my school was increasing and I was left waiting for what I perceived as the next move against it.

The narrative story, plotting the sequence of events involving both the personal and professional self, the dialogue and thought-tracking, places the self at the centre of the story; the school in its role as an embodiment of the 'Headteacher self' intertwines with the sequence of events of suffering that are then projected onto a single self. The suffering school and the suffering self become one.

The ill Headteacher, the 'wounded leader' (Ackermann and Ostrowski, 2002), refuses to acknowledge a deteriorating health and continues to work, to fight off what is depicted as another attack, not this time by MAT chiefs but by the State itself. The ill Headteacher portrayed as being on a self-appointed mission to shield and protect the school despite losing strength and ability. The narrative and thought-tracking reveal a sense of injustice being done to the school and an attempt to discredit the action that the State was taking. Language of battle such as 'ambush', 'blow', 'combative' depicts a scene of metaphorical violence targeting both the school and the Headteacher self. Incredulity and injustice are revealed in the thought-tracking comments on the letter from the State not being addressed to the Headteacher but instead to the Chair of Governors. A sense of dethronement is further revealed and my reaction echoes a past career episode of feeling pushed out, insignificant, 'an obstruction'; the legitimacy of my position being undermined, my own sense of self-importance and status overlooked. Yet here I continue to seek to justify my leadership decisions for the school in a stream of narrative peppered with an inner commentary of thought-tracking, self-justifying the chosen curriculum of an arts college. The narrative seeks to increase both the pace of events and the tension I felt, depicting an intensifying pressure from the State demanding conformity and, as the pace quickens, the thought-tracking commentary lessens, my confidence to fight back reduces and it is the State, through the role of the 'Project Officer' that has the final word.

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Where the data is most revealing in this section is through the episodes of method-acting. Here, steeped in pathos, are glimpses of real human frailty, fear and fallibility; a recognition of powerlessness, acceptance and submission. Leading up to my physical collapse at school, I recall the inner battle I was having with myself, still unable to accept and acknowledge my deterioration, still putting my role as Headteacher first despite recalling the anguish this was causing to those closest to me. Still evident are the threads of a self-appointed, salvific mission to protect the school in danger. It took a shocking incident of physical collapse to lead me to

finally surrender to illness and to helplessly give my body over to clinical intervention. At the point of most danger to my life, the portrayal of the final letter of instruction to the school from the State, presents a moment of poignant, simultaneous 'offering'; the physical body detaching from the spirit in congruence with the professional body detaching from the school. Surrender dominates this section of the data; as I was surrendering to illness, my school was surrendering to the State. As I felt my spirit detaching from my physical body, I was simultaneously detaching from the school.

The excerpts of method-acting transport me back and enable me to recall the physical and emotional experience of critical illness, of post-surgery horror and the long process of recovery, and to portray a sense of unsettling realism. The figure of the omnipotent Head, the authority figure in charge, the person at the top, powerful and in control, is reduced, helpless, dis-abled. Reduction thematically weaves through this section of the data; it is a metaphysical reduction not only of the physical body but of the ability to physically care for the reduced body. I am returned to childhood and helpless reliance on my parents to care for me and to shield me.

My sense of revulsion at the sight of my own body channels me into a period of self-loathing. Where I had previously seen the faces of those around me as 'disfigured', here I use similar defamatory language to describe how I felt about my own body: 'ugly', 'disfigured', 'broken'. Kleinman (1988) references 'the stigma and shame of illness' (p.158) and how I view my post-surgery body is depicted with a mixture of horror and disgust; again, my instinctive reaction is to withdraw so that no one, other than my mother, witnesses this.

The physical illness manifestation created a form of de-humanised self. The 'I' that I knew was no longer there (Frank, 1991). In her graphic and moving autoethnographical account of her own battle with critical illness, Moore (2012) references the horror she felt towards her appearance:

> I see a figure stooped in front of the mirror. It's drained of color [*sic*], bags run deep under its eyes, a face with no laughter, its whole body is limp, the stuffing knocked out of it…. I stand there facing the mirror. Not recognizing [*sic*] its reflection. Not wanting to recognize it [*sic*]. It's not me. This is not me. Who am I kidding? This is what you have become. This is what's left of you. Is this really me now?

> (p.205)

The outward appearance of my reflection embodied the turmoil and internal agony I was experiencing both physically and professionally. The physical shrinking of my body occurring in congruence with the shrinking of my ability to do anything other than accept what was happening. Frank's (1995; 1991) accounts of his critical illness treatment references how the

medical instruments used to diagnose, monitor and restore him became part of his human body and as a consequence, he felt that his body was no longer his own. My own body was covered in medical instruments, 'hooked into lines' (Defenbaugh, 2008, p.1402), being assisted to function. They too became an extension of me; they were literally life-lines. Yet I was still inside my body, 'wounded perhaps, but there' (Corbin, 2003, p.259).

There is, arguably, a temporal dualism surrounding critical illness. When a body is slowly deteriorating, time appears to extend endlessly into a nothingness; there is an inherent lethargy to the passing of time. But when that illness reaches a critical stage, time is suddenly fraught; action is rapid and desperate. The shift from one to the other is sudden and that is where fear intercedes. The fear is exacerbated by the pace associated with panic and the inability to know what will happen. 'Unknowing' and facing mortality perpetuate fear. Like Frank (1991) on 'that day I became someone who had come very close to dying' (p.11).

Echoing Frank (1991), illness took me to 'the threshold of life, from which you can see where your life could end' (p.1). I experienced brokenness in both physical and metaphorical terms. I had no strength to do anything other than breathe. Chronic illness humbled me beyond anything I had ever experienced (Nowakowski, 2016). Newell (2012) suggests that being able to accept brokenness is necessary if one is to become whole again. It felt as if I had been fighting to keep my body going and fighting to protect my school. The irony of this sense of suffering was that the moment I stopped fighting, both myself and my professional situation, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace (Frank, 1991). In illness I was able to see God; my suffering became 'a place of encounter with God' (Pope Francis, 2019, p.38). But the illness that weakened and 'dis-abled' me had also *enabled* me to move towards a level of discernment that I had not ever before encountered:

> In vulnerability, in poverty of spirit, in brokenness, we are often able to meet God in new ways – perhaps because our guard is down and we are more open to God's presence.
>
> Martin (2012, p.289)

A remarkable dualism surrounds life and death in that coming close to dying can offer an opportunity for re-birth to a new life (Frank, 1991). Facing the darkness of death reveals a new and different form of light and, I suggest, a new form of 'enlightenment'. Wyatt (2005), in documenting his near-death experience, noted how suddenly death seemed 'so much more profound…so much more alive' (p.274). The time of my most humble suffering drew me closer towards God (Martin, 2012) and perhaps ironically, it was through physical danger that I began to feel spiritually safer.

Coming close to dying was a critical moment of life; times of 'crisis can be an emergent occasion for transformation' (Ackermann and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. xiii). Coming close to dying transformed my relationship with my faith and brought me closer to God. In closeness to God, I began to feel an overwhelming sense of peace and perspective and, what it feels like to be spiritually healed.

Surgery had 'inflicted marks upon my body' (Frank, 1991, p. 131) and rendered me helpless in ability to even move or do anything for myself unaided. These were moments, days, and weeks of complete submission to an incapacitating and raw vulnerability. I was reduced to a shadow of myself physically, personally and professionally, stripped of all my previously known identity and its associated professional authority.

Death, like evil, is often evoked within a metaphor of darkness. There is no claimed truth, no epistemological certainty or any possibility of claiming a truth about death because death cannot truly be known by man until it has been accomplished. What can only be known is what is felt and then told by those who have come close to death. A common thread running through recorded experiences of both religious and non-religious persons that have faced death, is that death is not often presented within a metaphor of darkness; more often, it is depicted in light and transformation. Similarly, in faith, death and darkness are often referenced in terms of light (John 1:5; Pope Francis, 2019). Death is demonised and depicted as evil more often by those who are in role as witness to it or those who suffer the grief of loss following a death. For the person facing death, surrendering to the possibility of death and then not dying, often leads to a transformed life (Nowakowski, 2016; Moore, 2012; Defenbaugh, 2008; Wyatt, 2005).

Frank (1991) believed that surgery and life-threatening illness led him to view life through a different lens: 'Each person records the history of his life on his body. After surgery had rearranged me I would live differently' (p.38). Silf (2017) questions the human sense of trepidation surrounding darkness and suggests that a deeper wisdom, energy and hope can be reached if people simply had the courage to face the darkness. Evoking the image of a dark night sky she asks:

> Why [do] we shut our curtains and switch the lights on? We shut out the darkness because we are afraid of it. But in the daylight you can only see a few miles. In the night you can see the stars that are light years away.

(p.86)

In spiritual terms, dying is viewed as a prerequisite of one's ability to enter a new life in the spirit and to be transformed in deeper faith:

> There is a kind of dying we must do as we stand at the edge peering over. We give up our ordinary self in order to receive a transformed self. This dying is the key….To die means that we become vulnerable, we become open, we stop the hiding and lying, we face the truth once and for all, we let go the controls. In all of this we are listening to the voice of God. It is though we face our true selves in these moments, our full and true selves…and we have the opportunity to be transformed, to be moved, to be transfixed, to be made whole, and therefore to be made holy.

<div align="right">Huebsch (2009, p.68)</div>

In scripture, suffering is often equated with purification. Catholic doctrine teaches that suffering enables us to come close to Jesus as, through his own physical suffering, he will understand and accompany us in our pain and suffering. Through the experience of suffering, Catholics can come to know God in new ways (Martin, 2012). Through my own suffering and recovery, I was able to reach a new depth in my own Catholic faith. My suffering had become more than a 'place of encounter with God' (Pope Francis, 2019, p.57); my experience of suffering led me to encounter a new epistemological and ontological spirituality of healing and peace that now touches every facet of my life. Frank (1995; 1991) noted how illness taught him to appreciate every experience he had and was to have; life's high and low points now fully embraced and a new opportunity to spiritually grow. Facing loss of life teaches the value of life itself. The body, through illness, can teach us meaning of life and can reveal the path to a new way of living (Corbin, 2003).

A common thread in written accounts of critical illness and journeys through recovery is the concept of gratitude; the gratitude felt for the recovery but also in having been taken on that journey. It is not an experience relished but the opportunity to develop a new vision for life and how it is lived and appreciated (Corbin, 2003; Frank, 1991).

Critical illness and recovery encompass the concept of struggle. Combative language surrounds critical illness – ill people are often encouraged to 'fight' and 'battle' against their condition in order to overcome it. The illness is personified through this notion of conflict. To engage in a conflict of any kind must involve an 'other' – whether that is another person, a situation, an illness or even an aspect of oneself, the struggle requires at least two participants. I have personified multiple 'others' in order to present multiple battles being played out simultaneously in my personal and professional life, but I appreciate the value of these conflicts. Coming through them and emerging out of them, I have been able to experience the grace of peace, of healing and, above all, a spiritually purifying sense of reconciliation (Huebsch, 2009).

But there was still another dying that had to be accomplished. Despite the reality of my weakest and most vulnerable physical condition, despite this very real frailty and brokenness, I still seek to rise up and regain my sense of position and importance. The data describes my mission to recover quickly so that I can return to work and to my important role and my reaction to others who I seek to blame for holding me back from accomplishing this mission and my frustration at having to accept my physical limitations, leaves me angry and bitter, unable to do anything more than begrudgingly accept my dis-ability. Still the threads of egocentric desires are present despite the reality of my limited, diminished self.

It is the reluctance to let go of the pursuit of the self in wishing to return to school to support the school production. I was still thinking of myself in role as the Headteacher, and the expectations I had of myself to fulfil this role in being visibly supportive of the school community. I was not aware or even considerate of the impact this might have on the community to witness my physical deterioration; that the Headteacher is viewed as a leader with strength, omnipotence, omniscience, safety and stature. For this image to be dispelled by the vision of leadership I now portrayed, might be both unsettling and upsetting to the children and staff. The ego, even stripped away from a carefully prescribed and cultivated persona, was still seeking to determine and control.

I make reference to a 'heavy, reluctant spirit' that could only accept my situation, my limitations and learn to live with them. This sense of spiritual heaviness resembles a sense of sinking, a weight, a bowing down; a final surrender to nothingness.

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Part Four: Re-formation

The Lord is near to all who call upon him

Psalm 145:18

There is a clear sense of final submission in this part of the story and a temporal reference to weeks passing as the days were divided between sleeping and sitting. This very different 'transitional space' became a healing space, not only for physical healing but also spiritual healing and a new form of connection with faith. In despair of critical illness, I had asked 'Where are you?' of God. I thought I was abandoned. Ignatian spirituality references the duality of desolation and consolation; to journey through desolation is to then reach a sense of pure

consolation, akin to a purge of all that is not good. But desolation is a necessary journey; to not know desolation is to never know the true depths and meaning of consolation:

> Desolation feels painful, but if we can be still during it, then the effect of the desolation becomes life-giving. If we imagine ourselves to be in the hands of God as clay is in the hands of the potter, then we can see desolation as the turning of the clay so that it becomes a vessel which can contain life-giving water. Desolation gouges us out, so that we can receive more. At the time, the process simply feels painful; when it is over we become aware of new areas of feeling and perception within us. Having experienced the inner pain, we can better sense it in others and we are much more appreciative of the gifts we have been given. We also discover in the pain deep strengths within. We begin to understand in a new way the meaning of Christ, light of our darkness and the meaning of his Passion for he has come down into our pain and darkness and death and has risen again. Therefore there is no depth of experience I can reach where the power of God is not also present.

<div align="right">Hughes (1985, p.100)</div>

As Ignatian spirituality instructs it is important to trust when in desolation; we trust: 'that the negative times will not last, that dawn will return' (Gallagher, 2016, p.108). Through the empty days of nothingness and my inability to do anything other than lie down and watch the sky, or sit and read; with the help of my Parish Priest, and through the acts of kindness of a community, I found God again. There is a temporal assertion here in the data when my journal describes the nothingness of lying on my bed watching the changing clouds and colour formations in the sky, reminiscent of Nowakowski's (2016) own autoethnography of critical illness and suffering in which she references being 'suspended on the crest, gazing over a landscape that seems exceptional colourful and bright' (p.912). The data references a 'coming back', a return, a sense of resurrection, but the journal extracts here indicate a new, transformed self emerging from suffering and healing. Just as Kleinman's (1988) study of life-changing critical illness revealed, I too make reference in the data to being born into a 'second life' where it is simplicity and peace that provide the foundations of life.

Here I align my own suffering with the suffering of Christ and the inner need that Jesus had for silence and solitude; I realise that I need that too. Jesus was my silent companion through my own suffering, and it is the Lord that accompanies me in my moments of solitude. Suffering is a central theme of the Catholic faith; it is through suffering that we come to know a shared experience with Christ that then brings us closer to God: 'we can take our own suffering. In our pain we meet Christ in his Passion, know his presence and healing power, bringing hope out of our despair' (Hughes, 1985, p.131).

There is a clear thread of returning to roots; as a child I always preferred peace and solitude, but I had allowed that natural instinct to be overtaken by an egocentric, false need for achievement and recognition in my career. Now, in second life, I return to that inner root of being. I note how solitude removes the need to uphold an image. I suggest that I am simply playing a role when I am fulfilling my role as a Headteacher and that, in order to fulfil this role wisely, I need to engage in contemplative practice that fuels the soul.

I reference home as a place to retreat to, a place of peace and safety that offers tranquil space for contemplative practice within a contemplative life. I refer to my work now as a 'ministry', no longer a career; it is God's work that I am administered to do. There is no ladder. I no longer care for hierarchy; it no longer has meaning for me.

My journal musings on power reveal a gradual awakening of new personal insights. The paradox of being powerful at the point of being most vulnerable; the strength that emerges from weakness; the reparation that resides hidden within brokenness, for me, was a new insight into the meaning and relevance of my life, my work and my understanding of the wisdom of scripture.

I come, through these musings, to understand that I already hold power; it is a false power that is assigned and a temporal power from being appointed. Power attributed by man is a power that man can take away. It is *I* that holds the most power in my ability to detach from power, to let it go. There is no need to seek out power; I already hold it.

My journal moves towards seeing and understanding the place of detachment in my life. Detachment replaces attachment that had hitherto governed my life and my behaviour. Once again there are echoes of childhood when I would often detach myself and move to the periphery, making space between myself and others, leaving room to retreat.

Detachment as a main theme of this study has appeared throughout the data. At first, detachment from the social mainstream at university, detachment from my former life's path of performing musicianship, detachment from externally set goals via the process of fleeing to a country far away, detachment from people and situations in my professional journey – all these episodes of detachment were on my own terms, through my own choice; my will. But enforced detachment from unrecognised ideals and attachments that struck me via critical illness, in that space where human life hung in the balance and in the days of painstaking recovery that followed, it was brokenness of body, mind and spirit that led to the final detachment from the person I had become. This was a detachment over which I had no control, no choice. Through

suffering as one form of self, I then made my conversion of turning towards God, and I began to see life in a new and different way (O'Leary, 2018). What emerged from this detachment was a spiritual transformation and a re-formation of the self, re-born into a God-given, God-filled, new way of life.

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Epilogue

> If I appreciate what is around me, I will also wonder at it, be amazed and astonished by it, feel a kind of reverence for it. Out of appreciation comes praise, and true praise includes reverence and wonder and the desire to be somehow absorbed and at one with the object of my wonder. This is the root of the desire to serve.
>
> Hughes (1985, p.57)

It is a different voice in the closing section of data; perhaps it is the true self, the emergent authentic voice that has risen from the journey and through the silence. The pace slows and the outlook changes; a sense of enlightenment, an eye for the detail of creation through a 'window of gratitude' (Muto, 2018); wonder and appreciation for life. Rohr (2003) reflects on how 'everything seems enchanting with true sight' (p.59). There is a deep gratitude for service in Catholic headship. It is a blending of faith and work into one ==ministry==.

There is a sense of hope and of reconciliation; a gratitude for life re-born and transformed; no longer two separate selves but now a merging of one spiritually unified professional and personal self. There is a sense of optimistic resolution, of being protected and led by the Lord, to a life in the Lord and, finally, to be at peace.

Conclusion

Much depends on our attitude and, in spite of suffering and evil, we can afford a positive one.

We can see life and the world as essentially good for us.

We can approach life as a gift.

It is always possible to find 'the more'.

We can approach the world as meaningful. We can find life worthwhile.

Life is no bed of roses – but we can plant some.

Life invites us to generativity.

To live well requires an act of faith.

Thomas Groome, (1996, pp.148-50)

I had originally set out on this academic quest to examine and theorise the interplay between the politics of the Academies programme and the faith culture of Catholic education, to assess to what extent they could harmoniously exist alongside or within one another. What took me by surprise once I had embarked upon this study was that my originally conceived thesis was not at all what this work would become.

I began my doctoral studies in the autumn of 2014. I was angry and my early writing often descended into rampaging polemics about education policy and the new emerging executive structures in the Academies programme, to the detriment of any academic worth. In 2015, I became ill and my life, work and studies were interrupted. When I resumed my work in 2017, anger and hostility that I had privileged in my early writing were now in conflict with my new, emergent, transitory self. When I attempted to shape this thesis into its originally conceived form, it didn't work; it was disjointed, confused, irrational, an 'anti-thesis' in which my evolving, gradually more authentic voice was awakening inside the furious polemicist and would go on to expose the polemic voice as nothing more than a self-pitying, self-sanctifying, self-serving rage. I wrote as if I was angry but I wasn't angry anymore. I wrote disparagingly about my profession but it is work that I love; it is my vocation. I wrote from the position of the 'wronged' yet I had to concede that I may have been wrong; that there is no earthly authority legitimised to pronounce what and who is right and wrong – it is not my place or my wish to lead a crusade against Academies or the politics of education. It is simply unnecessary.

My position had changed; illness and suffering re-positioned me. The way that I viewed the world had changed. I had moved through a transformative experience to a new and personally undiscovered realm of being. How this thesis has emerged and developed since 2017 has been a transformational journey in itself.

I set out, in this research journey to:

1. explore the extent to which suffering critical illness as a revelatory experience could lead to deeper insights and perspectives of spiritual life, faith practice and school leadership *and*;
2. to examine the extent to which I, as a Catholic school leader, am able to practise my vocation and ministry with authenticity and integrity to the mission within the Academies programme.

I documented a period of professional and personal life history through a selection of vignettes that enabled me to interrogate my personal and professional formation, my teaching and leadership self, how I was shaped and influenced both by the roles I sought and was assigned, and the circumstances I faced along the leadership journey. However, as a practising Catholic, I did not, until 2017, practise my vocation in a Catholic school. And where I now serve in this ministry is within a Catholic Academy that is part of a Multi Academy Trust. This is significant to note in that the interrogation of self through a lens rooted in Ignatian spirituality gazes at a professional life lived *within* the Academies programme but mostly *outside* of the Catholic sector, and the position I hold now, with some irony, as Head of a Catholic school is *within* the Academies MAT structure that I had once demonised.

So what can I now draw from this reflexive introspection and autoethnographic inquiry into Academy leadership?

The Academies programme is a construct, a framework for organising groups of schools. However politically or neutrally one chooses to view this construct, it has evolved over the past twenty years to take a position of dominance in the landscape of state education in England. But it is simply a construct and, as publicly-funded institutions, Academies and Trusts are subject to government and public scrutiny and governed by Academies legislation and the terms set out in each Trust's funding agreement. Many Catholic schools and Dioceses have embraced the Academies programme and willingly converted from Diocesan Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled status to becoming Catholic Academy Trusts (Buck, 2020). Others have been more sceptical and cautious and have discerned that academisation is not the best path to follow for their schools in their specific contexts and within their specific Dioceses. But I suggest that it is not structure that threatens authenticity or integrity; moreover, it is the way that people choose to behave *within* those structures. If there is a misalignment of vision, values and principles within an organisation, there may be conflict, tension and polarisation amongst parties that may pull in different directions. It is central to authentic leadership to align an organisation and its people to a system of unified values and principles (Haydon, 2007). But whilst, within structures

such as MATs, there can be many Heads with differing ideas of what constitutes authentic Catholic leadership, there can ultimately be only one Chief, and that is the Chief Executive Officer. In Trusts where there is a joining together of several autonomous Heads that have been used to being the chief within their single school domain, the adjustment that inevitably has to be made is that in a MAT they are no longer in charge; it is in accepting the supremacy of the CEO as the overarching leader, a Chief amongst lesser ranked chiefs, where tension can lie.

The MAT structure sets a pre-determined hierarchy; it is not possible within the Articles of Association for MATs to operate a flat structure or to follow a co-operative model because there has to be a CEO and, by definition, the CEO becomes the overarching leader of the Headteachers of all the schools in the Trust. The MAT structure demands compliance and acceptance of its constructed hierarchical model. How Headteachers view this position and manage the possibility of emerging tension or sense of disempowerment that this model can create, I suggest, is largely dependent on their personal attachment to hierarchy and status, power, control and decision-making.

In Catholic terms, the Headteacher is perhaps no longer a Headteacher, but instead a Servant Leader. Detaching from status, power and control facilitates acceptance of a reversal of role from Master to Servant. Accepting a position as a Headteacher within a Catholic School or Catholic Academy Trust to become a 'Servant Leader' offers a very different, alternative perspective on the traditional hierarchy, and may open a pathway to a far less egoistic and less political form of leadership. It may even facilitate a holier and more authentic leadership of the mission. Arguably there is egoism embedded in the leadership title of 'Headteacher' and more so in the 'Executive' of CEO. Letting go of the need or desire for titles to reframe the essence of the role to the core purpose of service is perhaps a radical step, but one worthy of consideration. Jesus, our Lord and Master, after all: 'came not to be served, but to serve' (Matthew 20:28).

Authentic leadership is a leadership that is true to the person and the soul of the leader. If any part of the leader's authenticity or 'way of proceeding' (Fleming, 2008) is altered or affected as part of compliance either to a higher authority within the structure or with a chosen organisational policy, then, arguably, that leadership cannot be authentic. As Catholic leaders we accept the mission to be our authentic selves in service to God and to the Church; but I question whether it is possible to be the authentic version of oneself or in authentic mission to the Church or a particular charism when one is subservient to other 'Masters' (Matthew 6:24).

To be authentic is to be real, and to be the real version of a self in a world that demands Catholic Headteachers play multiple roles in a multitude of circumstances, serving other masters, is not

easy; the real, authentic self so easily lost, overwhelmed, unconsciously hidden, or consciously suppressed. To *be* authentic is first to *know* the authentic self. Catholic Headteachers are called to serve God first and foremost, to carry out the mission of the Catholic Church to educate with a preferential option for the poor. But when there are multiple masters or conflicting demands it is not always possible to maintain authentic leadership, the challenge indeed to maintain and to preserve the authentic self within the leadership role.

This inquiry has facilitated a path to knowing more of my authentic self; to recognising that multiple selves have formed through my life's journey thus far and to enable me now to have come to know and accept what I believe to be my more authentic self. But I suggest that coming to know and accept my authentic self has only been possible because of the journey I have taken. In twenty-six years of my life as a teacher it has only been in the past three years that I have come to practise my vocation as my more authentic self. And if I practise my ministry and vocation as my authentic self in faith, I am more able to practise with integrity to the mission.

This inquiry explored whether it is possible to practise Catholic ministry and vocation within the Academies programme. Ignatian ministry requires its members to first discern and then to respond to God's call; in service to others we carry out the ministry of our vocation, as our vocation and our ministry are inseparable. Where and within which framework it is that defines our work is, perhaps, inconsequential. This position can be discerned from my own experience as a Catholic living my vocation through my work across schools in the non-denominational sector as well as more recently within a Catholic Academy. It is not the structure or the organisational framework that either enhances or diminishes the practice of vocation and ministry; it is how the culture of the organisation and its leaders interpret the mission and the cultural practices that are held within it; in essence what is privileged. In my present school the charism that is rooted in Ignatian spirituality is unique to the Congregation of Religious Sisters who established the school in the late nineteenth century, but this particular charism is not practised more widely within the Academy Trust; indeed there are other Academies within the same Trust founded upon other charisms.

My reflections on my current practice have not identified tension in my ability to lead the ==maintenance== of the charism in relation to being a member Academy of a Catholic Academy Trust but that could largely be due to the devolvement of responsibilities and freedoms specific to the Trust's scheme of delegation. Other Catholic Academy Trusts may adopt more rigid and centralised approaches to how decision-making is devolved to their member Academies; some have actively grouped together as schools that practise a specific charism, so it is indeed the

charism that determines the way the Trust systematically operates and, by common devotion to principles and practices of a specific charism, there is, by definition, a communion of leadership. It is perhaps surprising that I have not identified tension in being a Headteacher within a Catholic Academy Trust but I attribute this to how I have come, through illness and suffering, to revaluate my life, my work and my place in the world, and how I no longer care for, or feel so attached to, much of life's personal, professional and material gains. I no longer care for power and privilege; the privilege I feel is directly related to the blessing I have been afforded in service to the school, the community and the faith.

I come now to assess the impact of my suffering and illness on myself and my life and to review the extent to which it can be discerned as a revelatory experience; whether there are deeper insights to be revealed and new perspectives into spiritual life, faith practice and school leadership. The self has been placed, through this autoethnographic research process, under a lens and scrutinised, examined, evaluated and critiqued.

Suffering emptied me; I became hollow and haunted, and bereft of spirit. I fell down from my pedestal and I lost; I lost my health, my emotional wellbeing as well as my physical body mass; my identity, my ability and my dignity; my freedom and control, my power, position and authority; my self-importance and self-esteem. I came close to losing my life. In moving towards dying, my body survived but my spirit was crushed. I turned to God but I could not find Him. The process of emptying had to be accomplished; my spirit had to completely break for me to detach from the soul of my former self. For a while I resided in darkness and emptiness. Nothing and no one could reach me in that desolation. My physical being was dangerously reduced as my soul had to die in order to find life again: 'The grain of wheat had to die or it remained just a grain of wheat – but if it died, it would bear much fruit' (John 12:24). I can therefore only describe this experience as revelatory; an allegory of death and resurrection, my own weak and humble, human form of 'paschal mystery' (Rohr, 2004, p.103). Words seem weak and insignificant, language cannot impart with any adequacy what a spiritual and soulful death-to-reawakening feels like and how it is experienced. I can only describe it as a blessing, as being first emptied and broken, and then healed and drawn into new life by God.

Residing in the Lord, my wounds began to heal. My life changed, I changed. I offered myself to God and was transformed. I realised how small and insignificant I was, how *nothing* mattered: goals, achievement, recognition, success; material possessions, wealth, status, power; admiration, politics, career ladders, promotions, expectations and ambitious pursuits of the self – all are empty, material, man-made entities; and they mean *nothing*.

A life of fulfilment is only possible when we are open to surrender to a true self, to let go of empty, constructed ideals and idols, to no longer care for measuring up against meaningless comparisons, to be free of enslavement to punishing demands and schedules, to be untouched by external forces, to slow down and to find a home in the quiet beauty of the Lord's creation; to simply 'be still and breathe in and out the love of God' (Byrne, 2019).

But can such a revelatory experience lead to new perspectives on spiritual life, faith practice and school leadership? I suggest the answer lies in the extent to which a leader is immersed in vocation as both a faith practice and a mission of service in work. I suggest that vocation in the spiritual life of a lay member of the Catholic Church can move one closer to the consecrated spiritual life when devotion to and service of God is channelled through the vocation of work within a Catholic school, and where there is an alignment between the practice of faith and the life lived within the spirit and the charism. Before my illness, I was a Catholic and a Headteacher but my faith-life and my work were separate; not that I carried out my work and duties outside of faith, but in that I was unable to channel my faith into and through my work so openly and joyfully and with such synergy as I can now within a Catholic school. It is only now that my work, faith, vocation and devotion to the mission are inseparably intertwined. I can express my faith through my work; my work life has become rooted in my spiritual life. My life has become whole.

I have come to discover a different 'way of proceeding' and drawing from the spiritual wisdom of Ignatian practices; from the wisdom of scripture, from clergy and spiritual writers and researchers. My revelatory experience of personal suffering and redemption have given me both a new and very different understanding of the world and new insights into school leadership. The leader as servant; humbled, not heroic, comfortable in the wings, not craving the spotlight; a preference for solitude, not central to the crowd; calm and stoic, not impatient or agitated; contemplative, not reactive; wise and discerning; gentle and merciful, not callous and unforgiving; selfless, not egoistic, abstemious not possessive. With the wisdom of foresight, not from hindsight; leading compassionately, not with indifference. Prayerful and modest, enlightened and radiant, peaceful and safe; ambitious for others, not for the self. The self no more than a tiny fragment of a magnificent whole; serving not the self but the other instead. It is to lead as Jesus led. Is this the parable of my own life? (Smith and Merz, 2015); a parable of lessons for Catholic school leadership?

The body of research on servant leadership has largely focused on the leader administering to the suffering of those she leads; the suffering of the other not of the leadership self (Jit et al., 2017; Davenport, 2015; Greenleaf, 2003; 2002). It is the extrinsic suffering of those that are led

rather than the intrinsic suffering of the servant leader self that has, to now, been a primary focus within the field. But I suggest there is a space within the field for autoethnographic studies to document the suffering of the servant leader self; a space for new and original perspectives to emerge that, in turn, contribute to the philosophy of Catholic school leadership. Frankl (1970) suggests: 'if there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering' (p.67). The meaning I have sought to draw from this study has not only profoundly impacted upon my life and work in leadership but will, I hope, impact on how leadership in Catholic schools might be shaped in humble service and selflessness.

Suffering, emptying, suspended temporally in a dark abyss of nothingness, then a slow reawakening, healing of wounds, a reparation of spirit; I suggest it is possible to discern an epistemology of visceral wisdom that accrues from the Passion of redemptive experience and from time itself. It is no longer just perspectives on Catholic school leadership that emerge through the process of this autoethnographic inquiry; what now begs future scholarship, is a theory of Catholic school 'Eldership'.

The professional lives of Catholic Headteachers are becoming increasingly complex with multiple, ever-changing and often conflicting demands and expectations bearing down upon leaders. The unique position of being a school leader, navigating and managing the politics and uncertainties that often engulf state education, is complex in itself, but add to that the dimension of faith and the responsibility of the Catholic Headteacher to deliver both pastoral and public leadership that is grounded first and foremost in integrity to the mission, at the same time as managing the complexity of the external, political world, propels the Catholic Headteacher into a realm that is in danger of becoming both unmanageable and unsustainable.

The impact of undertaking study for this doctoral thesis has had a remarkable impact on the professional understanding I now have of myself in role as a Catholic Headteacher. It has been a life-changing journey that has led me toward far deeper insights into faith leadership as both a lay member of the Church and professional Headteacher. The emerging concept of 'Eldership' within lay Catholic leadership now beckons further research. If the notion of vocation straddles both the call to religious life *and* the call to service as a lay member of the faith community, the question now arises whether the traditional reverence of the wisdom of Elders within the religious leaders of the Church, may also cross and stand alongside experiential and learned wisdom that matures and ripens through serving as a lay faith school leader. If it is indeed possible, I suggest there is an urgency in first identifying then harnessing the wisdom maturity of lay leaders and to develop an approach to leadership preparation and formation that preserves

and strengthens the future integrity of Catholic education in its central mission. It is in this research mission that, as a devoted follower of Ignatian spirituality, I believe the Lord has called; so I will respond.

53,988 words

Appendix A

Vignette: Formation of self at the heart of the research process

This section of vignette offers a series of glimpses into the formation of my early self as musician, teacher, middle leader and then early-career senior leader. The excerpts describe events and recall memories from the time of my life when I had not yet been touched by the Academies policy. It is here in these passages that I reference a critical moment of spiritual awakening that was to become the nexus upon which my school leadership persona emerged.

Scales, arpeggios, technical exercises, sight-reading, repertoire; the ninety minutes of piano practice punctuating each day throughout my childhood provided both a routine of comfort and safety, a non-negotiable structure to a rigidly organised life of study; a stable life of structure, discipline and determination underpinned by faith. It was important to set goals, giving my work and my life a purpose. Expectations weighed down upon me from the moment that it became apparent to those around me that I was always going to be a little bit different.

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I was offered a place at my chosen university to study music. I chose London so that I could be close to home and to my roots. I was not yet ready to sever the ties and fledge from the safety, comfort and routine of all that I knew. I was always a home-bird.

As an undergraduate who lived at home, I was immediately an outsider. But I was happier in that space; I always had been happier there. The other students would engage with me in conversation, keen to know who I was, where I was from, which halls I resided in. Attitudes noticeably changed when they discovered I was still living at home with my parents. I was not part of the new social norm, unable to join the late-night revelling for fear of missing the train. In essence, I did not wish to join their activities. I always felt as if I didn't belong; I didn't fit in and wasn't sure I wanted to. I knew that it was my choice to distance myself from the mainstream.

I was a passive presence during the more informal parts of the university day. I worked hard, attended lectures and seminars, completed my reading, took notes, kept my files meticulously ordered and spent more time in the library. On the occasions that I was invited socially to one of the halls of residence, I felt out of place, unable to relax. I would often sit with a group of friendly acquaintances during break times in the refectory, only half listening to their chatter. I was more intent on watching those around me, quietly absorbing my surroundings and other people's

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behaviour. I was learning more about human interaction and socialisation than I had ever experienced before.

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I quietly participated from the fringe, joining in when I had to so as not to appear unfriendly. I always smiled at people and took an interest in them. I became an avid listener and people seemed to like to talk to me, often sharing some intricate detail of their life, hopes, loves. They seemed to entrust me with their deepest anxieties. But I always then withdrew into the safety of my work and my inner world keeping a discrete distance. I was never really involved.

Those three years were an important period of transition. It was a time when my observations and conversations helped me to understand and to accept with grace that I was not like the others. I disagreed with some of their liberal views; I didn't dress like them, I didn't speak like them, nor behave like them. But I know I was choosing not to join in; a form of self-segregation. I was known as a serious student who kept herself to herself. I think I was looked upon and viewed with curious interest, seen as a safe person who could keep a confidence and offer advice, but I felt equally dismissed by those who lived their lives in a far more carefree and abandoned way.

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I graduated with a 2:1. I had aimed for a First but the realisation that my pianistic capabilities were never going to be at the level it takes for perfection, and my ideas for composition that did not conform to the conventional norms within that specific institution, left me frustrated. For me, my years as an undergraduate were years that I simply had to tolerate; a means to an end. I was relieved when they were over.

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The realisation of my own limitations as a pianist were made easier to bear knowing that my ability for instructing others would soon reveal itself. And it made me happy. I was doing something I loved without seeing it as a battle. My life as a recital and a rehearsal pianist was not a life of pleasure. It exposed my weaknesses and, as the repertoire became harder and excruciatingly technical, I simply couldn't keep up. I felt deflated and useless and withdrew further away from my student performance peers, into a world of theoretical and pedagogical study.

Initially taking on a few pupils to teach at home, the purpose at first was to earn money to support my undergraduate studies. But from the first few minutes of the first lesson with my first

piano pupil, that was it, a defining moment. I forgot myself and all my personal failings as a concert pianist in training. I was transported into the role that I felt born to; my enthusiasm soared. Soon enquiries from parents were flooding in and my case load increased to twenty five pupils a week. I was experiencing for the first time in a long time, a feeling of success and making my own way, setting my own schedule and a routine commanded by structure and work in which I thrived.

I recognise now that working with children in those early years of my teaching career was a powerful affirmation of my future professional journey, but also a slow realisation that I liked, even needed to have control and order, discipline and a strong desire for achievement, not only for myself; the desire to see others achieve at my hand was the ultimate reward.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

PGCE programme leader: So, tell me about yourself and why you wish to study for the PGCE.

I was three months away from completing my bachelor degree in music and applications had opened for the secondary-phase teacher training programme. I did not hesitate. Both in my application and in my response to her first question. The programme leader had clearly been briefed by her colleagues in the music department about her future prospective student teacher cohort. She was known for her astuteness in being able to identify who would go on to become a good teacher, who was suited to the profession and who was simply taking the postgraduate course just to fill in time.

She asked her question and waited in anticipation as I slowly began to speak. I watched her expression change from one that was preparing to dismiss me as the quiet, studious one who rarely mixed in and did not seem to possess either the social skills or the personality to become a classroom presence. I described my early philosophy of education, my love for music, my background, my cultural experiences and what happened to electrify both me and my pupils when I taught them to play the piano.

The superficiality of the opening interview question led us to discuss the nuances of applying techniques used in one-to-one instruction compared to a class of thirty. As I became more animated with every point, so did my interviewer reciprocate. She offered me a place on the course immediately and later revealed that her actions in doing so were unprecedented.

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That summer I disappeared to Sri Lanka for several weeks. It became a spiritual quest for me in coming to realisation of who I was as a person and what I was here in this life to both do and to achieve. I was far away from everything and everyone I knew, immersed in an unfamiliar yet enticing culture, living simply with few comforts and slowly unravelling the knots of confusion caused by years of conformity and misdirected pursuits. I spent my days in sheer blissful peace. The Sri Lankan people welcomed me with warmth, and I felt, for the first time in my life, a connection between physical and spiritual self, revealed to me through the eyes and the company of those who had nothing, who lived in material poverty but whose faith and love of God and life shone through everything they did. For a time, I considered not returning home.

This experience shaped me and gave me the space and capacity to loosen the shackles of the past, to shed my skin and emerge as a metamorphosed creature, confident and more assured, able to freely converse with anyone, no longer enveloped and suffocated by striving to be someone that was never meant to be; no longer plagued by the feelings of inadequacy that had first begun to haunt me when I could not play to the required standard. I returned home to begin my work as a teacher having felt as close to self-actualising as I ever thought possible.

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The corners of south-east London were the places that shaped the professional me. When my training year as a teacher came to an end, it was the relationships and bonds I had formed with the children in each school, the closest of which were tied to those from troubled families, that I took with me in my heart. For these were the first children whose lives I had touched, albeit fleetingly. Still now, after twenty six years, it overwhelms me to think of how many thousands of children my work has enabled me to reach. I have never lost that feeling of gratitude for vocation and for the privilege of being a teacher.

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Female Student A: Miss, how old are you? Where do you live Miss? Have you a got a boyfriend?

Male Student B: What are we doing today? This is my favourite lesson!

Male Student C: This lesson is SO boring!

Female Student D: Can we sing today, Miss?

Female Student A: I love your shoes, Miss. Where do you get your clothes from? I bet it's somewhere really posh like Debenhams!

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Line Manager: I've decided to retire. There's an opportunity to go early and still keep my pension. Staff cuts, you know. You'll be ok; you're young, cheap to employ.

Headmaster: I would like you to look after the music department. I cannot afford to pay you much more but could stretch to one responsibility point. The Head of English will be your line manager; just go to him with any issues.

Then I was outside the Headmaster's door having fumbled an acceptance of this hurried offer of first-level responsibility just a few months into my teaching career in my newly qualified status. Was it fear that gripped me then? Not exactly fear; apprehension perhaps, wanting to do a good job and show I was capable of running a department. No, it was more determined than apprehensive feelings that enveloped me.

Me: I am on the first rung now!

My proud announcement to my colleagues in the staffroom, shortly after exiting the Headmaster's office. Their puzzled looks invited me to explain that I was now on the 'career ladder' and it was my every intention now to climb up to the very top.

Amused and bemused faces from my more experienced colleagues, those close to retirement nodding with wry smiles, metaphorically patting the head of this young and overly enthusiastic rookie teacher with five minutes of experience and big ideas for the future.

Teacher A: I'm not interested in climbing the ladder.

Teacher B: I can't even find the ladder!

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I was permitted by the Headmaster to attend middle managers' meetings as a leader of a small subject, but I was not permitted to speak or to participate in decision-making. I didn't like that; I felt demeaned, patronised and unimportant, with nothing to say. But I had lots to say. So, I spoke in terms of action and applied for another job in a school far away. A gamble but one that proved to be fruitful. I was able to announce my resignation and promotion to a genuine, legitimate Faculty Head position. An all-girls comprehensive school where I would be free to develop the music and performing arts curriculum, supported and line managed by a senior leader, not a Head of English lumbered with overseeing me just because he happened to play the guitar.

I bade farewell to my first school; the second rung of the ladder now securely underfoot.

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I was about to give up on making first level senior leadership applications. It was one's age back then that was either friend or foe. It seemed to be an unwritten rule that you had to serve time as an apprentice for eight years at least before you were qualified in experience to lead anything other than your own subjects. But after four years as a middle leader and now a masters' degree in business management behind me, I was ready to take an early step up to senior leadership.

I was a 29-year-old risk with just seven years of teaching experience. But that shrewd and long serving Headteacher knew that young blood and boundless enthusiasm made the perfect recipe for re-energising a wilting 6th form.

Although welcomed onto the senior team, I did not feel legitimate in the role. Every day was a learning experience and I floundered often. I was part of a much more experienced, older and wiser team of colleagues. I felt naive every day. They affectionately ridiculed me for being 'too posh', my ideas being 'too upmarket for the likes of us'. I had to toughen my approach and adapt myself to fit in, especially if I was to earn their respect.

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Me: I would like to be the next one to apply for the NPQH.

The new and recently appointed Head agreed to support my application and, with my acceptance onto the training programme for aspiring Headteachers, I slowly began to feel more equal to my colleagues.

The training was fascinating. I was learning and exposed to issues of school leadership that I had never been aware of, as my job roles had not presented me with such intricate complexity before.

I absorbed everything, reading all the literature, sitting up late at night devouring leadership theory and practising and rehearsing for the role plays ready for practical workshops and seminars. I kept my learning journal meticulously and enjoyed the comradely working with other aspiring Heads. This was a whole new world.

My colleagues seemed to view me very differently. Now when I spoke, they listened and nodded.

Graduating from the NPQH was final validation. I was ready to move. The ladder was beckoning.

Analysis

> For men and women are not only themselves; they are the region in which they were born, the city apartment in which they learned to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives' tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poems they read, and the God they believed in.

> Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge* (1944; 2008, p. 2-3)

Safety and security in my formative years of life were rooted in structure, discipline and routine. 1970s family life, for me, was ordered. Socialisation was within a small circle of family, friends, congregation and school. Mine was a small world and one of sameness. But I never felt the same. As I progressed with my musical training, I was slowly breaking out of the mould of sameness; the goals I was working to became more about achievement and recognition that set me apart from those around me. I was happy in my small world surrounded by a small social circle, but I did feel I was slowly being pulled away from the shelter that this way of life offered.

I was complying with expectations because I was working hard at my craft; I was setting the same goals that my family was setting for me; new goals for my family. Despite a middle-class life of relative privilege, I was the first to receive a private school education. There was a felt weight of expectation of where these goals would lead as I grew older, but it took time, growth and an early maturity to realise they were not *my* expectations.

Rohr (2012) speaks about the importance of being mirrored well as a child, not so much that it tarnishes one with conceit or narcissism, but one that affords a child just enough to root their inner confidence and security so that, later in life, that child is able to mirror others in the same way. I felt secure and happy as a child and in growing into young adulthood. Pope Francis (2019) reminds us that 'it is impossible for us to grow unless we have strong roots to support us and to keep us firmly grounded' (p.63).

But I lived an early life contained within a 'false self', a self that was assigned by my upbringing, location, family memberships and education:

> Your 'False Self' is almost entirely a social construct to get you started on your life journey. It is a set of agreements between your childhood, your parents, your family, your neighbours, your school chums, your partner and your religion. It is your container for your separate self. Jesus would call it your wineskin (Mark 2:21-22)…..Jesus' central and oft repeated teaching that we must die to ourselves or "lose ourselves to find ourselves" (Mark 8:35).

> Rohr (2013, p.36)

I was never one for joining in. In social gatherings I was uncomfortable. Therein lies a notable binary – that I was quite happy in the small world of routine and sameness and I naturally defaulted to a preference for peace, quiet and solitude whenever I was afforded this, yet the path I was now setting out upon as a performing musician would not allow much room for this preference. It was a path where achievement and recognition were both the end goal and the milestones along the way. I didn't feel a need at the time to be recognised but I did gain a lot of personal satisfaction from achievement. I was fitting in, complying with the expectations that my family had of me. There was a determination that I would be the first in my family to attend university and a collective pride in my developing musical ability. I was often put on display at family and social gatherings even though I felt shy and embarrassed at being under the spotlight. I would perform then retreat as quickly as possible to a quiet corner.

I was anxious about university and the new and unexplored terrain. My small world was about to expand, and I was disturbed by this so the decision to cling onto home and commute to a university in the capital was very much a conscious choice as it allowed me to maintain some sense of home routine and a place of safety and familiarity to retreat to. Treating university in the same way that I attended school every day enabled me to endure it; but I did not enjoy it. I lacked confidence in this expanded world, and I was unsure of my place within it. I was also suddenly surrounded by gifted musicians, many more talented than I was.

Through university I felt increasingly burdened by a growing restlessness and a sense that I was not following my life's true path. Finlay (1978), references Thomas Merton's view of the marginal person: 'He does not belong to an establishment. He is a marginal person who withdraws deliberately to the margin of society' (p.54). In living the life expected of me I was unable to find how to live my life with more integrity, to be the person I was meant to be (Groome, 2019). This assertion is framed poignantly by O'Donohue (1997):

> If you live the life you love, you will receive shelter and blessings. Sometimes the great famine of blessing in and around us derives from the fact that we are living the life that is expected of us. When you force yourself into a pre-set mould you betray your individuality.

> (p.160)

It was university that confronted me with my first experience of failure but also a first experience of spiritual awakening. O'Leary (2018) suggests that we are fragile creatures, often unsure of our identity and purpose. In my life thus far, I had been placed on a path towards becoming a performing musician; I had been learning, developing and crafting, moving towards an end goal of piano mastery. But I was unable to make the final steps. The reality of failing at this point

could have been crushing; that it did not, astonishes me. My path to follow had taken me to a certain point then veered off to the side. Examining this through an Ignatian spiritual lens leads to the discernment of spirits as being at the heart of all decision-making:

> Life will always bring changes, gains and losses, clarity and confusion. Through it all we are encouraged to leave ourselves in the hands of God, to allow Him to write our own personal story.
>
> O'Leary (2018, p.119)

I placed myself and my trust in the hands of God; the path to performance ended but, simultaneously, a new path was revealed to me through the means not of performance, but of pedagogy. I had not planned to teach piano but once I started this at the suggestion of my tutor, it was a revelatory experience. For this revelation to emerge at the same time as my life-long pathway coming to a close, took away any bitterness, frustration and sense of loss that failing as a musician can bring. Failure for me was a springboard from which faith catapulted me onto a new path, one that was to become mine for life ahead.

O'Leary (2018) writes about St. Ignatius coming to realise through his own developing spiritual sensitivity that he was not the 'main mover' in his life, that there was 'another mover in his life who was more powerful and dynamic and far-seeing than himself' (p.59). I made a significant turn in my life and in how I understood my place within the world when I realised at university that I was not a performer; I was a teacher. Although unaware at the time, I can see now with heightened clarity of spiritual vision that there was a powerful force moving in my life, moving me towards what was to become my destined vocation in teaching.

West (2014) references the concept of 'transitional space' (p.69) and suggests that university can become 'a space where self is in negotiation and where struggles around separation and individuation – letting go of past ideas and relationships – takes place.' *(ibid.)* I had to then face the realisation that I would be letting down my family that had high expectations of what and who I would become. I would be a disappointment.

I believe that, in falling down as a performing musician, I was in fact 'falling upwards' into a higher plane of being (Rohr, 2012). Many musicians descend into despair in realising their own limitations; some never recover and then retreat into a life of begrudging acceptance where the demons of 'what if' and 'if only' occupy their thoughts. I am thankful that these thoughts never haunted me. Realising that performing was not my path brought with it enormous relief and a new sense of awakening to possibilities I had never considered.

Hattie (1992) suggested that the discovery of self is most often a 'haphazard emerging' (p.vii). I look back upon my interview for the teacher training course as one of the most pivotal moments of my life. I realise that up to that point, living the life I had, cloaked in the expectations of others, had actually smothered my true self (Finlay, 2000). I was given an identity, a role; it was one that I also chose to accept and one that I felt safe and comfortable with, but it wasn't mine. It was time to cast off the old 'wineskin' (Mark 2:22). I knew I could not do that without doing something completely different, radical even by my family's standards.

My decision to uproot and travel to the other side of the world was as much a part of escapism, confronting myself as being a disappointment, as it was a bid for space and freedom to disentangle myself from a way of life that I would no longer follow. Being far away in a culture that was alien to all I had known in my upbringing, far away from everyone who knew me, afforded me the 'transitional space' (West, 2014, p.69) to shed the skin that I came to realise had been sewn onto me, to find peace and to reconcile with who I was becoming. My trip to Sri Lanka was a form of spiritual 'metanoia' – it changed both my heart and my outlook at the start of my adult life's journey (Hughes, 1985, p.70).

I was filled with spirit and a new lust for life. I had hitherto not travelled beyond Europe with my family. But I was determined to take my newly discovered, newly-formed self away, across the world, pulled by a connection to a place that I knew very little about. It was a strong pull of the spirit that I believe now, in reflection, was part of a very important journey of formation in faith. To set forth into a new life and discover a new way of being in the world, is to close and let go of a past. A new self can emerge but only if the conditions are right at the time. I needed to experience a complete change of air, of culture, to have time and space to shed a skin. I was on a path to finding out who my true self actually was:

> In finding your True Self you will have found an absolute reference point that is both utterly within you and utterly beyond you at the same time. This grounds the soul in a big and reliable truth. The discovery of your True Self will feel like a thousand pounds of weight have fallen from your back. You will no longer have to build, protect or promote any idealised self-image. Living in the True Self is quite simply a much happier existence.

> Rohr (2013, p.4)

In the Catholic faith, the teaching of St. Ignatius centres upon finding God in all things and about finding freedom to become the person you are meant to be. Ignatian spirituality juxtaposes freedom and detachment; it is through detachment that we become freer and happier as spiritual beings (Martin, 2012). I used that time in Sri Lanka to come to terms with who I had been, and who I felt I was now becoming. Nin (1978) spoke of people on a journey of discovery

as 'peeling off the false selves, the programmed selves, the selves created by our families, our culture, our religions' (p.4).

It was an anxious time but not for long. Time spent far away, where no one knew me, where I did not know a soul, or had no connection with a place other than knowing its great sense of spirituality and simplicity, I had no one to listen to as they expressed their preferences for me. I was able to find *my* place in the world (Plotkin, 2003). I grew into my own identity, not an identity assigned by someone else, and could finally connect with my true feelings and wishes (Guignon, 2004). I came to realisation that I had hitherto allowed others' preferences for me to 'define who I was from the outside' (Rohr, 2013, p.9) and the life I was busy cultivating; it was as if I had denied myself the very essence of the person I was called to be (Rohr, 2012). I was always distant, on the fringe, on the outside because of my tendency to self-segregate. But I did not yet understand why I preferred to be this way.

Catholic and other spiritual writers discern the emergence of a person's true self as launching from a springboard of a 'false self' that we assume or are assigned in early life of formation: our image, our education, possessions, upbringing, our family's values, and social status are unrealised and unseen trappings holding us to our ego. It is when we are able to move beyond these attachments, at the time that is right for us as individual spirits, that we can really begin to experience a self-awakening, a liberation (Silf, 2017; Rohr, 2013; Huebsch, 2009). My trip was an essential prerequisite for my prior self, my false self, to let go and not look back. Silf (2017) encapsulates this poignantly: 'We don't have to force ourselves to fit into systems; the butterfly will never fit back into the caterpillar' (p.76)

Pope Francis (2019) suggests that we are not anchored to the roots that we started out in life with. They are, moreover, 'a fixed point from which we can grow and meet new challenges' (p.69). I realised there was nothing to fear or be anxious about because I felt an overwhelming sense of freedom. In journeying to Sri Lanka, I was finally able to find who I was; there was no fear or regret (Rohr, 2013).

Powell (1985) suggests that a life lived at the will of another person can never be the life that God wills for us; that it can be distressing and damaging to live out someone else's decision for us:

> The one sure way not to grow is to hitchhike on the mind and will of someone else. We will never mature if we let others think for us and make our choices.
>
> Powell (1985, p.131)

Hughes (1985) speaks of life as being free and not enslaved: 'to be indifferent or detached is the condition of being free' (p. 61). For me, the trip to Sri Lanka was a process of losing the trappings of enslavement to a life path that was not mine to follow; it would have enslaved me to a life of bitter frustration and repeated failure if I had refused to acknowledge that I was not a performing musician. My decision to become a teacher was the first experience I had of sensitivity to the will of God and my own will being in harmony. So, when I returned with a different vision for my life and set forth into my teaching ministry, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace, personal freedom and a new, independent confidence.

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In teaching I had discovered my vocation and my purpose. I understood what all the years of musical training had been for. Music was not my gift to own, it was my gift to impart. Martin (2012) defines vocation as:

> What we are called to do and who we are called to be. Vocation is not just about working, it is about being. It's not just about what you do but, more importantly, who you are.

> (p.342)

I never felt that I was working when I taught; I felt I was truly living. That has not changed to this day in my role as a teaching Head. Joy had entered my life via the process of work (Lad and Luechauer, 1998). I felt at home in this new skin, and this new understanding of my identity.

My early years in teaching were times of immense happiness and simplicity. My data recalls the everyday exchanges that would take place between the students and me, the easy conversations that cemented the teacher-student bonds and the way that I was aware even then of how differently boys and girls behaved in my lessons and towards me; girls often more inquisitive about the person and personal life of the teacher figure and boys who identified their lessons as either fun or 'boring'. The data recalls the comradery of the staffroom and the ease with which I shared news with my colleagues of my first step into unexpected promotion. Up to that point I had not considered teaching as a career that afforded progression; I was happy simply being a teacher. But my eyes were opened by the offer to lead a department within my first year of teaching. In my data I make reference to 'the ladder'; the metaphorical term for a long-held hierarchy in state education. I later reference this with a certain dose of irony as, when I had eventually reached the top of the career ladder and had become a Headteacher, the sector had changed, and the growth of the Multi Academy Trusts had given rise to more rungs being added to the hierarchy above.

The data reveals that structure and routine that had framed my early life and throughout childhood provided a framework for my life as a teacher too. Education is set within fixed structures where the weekly timetable and the school calendar determine the rhythm of the year. I found comfort and security in order and routine as a child and, as an adult too, I revelled in a job that afforded me familiar routine and structure.

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