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**IMPROVISATION AND TEACHER EXPERTISE:  
A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

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requirements of Bath Spa University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis reports on an enquiry into the nature of teacher expertise which pays particular attention to its improvisatory nature. The study draws on three main areas of literature and theory: critical studies in improvisation; expertise and expert practice and organisation theory. These are used to present a model of teacher expertise that is derived from grounded theory.

The data is taken from a series of comparative case studies of seven experienced teachers working in secondary schools in the South West of England and who have been identified as being expert within their school setting. Constant comparative methods of analysis have been used to draw out themes from the data. This has contributed to a grounded theory that identifies the nature of teacher expertise.

The findings that arise from the data are that teacher's expertise is best expressed as continually evolving practice, a process as opposed to an end state. Advanced professional practice is best described as a 'teacher with expertises' and this is preferable to the term 'expert teacher'. The data shows that teacher expertise is fundamentally improvisatory and that this has a positive impact on the quality of teaching. The improvisation nature of teacher expertise is derived from four processes: the expression of tacit knowledge, relational and interactional practice, personalisation of the learning environment and self-reflection leading to the continual adaptation of pedagogy.

The resulting model of teacher expertise casts new light on how we understand advanced professional practice and this has implications for school leaders, teachers, researchers and those with responsibility for the initial training and the continuing professional development of teachers.

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## **Appendices**

The appendices are contained within a separate document that accompanies this thesis.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*In this introduction the context for this research is presented, outlining the personal motivations to engage in this project and the problematical issues surrounding the description of advanced professional practice. The philosophical position is articulated along with the assumptions that underpin the research. A position statement outlines the axiological beliefs of the researcher which articulates the stance and the biases that shape the study. Finally an overview of the thesis is given.*

## 1.1 The personal motivation to undertake this research

The impetus to research the improvisatory nature of expert teaching has been driven by three main personal interests. The first of these is the author's long-standing interest in improvisation both as a music practitioner (a jazz saxophonist) and as an academic. A Master's thesis (Sorensen, 1988) explored improvisation as a phenomenon within the Arts (as a significant and identifiable mode of creativity) and supported the assumption that improvisation is not confined to the Arts but is present within the context of 'everyday life'. This, in turn, led to an interest in the ways in which improvisation is accorded significance, for example in the way in which the metaphor of 'the jazz band' has been used to illuminate the improvisatory nature of social life within organisations (Hatch, 1997), leadership (Newton, 2004), schools (Stoll et al., 2003) and the meaning of life (Eagleton, 2008). Within an educational context improvisational qualities are seen to underpin Piaget's (1990) view of intelligence; what you use when you don't know what to do. This idea has explicitly informed metacognitive approaches to classroom practice (Claxton, 1999; 2002; Deakin Crick et al., 2004; Deakin Crick, 2006). Social constructionist views of learning, based on notions of intersubjectivity and the social nature of learning (Vygotsky 1978), acknowledge a reality that is constructed through discussion and description. The word 'dialogic', often accompanied by an attribution to Bakhtin, is applied to the study of educational dialogue which, as Wegerif (2008) points out, 'always implies at least two voices, (and) assumes underlying difference rather than identity (348). Constructivist and dialogic pedagogies acknowledge that the unpredictability of multiple competing voices make discussion a uniquely effective teaching tool. Consequently, these approaches are viewed as being 'fundamentally improvisational' (Sawyer, 2004: 190) because if the classroom is scripted and controlled by the teacher then students are unable to co-construct their own

knowledge. The implicit improvisational assumptions behind this wide range of theories concerning learning and pedagogy suggest that the improvisatory nature of teaching is an area that deserves to be researched.

A second interest, which derives from the first, stems from the author's professional role in supporting the continuing professional development of teachers, initially through working as an independent education consultant and currently as a Senior Lecturer in Higher Education leading a Professional Masters Programme (PMP). The author's position as teacher educator is informed by Hoban (2002) who argues that there is a need for a theoretical framework for long-term teacher development and Coffield and Edwards (2009) who question what we should call 'good' teaching and what it means to be an advanced professional. These ideas instigated a desire to theorise advanced professional practice and articulate what it might look like in order to support teachers to attain that degree of competence. A theoretical framework (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010a) identifies four phases of professional practice of which the fourth and most advanced phase sees professional practice as having the ability to teach creatively within the context of a learner-centred classroom. In this advanced phase of teaching, students are perceived as knowledgeable and active partners who are engaged in a dialogic process of learning that is facilitated and supported by the teacher.

This pedagogic perspective is augmented by a view of professional status exemplified by the concept of the 'authorised teacher' (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010b) which offers an alternative title for the advanced practitioner. The 'authorised teacher' is based on notions of professional autonomy grounded in critical professional practice defined by three related concepts: 'authenticity', 'authorisation' and 'authoring'. Having 'authenticity' is concerned with being someone who acts and belongs to his or herself and whose opinion is entitled to acceptance. 'Authorisation' is about having the power to influence action, opinion and belief, and of having an opinion or testimony that is accepted. Finally 'authoring' is concerned with the articulating processes through which teachers author their own professional identity within a critical framework. This view of advanced professional practice sees professional values as being situated within communities of learning that employ reflective and critical practices to support professional development.

The third interest that prompted this research is the current educational debate concerning the nature of teaching that has arisen out of the educational reforms of the UK Coalition government, 2010 to 2015. Heralded in the significantly titled 'The Importance of Teaching'

(DfE, 2010) these reforms, building upon and extending the neoliberal policies introduced by the 1988 Education Act, challenge notions of what it means to be an effective professional. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) point out, teacher professionalism is a contested concept, subject to historical, political and cultural assumptions. There have been many changes to the professional boundaries and expectations of teachers, particularly since the wave of educational reforms that followed the 1988 Education Reform Act. For the Coalition government ‘the first, and most important, lesson is that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers’ (DfE, 2010: 3). This view, driven by comparison with ‘international competitors’ (ibid: 3) acknowledges The McKinsey Report ‘Closing the talent gap: attracting and retaining top-third graduates to careers in teaching’ (Auguste et al. 2010) which states that ‘of all the controllable factors in an education system, the most important by far is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. The world’s best performing school systems make great teaching their “north star”’ (Auguste et al., 2010: 5).

These three areas of interest have generated a number of questions regarding the advanced professional practice of teachers. What does it look like? How is it facilitated and supported? How do teachers view their expertise? The author’s assumption is that teachers are able to articulate and explain their practice and that their *voices* have a valuable contribution to make to the discourse on what ‘great teaching’ (as Auguste et al. call it) is and what it might look like in the classroom. One of the principal aims of the research is to bring these *voices* into this debate and this critical assumption has informed the methodology and ethical purpose of the research. However, there are a number of problems implicit in this area of research and some of these assumptions are linked to the use of language, assumptions about the nature of advanced professional practice and how we describe it.

## **1.2 Describing advanced professional practice**

The language used to describe the advanced professional practice of teachers is extremely problematical. This is partly due to the fact that many of these terms, such as ‘good’, ‘outstanding’, ‘advanced skilled’ or ‘experienced’ have now accumulated very specific meanings derived from the context of UK inspection and evaluation (Ofsted, 2014) or the standards for teachers (TDA, 2007; DCSF, 2009). These terms, and their associated criteria, have in their turn shaped and influenced what is deemed to be ‘great teaching’. Teachers, understandably, reflect these views in their practice to the extent that these externally derived norms prevail over the

situated reality of the individual teacher's classroom. Assumptions of advanced practice therefore are influenced by what can be measured, observed and evidenced. Consequently, certain aspects of practice that exist, but are not easily articulated are ignored or marginalised. This research is situated in the view that the generalised knowledge of teaching and learning, as promoted by the UK standards agenda and inspection criteria, does not fully represent the cognitive framework of practitioners (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000). A key assumption underlying this research is that professional practice is complex, dynamic and interactive and that it occurs within specific and constantly changing cultural, political, social and organisational contexts (Atkinson and Claxton 2000: 6, Hoban 2002). A further assumption is that teaching as an activity, which would include the work of the 'advanced practitioner', is socially constructed. This assumption recognises that teaching is fundamentally a relational activity and that the nature of teaching can only be understood in terms of the relationship and interaction between teacher and pupil. This not only applies to the pedagogic relationship with learners but also to the process of continuing professional development within 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in which self-reflection is moderated through interactions with other professionals.

The complexities surrounding the language used to describe advanced professional practice have two main causes. The first is a consequence of the drive for continual improvement that results in a shift in the rhetoric of policy within government strategies for improving the education system. Coffield and Edwards (2009) note this shift as 'good practice' is replaced by 'best practice' and then 'excellent practice for all'. The second cause is the multiplicity of terms that describe desirable practice and which have now gained specific meanings through the UK's Ofsted criteria ('good' or 'outstanding') or through the Standards for Teaching ('Excellent teachers' or 'Advanced skills teachers'). Consequently, when statements are made such as 'The world's best performing school systems make great teaching their "north star"' (Auguste et al., 2010: 5) it is difficult to know exactly what is meant by 'great teaching'; this subjective term is open to interpretation and political bias especially when being 'measured' in practice by external agencies such as Ofsted.

These contextual issues suggest that there is much to be gained from research into the advanced professional practice of teachers by taking into account that which is not accounted for in the current discourse (based on the standards and the accountability framework). Therefore, in order to bypass current assumptions and practices, broaden the debate and to

draw on findings from other disciplines this research is located within the newly developed area of expertise and expert performance. This is a field of study that seeks to explore generalizable understandings and knowledge of expertise from across diverse, and discrete, domains (Ericsson et al., 2006). Furthermore, given that the generalised knowledge of teaching and learning, as promoted by the UK standards agenda and inspection criteria, does not fully represent the cognitive framework of practitioners (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000) there is a need to understand the ways in which tacit knowledge and social context inform teacher expertise. This suggests that there is value in exploring the improvisatory aspects of teaching.

### **1.3 Rationale and aims of the research**

The purpose of this research is to find whether there is a relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation and to discover what this means in terms of practice. There is broad evidence, both anecdotal and from the research community that improvisation is a facet of expert teaching (Hattie, 2009; Goodwyn, 2011) and therefore it would be valuable to determine the extent to which this is the case. This will lead to finding whether expert teachers perceive their practice to be improvisatory. The ultimate purpose of the research is to see how the research findings might challenge, extend or complement existing notions of what it means to be an expert teacher and clarify the myths and assumptions that surround the existing terminology.

The purpose of the research is expressed in the principal research question ‘what is the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation?’ Leading on from this are six other *prima facie* questions:

1. How do teachers (and headteachers) describe and identify expert teachers?
2. How do teachers come to be identified as ‘experts’ and what processes in schools enable this to happen?
3. To what extent do ‘expert teachers’ perceive themselves to be expert?
4. How is teacher expertise displayed in the classroom?
5. In what ways do expert teachers improvise?
6. To what extent is improvisation a conscious and intentional facet of their expertise?

This research potentially offers a number of contributions to new knowledge. Firstly, given the importance of developing a fuller understanding of advanced professional practice this research can offer practitioner based insights into teacher expertise derived from empirical study.

Secondly, this research is located within two emerging fields of academic interest within the social sciences: the study of improvisation as an artistic and social phenomenon and the study of expertise and expert performance. The findings will hopefully make a contribution to both of these new areas as well as informing cross-disciplinary links between them.

Thirdly, the research offers a new and innovative methodological approach to the empirical study of teacher expertise that privileges the voice of teachers and acknowledges the social construction of expertise. Fourthly, the research findings have implications for the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers as well as providing insights for headteachers and policy makers into the cultural conditions that foster teacher expertise.

## **1.4 Assumptions underpinning the research**

The philosophical position in which this research is located is based on an acknowledgment of the unique qualities of improvisation which takes into account the spontaneous, unpredictable, creative and interactive nature of improvisation which is viewed as an essential and defining characteristic of the social and natural world. Therefore, a meta-assumption of this research is that improvisation contains its own ontology, an ontology that is reflected within the paradigm of social constructionism. This philosophical position is derived from a range of ontological and epistemological assumptions about the way in which the world is viewed, the nature of reality, individuals and social action. Social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Shotter, 2008 and Gergen, 2009) suggests that there is shared knowledge and reality that individuals negotiate with each other.

Clear distinctions can be made between social constructionism and the constructivist theories of learning of Piaget (1951) and Vygotsky (1978) that assert that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Constructivists claim that knowledge lies in the minds of individuals who construct *individual* meaning on the basis of their own experiences whereas social constructionism is

concerned with the idea that individuals construct *social* meaning through their shared realities and their social interaction.

The ontological assumption on which this research is based takes the position that the world is continually changing, reflecting the Heraclitian view that 'you never step into the same river twice' (Barnes, 1987: 69). Change is seen to be unpredictable in that there are no universal laws governing this process. Whilst what happens in the world is not predictable it is patterned and this enables us to make tentative speculations about phenomena. Things happen in the natural world through the process of emergence (Capra, 2002), the interplay between fixed and generative structures. Events do not have single causes but have to be viewed in an organic, non-linear and holistic manner. Humans are part of the natural world and are co-dependent on other life forms from which they are not separate, different or superior. What distinguishes them from other species is language, intentionality and their capacity to demonstrate free will. The process of emergence is mirrored in the social world.

Reality is viewed from the point of view of idealism (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 57), meaning that it is a subjective phenomenon which is socially constructed by individuals and groups through multiple perspectives and warrants being brought forward. Individuals are able to achieve a subjective understanding of their world, ascribe meaning to their lived experience and interpret their world and represent it. There are no such things as objective facts; facts are theory and value-laden and differ according to place, time and people; truth is situated and historical. The human mind is comprised of conscious (rational) and unconscious (intuitive) elements and individuals are able to reflect on their experiences and adapt their behaviours.

Human action is voluntaristic (not deterministic); through their actions individuals are able to exercise agency and act intentionally in a manner that is futures orientated. They have free will which enables them to initiate their own actions and to be creative; people are viewed as positive, active and purposive. Free will is realised within limits; these boundaries are shaped by structural and external forces that influence behaviour and events.

Social action is understood through the interaction between social structures and human agency. Both of these factors are viewed from a holistic perspective. Humans have the capacity to change and develop; this can be encouraged or inhibited by other people or cultural circumstances. Our relationships with other people are influenced by power. Within the paradigm of social constructionism (Burr, 2003), social knowledge and meanings are shared as

people engage in a process of co-construction through a culture of shared artefacts and shared meanings.

The epistemological assumptions that underpin social constructionism (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009) view knowledge as being personal, subjective and unique; through reflection it is possible to 'know thyself'. However knowledge is not located within an individual, it is socially constructed and consequently intersubjective. 'Knowledge and the knower are interdependent and embedded within history, context, culture, language and experience' (Savin Baden and Major, 2013: 62) Whilst direct (objective) knowledge is not possible, accounts and observations of the world can provide indirect indications of phenomena (Arthur et al., 2012: 16). Individuals can explain themselves through narrative and knowledge can be developed through a process of interpretation. However, as Giddens (1976) points out, social scientists have to deal with a 'double hermeneutic'; they are interpreting their subject matter which is itself engaged in interpretation.. The implications of this are that, in order to understand human conduct and behaviour, we must take subjective phenomenological insights seriously.

The social constructionist view of theory is that it arises from particular situations and is 'grounded', providing sets of meaning which yield insight and understanding of people's behaviour, a co-construction between researcher and participant (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 63). Theory is not seen as the end product of research, but as a transitory and contingent process that produces explanations; these explanations are more important than the theory. Different theories generate different facts. Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of phenomena there is a need to look at the data from a number of theoretical viewpoints. The choice of research methodology involves a synthesis of phenomenological research paradigms in order to encompass consensus viewpoints.

Phenomena need to be looked at holistically and from a number of viewpoints in order to get a rich as possible understanding of what is going on. People need to be studied as a whole and their views need to be understood and verified by those involved in the research (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Communities and cultures will attribute and generate their own understanding of concepts, ideas and facts and these are often represented through narrative accounts. These assumptions have influenced the methodological choices used in this research.

Alongside the ontological and epistemological assumptions there is a need to take into account axiological assumptions, the values and beliefs held by the researcher. These also have a

considerable influence upon the research design, the collection and analysis of the data and the findings. Axiological assumptions articulate the stance and bias of the researcher. Emanating from these views is the positionality of the researcher, 'the position the researcher has chosen *within* a given research study' (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 71). Given the nature and the significance of the issues of stance, bias and positionality this statement will be written in the first person.

I am a white Caucasian male in my late 50's and have spent my entire professional career working within education. From 1979 to 2003 I was employed within state secondary schools in England, the latter six years as the headteacher of a large comprehensive school. Following five years working as an independent education consultant I began working in Higher Education as a Senior Lecturer within a School of Education on a 0.5 contract. It was at this point in time (2008) that I commenced this PhD research. In September 2012 I began working full time at the university. I have used my network of professional contacts to identify and gain access to the various research sites. My position as an ex-headteacher and as a provider of continuing professional development has provided me with the credibility and trust that has encouraged headteachers to grant permission for me to undertake this research within their schools.

The motivation and interest to undertake this research derives from my professional context as a Senior Lecturer in an HEI and as an independent consultant specialising in teacher development and educational leadership and management. A number of issues have fascinated me and have influenced and shaped my research interests and these are outlined below. These issues illuminate the axiological assumptions that I hold, which have been articulated in earlier writing (Sorensen and Coombs 2009, 2010a, 2010b), and identify the stance that I have taken as a researcher.

Over the past decade or so I believe that there has been a radical shift in our notions of teacher professionalism. This can be summarised as a move away from the use of a didactic transmission-based pedagogy towards a reflexive, dialogic pedagogy with the teacher seen as a facilitator of learning. I describe the long-term goal of teacher development as a journey from a teacher-directed classroom to a learner-centred classroom. This view of teacher development is accompanied by a shift in school culture towards embracing notions of schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1990 and Stoll et al., 2003). What constitutes teacher professionalism is a shifting notion and the dialogic / metacognitive aspect of teaching represents a further area of expertise that needs to be demonstrated by outstanding practitioners.

I believe that there is a need for a long-term approach to support teachers through the non-linear process of change (Hoban 2002); the pathway through which teachers progress from novice to expert is under-theorised (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010) and under-researched (Genberg, 1992: 492). The lack of a theoretical framework for long-term teacher development creates difficulties in determining what it means to be an 'expert teacher', not least because it makes it difficult to begin with what Covey (1989) calls 'the end in mind'; to 'work with your mind until you get a clear image of what you want to build' (99).

As teachers gain more experience and become more competent and effective their professional development needs change and differ from novice or inexperienced teachers. Consequently there is a need to conceptualise the professional development of teachers as a life-long process to support these professional transitions. Continuing professional development (CPD) needs to be differentiated and should mirror, and model, outstanding classroom practice. A normative assumption about the purpose of education is that the learner should eventually become independent of the teacher. 'Translating' this assumption to the context of CPD means that as teachers gain greater expertise they should have greater autonomy as critical professional learners. They should have the authority to make professional decisions that they feel are right for individuals or groups of students in a given context. Accompanying this idea is the fact that since the 1988 Education Act educational reforms have steadily and progressively reduced the professional autonomy of teachers (Whitty, 2000).

The metaphor that has been frequently used to describe learning organizations is that of 'the jazz band' (Sorensen, 2013) and for me this raises the question 'what is the connection between teacher expertise and improvisation?' Consequently, the 'expert teacher' has become the focus for this research project. My view of teacher expertise is that it cannot be simply expressed as the sum total of a number of skills and competencies. My ontological assumptions are that phenomena, such as expertise, need to be looked at holistically as properties of a culture or organisation. Therefore, instead of looking to externally derived criteria to define teacher expertise, there is a need to explore how expertise is defined and expressed by particular individuals within specific locations / cultures.

Social research is political (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002: 12) in the sense that it could, or should, bring about social change. The outcome of this research could have an impact on policy, practice and the professional development of teachers. The research is rooted in a belief that neoliberal

education policies are fundamentally damaging to an education system that aspires to deliver social justice (Connell, 2012). A socially just education will be one that

emphasizes mutual responsibility: institutionally, in the form of a public school and university system not a privatized one, and pedagogically in classrooms that emphasise mutual aid in learning and development (2).

Consequently, a socially just education system will reverse the trend that has de-professionalised teachers, providing the good working conditions that allow teachers to use their own professional skills and judgement because they are best placed to provide what is needed for those that they teach (Nandy, 2012: 3). As Ayers states:

‘Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students ..... and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context – historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality’ (Ayers, 1998 xvii cited in Reay, 2012: 6).

The above statement of my stance as a researcher contains within it certain biases that will impact upon this research. These preconceptions can be summarised as follows:

- The view of ‘advanced practice’ that is promoted assumes that there is a correlation between improvisation and teacher expertise.
- That creative teaching is a desired outcome.
- A positive value is given to improvisation and the importance of improvisation within a teacher’s pedagogical repertoire.
- The quality of learning in the classroom is related to the quality of the relationship between teacher and learners.

## 1.5 Overview of the thesis

The structure of this thesis builds towards the comparison of a series of case studies of expert teachers. From a pilot case study (Phase One of the research) a number of themes will emerge that will be explored and analysed through the data that is gained from the main case studies in Phase Two of the research.

### **The structure of the thesis is as follows:**

Part 1 forms the literature review of the thesis, starting with this introduction. It outlines the broad theories that underpin this research.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to improvisation as a mode of creativity which can be viewed as an artistic and cultural phenomenon as well as a feature of everyday life. This leads to a working definition that informs this research. Improvisation is theorised from three viewpoints: complexity theory, critical theory and social constructionism.

Chapter 3 explores definitions of experts and expertise and outlines the main theoretical issues within this new area of study and is in two parts. The first part explores the way in which experts and expertise can be defined and outlines the characteristics of expert performance. Different theories of expertise are critically examined. The second part of the chapter provides a selective overview of the research into teacher expertise, focussing on those examples that have perceived a relationship with teacher expertise and improvisation.

Chapter 4 explores how changing notions of professionalism have impacted upon teaching and our understanding of what it means to be an expert teacher. Professionalism is viewed as a problematic and contested concept particularly within a neoliberal discourse which has challenged notions of the nature of the professional knowledge of teachers. Competing and conflicting notions of what constitutes advanced practice are explored through five discourses concluding with a summary of how these 'voices' are reflected in the education policies of the Coalition government.

Chapter 5 provides a view of schools from a social constructionist perspective looking at school cultures in the context of the related issues of structure and power.

Part 2 concentrates on the case studies of expert teachers and is concerned with the research process, the analysis of the data and presenting the research findings.

Chapter 6 discusses the methodological background for the study and the reason for choosing a case study approach to develop a grounded theory. The methods used to gather and analyse the data are explained and the ethical issues involved in selecting and researching expert teachers. In conclusion claims for the quality of the research are made.

Chapter 7 reports on Phase One of the research and presents the methodology, methods and findings from a pilot case study. There is an explanation of the adaptations to the methodology and approach to data collection that have been made in the light of the findings of the pilot case study.

Chapter 8 presents the findings from Phase Two of the research, a collection of six comparative case studies. Expert teaching is explored under four themes that emerged from the pilot case study: the views of the expert teachers, the culture of the classroom, the impact of the school culture and influences beyond the school.

Chapter 9 presents the thesis that arises from the research in the form of tentative conclusions that are derived from the grounded theory of teacher expertise outlined in the previous chapter and the postulates derived from the literature review. The thesis is then discussed from a theoretical perspective with particular reference to three concepts: structure, culture and power.

Chapter 10 presents a summary of the thesis and the conclusions derived from the case studies. There is a discussion of the concept of the expert teacher that emerges from the data and the significance of improvisation as a facet of expert teaching that leads to tentative conclusions on the relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise. The implications for practice derived from the research are outlined with particular reference to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of teachers and for educational leadership. The limitations of the research are considered as are the possibilities for further research and publication. Finally, the question of 'why does this research matter?' is addressed and how it has contributed to the interdisciplinary fields of expertise and critical studies in improvisation.

# Chapter 2: Improvisation: definitions and theoretical perspectives

*This chapter problematizes the process of defining and understanding improvisation as a phenomenon through acknowledging that there are a wide range of conflicting meanings associated with this activity that have arisen from different historical and cultural contexts. A grounded theory approach to coding these different definitions is used to identify the range of qualities and concepts that characterize improvisational activity in order to produce a working definition to guide the research. Different approaches to the ways in which improvisation can be theorised are considered: complexity theory, critical theory and social constructionism. The chapter concludes with articulating the theoretical perspectives and concepts that will be used in the research.*

## 2.1 Problematising improvisation

Jazz saxophonist Steve Lacy was once stopped in the street and asked to give a fifteen second explanation of the difference between composition and improvisation:

Straight away he replied: 'The main difference is that in composition you have all the time you need to think about what you are going to say in fifteen seconds, whereas in improvisation you only have fifteen seconds to say what you want to say.' He had taken exactly fifteen seconds to answer me (Rzewski, 1979 cited in Lacy, 2005, p70).

Lacy's response provides an articulate and easily grasped explanation of the nature of improvisation in which the nature of his response is also improvisatory. This short anecdote contains a number of assumptions about improvisation. In no particular order they are that improvisation is a creative act, that it is different to other creative acts (a composition), that it takes place within a context (in this case jazz), it involves spontaneity (happening 'in the moment') and it is an artistic activity that is deemed to be valuable and worthwhile. Finally, the conversation between Steve Lacy and his interviewer put him 'on the spot'; having no time to prepare an answer the dialogue itself was also an improvisation, an 'in the moment' interaction.

Yet this example, and the assumptions that accompany it, provides only a partial view of improvisation as a phenomenon. In addition to improvisation being an artistic activity and a characteristic of our conversations it is also a feature of our social interactions in everyday life; individuals improvise when they interact with others, when they 'make do' with what is available, react to the unexpected, are 'put on the spot' or spontaneously deviate from planned intentions. Indeed, such behaviour constitutes a significant aspect of our lived experience; it is what makes us human. Furthermore, improvisation can be seen both positively and negatively; in some contexts it is deemed appropriate and in others it is unacceptable. Improvising a jazz solo is one thing, improvising an end of year report to a Board of Directors is another. The all-pervasive nature of improvisation makes it difficult to determine exactly what constitutes an improvisation and what defines improvisatory behaviour. Derek Bailey, a leading improvising musician and writer, notes:

Improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practiced of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood. While it is today present in almost every area of music, there is almost a total absence of information about it. Perhaps this is inevitable, even appropriate (Bailey, 1980, p1).

The lack of understanding about improvisation is further compounded by the fact that even within the area of music there are difficulties and confusions. As Durant (1984, p5) points out the word 'improvisation', as the central term defining an area of musical activity, contains a surprisingly wide range of senses and significances. Not all of these are necessarily compatible with each other, and so it is helpful to begin to chart them, since particular senses in play can shift and change while playing or listening to improvised music, as well as in the more abstract considerations of it. It is even possible to argue that this variety in the senses of 'improvisation' has contributed, over a long period, to the confusion which obscures and complicates both the practice and the surrounding theory of this area of contemporary music making.

The variety of senses noted by Durant may make it impossible to arrive at an 'exact' definition of improvisation. Indeed there may well be no need for this as it can be argued that most people are aware when they are improvising or experiencing an improvised action or object. The writer Toni Morrison pertinently observes that 'definitions belong to the definers, not the defined' (Grice et al., 2001: 9). In spite of this there is a value to exploring the range of contexts and meanings attributed to improvisation; they inform our understanding of this multi-faceted and varied field of study and provide a working definition to serve this research.

Consequently, this chapter follows Durant's suggestion to chart the different senses and significances of improvisation and builds on earlier attempts to identify the different meanings of this concept (Sorensen, 1988) through exploring the etymology of improvisation. The assumption informing this approach is that understandings of improvisation are culturally and historically situated and that it is necessary to explore both the phenomenological and ontological aspects of this word. This survey begins by looking specifically at the etymological development of the word 'improvisation' before taking a broader view of activities that can be described as spontaneous acts of creativity. These different assumptions will be used to arrive at a working definition that will inform this research.

## **2.2 The etymology of improvisation**

### **2.2.1 Ancient Greece**

The earliest reference to improvisation as a phenomenon is made by Aristotle in 'The Art of Poetry' in relation to the origins and development of poetry.

The instinct for imitation, then, is natural to us, as is also a feeling for music and for rhythm – and metres are obviously detached sections of rhythms. Starting from these natural aptitudes, and by a series of, for the most part, gradual improvements on their first efforts, men eventually created poetry from their improvisations (Aristotle in Dorsch, 1965: 35).

Aristotle views improvisation as the expression of natural aptitudes, rooted in music and rhythm that lead us towards an end product:

both tragedy and comedy had their first beginnings in improvisation. .... Little by little tragedy advanced, each new element being developed as it came into use, until after many changes it attained its natural form and came to a standstill (Ibid: 36).

Improvisation is perceived as formative activity, part of the creative process, associated with artistic expression but not seen as a form of expression in its own right. Through improvisation initial ideas are generated which can then be subject to later revision and refinement.

### **2.2.2 The Enlightenment and Romanticism**

The word 'improvisation' does not enter the English language until relatively modern times. The earliest record of its usage was in 1786 when it was concerned with the extemporisation of music and verse, including the extensive elaboration of poetry or ballads. Accompanying this definition is a wider application of the word as 'the production or execution of anything offhand, any work or structure produced on the spur of the moment'. (Oxford English Dictionary).

The English word 'improvisation' is derived from the Latin past participle 'improvisus' which is related to the verb 'providere': to foresee. 'Improvisus' carries connotations of the unforeseen, events or actions that are unexpected and the Latin noun 'improvisum' would include the idea of an emergency. These connotations offer a shift in meaning, introducing negative associations to the idea of an improvisation. By contrasting 'improvisus' with 'providere' we gain a sense that improvisation is about not taking care, a lack of perception or attention, not planning ahead or having foresight.

These meanings followed the word when it passed into Italian, 'improvvisare' and French, where it produced the word 'improviser', 'to act without foresight or planning'. This was applied within the context of spontaneous artistic creation: 'to utter or compose extemporare'. There was also the notion of doing something hastily without the necessary preparation. In modern Italian, for example, 'improvviso' means 'unexpected, unforeseen, suddenly'.

### **2.2.3 Modernism**

The concept of improvisation underwent considerable development during the cultural movement of Modernism. As Faulkner (1977) points out, the ascription of dates to cultural movements is bound to be arbitrary; nevertheless the two decades from 1910 to 1930 'constitute an intelligible unity' (p13). Modernism was 'part of the historical process by which the arts have disassociated themselves from nineteenth century assumptions' (Faulkner, p1) and involved the embracing of new sensibilities, experimentation and the discovery of new means of artistic expression.

A significant feature of modernism was the increasing self-consciousness that artists had concerning the creative process; with self-referentiality or reflexivity often being combined with

high aesthetic or moral seriousness (Macey, 2000: 259). This increased self-awareness produced a body of theoretical works to validate and explain particular forms of expression. The proliferation of artistic movements and their related manifestos at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates the preoccupation with theories and ideas that often preceded, conditioned and predefined the nature of the art object. Gradually this theorising became in itself one of the chief constituents of artistic activity and this included the first attempt to theorise improvisation.

Modernism was especially influenced by recent scientific developments, in particular Freud and Jung's work relating to the power and significance of the unconscious mind. Above all this placed the emphasis on individuality and cognition: especially the unique experience of consciousness by the artist. For modernist writers this led to an interest in "moments of epiphany", an idea introduced by James Joyce in his novel 'Stephen Hero' (1944). The eponymous central character is passing through Eccles Street when he overhears a trivial exchange between a young couple. 'This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation' (188). An acknowledgement of the unconscious, the intensity of the epiphanic moment and its associated spiritual dimension all inform the significance that Modernism accorded to improvisation. Interestingly it was in visual arts, not the performing arts, that improvisation was identified as a particular and distinct form of expression.

Kandinsky, in his treatise "Concerning the Spiritual in Art", first published in 1911, recognized three sources of inspiration. He described them as follows.

1. A direct impression of outward nature. This I call an **Impression**.
2. A largely unconscious, spontaneous expression of inner character, of non-material (i.e. spiritual) nature. This I call an **Improvisation**.
3. An expression of a slowly formed inner feeling, worked over repeatedly and almost pedantically. This I call a **Composition**. In this reason, consciousness, purpose play an overwhelming part. But of the calculation nothing appears, only the feeling. (Kandinsky, 1977: 57)

Kandinsky's definitions are very important for a number of reasons. Firstly, he recognises improvisation as a permissible form of expression with clearly identifiable and unique qualities.

Aristotle's view of improvisation was that it was a spontaneous generation of ideas that could be refined and developed until they reached their final form, when they could be classed as an artistic product. For Kandinsky the initial improvised outpouring was in itself an artistic product – a celebration of the moment of creation.

Secondly, by distinguishing between improvisation and composition he recognises that they have different, but equally valuable, qualities that celebrate different ways of thinking. The former relies on the fluid intuitive thinking processes, the latter the more logical and rationalistic forms of thinking that promote redrafting and revision.

Thirdly, Kandinsky emphasised the importance of 'inner character' to improvisation. Whilst some people might view spontaneous creativity as only capable of superficial ideas, Kandinsky saw the opposite. Improvising, by tapping into the intuitive and unconscious elements of the mind, was an expression of spiritual nature. An improvisation, therefore, was an expression of the most powerful and profound insights and experiences that a being can have, endowing creativity with a sacred significance. This redressed the view that had dominated Western European art in the previous 200 years, that improvisation was an inferior form of creativity.

#### **2.2.4 Late-modernism**

Following the end of the Second World War a further, and distinct, phase of modernism began. In music the centre for this movement was Paris (Griffiths, 1995: 3); in the visual arts there was a shift in art world domination from Paris to New York (Hopkins, 2000: p37). This cultural shift also brought about new understandings and significances being attached to improvisation. These included the performativity of the act of painting, especially as seen in the approach developed by Jackson Pollock, the way that many contemporary composers turned their attention from composition towards improvisation and the practices of the Beat writers as they embraced spontaneous writing, and the public declamation of poetry (Warner, 2013).

From the mid-sixties onwards many composers and performers, encouraged by the attention given to the development of instrumental virtuosity and possibly reacting to the restrictions of serialism, saw improvisation as an expression of musical freedom. For some musicians there was an explicit link with socialism: improvisation being an artistic expression of political freedom (Griffiths, 1995, p204). This was particularly the case with those musicians who supported the

civil rights issues in the US and the demonstrations and unrest that occurred in 1968. Writing of the black avant-garde musicians associated with the 'New Thing' Amiri Baraka (1963) writes 'This recent music *is* significant of more "radical" changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes towards the general environment (235).

There was the emergence of 'a school of completely free, collective improvisation or spontaneous music' (Durant, 1984, p6). This music had a distinct identity in that it was concerned with improvising 'without reference to any framing backcloth of 'prescriptions' or conventions' (ibid, p6). The act of improvising took precedence over what was improvised: process dominated product. In the place of musical improvisations being derived from existing musical structures (for example the repertoire of jazz standards) musicians 'just played'; improvisation became the music. Whilst the spiritual aspect of improvisation had not completely disappeared (for example John Coltrane's sequence of albums; 'A Love Supreme', 'Ascension' and 'Meditations') the social, democratic, relationships between the players were viewed as being of great significance. The process of improvised music making was seen as a model for a democratic community and social practice (Fischlin et al, 2013). Interaction supplemented 'inner character' as a significant aspect of improvisational activity.

### **2.2.5 Structuralism**

Structuralism has influenced much recent thinking and understanding of improvisation. Two particularly significant fields are linguistics (Chomsky's theories of 'generative grammar') and anthropology (Levi-Strauss's concept of 'the bricoleur').

Language as the principal tool for social interaction and grammar is a body of knowledge shared by all language users. Chomsky's claim is that our knowledge of grammar is not only innate but is also generative: a finite number of rules for producing grammatical sentences operating on a finite vocabulary can generate an infinite number of novel sentences. This suggests that we are all capable of improvising through the medium of language and 'generative grammar'.

Chomsky's theories also point to the idea that improvising is not just 'doing what you like' but that it involves a dynamic interplay between fixed (finite) elements and an individual's operation of those restrictions.

One of the earliest associations made with the word 'improvisation' is the sense of the unforeseen, responding to an emergency situation. This is perhaps particularly evident in everyday, as opposed to artistic, contexts. Take the example of a broken window. A glazier is unavailable to make an immediate repair and so a tea chest is taken apart and reassembled in order to provide a sheet of wood, of the right size, in order to cover the window and make the house secure. In this sense an improvisation is a makeshift response, a temporary measure that whilst being adequate 'for the time being' is not an ideal solution.

This sense of improvisation as a 'making do' was appropriated by Levi-Strauss and developed into the concept of 'bricolage', the bricoleur being a person who works with their hands but uses devious means compared to a craftsman.

The 'bricoleur' is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand" (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p17).

Bricolage, as a process of creating something, is not concerned with the calculated choice of the right materials that are most suited for a pre-determined purpose but it involves a 'dialogue with the materials and means of execution' (Chandler, 1994). Consequently 'the bricoleur "speaks" not only with things but through the medium of things' (Chandler, 1994). This can extend beyond the pragmatic, everyday world to the realm of ideas. Levi-Strauss considered myth to be an intellectual form of bricolage in that a limited level of understanding and knowledge is applied to explain a particular phenomenon. Myths provide the gap between the known and the unknown.

The idea of 'speaking through the medium of things' connects with Heidegger's view of technology (1977) which unites two definitions: a means to an end and a human activity.

Bricolage as a concept has found a wide range of applications in many fields: within the arts, cultural studies, philosophy, business, Information Technology. Of particular interest for this study is the way that bricolage has impacted upon education. Papert's constructivist theories of learning (Papert and Harel, 1991) identify two styles of problem solving; the analytical and bricolage. The latter is a way to learn and solve problems by trying, testing and playing around. This improvisatory mode of learning is acknowledged by Claxton who sees learning as 'knowing what to do when you don't know what to do (Claxton, 1999, p3).

## 2.2.6. Postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives

All areas of the cultural and intellectual scene, since the 1980s, have been engaged in debates over the existence and nature of a postmodern world. Whilst this is not the appropriate place to engage in detail with the complex and contradictory arguments over the nature of postmodernity there is a recognition of the postmodern claim made by Best and Kellner (1991):

that in the contemporary high tech media society, emergent processes of change and transformation are producing a new postmodern society and its advocates claim that the era of postmodernity constitutes a novel stage of history and novel sociocultural formation that requires new concepts and theories (p.3).

A characteristic feature of postmodern thinking is the notion that a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) has taken place. Post-quantum physics have offered an alternative perspective on the linear cause and effects thinking that has dominated Western thought since the Enlightenment. A 'new' understanding of life, based on post-quantum physics and nonlinear dynamics has emerged from chaos theory, complexity theory and systems theory which integrates biological, cognitive and social dimensions (Capra, 2002, pxii). This holistic and systemic worldview provides insights into a range of contexts all of which share the common characteristic of spontaneous creativity. Complexity theory offers the view that the world is continually changing and developing through the process of emergence a phenomenon that:

takes place at critical points of instability that arise from fluctuation in the environment, amplified by feedback loops. The constant generation of novelty – 'nature's creative advance', as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead called it – is a key property of all living systems (Capra, 2002, p102).

This suggests that the natural world is essentially improvisatory, a point that is reinforced by the postmodern recognition that the world is complex, chaotic and continually changing. From an ontological perspective this acknowledges the frequently cited pre-Socratic views of Heraclitus that the world is all flux and change, a constant state of becoming and that 'you never step into the same river twice'.

Evidence of the pervasive ontological view that sees the world as improvisatory can be found in the number of contexts and ways in which improvisation has been used as a metaphor in order

to gain an understanding into a range of social and cultural phenomena (Morgan, 1997; Hatch, 1997).

## 2.3 A working definition of improvisation

The multiplicity of definitions of improvisation means that it is not possible to draw upon a single example that will serve all contexts. A synthesis of the whole range of meanings will be attempted in order to provide a working definition for the research. The preceding definitions and aspects of improvisation have been subjected to a grounded theory analysis in order to identify a conceptual framework within which improvisation can be studied (the theoretical memo that contains this analysis –TM036- is presented in Appendix 1). Nine aspects or characteristics of improvisation have been derived from coding the different definitions. Each definition was looked at in turn and initial codings were ascribed to it. These initial codings were then grouped together to form focussed codes that gave rise to the following characteristics:

1. Intentionality
2. Context and structure
3. Creativity
4. Spontaneous 'real time' activity
5. Unpredictability
6. Intuitive and spiritual
7. Unique
8. Dialogic
9. A type of intelligence

The following offers a summary of the analysis of the different definitions of improvisation.

Improvisation is an **intentional** act, not a philosophical concept. It is a kind of action, a particular way of doing things. We do not improvise by accident; we do so deliberately either through choice or through necessity, because we have to. This suggests that improvisation is rule guided rather than law governed. However, we have to recognise that improvisation is a possibility before it can become part of our practice. The commitment to improvise is a prerequisite if we are to develop our skills and understanding as an improviser. This also raises the issue of power, of having permission to improvise. This can either be given by someone else or it is a permission that we grant ourselves. In some cases the intention to improvise is a paradoxical decision. Part

of the intention to improvise can involve trying to act without foresight; the intention of the improviser is to act without intention.

Improvisation does not exist as an activity in its own right; it takes place within a **context**. There are three broad contexts in which we can understand improvisation; the natural world, the social world (real life contexts) and artistic. There is no such thing as “pure improvisation”, we have to improvise with something; food, building materials or musical sounds. Therefore, the context within which an improvisation takes place will have some predetermined structural features that can generate improvisational activity. Given that improvisation is rule bound then it can be said to have meaning.

Improvisation generates new material from its defining context. We can therefore say that improvisation is a form of **creativity**. This generative process can be spontaneous but need not be totally so. Previously thought of ideas can be introduced into an improvisation, often with the intention of creating a sense of improvisation. The creative quality of improvisation is present in every context: functional or artistic. This acknowledges that creativity (with a small c) is present in all aspects of life.

Improvisation involves **spontaneous action** that takes place in “**real time**”. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, we find those art forms that exist in real time (the performance arts of music, theatre, dance, poetry and storytelling) are most readily able to admit improvised elements. Artistic forms that exist as an object and are not real-time dependent (for example books and paintings) can include improvised elements but most often these refer to spontaneous actions that formed part of the creative process. The stream of consciousness writing of Jack Kerouac and the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock are two examples. Once an improvisation comes to an end it cannot be repeated, certainly not in the same form. Recording can capture what happened, but the real essence, the quality of an improvisation, is related to the moment in time in which it takes place. You have to be there to fully experience what happens ‘on the spur of the moment’.

The possibility of spontaneous action means that the course of an improvisation is **unpredictable**. To improvise is to exist within a moment in time, to act without forethought. We cannot know what will happen until it happens. Although an improviser may have an overall plan or structure for what they are going to do there will be decisions that will be made ‘in the moment’. Being spontaneous is about deciding not to control the future. Keith Johnstone

describes this as 'learning to walk backwards' (1979: 116) which has an impact upon the way that improvised activity is structured.

He (the improviser) sees where he has been, but pays no attention to the future. His story can take him anywhere, but he must still "balance" it and give it shape, by remembering events that have been shelved and reincorporating them. Very often an audience will applaud when earlier material is brought back into the story.... They admire the improviser's grasp since he not only generates new material, but remembers and makes use of earlier events that the audience itself may have temporarily forgotten (Johnstone, 1979: 116).

A consequence of the previous qualities is that every improvisation will be **unique** and this is a key attribute. One of the requirements of an improvisation is that it should be evidently different to other acts that have taken place within similar or the same constraints. An improviser has to come up with new material. A jazz musician would be expected to create a different solo every time he plays the same number.

Improvisation requires spontaneous decisions. There is no time to analyse what should happen; the improviser **acts intuitively**. An intuitive act appears to be rational but is performed without the conscious adaptation of means to ends. An intuition is the immediate apprehension of an object by the mind without the intervention of the reasoning process. The validity of an intuitive act is its appropriateness. Linguists, for example, understand intuition to be a language user's knowledge of or about his language, used in deciding questions of acceptability. Intuitions are the consequences of unconscious responses which can be associated with spiritual experiences. Hence for Kandinsky the intuitive and unconscious mode of creativity is linked with spiritual expression.

As we have seen improvisation relies upon a context. An improvisation will be derived from the **interaction** (or dialogic relationship) between the improviser and the context. Interaction will take place in many ways and on different levels. The improviser will interact with the materials, the other improvisers, the audience, things that happen in the moment. The improviser has to develop a sense of being "wide open" to influences in the moment. An important feature of improvisation is the relationships that are made, the connections that are established with other improvisers, the audience, the environment, the tradition or idiom. Above all an improvisation is concerned not only with the interaction between fixed elements (the designed structures) and elements that can be changed and adapted (the generative structures) but also

with interpersonal interaction. From a philosophical position this means that improvisations need to be understood from a relational perspective.

The unpredictable nature of improvisation means that the improviser is continually faced with uncertainty, of not knowing what to do next. This means that within the moment they are learning from what is going on around them. The ability to do this suggests an improvisational intelligence that is akin to Claxton's notion of learning as "knowing what to do when you don't know what to do'.

Finally, there are two broader philosophical issues that need to be addressed when considering an improvisation: the teleological and the moral. Considering the teleological implications of improvisation leads us to ask questions about what the final purpose or outcome of an improvisation might be. From the analysis of the different definitions the five distinctive outcomes can be identified:

- Unpredictability (not knowing how the improvisation will end);
- The means to an end (improvisation as part of the creative process);
- Elaborating on an existing form;
- An emergency response (the best that can be done in the circumstances);
- A product in its own right.

Considering the teleological implications of improvisation naturally leads on to asking questions about the moral and ethical implications of improvising. On its own terms an improvisation cannot be seen as either ethically, or morally, acceptable or unacceptable. If an improvisation is neither 'good' or 'bad' then it has to be the intentions of the improviser that determines what is morally acceptable or not as well as the context in which the improvisation takes place.

Improvising a birthday greeting might be considered acceptable whilst improvising an end of year report to the board of a multinational company might not. This recognises that the moral and ethical implications of improvisation are grounded within social contexts

The preceding analysis and discussion leads to the conclusion that no single definition of improvisation can be definitive given the many senses, meanings, qualities and contexts in which the word is used. The following offers a working definition that will serve for the purposes of this research.

**Improvisation: a working definition**

Improvisation is a mode of intentional creative action that has unpredictable and uncertain outcomes, derived from “real time” interactions (with other people or materials).

Improvisations are determined by spontaneous and intuitive decisions arriving from the dynamic interplay between fixed and informal, generative structures. Improvisations are a feature of all aspects of life and the conditions for improvisational action are dependent on the permission that the improviser gives themselves, or is given, to act in this way.

## 2.4 Theorising improvisation

Improvisation can be, and has been, theorised in a number of ways. Ultimately the choice of theoretical lens through which to critique this phenomenon is dependent on the philosophical position taken by the researcher as there needs to be a coherent and congruent approach. The choice of a philosophical position which shapes and directs the research project is rarely, if at all, a rational and conscious decision; final choices stem from values and beliefs (Savin-Baden and Major 2013: 35). Both intuitive and conscious decisions have helped to define where this research is philosophically located. The axiological assumption that improvisation is a significant and socially valuable phenomenon has informed the philosophical, theoretical and conceptual framework of this research.

The philosophical position within which this research is located acknowledges a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) that has occurred over the past 30 years, characterised by a postmodern sensibility. Specifically this research is poststructuralist in intent, acknowledging Best and Kellner’s (1991) view that post-structuralists give primacy to the signifier over the signified, acknowledge the dynamic productivity of language, the instability of meaning and break with conventional representational schemes of meaning (21). Post-structuralism is located within the matrix of postmodern theory but is interpreted as ‘a subset of a broader range of theoretical, cultural and social tendencies which constitute postmodern discourses’ (ibid: 25). Within the context of educational research, post-structuralism offers a counter view to structural-functionalists who adopt a systems view of society in which individual behaviour is largely determined by the structural features of society (Cohen et al, 2011). The post-structuralist position, in which this research is located, views structure and agency as being related to each other, different sides of the same coin. As Cohen et al state (2011) ‘individuals have views of

themselves, and one task of the researcher is to locate research findings within the views of the self that the participants hold, and to identify the meanings which the participants accord to phenomena' (28). This position argues for multiple interpretations, accords legitimacy to individual voices in research and rejects deterministic and simple cause-and-effect laws of behaviour and action (ibid: 28).

The working definition contains within it assumptions that are congruent with a poststructuralist philosophy. Three theoretical approaches, all congruent with a post-structuralist position, offer possibilities for theorising and researching improvisation: complexity theory, critical theory and social constructionism. They all have contributions to offer the theoretical basis of this research and are explored in turn in the next sections.

### **2.4.1 Complexity theory**

Complexity theory offers a way to look at the world which breaks with simple cause and effect models, determinism and linear predictability (Cohen et al, 2011: 28). As a paradigm it replaces the Newtonian mechanistic view of the world with an organic, non-linear and holistic approach.

As an emerging paradigm in educational research (Cohen et al, 2011: 28) it undermines the value of experiments and positivistic research. In place of this complexity theory suggests that phenomena need to be looked at holistically and that there is a need to acknowledge the necessary dynamic interaction of different parts. There is a move away from conventional units of analysis (for example individuals, institutions, communities and systems) to a merged approach which looks at a web or ecosystem (Capra, 1996) that is focussed on, or arises out of a specific topic or a centre of interest. In complexity theory a centre of interest is referred to as a 'strange attractor'. The main focus is on relationships and to view situations from as many eyes as possible allowing for multiple causality, multiple perspectives and multiple effects to be charted. The intentions of research are to catch the deliberate, intentional, agentic actions of participants using interactionist and constructivist perspectives. Complexity theory argues for methodological, paradigmatic and theoretical pluralism. Cohen et al (2011: 29) identify four ways in which complexity theory could lead educational research:

1. how multivalency and non-linearity enter into education;
2. how voluntarism and determinism, intentionality, agency and structure, lifeworld and system, divergence and convergence interact in education;

3. how to both use, but transcend, simple causality in understanding the processes of education;
4. how viewing a system holistically, as having its own ecology of multiple interacting elements, is more powerful than an atomised approach.

The application of complexity theory to social organizations has itself been a complex development and one of the problems of using this theoretical paradigm is that key concepts are used in a loose and uncritical manner. Stacey et al (2000: 85) point out that there is no single science of complexity but rather a range of strands that might be called the complexity sciences. They argue that those writing about complexity in human organisations draw upon concepts that come from one or more of three strands: chaos theory, dissipative structure theory and the theory of complex adaptive systems.

Chaos theory (Gleick, 1988) provides an explanation of the behaviour of a system that can be modelled by deterministic nonlinear equations in which the output of one calculation is taken as the input of the next. A significant discovery that led to the development of chaos theory was made by Lorenz in 1960; tiny errors in the equations he was using to model weather systems resulted in enormous and apparently unpredictable variations in the outcome of the equations. When data from chaotic systems is plotted complex but recognisable patterns emerge which allow short-term predictions and general trends to be perceived. Chaotic systems have a sensitive dependence on their initial conditions. This has been called 'the butterfly effect' - the flapping of a butterfly's wings in China could create a causal chain, the outcome of which is a hurricane in Indonesia (Sim, 1998: 212).

The theory of dissipative structures (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984) also point to the potential that deterministic nonlinear systems have for producing unpredictable behaviour. An example of a dissipative structure that is often referred to by writers applying complexity to organizations is that of convection. The experiment to do with convection involves taking a small layer of liquid and observing its behaviour as increasing heat is applied to it. Prigogine identified a dynamical pattern of change, summarised by Stacey et al (2000: 94) as follows:

- At thermodynamic equilibrium the temperature of the liquid is uniform throughout. It is in a state of rest and there are no bulk movements in it;
- As the heat increases the liquid is held far from equilibrium and small fluctuations occur without patterns or symmetry;

- As the heat increases these fluctuations cease to be random and display bulk movement in the form of convection rolls;
- When a critical temperature is reached a new structure emerges in the liquid. Molecules move in a regular direction setting up hexagonal cells, some turning clockwise, some turning anti-clockwise. This is referred to as a bifurcation point where the molecules spontaneously self-organize themselves and a new coherent pattern emerges;
- This pattern is called a dissipative structure in that it dissipates energy or information from the environment, so continuously renewing itself.

Stacey et al (2000) state that chaos theory and dissipative structures model natural phenomena at a macro level, formulating rules or laws for whole populations. The third strand of the complexity sciences, the theory of complex adaptive systems uses an agent based approach, and is concerned with formulating rules of interaction for the individual entities making up a population or system. Stacey et al describe this as a large number of agents who each behave according to principles of local interaction. No individual agent or group of agents determine the pattern of behaviour that the system as a whole displays, or how patterns evolve and neither does anything outside the system. The simulation of complex adaptive systems is flocking and emergence is seen as the consequence of local interaction between agents.

The framework Stacey et al use to critically analyse the various claims made by the complexity sciences is based on the notion of teleology, or final cause, asking 'why does a particular phenomenon become what it becomes?' They define five different kinds of teleological causes: secular Natural Law, Rationalist, Formative, Transformative and Adaptationist. Their argument is that the potential for a radical rethink of organizational change is only possible when the complexity sciences are used as analogies that illuminate change from the perspective of Transformative Teleology.

The central proposition in Transformative Teleology is that human actions and interactions are processes, not systems, and the coherent patterning of those processes becomes what it becomes because of their intrinsic capacity, the intrinsic capacity of interaction and relationship to form coherence. That emergent form is radically unpredictable, but it emerges in a controlled or patterned way because of the characteristics of relationship itself, to do with conflicting

constraints and the self-controlled dynamics of creation and destruction in conditions at the edge of chaos (Stacey et al, 2000: 128).

This understanding offered by the concept of a Transformative Teleology rejects the notion of organisation as a system and replaces it with thinking about organising as a highly complex process of people relating to each other. This is coherent with the view of improvisation that is presented in the working definition in that it acknowledges the interactive, unpredictable and creative nature of human actions at all levels. This process is referred to as 'Complex Responsive Processes' (Stacey et al., 2000: 188). Placing the emphasis on relationships allows the complexity sciences to be interpreted in human terms. However doing this raises the issue of power that is implicit in all relationships. On its own the complexity theory offers an incomplete explanation of these issues as it neglects political and ideological issues. These matters are at the heart of critical theory and it is to this paradigm that attention is now given.

## **2.4.2 Critical theory**

Critical theory was developed by the work of the Frankfurt School, particularly the early work of Habermas, and has the explicit political purpose to promote the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society. The intention is to not merely give an account of society and behaviour but to realize a society that is based on democracy and equality for all its members. (Cohen et al., 2011: 31). Critical theory identifies the circumstances that have brought an individual or social group to powerlessness or to power, questions the legitimacy of this and is concerned to uncover the interests at work in a particular situation. In common with the view of Transformative Teleology Stacey et al. (2000), it is concerned with change; although in this context it is concerned with changing society and individuals to social democracy. Hence it has a normative intent.

Within the field of critical theory it is the ideas of Jurgen Habermas that have particular relevance to this research. Firstly, there is the view that he holds that modernism is still a valid project, a view that runs counter to many post-modernist thinkers. For Outhwaite (1996) Habermas's modernity is seen as 'offering a highly conditional promise of autonomy, justice, democracy, and solidarity' and seems increasingly to be the organising category with which to understand his thought (3). As a theorist Habermas straddles the fields of sociology and philosophy but he also is concerned with cross-disciplinary enquiry. His perspective is informed by that of the Frankfurt School which developed a neo-Marxist response to three major

challenges: those of fascism, Stalinism and managerial capitalism (Outhwaite, 1996:6). In contemporary terms his theories offers a critical perspective through which to counter the development of neoliberalism.

From the point of view of this research these ideas provide a theoretical foundation for the exploration of autonomy and intersubjective interaction. They offer the potential for providing a framework for looking at teacher expertise and improvisation from a normative and moral perspective, relating it to notions of social justice. The sheer breadth and complexity of Habermas's writing is problematical and this research draws on two areas: the theory of knowing and the theory of communicative action. Lovat (2013) claims that these have the capacity to deepen our research understanding in several areas of education, including the role of the teacher and effective pedagogy, areas which match the focus of this research. These ideas, initially developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972) and *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), will be looked at in turn.

Lovat (2013) argues that Habermas' single most enduring influence has been his epistemological work: 'a theory of knowing that impels the kind of reasoned and compassionate reflection and self-reflexivity that results in benevolent action' (70). The epistemological claims Habermas makes are that such self-reflection produces an authentic learning that is beyond the *techne* if the goal of learning is to be one befitting being human. This theory is also important in that it helps contextualize the expert teacher within a neo-liberal educational system.

Habermas' views acknowledge the place of subjectivity in knowing; 'facts are never given in isolation from the minds that receive them' (Ferre, 1982: 761), a view that is reinforced by Kuhn's (1962) notion of a 'paradigm' which sees 'knowing' as a complex process, not a linear one, and which is not objective given that it is infused with the subjectivity of the person doing the knowing. Habermas's (1972) interest is in the ways in which the mind works in constructing reality (as opposed to a view that acknowledges certain 'forms of knowledge'). He explains the apparent division of knowledge into 'forms' in which knowing incorporates a series of cognitive interests:

- The approach of the **empirical-analytic** sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest (hypothetico-deductive propositions that offers possible predictive knowledge).

- The approach of the **'historical hermeneutic'** way of knowing incorporates a 'communicative knowledge' (the knowing that results from engagement, interrelationship and dialogue with others).
- The approach offered by the **'critical / self-reflective'** way of knowing in the social sciences (for example economics, sociology and political science) incorporates a way of knowing that has an emancipatory interest. The argument for this is that our interest in ensuring our autonomy as a knower will make us reflect critically on our subject matter, our sources and ultimately ourselves as agents of knowing. According to Habermas this is achieved through self-reflection that releases the subject from dependence on hypostasised powers.

Habermas's theory of knowing was the basis for the development of his theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; 1987). Communicative capacity was an idea that developed from the idea of the self-reflective knower which led to notions of communicative action. For Habermas there is a connection, and continuity between knowledge and action.

Critical or self-reflective knowledge is a form of knowing that is impelled beyond historical-hermeneutical knowing, requiring the more profound knowledge that comes from self-reflectivity. The self-reflective knower steps beyond mere tolerance of other lifeworlds to take a stand to defend the right of legitimate lifeworlds to exist and to be accommodated within the human community. The stand for social justice is also a stand for one's new found self for one's own integrity is at stake. These ideas reflect *eudaimonia* (Aristotle, 2009), Aristotle's supreme good, but it is not a good that can be pursued by being known or experienced, it is a good that must be lived through practical action or *praxis*.

The theory of communicative action is based in a distinction between the lifeworld (where communicative action takes place) and the system (defined by power and money where strategic action holds sway). These two worlds are seen to be in opposition.

The lifeworld is where subjects arrive at a common and mutual understanding that facilitates shared action because they recognize the mutual compatibility of the validity claims that they are putting forward. It is a concept for the everyday world that we share with others (Finlayson, 2005); Habermas uses the term for the informal and unmarketised domains of social life which include family and household, culture and so on. 'These unregulated spheres of sociality provide a repository of shared meanings and understandings, and a social horizon for the everyday

encounters with other people' (Finlayson, 2005: 52). The shared meanings and understandings of the lifeworld provide a unity but not a totality in that it is open to revision and change.

The lifeworld has three functions:

1. It provides the context for action – a stock of shared assumptions and background knowledge, of shared reasons on the basis of which agents may reach consensus. It is a force for social integration.
2. Overall the lifeworld is conservative of social meaning, in that it minimizes the risk of dissent, disagreement, and misunderstanding that attends any individual instances of communication and discourse.
3. It is the medium of the symbolic and cultural reproduction of society, the vehicle through which traditions are passed on. Under normal conditions, that is in the absence of massive social upheaval, the lifeworld serves as the medium for the transmission and improvement of all kinds of knowledge: technical, practical, scientific and moral.

The lifeworld is contrasted with the system: the sedimented structures and established patterns of instrumental action. It can be divided into two sub-systems: money and power.

Because they are open to public scrutiny and recognised as being comprehensible and sincere, these claims to be speaking the truth can be modified through argument and consensual persuasion. In theory it is possible to arrive at a full or ideal consensus.

An interest in improvisation also needs to take into account the human actions that accompany language and this is where Habermas' theory of communicative action provides a starting point for theorising the improvisational qualities of social interaction. Habermas' central idea is that every standard use of language to make statements involves certain presuppositions: that what the speaker says is true, that it is sincerely meant, and that it is normatively appropriate (Outhwaite, 1996:11). Habermas is exploring the relationship between communication and action and how this relationship is guided by presuppositions. His analysis of communicative action is seen in part as a normative theory, one that yields moral and political prescriptions.

In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) Habermas offers a critique of the Western philosophical tradition since Hegel, which is marked by a sense that philosophy is at an end. His argument is that Western philosophy has taken three directions from Hegel. First, the left Hegelians and Marxists aimed to generalise and realise the rationality of the enlightenment in a new society of freedom. Second, the right Hegelians aim to tame and incorporate it into secure institutional forms and third, Nietzsche turned reasoning against itself, unmasking it as an expression of the will to power and mocking the rationalistic and moralistic delusions of

modernity. Whilst this has led subsequent thinkers (for example Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault) to reject the philosophy of consciousness centred on the subject, Habermas comes to a different conclusion. He sees another way out of the philosophy of the subject through reflection on human *intersubjectivity* and communication. As Outhwaite states:

rather than oscillate between the inflation of the human knowing subject and a radical scepticism about its reality we should hold onto a model in which “participants in interaction... coordinate their plans for action by coming to an understanding about something in the world”(1996:16).

Habermas (1987) claims that ‘communicative reason finds its criteria in the argumentative procedures for... redeeming claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness, and aesthetic harmony’ (314).

A significant reference point for Habermas’s own thinking has been the system theorist Luhmann. Whilst largely accepting Luhmann’s diagnosis of the growth of relatively autonomous subsystems in modern societies he does not agree with this as a beneficial advance, viewing it as pathological in its consequences for the life world and the democratic self-rule.

In what ways are these ideas applicable to educational research in general and this research in particular? Critical theory has given rise to an emerging paradigm of critical educational research which regards positivism and interpretivism as offering incomplete accounts of social behaviour through the neglect of the political and ideological contexts within which education takes place (Cohen et al., 2011) .

Their particular value for this research is in their relevance in understanding expert teaching as a relational activity. Habermas’s ideas have been used to analyse teacher-learner relationships and the power within them in order to clarify and contest assumptions that lie behind certain curriculum approaches and forms of pedagogy (Lovat and Smith, 2003; Lovat et al., 2005). The three forms of knowing have provided insights into the relationships between the teacher and learner, particularly in relation to where the power lies in that relationship.

Empirical-analytic knowing is based on the notion that the teacher is the ‘expert’, all power is with the teacher and little or none resides with the learner. Historical-hermeneutic knowing tends to a conception of the teacher-learner relationship as a partnership. This suggests a more democratic pedagogy that allows and encourages a measure of free thought and speech and space to ‘make mistakes’. ‘The rider on shared power is that the teacher will normally retain

some responsibility to guide the learner around interpretations that are found in the tradition, better evidences in the research etc. Like most phenomena in a democracy it is not 'anything goes' (Lovat, 2013: 74). Critical / self-reflective knowing is impelled by the cognitive interest in being free to think one's thoughts and so to engage in *praxis*. Within this way of knowing the relationship between the teacher and the knower has the potential to attain a measure of symmetry, of power sharing. Here the teacher delegates power to the learner so that they have the confidence to be in control of their own learning. This can lead to a role reversal where the teacher becomes the learner and the learner the teacher. The challenge for more traditional forms of teaching / learning is that within this relationship the extent of the learners knowing may go beyond the knowing of the teacher.

Habermas's theory of knowing has specific relevance for this thesis particularly in the ways in which there is an implicit connection between this theory and the author's earlier writing. The changing relationship between the teacher and the learner that is suggested by the critical / self-reflective approach to knowing reflects the ideas presented in earlier writing that has outlined four phases of teacher development (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010a). Likewise the concept of 'the authorised teacher' (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010b) contains similar assumptions that greater autonomy can be achieved through self-reflection.

Van Manen (1977) suggests that the type of learning that is being proffered by critical/self-reflective knowing can be described in terms of equity and social justice:

'The norm is a distortion-free model of a communication situation .... (where) there exists no repressive dominance, no asymmetry or inequality among the participants of the educational process' (227).

It is at this point for Van Manen (and Habermas) that education becomes distinctly ethical, characterised by a sense of justice, equality allowing the freedom of individuals to follow their instincts of 'knowing' wherever they might lead. It is the way to which genuinely new knowing can take place. This approach to learning can be seen in metacognitive strategies that are designed to develop independent learning and that conceptualise the learning process as 'knowing what to do when you don't know what to do' (Claxton, 1999: 11). This understanding of learning, grounded as it is in Piaget's view of intelligence, is improvisatory.

The argument of this thesis is that Habermas's theory of knowing contains an implicit relationship between knowing and improvisation. As the approaches to knowing move towards

the critical / self-reflective mode then the ways in which knowledge is gained (inevitably) becomes more improvisatory. Another way of saying this is that, of necessity, teachers require an improvisatory disposition and that, through critical self-reflection, they can develop an understanding and awareness of the processes and practices of the improviser. This is not to say that improvisation is not, or cannot be, a feature of other forms of knowing; it is that the improvisation will be of a different kind and will have different characteristics in this more advanced mode through considering improvisation through reflection. This suggests that improvisation has a particular significance and importance for advanced practitioners.

A further theme that is illuminated by Habermas's theories is concerned with the outcomes of education and the importance afforded to holistic learning and student well-being. According to Lovat (2013: 76) a persistent concern of education is with the notion of student achievement and whether this is best served through regular instrumentalist approaches to learning and assessment or through more holistic approaches. This debate contains within it a considerable amount of evidence that points to the importance of values based education and holistic approaches to learning.

Lovat (2013) views values education as being normally outside (and possibly oppositional to) the mainstream agenda of an instrumental approach to learning and assessment. Values education is not characterised by a firm set of guidelines but rather 'a loose alliance of approaches with a common focus on creating, in learning sites, values-rich environments through relationships, modelling and ambience and interesting values discourse into the overt curriculum' (Lovat 2013:76). It is principally concerned with student well-being as a whole. The argument is that approaches to learning that de-emphasize academic content and assessment, concentrating on creating supportive environments of learning, richer and more personalised discourse, impact positively on student behaviour and classroom calm and in turn lead students to be more attentive to their academic work. All dimensions of student wellbeing, including academic achievement, might be better served through holistic approaches to learning.

Carr (2000) argues that there can be no adequate and effective learning without teachers who model integrity and practice their profession in a way that entails sound relationships and moral interchange with their students. Those teachers who go about their business in a fully professional and ethical way, with all the attachments of more secure environments and richer classroom talk and interchange, will produce better results of all kinds. Carr (2000) is

approaching this from a philosophical standpoint, but similar conclusions are being reached by psychologists and neuroscientists:

- that student motivation to learn can only be fully engaged when the emotional context is conducive (Ainley 2006);
- the seat of cognition in the brain is not separable from the seats of affect and sociality (Damasio 2003);
- work on the 'pedagogical dynamics' required for quality teaching recognises that several of the dynamics concern relationships and the ambience of learning (Newmann, 1996), for example that students need to feel accepted, understood and valued;
- Osterman (2010) supports all the above conclusions with her views of the integrative nature of a supportive ambience and pedagogic instruction. 'It is the teacher whose pedagogy is characterized by the integrity of a supportive relationship and best practice pedagogy as one action, rather than two, who bring students to new levels of academic enhancement.

From a philosophical perspective Habermas' theories of knowing and communicative action offer, between them, particularly powerful tools for analysing educational practice of the kind that is being examined in this research. In particular his theories provide epistemological explanations for:

- The distinction between instrumentalist approaches to education and more holistic and values based approaches.
- An 'authentic' pedagogy, which goes beyond the instrumental, and which is centred in emotional values.
- The centrality of the relationship between teacher and pupil.
- An improvisational view of teacher expertise that privilege's self-reflective practice and a relational (as opposed to an instrumental) pedagogy. Both rely on the disposition to respond, adapt and change to people as individuals.
- A critique of neoliberal education policies and the articulation of alternative approaches to the continuing professional development of teachers.

- The theory of communicative action raises questions about power and draws attention to the power relationships between teachers and their pupils as well as the power relations between expert teachers, other school staff, school leaders and parents. It raises questions of having the power (or permission) **to** improvise as well as the power **of** improvising.

The above points provide a justification for the value that Habermas has in the theoretical foundations of this thesis which explores the improvisational nature of teacher expertise. The assumptions behind the thesis is that teacher expertise is based on social engagement and relational action and reaction. Furthermore the Habermasian project has a normative function:

Habermasian theory determines that effective education can never be focussed solely on ‘the basics’ of technical learning (the *techne*) if it is seriously looking to the good of its clients and society at large. In a Habermasian schema, social engagement that is aimed at developing *praxis* and communicative action is not an added extra or marginal nicety. It is at the heart of what an authentic school will be about, namely, taking a wide-ranging social agency for the good of society and directly for the good of its clients, the students at hand, because it is only the school that provides these forms of pedagogy that can ultimately facilitate the kind of knowing that is most authentically human (Lovat, 2013: 80).

The social nature of this enterprise brings us to the third perspective that provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding improvisation: social constructionism.

### **2.4.3 Social constructionism**

The social constructionist position is based on the assumption that reality is constructed intersubjectively. Burr’s view (2003), writing from the basis of psychology and social psychology, is that whilst there is no one feature that defines a social constructionist position the foundations of social constructionism are based on one or more of the following key assumptions:

- a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge;
- that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative;
- that knowledge is sustained by social processes and that people construct knowledge between them; and,

- knowledge and social actions go together (3-5).

Such a position is anti-essentialist, denying that there are essences within people that make them what they are, and challenges the notion that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Consequently there are no objective facts as knowledge and truth claims are relativist; they are relative to the particular perspective of the judging subject. Language is also seen as the pre-condition of thought, the way that people think, the categories and concepts that they use are provided by the language that they use. Consequently social constructionism sees the focus of research as 'the social practices engaged in by people and their interactions with each other' (Burr 2006: 9). This places a focus on language, the way that individuals describe and construct their world and how these processes sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others. Burr sees this as being bound up with power relations in that there are implications for what is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others (5).

Plummer (2000) views social constructionism as part of a broader tradition within the social sciences, a tradition that is congruent with social interactionism but is often neglected (149). The most significant intellectual foundation of symbolic interactionism is pragmatism with G.H. Mead's text, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) as a key source. Mead's concerns are with the analysis of experience located firmly within society, the importance of language, symbols and communication in human group life, the ways in which words and gestures bring forth responses in others and the reflective and reflexive nature of the self. The core of pragmatism can be seen as dealing with the concrete and the particular rather than the abstract and the universal, acknowledging that there is no universal truth but that the search for truths and meanings are possible and a rejection of philosophical dualisms.

Symbolic interactionism is infused with four interweaving themes (Plummer, 2000: 142):

- distinctly human worlds are not only material, objective worlds but they are also immensely semiotic and symbolic;
- lives and situations are evolving, adjusting and becoming; the world is characterised by change, flux, emergence and process;
- a focus on interaction, the joint acts through which lives are organized and society assembled; and,

- an engagement with the empirical world.

The theoretical core of Mead's work influenced the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) who (re) conceptualised knowledge as a social phenomenon. Drawing on fundamental assumptions derived from symbolic interactionism, their view is that as people we construct our own, and each other's, identities through their everyday encounters with each other in social interaction (Burr, 2006: 13). Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasise that the relationship between individuals and the social world is dialectical, based on collective interaction (61). Human beings create and then sustain all social phenomena through social practices. They see three fundamental processes as being responsible for this. *Externalisation* and *objectivation* are moments in a continuing dialectical process. The third process is *internalisation*, by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of socialisation (ibid. 61).

A seminal paper within the field of psychology is Gergen's (1973) 'Social psychology as history' in which he argues that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific and therefore researchers need to go beyond the individual into social, political and economic realms for a proper understanding of the evolution of social life (Burr, 2006: 13). Furthermore there is no absolute or 'once and for all' description of people or society, as the only abiding feature of social life is that it is continually changing. In a later paper Gergen et al. (2004) outline four themes that determine a social constructionist position. These themes are the social origins of knowledge, the centrality of language, the politics of knowledge and the shift from self to relationship.

The claim for the social origins of knowledge is based on the premise that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds itself in human relationships. Knowledge is brought into being by historically and culturally situated groups of people and the social constructionist proposition, therefore, is that what we take to be real and true is not *found* in nature but created in the course of participating within particular communities of practice. Consequently all voices may justifiably contribute to the dialogues on which our futures depend and that each tradition, although limited, may offer us options for living.

Linked with the above view of knowledge is the constructionist focus on written and spoken language as perhaps the most important resource for creating and sustaining meaning in relationships. The focus on language has four important outcomes:

1. we come to understand the importance that we must grant to alternative traditions of knowledge;
2. we appreciate the importance of the reflexive assessment of our own constructions;
3. the emphasis on language brings us to the realisation that we can create new realities; and,
4. the development of new theories generates new possibilities for research and practice.

The knowledge gained through exploring cultural and historical contexts cannot be accepted as being neutral or value free; such knowledge is political. Social constructionism holds a pragmatic view of knowledge replacing traditional concerns for transcendental truths and objectivity with practical outcomes. There can be many truth claims and, for the social constructionist the question is 'what happens to us, for good or ill, as we honour one as opposed to another account?' Issues of good or ill are moral and political questions and therefore research within this tradition needs to be evaluated and appraised on these grounds. This has implications and repercussions especially for academics and practitioners concerned with social justice, oppression and the marginalisation of minority groups in society.

Perhaps the most radical aspect of social constructionism is the shift of attention from the individual actor to coordinated relationships, challenging long held Western assumptions that individuals form the basic atoms of social life. Whilst autonomy is prized constructivists ask whether it is possible to construct an account of human action in which relationship rather than self is fundamental. Such a view reflects Vygotsky's ideas that individual thought is lodged in cultural settings (Gergen et al., 2004: 389-392)

Shotter (2008) offers a reformulation of social constructionism. The focus on language is acknowledged to have reversed one of the major positivist assumptions of classical science: that there is a well-defined reality 'out there' and that 'truth is accuracy'. However there are two other major assumptions that it did not reverse. First there is the assumption that a linguistic representation is a sufficient guide to practical action and, second, the assumption that a representation exerts its shaping influence on our actions in terms of its patterning, its order

(Shotter, 2008: iii). His aim is to go beyond language and acknowledge the crucial and central importance of 'our spontaneous bodily reactions to events occurring around us' (ibid, iii) and to focus 'on spontaneously expressed, unique, bodily activities, on unique events'; on what Bakhtin (1993) calls 'one occurrent events of Being and the social influences shaping such events' (cited in Shotter, 2008: iv). This is a shift from the cognitive to the perceptual where the focus is on our spontaneously responsive, living bodily activity, and where this activity is expressive to others. 'In other words it is on events that 'just happen' to us, rather than on those of our activities we perform deliberately and self-consciously' (ibid: viii).

This calls for a move away from retrospective orderly accounts to 'in the moment' accounts of the actual activities and processes occurring between us in our collaborative creations of meaning together.

There are four themes that he explores:

1. the focus on people's spontaneous, bodily responsiveness to the expressive movements of the others around them, and the creative nature of the dialogically-structured nature of the events occurring in the meetings between them;
2. that events occurring with such living processes of growth and development always occur for *another next first time* (Garfinkel, 1967). No patterns are ever repeated the same, living time is irreversible;
3. because of 2 above, and because of the creative and responsive nature of each unique moment, such processes cannot be understood in terms of mechanical repetitions or patterns;
4. that our actual use of words, our voiced utterances as we body them forth, exert a directive, motivational, and anticipatory influence both on the others around us as on ourselves.

The pragmatism of Dewey and the social interactionists of the Chicago school offer one tradition of influences on the development of social constructionism. An additional set of influences can be found within sociocultural theory as articulated by Vygotsky and Bakhtin which is based on assumptions that reality is socially constructed and that humans are active participants in a culturally specific world.

In 'Thought and Language' (1986) Vygotsky argues that thought and speech are the key to the nature of human consciousness (256). Based on a critique of the work of Piaget and Stern and emerging from research into child development there are three ideas that have particular relevance for this study. Firstly there is the claim that a distinction can be made between scientific concepts, 'which originate in the highly structured and specialised activity of classroom instruction and impose on child's logically defined concepts' and spontaneous concepts that 'emerge from the child's own reflections on everyday experience' (xxxiii). Secondly there is the claim for the cooperative nature of learning through the input from the teacher as children tackle problems that were harder than the ones that they would tackle on their own. The discrepancy between the child's actual age and the level of problem that they can solve with support and scaffolding provided by the teacher indicates the child's 'zone of proximal development'. Thirdly Vygotsky makes the distinction between dialogue and the monologue where written speech and inner speech represent the monologue and where (in most cases) oral speech is dialogue (240). Dialogue is given preference over monologue as it is the natural form of oral speech, the one in which language fully reveals its nature.

These ideas are also found in 'Mind in Society' (1978) in which meanings are seen as being constructed inter-mentally / psychologically and intra-mentally / psychologically. For Vygotsky social context is at the heart of learning and development. Joint meanings are created by communicating with each other in addition to meanings being formed by individuals as they interpret their world.

Bakhtin also recognised the dialogic nature of the world and construed all meaning to be relative given that it comes about as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous not different space (Holquist, 1990: 21). Dialogism is not the name given to a dualism but acknowledges a necessary multiplicity in human perception. For schematic purposes this can be reduced to a minimum of three events: an utterance, a reply and a relation between the two. However this should not be seen as solely language based but should incorporate bodily actions and well.

## 2.5 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has explored the meanings that have been attributed to improvisation and has used this survey to arrive at a working definition for the purposes of this research. Three related perspectives have been drawn upon (complexity theory, critical theory and social constructionism) in order to provide an epistemological and theoretical framework through which improvisation can be viewed.

The commonalities drawn from these three theories are shown in Table 2.1

**Table 2.1 Commonalities between Transformative Teleology, Critical Theory and Social Constructionism.**

Transformative Teleology	Critical Theory	Social Constructionism
<p>A movement towards a future that is under perpetual construction by the moment itself. No mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation.</p> <p>A focus on relationships as Complex Responsive Processes.</p> <p>Implicit acknowledgement of power.</p>	<p>A movement towards emancipatory action that is based on critical / self-reflective knowing.</p> <p>Acknowledges the centrality of relationships through the importance of the lifeworld as the context for action based on shared meanings and assumptions.</p> <p>Normative agenda concerned with education as a human, values based enterprise directed towards democracy and social justice.</p> <p>Explicit acknowledgement of issues relating to power and powerlessness.</p>	<p>The world is characterised by change, flux, emergence and process</p> <p>Critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge.</p> <p>Ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative</p> <p>A focus on interaction.</p> <p>Knowledge is sustained by social processes and people construct knowledge between them.</p> <p>Focus away from individual and onto interaction.</p> <p>Knowledge and social actions go together: there is a need to focus on dialogism (language) and action (spontaneous, bodily responsiveness and interactions with others)</p> <p>Anti- essentialist</p>

# Chapter 3: Experts, expertise and expert performance

*This chapter is in two parts. The first part explores the way in which experts and expertise can be defined and outlines the characteristics of expert performance. Different theories of expertise are critically examined and the relationship between expertise and notions of excellence and creativity are explored. The importance of Lave and Wenger's concept of a 'community of practice' is considered in relation to understanding the social construction of expertise. The second part of the chapter provides a selective overview of the research into teacher expertise, focussing on those examples that have drawn a relationship with teacher expertise and improvisation.*

## 3.1 About expertise and the characteristics of experts

The study of expertise as a discrete field of scientific research has been a comparatively recent development (Ericsson et al., 2006). Over the past 40 years research undertaken within a number of discrete domains has been viewed from a holistic perspective which is based on the assumptions that some aspects of expertise are generalisable and that an understanding of expertise within one specific domain could provide insights into expertise in other domains. The premise for studying expertise and expert performance is that 'there are sufficient similarities in the theoretical principles mediating the phenomena and the methods for studying them that it would be possible to propose a general theory of expertise and expert performance' (Ericsson et al., 2006: 9). This chapter explores some of the general principles and debates that influence the discourse on expertise.

An **expert** is defined as 'a person who is very knowledgeable about or skilful in a particular area' (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2012). An expert is 'a reliable source of knowledge, technique or skill and who is perceived as having authority or status by the public or peers' (Ericsson et al., 2006: 3). The process of becoming an expert is based on the assumption that there has been a

period of practice, training or some form of education. An expert is seen as the product of extensive practice and learning (Gladwell, 2008). An expert is most commonly contrasted with a **novice**: 'a person new to and inexperienced in a job or situation' (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2013). A novice is any person who is new to any field or domain and who is undergoing training in order to meet normal requirements of being regarded as a mature and equal participant.

Further distinctions can be made between experts and *specialists*, *laypersons* and *technicians*. A *specialist* is someone who has to be able to solve a problem, whilst an expert has to know its solution. In contrast to an expert is the *layperson*, who might have a general understanding but not an expert knowledge. Someone who occupies the middle ground between expert and layperson is a *technician*. It is **expertise** that distinguishes the expert from novices, specialists, laypersons and technicians: the characteristics, skills and knowledge that allow for superior performance.

The academic study of expertise has been governed by attempting to understand the relationship between expert knowledge and exceptional performance in terms of cognitive structures and processes. The fundamental research endeavour is to describe what it is that experts **know** and how they use this knowledge to **achieve** performance that most people assume requires extreme or extraordinary ability. Research is therefore governed by the attempt to understand the relationship between knowledge and achievement (Ericsson et al., 2006)

Two main academic approaches have been used to understand this relationship. The first is the **psychological** approach which sees expertise as a characteristic of individuals, a consequence of the human capacity for extensive adaptation to physical and social environments. This perspective defines experts by intrinsic individual characteristics (cognitive psychology), or their expertise is perceived in working contexts and through social interactions (social psychology). Related to this latter perspective is the view that expertise is an emergent property of a community of practice, and that expertise is socially constructed.

The second is the **sociological** approach which concerns itself with the importance of professions, of specific qualifications and social status and the related issues of power, influence and agency. The roots of the sociological perspective on expertise are found in Plato's 'Noble Lie' (Plato, 1974: 117-182) with which, historically, the debate concerning expertise begins. Plato, in answer to the question as to which of the governors should govern and who should be

governed, suggests that the best skilled (the experts) should do this; 'we must pick the ones who have the greatest skill in watching over the community' (Plato, 1974: 178). They would need to show the interests of the community over their self-interest and selected through tasks and tests. Their position would be protected by "some magnificent myth" (the 'Noble Lie') that their position, and those of the other tiers of society, were fashioned by god. Through this myth came the idea of an elite form of specialist (the Philosopher Kings) who held expert knowledge that was authoritative and intrinsically linked to notions of power. Nevertheless it raises the question of "who shall guard the guardians?" What should be the relationship between experts and specialists on the one hand and leaders, generalists and democracy on the other? (Collins and Evans 2007). The sociological view of expertise leads us to consider the associated issues of authority and agency.

The characteristics of experts are closely associated to the domain in which expertise is demonstrated. Ericsson (2000) identifies three characteristics:

1. measures of general basic capacities do not predict success in a domain;
2. the superior performance of experts is often very domain specific and transfer outside of the domain is surprisingly rare;
3. systematic differences between experts and less proficient individuals nearly always reflect attributes required by experts during their lengthy training.

Chase and Simon's study of chess players (1973 cited in Ericsson, 2000) suggest that expert performance is an extreme case of skill acquisition. Other research indicates that experience in itself is insufficient, but that deliberate practice is essential to develop expert performance. The notional figure of 10,000 hours is suggested as the period of time in which expertise can be acquired; 'ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness' (Gladwell, 2008: 41). This raises an important question concerning the relationship between nature and nurture. Is expertise an innate talent or can it be developed? The '10,000 hours rule' suggests that expertise can be nurtured and if this is the case then it provides a strong argument for the value of expertise and expert performance as an area of academic study.

## 3.2 Theories of expertise

This section critically reviews a range of theories of expertise that are regularly cited as being of importance within the literature (Eraut, 1994; Atkinson and Claxton, 2000; Goodwyn, 2011 and Winch, 2010). The survey begins with the Dreyfus and Dreyfus model that maps the progression from novice to expert and which has attracted considerable attention within professional education (Eraut, 1994). This theory, and the others that follow it, present a dominant picture of the nature of proficient and expert performance that acknowledges the importance of tacit knowledge. This concept, introduced by Polanyi (1958), refers to the knowledge or understanding that a person has that they may not be able to express verbally or in writing or even to be aware of. Winch (2010) argues that these theories are a reaction to earlier theories that emphasise the importance of the possession of a systematic body of professional knowledge as a necessary feature of expertise.

### 3.2.1 Dreyfus and Dreyfus

Dreyfus and Dreyfus 's (1986) five-stage model of expertise is a fluency theory (Winch, 2010), in that it focusses on the performance of experts and the ways that their work is not only of a high quality, but that it is conducted without hesitation, with rapidity, and in such a way that they cannot fully explain what they are doing. The theory outlines a process of skill acquisition that goes through five stages, starting with the novice and leading to the expert. Table 3.1 summarises the Dreyfus model of Skills Acquisition.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition (adapted from Eraut, 1994: 124)**

Level	Characteristics
Level 1 Novice	Rigid adherence to taught rules or plans Little situational perception No discretionary judgment
Level 2 Advanced beginner	Guidelines for action based on attributes or aspects (aspects are global characteristics of situations recognisable only after some prior experience) Situational perceptions still limited All attributes and aspects are treated separately and given equal importance

Level 3 Competent	Coping with crowdedness Now sees actions at least partially in terms of longer-term goals Conscious deliberate planning Standardised and routinized procedures
Level 4 Proficient	Sees situations holistically rather than in terms of aspects See what is most important in a situation Perceives deviations from the normal pattern Decision-making less laboured Use maxims for guidance, whose meaning varies according to the situation
Level 5 Expert	No longer relies on rules, guidelines or maxims Intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding Analytic approaches used only in novel situations or when problems occur Vision of what is possible

The impact of the theory within professional settings was led by Benner (1984) who applies the model to nursing and, as Goodwyn (2011) suggests, the model also sits well with notions of teacher development and helps operationalise our understanding of teacher expertise. Goodwyn maps the five levels against the current approaches to teacher development. The novice stage relating to the phase of UK teacher education in England where the trainee is working towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and the advanced beginner with becoming a newly qualified teacher (NQT). Stage 3, competence, is also a recognisable phase that is arrived at after two or three years in the profession when teachers have gained an understanding of the longer time cycles of the educational world: the term, the school year, the assessment and examination cycles and the longer phases of the key stage. The understanding that is gained from this experience allows an appreciation of the longer term goals for both the individual teacher and the school. Goodwyn (2011) sees a clear link between Stage 4, proficient, and the notion of crossing the 'threshold', becoming a full professional when teachers begin to develop their own schema (or maxims) to guide their actions.

It is worth looking in detail at descriptions of Level 5 to understand how Benner has built upon the Dreyfus model in order to describe expert nursing.

Stage five: the expert. The expert performer no longer relies on an analytic principle to connect their understanding of the situation to appropriate action. The expert nurse, with an enormous background experience, now has an intuitive grasp of each situation

and zeroes in on the precise region of the problem without wasteful consideration of a large range of unfruitful alternative diagnoses and solutions. The expert operates from a deep understanding of the total situation. Their actions are intuitive and often the justification for a particular decision will be that "it felt right or it looked good". The performer is no longer aware of features and rules; his / her performance becomes fluid and flexible and highly proficient. This is not to say that the expert does not use analytic tools. Highly skilled analytic ability is necessary for those situations with which the nurse has had no previous experience.... when the expert gets a wrong grasp of the situation and then finds that events and behaviours are not occurring as expected (Benner, 1984, cited in Goodwyn, 2011: 36).

The Dreyfus model emphasises the importance of intuition and unconscious competence when operating at the highest levels; this highlights a paradox of expert performance which is that the action of experts is automatic and intuitive and which often takes place at such a speed that it may be difficult later to explain and analyse what they have done. One of the problems of studying expertise is that experts may not be in a position to understand and explain exactly what they do. This is an important issue and it highlights the need for a critical approach to professional development to support the articulation and sharing of expertise inside the profession.

The view that is presented of expert performance is of fluid and flexible approaches to situations in which decisions are guided by an intuitive understanding that is informed by extensive experience and practice. Analytical approaches are deployed when problems and new situations are encountered and the expert is unable to give a full account of what she or he does. Eraut (1994) notes that the Dreyfus model 'provides an analysis of skilled behaviour under conditions of rapid interpretation and decision-making, in which the logically distinct processes, of acquiring information, following routines and making decisions are fully integrated' (ibid: 128). He holds with the view that the theory accounts for the greater complexity of professional work and the time required to develop expertise, but sees two shortcomings in the theory: the neglect of the problem of expert fallibility and the proportion of professional work that it covers.

Winch (2010) offers a more comprehensive critique of this model on seven counts which are summarised below:

1. If many (if not all) activities require a theoretical basis for successful, let alone expert, practice then this model would not apply to them.

2. The model focuses on action (performance) and not outcome and, as expert performance ought to produce excellent results, this is a shortcoming.
3. This is the most important criticism and is concerned with the tendency to see a correlation between action and the activity or structural functions of the brain, which are then subsequently subsumed into identities.
4. The claim that experts make use of 'analytical approaches in novel or problematic situations' This is the claim made for 'non-experts' and therefore is seen as being contradictory as the expert and the non-expert cannot be distinguished in this regard.
5. Expertise is conceived in terms of the character of actions and judgements rather than results. In some cases action and results are inseparable, for example musical performance. However, this is not the case with teaching where the results derived from the actions of the teacher might not be seen for some months or even years (for example in the case of test or examination results).
6. This criticism questions the field of action in which exercise is supposed to be attributed: is it the *occupation* or the *task*? Winch argues that the primary attribution should be to task rather than occupation.
7. Finally, the concept of *excellence* is seen as being problematic in the context of considering expert performance. An excellent action or outcome is attributed on the basis of criteria appropriate to that activity or outcome being held by the relevant community. Winch questions whether understanding action can be conceptually detached from understanding the intended outcome of the action. Nevertheless the attribution of excellence is problematic due to the *conceptual* criteria and the *empirical* ones.

### **3.2.2 Schön's theory of 'the Reflective Practitioner'**

A further influential theory of expertise is Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner which also shares assumptions that expertise is based on tacit knowledge. Schön seeks a more effective way to understand the intuitive and implicit thinking of a professional than that afforded by rational analysis. His search is for 'an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes by which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict' (Schön, 1983: 49 cited in Atkinson and Claxton, 2000: 5).

Schön's view of professional practice is one in which the knowledge and thought of a practitioner are most evident in the actions of the practitioner. Therefore, the accomplished professional is reflective and Schön makes the distinction between two kinds of reflection. *Reflection in action* which occurs during the course of professional action and *reflection on action* after the action has been completed. Winch raises the point that in order to understand this theory you need to understand both the basis for reflection and the subject matter. Eraut (1994) finds it more helpful to see this theory as a theory of metacognition deployed during skilled behaviour.

### **3.2.3 Conscious and unconscious competences**

The concept of tacit knowledge has informed a four-stage model of competence, based around conscious and unconscious competences. This model is widely used in the training of leaders to help understand the processes of acquiring expertise.

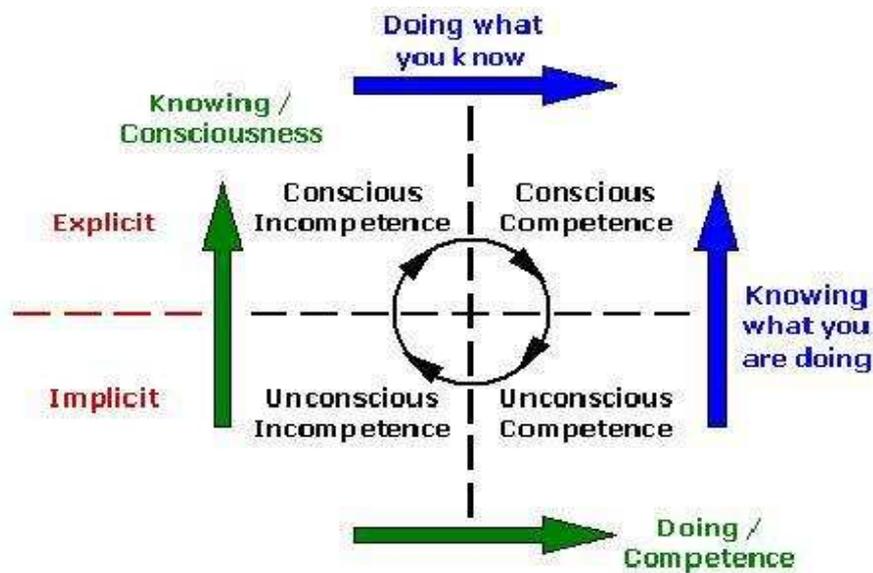
Carmichael et al. (2011: 151) point out that this model has been attributed variously to Dubin (1962); Robinson (1974); Straangard (1981); Howell (1982); May and Kruger (1988) and many others, and has been presented as a matrix (see Figure 3.1 below) or as a ladder. Nobody has been able definitely to confirm its origin. This model, initially derived from ideas of cybernetics, incorporates a more recent understanding of the brain's ability to process multiple pieces of information at any one time and it provides a useful analogy to help our understanding of learning. It uses the idea of information processing, awareness, and handling as well as our understanding of tacit knowledge. This model describes the move from novice to expert in four interlinked stages.

1 The unconscious incompetence stage: in this stage the learner has had no experience and therefore has no comprehension of what is required to do a task.

2 Conscious incompetence: the learner attempts the activity and begins to understand how much information there is to be aware of and the range of smaller skills involved in, for example, horse riding.

3 Conscious competence: this stage is arrived through practice and instruction so that a learner can undertake these tasks but needs to concentrate and give attention to each small detail.

4 Unconscious competence: this is only reached by some through continued practice in becoming an expert in a specific field. In this stage all of the skill sets are well established in the brain through practice; therefore information passes without effort on the part of the expert. This stage of unconscious competence is congruent with ideas of tacit knowledge.



**Figure 3.1 Unconscious and conscious competences**

### 3.2.4 Collins and Evans

A more sophisticated model of expertise is offered by Collins and Evans (2007) who offer an analysis of the meaning of expertise upon which the practice of science and technology rests. Their approach is based on the view that we ought to prefer the judgement of experts and that we should value those who ‘know what they are talking about’ (ibid: 2). They take a realistic position based on the assumption that expertise is the real and substantive possession of a group of experts and that individuals will acquire real and substantive expertise through their membership of these professional groups. Essentially they adopt a constructionist approach which sees the acquiring of expertise as a social process. They call their model the periodic table of expertises: a table of the expertise that might be used when individuals make judgements. This model is shown in Figure 3.1.

<b>UBIQUITOUS EXPERTISES</b>		
<b>DISPOSITIONS</b>	Interactive ability / Reflective ability	
<b>SPECIALIST EXPERTISES</b>	<b>UBIQUITOUS TACIT KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>SPECIALIST TACIT KNOWLEDGE</b>
	Beer mat knowledge Popular understanding Primary source knowledge	Interactional expertise Contributory expertise
	Polymorphic / Mimeomorphic	
<b>META-EXPERTISES</b>	<b>EXTERNAL (Transmuted expertises)</b>	<b>INTERNAL (Non-transmuted expertises)</b>
	Ubiquitous discrimination Local Discrimination	Technical connoisseurship Downward discrimination Referred expertise
<b>META-CRITERIA</b>	Credentials	Experience Track record

**Figure 3.2 The Periodic Table of Expertises**

The model considers expertise at different levels making distinctions between ubiquitous expertise, which every member of the society must possess in order to live in it, to specialist expertise that is specific to a particular domain. Of particular importance is their identification of specialist tacit knowledge. Their unique contribution to the field of expertise is expressed in the concept of interactional expertise which is the expertise in the language of the specialism in the absence of its practice. This is a distinct form of expertise as opposed to contributing expertise which enables those who have gained the skill to contribute to the domain to which the expertise pertains.

A further important distinction made by Collins and Evans is between mimeomorphic actions and polymorphic actions. A mimeomorphic action is one that is not dependent on social understanding and can be reproduced through mimicry. A polymorphic action, on the other hand, is dependent on social actions and requires behaviour to fit changing circumstances. In relation to this research polymorphic actions are typical of the work of teachers and as such highlight the adaptive nature of their professional circumstances and the improvisatory nature of teaching. Under these circumstances improvisation can be seen as an essential skill set and strategy for engaging successfully in dynamic social settings such as teaching. This is a further example of the positive relationship between expertise and improvisation.

### 3.2.5 Sternberg and Horvath's Prototype View of Teaching

The theories that have been discussed so far can be applied across a wide range of domains of expertise. Sternberg and Horvath's (1995) Prototype View has been developed specifically in relation to teacher expertise. Its function as a theory is to orientate thinking through a synthetic framework that is designed to encourage debate and stimulate further research. Their view is based on three assumptions:

1. That there are no well-defined standards that all experts meet and that no non-experts meet;
2. Experts bear a family resemblance to each other and it is this resemblance that structures the category "expert";
3. A convenient way of talking about this is through the concept of a prototype.

A prototype is defined as that which 'represents the central tendency of all the exemplars in the category' (Sternberg and Horvath, 1995: 9) and is derived from Rosch's (1973, 1978) cognitive psychology research on natural language concepts. Rosch argues that similarity-based categories exhibit a graded structure wherein some category members are better exemplars of the category than others: the greater the similarity between the subject and the prototype, the greater the probability that it belongs to the category.

The contents of the Expert Teaching Profile are organised under three headings: knowledge, efficiency and insight. These are the basic ways in which experts differ from novices. The features of these three areas are summarised in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Summary of the contents of the Expert Teaching Prototype**

<b>Knowledge (Quantity and Organization)</b>	<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>Insight</b>
Content Knowledge	Automatisation	Selective encoding (selecting what is and what is not relevant in solving problems)
Pedagogical knowledge Content specific Content non-specific	Executive control Planning Monitoring Evaluating Reinvestment of cognitive resources	Selective combination (combining information in ways that is useful for problems solving)
Practical knowledge Explicit Tacit		Selective comparison (applying information acquired in another context to solving the problem in hand)

Sternberg and Horvath are suggesting that teaching expertise can be viewed as a natural category that is structured by the similarity of expert teachers to one another and represented by a prototype with reference to which decisions about the expert status of a teacher can be made.

The implications of this approach are that it offers a way of distinguishing experts from experienced non-experts that acknowledges two important points. The first is that there is diversity in the population of expert teachers. The second is the absence of a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient features of an expert teacher. These implications have significance for this research in that it refutes the idea of an essentialist list of qualities that a teacher needs to acquire in order to be deemed an expert. The theory of prototypes suggests that expertise is displayed in a number of ways and that two equally valid members of the category may resemble each other much less than they individually resemble the prototype. This view is supported by Winch's critique of theories of expertise.

### **3.2.6 Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991)**

Whilst one approach to the development of expertise focuses on the individual and the consequence of specific and specialist training (the psychological view), an alternative view sees

learning as a social activity that comes from the experience of participating in everyday life. This is the view of Lave and Wenger (1991) whose model of situated learning proposes that learning involves a process of engagement in a community of practice. This approach views expertise as being gained through interaction with others. A community of practice is formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning; the sources of this practice can be traced back to the Medieval guilds that were formed to protect themselves from competition (Ericsson et al., 2006; Sennett, 2008). This takes the form of a nested structure in that an individual can be a member of different communities of practice. For some they might be a central member whilst for others they may have a marginal or peripheral role.

There are three crucial characteristics:

1. A domain. A community of practice has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
2. The community. In pursuing their interest in the domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
3. The practice. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems – in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

Placing learning within social relationships ( as opposed to seeing it as the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge) leads to asking questions about what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place. This moves away from a concern with cognitive processes and conceptual structures that, as has been shown, dominates much research into teacher expertise. The process of learning is one of moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to full participation as the individual becomes more competent and more involved in the main processes of the particular community.

Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and.... the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of

becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29).

Thus communities of practice have much to say about the development of identity, and specifically the way the identity of 'expert' is arrived at. This raises questions about the ways in which participants speak, act and improvise in ways that make sense to the community. Learning is viewed holistically, 'learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 29).

The emphasis on the situated nature of learning means that knowledge and learning has to be looked at in context, as being located in communities of practice. Yet this is not a straightforward matter as there are issues of power, for example if the community of practice is weak or if there are power relationships that inhibit entry or participation.

Nevertheless the concept of the community of practice has many implications for this thesis in that it offers an alternative frame of reference to the cognitive / conceptual view of expertise that complements Sternberg and Hovath's view of the prototypes. It suggests lines of enquiry that look at the ways that expertise is conferred through engagement in communities of practice and looks at the expertise that teachers have in relating to their pupils as well as other members of the school community. It also points to looking at knowledge and practice as being connected through a construct of professionalism linked to a variety of peer groups.

### **3.2.7 Winch's critique of theories of expertise**

Whilst acknowledging that theories of expertise have important insights to offer on expertise in particular areas and on some fairly general factors of expertise, Winch (2010) is critical of the extent to the claims that can be made. His critique can be summarised as follows. Claims on the essential nature of expertise cannot be sustained (partly due to the fluid criteria for expertise) and therefore it is difficult to see how a general theory of expertise can be constructed. He does, however, acknowledge that a contribution to the greater understanding of expertise can be made through pointing to important features that may be found in a variety of different circumstances. His argument is that 'the important issue in an examination of expertise is not the attainment of a general account, applicable to all cases of expertise, but rather a greater understanding of the enormous variety of what we call 'expertise' and 'experts', together with an understanding of the different conceptual dimensions in which we talk about expertise' (Winch, 2010: 136).

Applying Winch's critique to this research suggests that there is little value in trying to provide a generalised picture of 'the expert teacher' but to understand the variety of expertise that teachers have. This moves the focus away from 'the expert teacher' towards 'teacher expertise'. Therefore, it is inappropriate to ask 'what defines an expert teacher?' The better research question is 'in what ways do teachers demonstrate expertise? Sternberg and Horvath's view of prototype's suggests that expertise will be displayed in different ways in different contexts, a view that is consistent with notions of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and it is this theoretical position that will be used to inform an understanding of expertise as a social construction rather than as a set of cognitive traits.

### **3.3 Researching teacher expertise**

A number of different approaches have been taken to researching expertise and expert performance across a wide range of domains. Many studies have been grounded in cognitive psychology and relate to the ways in which experts process information. The general approach is to investigate the strategies and tactics used to interpret situations, organisation and knowledge in a content domain in order to determine how novices and experts differ when confronted with solving difficult problems (Olson and Biolsi, 1991). The early research findings in this area tell us that an expert differs from a novice in three ways: their level of tacit knowledge, efficiency in solving problems, and the application of insight in creative problem solving. This section provides an overview of the research into teacher expertise with consideration to the approaches that have been taken and the implications of undertaking research in this area.

The predominant research tradition into teacher expertise sees expertise as a cognitive phenomenon, comparing the behaviours and performances of novices to those of experts. Many of these studies rely upon experimental or simulated tasks. Expertise is also viewed as a function of experience and / or identified with certain dispositions (particularly that of Schön's reflective practitioner).

One of the seminal studies is Berliner (1986) 'In Pursuit of the Expert Pedagogue'. This paper offers insights into the experimental approach to researching teacher expertise and the following critique highlights some significant problems.

Berliner argues that expert teachers display adaptability, demonstrate 'knowing in action' through the automation of procedures and are able to show greater flexibility in response to the classroom situations, echoing the fluency approach that underpins the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) model. The intention of the research is 'to try and understand how knowledge about the running of classrooms is influenced by experience and expertise' (Berliner, 1986 p9).

The research involved undertaking a review of observational, correlational and experimental literature and experimentally-based research to test the hypothesis that expert teachers differ in their response to certain situations more so than novice teachers. Specifically, this involved looking at the efficiency with which expert teachers dealt with the technical aspects of teaching: handling the routines at the start of a lesson, planning lessons and 'reading' the classroom'. Three different groups of teachers are examined: experts, novices and postulants (teachers engaged in initial training). Empirical research methods, linked to a quasi-experimental behaviourist methodology, were based around a range of different activities or tasks that were undertaken by the three different groups (experts, postulants and novices). These activities took place outside of the classroom and included:

- Looking over class records of tests and other information prior to teaching a class;
- Viewing "for the briefest moment" a slide of a classroom and then asked to talk about what they saw;
- Reading and then commenting on scenarios written about gifted children;
- A 'look again task' where a picture of a classroom is shown on three occasions; after each showing the respondents are asked to talk about what they see and update their perceptions with new information;
- To prepare to teach a new class after examining some material and data about the students by planning the first two lessons.

The research is based on six main assumptions.

1. That a scientific approach can be utilised to study teacher education and that the dissection of 'classroom openings' (the ways in which teachers begin their lessons) are the conceptual equivalent of scientific experiments.
2. This positivist approach leads to a related assumption that such cases can be studied in the laboratory.

3. Teachers can be studied in isolation. Whilst the research looks at a range of teachers, they are viewed individually and evaluated according to the extent they can operate certain pedagogic procedures. Berliner's assumptions are that teaching techniques can be isolated from their context and outside of the relationship with pupils. Teaching therefore is seen as a lone occupation and no account is given of the value of team teaching, collaboration or the social context of the school.
4. There are assumptions about the nature of teacher expertise. Berliner argues that being an expert public school teacher is harder than being an expert physicist. This claim is made on the basis that teaching is a more complicated "ill-structured domain" due to the fact that surety of right action does not exist. Consequently '...the choice of a sensible solution strategy for a problem is an even more complex task than is solving problems in well-structured domains such as mathematics, radiology or chess' (Berliner, 1986: p13). Assumptions about the contexts in which expertise is demonstrated are not explored. Comparisons with other domains are made on the basis of the characteristics of problem-solving. Berliner argues that if the complexity of the problem solving undertaken by teachers was made more explicit then their job would be valued more. As such this research aims to challenge publicly held notions that teaching is a relatively simple activity.
5. Expertise in teaching is assumed to take the form of practical knowledge, 'knowing in action' (Berliner 1986 p7). These unconscious competences cannot be readily explained and they contribute to the way that teaching is undervalued. This is an important point which acknowledges one of the fundamental problems encountered when undertaking research in to expertise. Because expertise is comprised of a significant amount of 'tacit knowledge', experts often are not consciously aware of what they do.
6. The final assumption is that the classroom can be read like a chess board and that expert teachers, like chess players, have well developed pattern recognition systems. This offers a rather static view of the classroom where expertise is considered as someone who has "seen it all before". It does not see the expert teacher as a critically reflective practitioner who is dynamically interacting with a class that comprises thirty pupils who need to be viewed as individuals.

Whilst this research rejects some of the assumptions that Berliner holds, it does acknowledge others. Given that this research is positioned within a qualitative research paradigm it does not

claim affinities with positivist, experimental approaches and neither does it consider that teachers can be studied in isolation. On the other hand there is agreement with Berliner's view that teacher expertise is complex in nature and that teacher expertise comprises tacit knowledge. There is an acceptance that teachers have well developed pattern recognition systems but this assumption would be extended to acknowledge the ways in which expert teachers display adaptability within novel and unexpected situations.

The research raises a number of problems that are common to all research into teacher expertise, including this study. What criteria should be used for defining expertise and what is the difference between experience and expertise? (Berliner acknowledges that these terms are interrelated and symbiotic. Is expertise dependent on experience? Is an experienced teacher always an expert?) What knowledge systems should be studied? How will the sample of expert teachers be selected?

Three criteria were used to "build a pool of interesting, experienced informants' who we called experts" (Berliner, 1986 p8) namely reputation, classroom observation by three independent observers and by performance in laboratory tasks (although the nature of these laboratory tasks is not described). Two knowledge domains were identified as being of significance; subject knowledge and knowledge of subject management and organisation.

The conclusions arising from Berliner's research project are tentative but suggest that experts possess a special kind of knowledge about classrooms that is different from that of novices and postulants, and that this is a different kind of knowledge from subject-matter knowledge. The research suggests that expert teachers forge their own relationship with students, that they have different schema that they operate from and have a greater mass of knowledge to fall back on. The research offers an overview of the characteristics that might define expert teachers drawn from the literature review and the empirical research, summarised in Table 3.3

**Table 3.3 Summary of characteristics of expert teachers from Berliner (1988)**

Expert teachers are:

Able to make inferences of objects and events, whereas novices hold a more literal view of objects. They apply domain specific knowledge to make sense of classrooms.

Able to categorise problems to be solved at some kind of higher level.

Able to recognise patterns at an extraordinarily fast rate whereas novices are not so good at recognising patterns.

Slower than novices in the initial stages of problem solving. They take longer to look at a problem and think through first strategies.

Sensitive to task demands and the “social structure” of the job situation.

Opportunistic planners and quick to change tracks.

Able to use self-regulatory or meta-cognitive capabilities that are not present in less-experienced learners.

Able to adapt their plans according to need.

People that have developed their expertise over a long time frame.

Able to “look inside” a situation and can pull out what is important or significant.

Able to represent problems differently.

Experts start off differently with new classes.

Less concerned about classroom management and discipline.

The claims arising from Berliner’s research are that expert teachers are defined by a more complex notion of problem-solving. Whilst practical problem-solving seems to have a low status in teaching, it is an important characteristic of other domains of expertise. Consequently he regards expert teachers as one of the best sources for looking at ‘defensible action’, a consequence of the practical thinking displayed by teachers. Furthermore, Berliner argues that the knowledge gained from such a study is more codifiable than some teachers may think and that this offers opportunities for further research. He considers that the profession will benefit from knowing that there are experts within their number and that the expertise of teachers can be compared, favourably, to experts in other domains and that this has implications for teacher educators, mentors and novice teachers. Given the claim that teaching is more complex than we might expect it to be, he argues that more rigorous procedures are required for the licensing

of teachers. (In this regard Berliner offers an amusing diversion comparing the *ad hoc* selection processes for 'teacher of the year' in America to the rigorous protocols that govern the judging of livestock, pedigree dogs and sports competitions!)

The main flaw in Berliner's research is that it doesn't take into account the relationship of the teachers with their students, arguably one of the most important domains of teacher knowledge. This omission stems from the mechanistic, behaviourist and positivist paradigm employed. The researchers' interest in accessing 'internal data' (the thought processes of experts and novices) suggests that a greater emphasis on interpretative methodologies could have been more productive. Semi-structured interviews, reflective diaries and other qualitative data could have been employed in order to articulate the relationship between experience and expertise from the participants' point of view. This has confirmed my own decision to explore the nature of teacher expertise using a qualitative methodology within an interpretative paradigm in order to gain a richer description of the social dimensions of teaching.

Berliner implicitly acknowledges that there is a relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation and this has been explicitly explored by other researchers, for example Borko and Livingston's (1989) study of expert and novice mathematics teachers. Utilising a research approach based on expert-novice comparisons they use two conceptual frameworks to explain differences in patterns noticed in the participants planning, teaching and post-lesson reflections.

The first conceptual framework characterises teaching as a complex cognitive skill determined, in part, by the nature of a teacher's knowledge system. This assumption about teaching is based on three related concepts:

1. pedagogical reasoning (the process of transforming subject matter knowledge into forms that can be communicated to students and adapted according to variations in ability and background);
2. pedagogical content knowledge (the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues can be organised represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners); and,
3. schema (an abstract knowledge structure that summarises information about many particular cases and the relationships among them).

Shavelson (1986 cited in Borko and Livingston, 1989: 475) describes three schemata that characterise teachers' knowledge systems:

- Scripts: a knowledge structure that summarises information about familiar, everyday experiences.
- Scenes: a teacher's knowledge of people and objects in common classroom events such as whole group work, small group work and independent study.
- Propositional structures: representing teachers' factual knowledge about the components of the teaching-learning situation such as the students in their classroom, subject matter and pedagogical strategies.

Borko and Livingston (1989) use improvisation as a metaphor to describe teaching, drawing upon Yinger (1987) who suggests that we can understand some aspects of interactive teaching as improvisational performance.

The research design involved a small sample of teachers (four novices and four expert teachers) who were observed teaching mathematics on consecutive days for one week. The participants were interviewed prior and post observation. Ethnographic procedures were used to analyse the data which was presented as a cross-case analysis. The improvisational aspects of teaching that were noted were flexibility in planning and responsiveness to students during interactive teaching:

the success of the expert teachers' improvisation seemed to depend on their ability to quickly generate or provide examples and to draw connections between students' comments or questions and the lesson's objectives. In terms of cognitive structure, successful improvisational teaching requires that the teacher have an extensive network of interconnected, easily accessible schemata. Further, he or she must have the ability to select particular strategies, routines and information from these schemata during actual teaching and learning interaction, based on specific classroom occurrences (Borko and Livingston, 1989: 485).

Borko and Livingston's research indicates that there is a qualitative difference in the ways in which expert teachers improvise that is based on their greater experience and understanding of the process of teaching. They suggest that there is much left to learn about pedagogical expertise, in particular the process through which novices become experts. Whilst this has implications for the design of initial teacher training programmes, there are also implications for the continuing professional development of teachers; Borko and Livingstone hope that 'more researchers will examine the entire process of becoming an expert teacher' (1989: 495). This desire accords with the intentions of this thesis to explore the characteristics of advanced

professional practice in order to identify appropriate and relevant professional development activities for expert teachers.

Research undertaken by Jegede et al. (2000) explores trainee teachers' perception of their knowledge about expert teaching through a statistical study that collected data 'on trainee teachers perception of their current knowledge and what they need to know to become expert teachers' (Jegede et al., 2000: 291). The implications of their findings were that professional development only caters for current developments in education and that the traditional concept of in-service training is inadequate to equip modern day teachers to perform to any appreciable level of expertise. They also recognised a call in the literature for a reconceptualization of expert teaching that was based on the way that people learn, noting that expert teaching is central to the movement to excellence in education (ibid: 305).

Whilst distinctions are made between pre-service and in-service training, a further distinction can be made between two kinds of continuing professional development activities: those designed to enable teachers to become experts (developing experienced teachers into expert teachers) and those to support and sustain teachers that are already expert, or who are exhibiting high levels of expertise. It is the latter group that arguably is neglected within current approaches to professional development and this is an aspect of expert teaching that deserves attention in this thesis.

The final example in this selective survey of research into teacher expertise uses the theoretical approach offered by Sternberg and Horvath (1995) of a prototype view of expert teaching. Smith and Strahan (2004) take the view that there is no well-defined standard that all teachers meet and that experts bear a family resemblance. Their research adopts a different methodology of a similarity-based study within naturalistic settings. The case study approach, whilst acknowledging the narrow scope, offers the possibility of a rich description of a small but particular set of participants. The research took place in the USA and the sample of three teachers was selected according to the criteria of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for accomplished teachers. In order to meet these standards teachers have to demonstrate accomplished practice in portfolio and assessment centre exercises.

Smith and Strahan (2004) make three claims:

1. That case study evidence which provides descriptions of what teachers do and say will contribute to our understanding of the complexity of expertise in teaching;

2. That the prototype view has applicability (although not generalisability);
3. Rich descriptions provide specific and complex profiles in their efforts to improve professional practice among teachers.

Having looked at the individual characteristics of each teacher a cross-case analysis produced six central tendencies, a summary representation of behaviours, practices and attitudes. These shared tendencies were that the teachers:

1. had a sense of confidence in themselves and their profession;
2. talked about their classrooms as communities of learners;
3. maximised the importance of relationships with students;
4. employed student-centred approaches to instruction;
5. contributed to the teaching profession through leadership and service;
6. were masters of their content areas.

### **3.4 Summary and conclusions**

This chapter has explored the ways in which experts and expertise can be defined and different theories of expertise have been critically examined. The importance of Lave and Wenger's concept of a 'community of practice' for this research was considered in relation to being able to understand the social construction of expertise. Sternberg and Horvath's prototype view of the expert teacher offers a non-essentialist perspective that influences this research. In the second part of the chapter a selective overview of the research into teacher expertise identified the complexity of teaching and the potential for codifying teacher expertise. Other research (Borko and Livingston, 1989) suggests that there is a relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise. Smith and Strahan (2004) offer an alternative approach to studying teacher expertise that rejects experimental approaches that are focussed on novice / expert comparisons. Their case study approach in which teachers are observed in naturalistic settings with the intention to provide rich description offers a model on which the research in this thesis is based. An important message that comes from the prototype view of expert teaching is that notions of teacher expertise are dependent on context. One of the shortcomings of the Berliner (1988) research is that it ignores the social and political context in which teachers operate. This

is a significant omission given what we know about the impact of socio-economic status on educational attainment (Riddell, 2003) and the direct political engagement with educational practice in the UK, especially since the 1988 Education Act. Therefore the next chapter explores teacher professionalism as a contested concept and attempts to articulate the social and political issues that impact upon the teachers within this research.

# Chapter 4: Understanding teacher expertise

*This chapter explores the issues surrounding notions of expertise and expert performance within the specific context of teaching with reference to the ways in which the teacher as an advanced practitioner has been conceptualised. The topic is treated diachronically acknowledging that the concept of 'the expert teacher' is historically and culturally situated. Furthermore in order to arrive at a view of teacher expertise there is a need to understand a number of related concepts: professionalism, what is teaching and how is it considered to be effective. There are a number of terms that are used to describe the advanced practitioner. This is viewed as the consequence of a number of discourses and the nature of these voices is described. Finally these voices are summarised through looking at the ways in which they are either privileged or disregarded by the current UK Coalition government. This provides an outline of the socio-political context for this research.*

## 4.1 Teaching as a profession

As has been previously stated one of the initial motivations to undertake this research was to gain a greater understanding of what it meant to be an 'advanced practitioner' and to articulate the long term goal of professional development. This led to one of the *prima facie* questions of this research 'what are the characteristics of an expert teacher?' A concept such as the expert teacher cannot be understood in a vacuum (Goodwyn, 2011: 9) and therefore in order to bring greater understanding to this term attention has to be given to a number of other related concepts: *professionalism*, what we mean by *teaching*, what is considered to be *effective teaching*.

The transformation of many organizations into professions is one of the key features of the emergence of 'modern' society (Bullock et al. 1988) and is seen as a process involving the development of formal entry qualifications based on education and examinations, the emergence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline members and some degree of state-guaranteed monopoly rights (ibid: 684). The notion of professionalism carries with it notions of power, right to operate with autonomy along with a need to be seen to be accountable. The relationship between autonomy and accountability is a key issue especially within the context of teaching (Goodwyn, 2011).

Eraut (1994) sees professionalism as an ideology citing Johnson's view (1972, 1984) that 'professionalisation' is the process by which occupations seek to gain status and privilege in accord with that ideology, "The problem to which the concept of a profession is said to provide an answer is that of the social control of expertise" (Eraut, 1994: 2). Expertise is regarded as the prime source of professional power. Two important questions are, what is the knowledge base on which expertise rests and who controls it?

Professions tend to be autonomous, which means that they have a high degree of control over their own affairs. This carries with it an expectation that they have the freedom to exercise professional judgement. The power that a profession has can be used to control not only its area of expertise, but also its members and its interests. Professions contribute to the stratification of society, becoming part of the 'professional class' is an aspiration for many as they enjoy relatively secure and remunerative careers and perceive a separation from people in more routine manual jobs (Giddens 1993: 235). Most professional roles are found within those sectors of the economy where the State plays a major role: in government, education, health and social welfare. The majority of people working in professional occupations – doctors, accountants, lawyers and teachers for example - are employed by the state. This will be of particular significance when considering the relationship between the state and the teaching profession.

The nature of teacher professionalism has changed in response to social, historical and political influences. Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) provide a useful framework of 'four phases of teachers' professionalism' to chart these developments:

1. The pre-professional phase;
2. The autonomous professional;
3. The collegial professional;
4. The fourth age – post-professional or post-modern.

This has been extended and updated for the purposes of this research to include an additional phase 'the emerging professional' following on from the pre-professional phase.

#### **4.1.1 The pre-professional phase**

In the early nineteenth century education was broadly carried out at a local level with minimal influence from the state. Education was largely religious in character and the teacher was engaged in the rudimentary delivery of basic knowledge and skills. With the spread of urbanization so the size and nature of schools changed and teachers, no longer operating individually within an informal setting, became salaried employees. Education was based on utilitarian ideals and centred on the transmission of facts. The principles and parameters of teaching were based around common sense, managing discipline (through the use of corporal punishment) and the ability to secure a limited proficiency in the '3 Rs'. There was an assumption that teachers were 'born not made' and that rudimentary training was sufficient; 'sitting with Nellie'.

There were two significant pieces of legislation that impacted upon the work of teachers: the Revised Code of 1861 and the Education Act of 1870. The former was driven by governmental concern about levels of literacy and numeracy and an apparent dissatisfaction with the profession.

#### **4.1.2 The emerging professional**

The 1902 Education Act (the Balfour Act) is regarded by some as the inauguration of a professional status for teachers. Building on the developments of 1870, the control of existing schools and development of secondary education was placed in the hands of newly formed LEAs. The creation of the new tier of secondary education also impacted on the training of teachers. Traditional approaches to the training of teachers was deemed to be inadequate and the intention was that new secondary school graduates would provide most of the recruits for the elementary schools, while the most-able secondary school pupils would proceed to higher education and then perhaps be recruited to the middle class grammar and private schools (Hoyle and John, 1995: 24). At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of universities started their own 'training departments' in which graduates, after completing their degree course, could study the theory and practice of education.

At the same time there was a growing interest in ideas emanating from mainland Europe on child centred, early years education. Theorists such as Pestalozzi, Montessori and Piaget were influenced by the ideas of Rousseau who, in 'Emile, or On Education' (1762), argues for the essential goodness of people. The union movement began the organisation of teachers as a professional body and by the 1920s teachers began to gain a professional autonomy in which

they were required to meet the needs of the state but were allowed a degree of workplace independence and opportunities to develop the curriculum and new pedagogies (Hoyle and John, 1995).

### **4.1.3 The autonomous professional**

This 'responsible autonomy' can be seen as the hallmark of teacher-state relations up until the 1970s (Hoyle and John 1995) and it was seen by many, especially the teachers' associations and unions, as a move towards a greater professionalism. This was particularly the case from the 1960s onwards when classroom practice was the basis of the development of a wider range of teaching methods, including the wider dissemination of child-centred approaches. This was reflected in the Plowden Report *Children and their Primary Schools* (1967) that acknowledged 'to a unique extent English teachers have the responsibility and the spur of freedom' (Plowden 1967: 312). However, the report also criticised the fact that graduates entering the profession were not required to have a professional training. This was perceived as having an impact on teachers standing as professionals.

The desire to see all teachers achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), an approval by the Department for Education and Science (DES) was fulfilled in September 1970. The James Report (DES, 1972), *Teacher Education and Training* reinforced the establishment of teaching as a graduate career, proposing a radical reorganisation of teacher training into three stages (or cycles); the first cycle (two years) would consist of a general higher education course and the second cycle (two years) consisting of a year of professional studies followed by a year as a 'licensed teacher' replacing the existing probationary year. A teacher who completed these four years would be awarded a BA (Ed). The third cycle would consist of in-service training.

The James Report is important for a number of reasons, not least in that it acknowledges a relationship between theory and practice. It also suggests that there should be a continuous link between initial teacher training and the continuing professional development of teachers. Whilst the 'licensed teacher' proposal was not implemented (following opposition from the trade unions) the principle of integrating teacher education into higher education was accepted by the government and throughout the 1970s colleges of education merged with other further and higher education establishments to form colleges and institutes of higher education (Mackinnon and Statham, 1999: 28).

However, whilst it might appear that teachers were gaining greater status as professionals there were concerted challenges to their autonomy. Three dominant issues were the reaction to progressive teaching methods, the impact of the 'William Tyndale Affair' and the speech given by Jim Callaghan, the then Prime Minister at Ruskin College in 1976.

The autonomy that teachers had gained within their classroom to develop the curriculum and new pedagogies was conceptualised as the contrast between 'progressive' and 'traditional' approaches to education. This led to educational research which was focussed on discovering which approach was better. The publication of a series of 'Black Papers' by right-wing educationalists attacked the progressive style of education being developed in primary schools, blaming these approaches for the wider ills of society as "a main cause not only of student unrest in the universities but of other unwelcome tendencies or phenomena" (Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980: 41).

The 'William Tyndale Affair' provided ammunition for the Black Paper writers and extensive media coverage that reinforced the failure of 'progressive' educational methods. William Tyndale was a primary school in north London where, in 1974, some of the staff introduced radical changes. These changes resulted in a violent dispute amongst staff and with the school managers from which ensued a chaotic lack of control of the school and its pupils. This incident marked a turning point in modern educational history (Davis, 2002).

The Tyndale controversy was thus very complex, but its outcome is relatively straightforward: the apparent failure of 'progressive methods in one London school prompted the adoption nationally of a more interventionist approach to methods and standards by central government and, in the process, a diminution of the autonomy of LEAs (275).

The affair raised a number of crucial issues that have influenced subsequent educational debates and policy making particularly in relation to the control of the school curriculum, the responsibilities of local education authorities, the accountability of teachers and the assessment of effectiveness in education.

The arguments put forward in the Black Papers and the events surrounding the debate over 'progressive' educational methods led to the speech by Jim Callaghan at Ruskin College Oxford on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1976. This speech marks a watershed in both the ways and the extent to which the state would intervene in education (Hoyle and John 1995: 39). This would be a challenge to the notion that the curriculum was a 'secret garden' and that the education system and all those

who worked within it would have to acknowledge the needs of a national economic agenda. For the first time an explicit link was made between the education system and the economic well-being of the country. The speech initiated the accountability agenda into education (Hoyle and John 1995: 105) which subsequently led to initiatives regarding the curriculum, the mass testing of pupils by LEAs and the establishment of the Assessment of Performance Unit.

Callaghan was also careful to stake out his own position: that he was not supporting the prejudices of the Black Paper writers who claimed to defend standards but were actually defending old privileges, and neither was he thinking of moving forward without the cooperation of teachers. 'We must carry the teaching profession with us. They have the expertise and the professional approach' (Callaghan 1976).

#### **4.1.4 The collegiate professional**

The issues that were raised in Callaghan's Ruskin speech were taken even further by the Conservative government that came to power in 1979 led by Margaret Thatcher. 'Thatcherism' became synonymous with the politics of the New Right, an umbrella term that in part is associated with neo-liberal *laissez-faire* economics associated with Adam Smith, Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman as well as embracing traditional conservative values of authoritarianism and hierarchical social structures epitomized by the primacy of the nation state (Hoyle and John 1995 40).

Whilst control of the whole landscape of education for England and Wales was accomplished with the 1988 Education 'Reform' Act this was preceded by a number of reforms that began with giving more power to parents as well as an intention to restructure teacher's salaries and change their conditions of service. A series of papers from the Department of Education and Science (DES) outlined the Conservative priorities; 'to make the best use of available resources to maintain and improve standards in education' (DES 1983). In 'Better Schools' (DES 1985a) the importance of teacher quality was emphasised which led to outlines for an approach to teacher appraisal (1985b). This raised the issue that there were no guidelines or criteria against which teacher performance could be measured. Therefore, a paper by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) was produced that offered a review of what constitutes good performance by teachers in

primary and secondary schools (DES, 1985c), significantly the first time that the state had outlined what constituted 'good' teaching.

The impact of a National Curriculum, initially constructed around a lattice framework of subjects and cross-curricular themes, and standardised assessment tests (SATs) placed complex demands on teachers; demands that required them to teach beyond traditional subject boundaries. This represented a reconceptualization of their work as teachers of pupils and not subjects, particularly with regard to the incorporation of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. These pressures led to the creation of collaborative cultures within schools, facilitated by the introduction of five 'Baker' days of in-service training per year (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000).

The argument was that collaborative enterprise would allow for a co-ordinated approach to curriculum innovation and the realisation of whole school initiatives. Whilst supporting the requirement for continuing professional development this approach also encouraged teachers to learn from each other, sharing and developing good practice. This view of teaching holds the basic assumption that teaching is a collective and collaborative activity.

#### **4.1.5 The fourth professional age**

The shift envisaged in the fourth professional age is aligned with the profound transformations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; 'the social geography of post modernity is one where boundaries between institutions are dissolving, roles are becoming less segregated, and borders are becoming increasingly irrelevant' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000: 51).

The social geographies of professional learning are changing radically and this is impacting upon the nature of teacher professionalism, with wider expectations of the areas in which teachers are expected to engage. These include a shift in focus in teaching as an activity from transmission of knowledge to the facilitation of learning, engaging parents in supporting the process of learning, working with a wider range of professionals (including health, social services and the police). With the decline in power and influence of local educational authorities teachers are creating new partnerships and support networks and 'self-improving school systems' (Hargreaves 2011). These changes are taking place within an on-going debate over the status of teacher professionalism of which there are two main lines of argument. One is that

teaching does have an identity and status as a profession, the other is that it is concerned with the technical/ rationalist delivery of prescribed content.

## **4.2 The language of advanced practice: five discourses (1976 – 2010)**

Having explored the professional knowledge base that underpins teaching the next question to ask is 'what constitutes effective teaching?' What approaches are 'successful in producing a desired or intended result' (Oxford Online Dictionary). The notion of school, classroom and teacher effectiveness developed in the late 70's, with Ron Edmonds from the United States being generally credited with initiating this movement (Hopkins et al., 1994). The argument being that the internal features of individual schools can make a difference, outweighing the influence of the home or hereditary factors. The first major study in the UK was undertaken by Rutter et al. (1979) comparing the 'effectiveness' of ten secondary schools in south London on a range of student outcome measures. As research into the effectiveness of schools developed, and this naturally included ideas about effective teaching, so did notions of school accountability as neoliberal ideas began to be applied to many Western educational systems (Hopkins et al., 1994: 44). The evidence for school effectiveness provided the agenda for school accountability.

The process of defining what constitutes effective teaching is complex and controversial. As Ko et al. argue (2013: 5) 'effective' is a narrow term that needs criteria (effective of what?).

Effective teaching requires criteria for effectiveness. These criteria refer to the objectives of education in general and of teaching in particular. Visions about the criteria are the result of a political and societal debate, but educational professionals, teachers and schools can also take part in it. (Ko et al., 2013: 5)

They go on to point out that focussing on outcomes reflects value-driven choices and priorities for the goals of education that are defined politically and ideologically by either central or local government, whole school or department level. The effectiveness of a teacher therefore is determined on the achievement of agreed outcomes. This can be seen in the definition offered by Campbell et al. 'A teacher is effective if he/she can accomplish the planned goals and

assigned tasks in accordance with school goals.’ (Campbell et al. 2004: 61 cited in Ko et al., 2013: 5).

Criticism of the teacher effectiveness movement can be made on the grounds that it offers a constrained view of what I am calling ‘advanced professional practice’. The constraints are of two kinds. First, teaching is seen as being the accomplishment of school or current ideological goals of education. Second, notions of teacher effectiveness are accompanied by demands for consistency, the importance for schools to establish ‘consistent patterns of teacher practices’ (Ko et al., 2013: 6). Furthermore, it is not possible to ignore the impact that high stakes accountability systems (such as Ofsted) have on reducing the teachers’ freedom to be creative and damaging professional autonomy (Ko et al., 2013: 13). The evidence of what constitutes the ‘effective’ practice that requires ‘consistent’ application in schools (derived from formal or informal inspection processes) is significantly influenced by teachers meeting external expectations of what is deemed to be effective practice. Whilst this is understandable I consider that it creates a problem when exploring ‘advanced professional practice’. The problem is that the professional autonomy of the teacher, and the tacit knowledge that they hold about what works for a particular group of students and class is denied in the process of the observation of professional practice.

Therefore there needs to be other ways of considering advanced professional practice and the ways in which it can be described. This is also a complex and contested area due to the multiplicity of conflicting voices and views. In the next section I explore five discourses that have influenced and shaped the ways in which advanced professional practice is described between 1976 and 2010.

Views of teacher professionalism will impact upon notions of teacher identity (Sachs, 2001: 149) and this is particularly the case when we look at one aspect of teacher identity, the notion of the ‘advanced practitioner’. There is a proliferation of terms that are used in order to describe teacher expertise. Sachs (2001) has viewed this in a dualistic manner, identifying two discourses that have dominated education policy and practices in recent times: the managerialist discourse and the democratic discourse (159). She acknowledges the problems of using binary oppositions and that is particularly relevant when trying to analyse the complex and competing voices that engage in defining what advanced professional practice might be. A broader approach is taken here. As has been argued above, the ‘Ruskin’ speech is a watershed in the development of teacher professionalism in the way that it marked the beginning of a different relationship

between the teacher and the state. Taking this as a starting point it is possible to discern five discourses that contribute to the competing notions of what constitutes expert practice. These are:

1. The professional discourse: the autonomous, reflective practitioner;
2. The discourse of the Masters in Teaching and Learning.
3. The managerialist discourse;
4. The accountability discourse;
5. The discourse of globalisation;

### **4.3.1 The professional discourse: expertise as reflective practice**

The professional discourse has its roots in notions of teacher autonomy and the role that teachers play within their own professional development. Eraut (1995) makes the distinction between propositional knowledge which underpins or enables professional action and practical know-how which is inherent in the action itself and cannot be separated from it. Practical knowledge has also been called 'tacit knowledge' (Polyani, 1967) and its significance is that it recognises "that important aspects of professional competence and expertise cannot be represented in propositional form and embedded in a publicly accessible knowledge base" (Eraut 1995: 15). Theorists who have attempted to explain professional expertise in the light of tacit knowledge include Schön (1983, 1987) whose notion of the 'reflective practitioner' is based on assumptions that people do not know what they know but that through reflection they are able to articulate their thinking and be more explicit about their practice. Schön's three levels of consciousness are 'knowing-in-action', 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. Rejecting a model of professionalism that is based on technical rationality, he argues for 'an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict' (Schön 1983: 49). These ideas have been explored further by Atkinson and Claxton (2000) who emphasise the importance of intuition for professional practice that is "characterised by complexity, is dynamic and interactive and happens in a very specific and constantly changing context" (6).

What is the language that is found within this discourse? This is a problematic question given that much of what constitutes 'expert practice' is often not articulated. Sachs (2001) refers to an

'activist identity' that emerges from democratic discourses with emancipatory aims (157). This suggests that the language of this discourse is the language of teachers themselves, acknowledging the importance of professional self-narratives. Gergen and Gergen (1988) see these as "symbolic systems used for such social purposes as justification, criticism and social solidification" (20-21); they are the glue for collective professional identity and the provocation for a renewal of teacher professionalism (Sachs 2001: 158). These ideas are implicit in the notion of the 'authorised teacher', an articulation of advanced practice that is based around the interrelated concepts of 'authority', 'autonomy' and 'authoring' (Sorensen and Coombs, 2010b).

### **4.3.2 The MTL discourse: expertise as 'masterliness'**

A version of this discourse was developed by the UK government for England with the short-lived introduction of a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL). The assumptions behind this initiative was that 'top down' approaches linked to national strategies were not effective and that reflective practice (Schön, 1983, Kolb, 1984) supported by communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) could have an impact on student outcomes. Introduced by the New Labour government in 2010, the MTL signalled a declared intention from the government that teaching would be a master's led profession (Sorensen and la Velle, 2013: 77). This set a new benchmark for advanced professional practice, introducing the concept of 'masterliness'. Whilst this is not a word that is found in current dictionaries it has entered the discourse of professional development as: "a state of advanced professional critical thinking linked to action and informed by research and evidence" (la Velle 2013: 7).

The nearest noun to masterliness is 'masterly': showing great skill, very accomplished (Oxford English Dictionary Online). The promise of a master's led profession on one hand had a positive impact on the validation of teacher expertise, raising the professional identity of teachers through their engagement in academic study and the theoretical evaluation of their practice. The overall intentions being that all teachers at some stage in their careers would engage in practice-based critical enquiry (DCSF, 2008). Burton and Goodman (2011) pose a counter argument that the MTL would actually promote a standardised approach to post-qualification teacher education. Ensuring that all teachers are exposed to largely the same professional development provisions would lead to greater state control of the education system.

### 4.3.3 The managerialist discourse

The impact of neo-liberal policies on education arrived with the Education 'Reform' Act of 1988, introducing a 'free market' in which education becomes a commodity, schools the providers and parents and children the consumers or 'customers' (Ward 2013: 5). This introduced managerialist discourses and ideologies into educational bureaucracies as well as schools. The managerialist discourse is based on two claims: that efficient management can solve any problem, and practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector (Rees, 1995). Managerialist discourses have impacted on notions of advanced professional practice in two main ways: through the introduction of performance management and the introduction of standards for teachers.

Prior to the 1998 Education 'Reform' Act consideration had been given to raising the standards at all levels of achievement and securing the best possible return from the resources that are invested in education. In 'Better Schools: a summary' (DES, 1985a) concerns were raised about the quality of teaching which led to the proposal that LEAs should be required to appraise the performance of their teachers. This led to a subsequent paper 'Education Observed 3: Good Teachers' (DES, 1985c) in which HMI offer a review of what constitutes good performance by teachers in primary and secondary schools.

The qualities of 'good teachers' included minimum expectations (reliable, punctual, cooperative and willing), qualifications, personal qualities (calm attitude and creation of a climate of purpose), variety of teaching approaches, the ability to differentiate, motivation of pupils and class control, planning and assessment, relationships outside of the classroom and engagement in extracurricular activities.

With the introduction of the Teacher Training Agency in 1994 there came into being 'standards', or competencies, that defined what was expected of teachers at the point of entry to the profession and also what was required in order to progress in the profession. These standards were introduced in 1994 and, whilst they are not strictly speaking a model of expertise (Goodwyn 2011) they do acknowledge stages in advanced practice. In 1997 the term 'advanced skills teacher' was introduced (a term originating from Australia) and to this was added the 'excellent teacher' in 2006.

The 2009 version of the standards for teachers suggests a progression through different stages:

- Achieving qualified teachers status, i.e. initial training;
- Passing 'induction' and achieving the core standards, i.e. 'probation';
- Post-threshold;
- Excellent;
- Advanced skills.

Whilst the advanced skills teacher (AST) is positioned as the ultimate level it is described in the guidance as essentially a career and reward stage (Goodwyn 2011:38). This was derived from the intention to reward teachers and to provide a career pathway that did not require them to take on management and / or leadership responsibilities. This encouraged the 'good' teacher to remain in the classroom and become a leading practitioner who can have an impact on school improvement and to support and encourage the teaching of others.

The role of the Excellent Teacher supported the need for a career route for those teachers that wanted to stay in the classroom and subsumed most of the standards of the AST (three standards were retained as unique to the AST). One of the key issues about the Excellent Teacher scheme was the negative reaction that it had within the teaching profession who felt that the scheme, and the title ET, were potentially divisive (Hutchings et al. 2009: 10).

#### **4.3.4 The accountability discourse – Ofsted**

Alongside the managerialist discourse, and forming part of it, is the accountability discourse as represented by The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). This is given separate attention as the intentions of this discourse are identifiably different and the language of this discourse is unique and the terms used to describe teaching quality, for example, have gained very specific meanings. Ofsted was created in 1992 to ensure that all schools in England were regularly inspected. From the outset the Ofsted framework included making judgements on the quality of teaching and this was achieved through the use of an externally determined set of criteria.

The first Ofsted inspection schedule and handbook was produced in 1992. Initially there were seven different levels of judgement from 'excellent' (1) to 'very poor' (7). The handbook contained evaluation criteria with descriptions of what 'good' (3) and 'satisfactory' (4) would look like in all aspects of school life to be judged (Elliott, 2012: 1). The handbook was subject to

continual revisions with greater detail being added to the criteria (Maw, 1995). By the time that the 2003 Handbook was produced written criteria for the characteristics of teaching and learning were provided for levels 2 to 6 with short statements providing indications for awarding levels 1 and 7. So the additional guidance for awarding a level 1 for teaching and learning was that 'difficult ideas or skills taught in an inspiring and highly effective way indicate excellent teaching (1)' (Ofsted 2003: 73). This indicates that even within the Ofsted framework it was difficult to be precise about the characteristics of 'excellence'.

The revision of the framework in 2005 brought further changes; the frequency of inspections were proportionate to success and there were reductions to the size of the inspection team, the length of inspections, the amount of notice schools were given of inspections and the amount of teaching observed (Elliott 2012: 2). Inspection was now based on a four rather than a seven grade system: outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate.

There is no direct correlation between being an 'expert teacher' and gaining an Ofsted judgement of 'outstanding'. However, the criteria that define outstanding teaching have had an influence on notions of teacher expertise. These criteria have not remained constant, changing and adapting according to revisions to the frameworks. The impact on classroom practice was that teachers, often supported by schools, developed formulaic approaches to teaching that would ensure that they were 'ticking the boxes' when observed. These changes in school culture were also reflected in changes within the Ofsted handbook. During the period 1992 to 2010 there was a shift from looking at teaching to focussing on learning and an emphasis on the ways that teachers responded to pupils during the lessons and not strictly adhering to their lesson plan.

Schools that saw the Ofsted criteria of 'good' and 'outstanding' as the benchmarks of advanced practice developed approaches to pedagogy that were driven by the criteria. For some schools this was stultifying and needed to be avoided.

#### **4.3.5 The globalisation discourse**

A final discourse that contributes to the notions of advanced professional practice is derived from the impact that globalisation has had upon education. Shields (2013) points out the ambiguous and contested nature of globalisation which can be seen either as beneficial

(Friedman, 2006) or as a form of 'global pillage' (Giddens, 1999) in which the spread of global capitalism increases global inequality and destroys environmental resources.

One of the significant effects of the globalisation of education is the increased competition between national systems of education within the context of a global 'knowledge economy' (Shields, 2013: 100). This competition is reflected in, and fuelled by, international tests that measure and compare educational achievement in different countries. Of particular significance have been the Trends in Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS: [www.ttmss.bc.edu](http://www.ttmss.bc.edu)) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA: [www.oecd.org/pisa/](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/)). Both TIMSS and PISA have ignited debates on educational policy and practice and have encouraged politicians and researcher to seek to learn best practices from other countries (Shields 2013: 101).

Organisations such as McKinsey and Company have produced reports in response to the data on 'the world's top-performing school systems'; notably "How the World's Best School Systems Stay on Top" (McKinsey and Co. 2007) and "Closing the talent gap: attracting and retaining top-third graduates to careers in teaching (McKinsey and Co. 2010). Importantly these reports have placed significant emphasis on the effectiveness of teaching "*the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers*" (McKinsey and Co., 2007). The effectiveness of the classroom teacher is seen as the most important controllable feature of an education system. "The world's best-performing school systems make teaching their 'north star'" (McKinsey and Co., 2010:5). The discourse of globalisation has therefore raised the importance and profile of what constitutes 'great teaching' and has played a part in promoting a greater interest in teacher expertise.

## **4.4 Positioning the UK's 2010 Coalition Government**

In the concluding section of this chapter the five discourses, or voices, will be considered in relation to the current education policies of the 2010 Coalition Government. This will be an attempt to critically analyse the Coalition's educational policies through exploring the voices that are privileged or disregarded in order to articulate the political context within which this research is taking place.

The Coalition's White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) emphasises the importance and influence of the discourse of globalisation: '... our school system performs well below its potential and can improve significantly. Many other countries in the world are

improving their schools faster than we are. Many other countries have much smaller gaps between the achievements of rich and poor than we do' (DfE, 2010: 8). They draw three lessons from 'the most successful countries': that no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers, that as much power as possible should be devolved to the front line while retaining high levels of accountability and that no country that wishes to be world class can allow children from poorer families to fail as a matter of course. This policy borrowing is based on unquestioned assumptions about the nature of international league tables and does not take into account cultural context, the conditions of service of teachers and wider welfare support systems.

The discourse of globalisation might provide the justification for a programme of radical reforms but in reality policy was actually determined by a commitment to pay off government debt by the end of the parliament in 2015. This resulted in massive cuts in government spending on social services, health and education.

The master's discourse has been completely silenced by the Coalition government. In line with the requirement to make severe cuts to public spending the decision was made to remove funding for postgraduate professional development (PPD) and the MTL. This suggests that teacher education is seen as the acquisition of skills and competencies relating to subject knowledge and classroom management. The 'autonomy with accountability' view of teaching that permeates 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) is at variance with the complex view of professional knowledge accumulation and development promoted by the MTL (Sorensen and la Velle 2013: 88).

A limited CPD Scholarship scheme has been retained by the Coalition to support master's level study in the development of subject knowledge in mathematics, English, science and special educational needs (SEN). Beyond this there is no current political will to equate advanced practice with the acquisition of a Masters qualification.

A final linguistic twist to the Masters discourse came following the Second Report of the Independent Review of Teachers Standards (DfE, 2011) which recommended that the existing standards for 'advanced practice' (Post-Threshold, Excellent Teacher, and Advanced Skills Teacher) should be discontinued and replaced with a new single higher-level standard called the Master Teacher Standard. This deft transformation ensured that teaching can still be called a master profession although not in its original sense. This recommendation

received a critical reception from teaching unions and professional associations and to date has not been advanced any further.

Using this critical framework of domains or 'voices' usefully highlights the political manipulation of language and intent; in this instance the language of the Masters domain has been transferred to the managerialist domain and adopted within the discourse of teaching standards. At the same time it removes any form of academic accountability and the higher level of critical thinking equated with EU level 7 masters academic work.

Further changes within the managerialist domain include the introduction of new performance management arrangements.

The main changes are that under the new regulations:

- Teachers' performance of their role and responsibilities will be assessed against the relevant standards and their objectives;
- Most of the prescription in the previous regulations have disappeared, including the three-hour limit on classroom observation (DfE website 2013).

Additionally, a clear link is established between performance management and progression up the pay scale. These changes give headteachers and governing bodies (who have the responsibility of producing a policy for appraisal arrangements) greater power over teachers, especially when changes in the capability procedures are taken into account. From September 2012 there was to be no informal stage in the capability procedure and the suggested length of the monitoring and review period following a first warning was reduced in length from 20 weeks to between four and ten weeks (DfE, 2013).

The changes in the managerialist discourse have also been reflected in the Ofsted discourse which has also been subject to political revisions that offer further challenges to the teaching profession. The managerialist approaches have been reinforced through the appointment by Michael Gove of Sir Michael Wilshaw in January 2012. Wilshaw has taken a robust and critical stance towards schools and headteachers. There have been changes to the Ofsted framework which, like the teaching standards, has been slimmed down; the 'satisfactory' grading has been removed and replaced by 'requiring improvement'. The tougher regime and the stricter grading procedures have resulted in a number of schools being 'downgraded'. There have been concerns that Ofsted has become less independent through producing judgements that provide

‘evidence’ to support Coalition policies (such as the development of academies and free schools and the move of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) from HEIs to school based training).

In conclusion, what can be said of the Professional discourse? On a superficial level it appears that the Coalition government is acknowledging this discourse through emphasising ‘The Importance of Teaching’ and announcing its intention to remove bureaucracy in order to enable teachers to operate without unnecessary restraint and restriction on their professional autonomy. The discourse of ‘The Importance of Teaching’ (DfE, 2010) is one of autonomy with accountability. However, as has been argued above, the autonomy of teachers has been constrained through an increase in managerialist approaches and a more rigorous accountability framework. The model of teaching that is being promoted is that it is a craft that can be best learnt through work based training, a low level vocational knowledge as opposed to the professional knowledge obtained through critical discourse.

Professional development is important but is mainly concerned with how teachers impart subject knowledge; indeed the criteria for ‘outstanding’ teaching in the latest Ofsted handbook (Ofsted, 2013) states that:

Teachers and other adults **authoritatively impart knowledge** (my emphasis) to ensure students are engaged in learning, and generate high levels of commitment to learning across the school.

## 4.5 Summary and conclusions

What picture of advanced professional practice emerges from the Coalition discourse? Notions of reflective critical practitioners, as represented in the professional discourse, are not seen as relevant. Any claims for good practice that are based on theory or academic study are dismissed, as has been seen in the response given by the hundred academics to the proposed new primary curriculum (Garner, 2013). If outstanding teaching is, in part, seen as the authoritative imparting of knowledge, then people with strong subject knowledge will make good teachers. Therefore the ‘best’ graduates (those with a 2.1 or above) from the ‘best’ universities (Oxford and Cambridge and the Russell group of universities) need to be attracted into teaching. Teaching is viewed as a craft and therefore ITT needs to be moved from universities to schools through the establishment of ‘teaching schools’ (DfE, 2010; NCTL, 2013). Teacher autonomy has to be related to teacher accountability.

The reforms of the Coalition government have been driven by an ideological urge to increase the privatisation of the education sector. Whatever the arguments are that support the development of academies and free schools it is also clear that they offer the greater opportunities for private companies to engage in education. The marketisation of schools has taken a further step forward with the declaration that the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, saw no ideological objection to schools being run for a profit. Academies and free schools are independent of the restrictions applied to maintained schools and therefore can appoint teachers who do not have qualified teacher status if they choose to do so.

This challenges notions of what constitutes a 'teacher' and the nature of their professional identity. Consequently it impacts on how teacher expertise is conceived. On the one hand there is a clear message that what constitutes 'great teaching' is of the utmost significance; the 'north star' of world class education systems and a significant aspect of leadership development (the leadership of teaching and learning). On the other hand there is ideological ambiguity over the nature of teaching, the unquestioning delivery of knowledge and facts as outlined within a national curriculum. Therefore, this research takes the position of seeing expert teaching not from an essentialist view, as a list of competencies and traits that are to be found in individuals, but as an aspect of professional identity that is socially constructed. This thesis explores how teacher expertise is socially constructed in different secondary school settings and the extent to which teacher autonomy is allowed, the extent to which permission is given for improvisatory activity and what the nature of improvisation is. Therefore the next chapter will look at the school culture from the perspective of organization theory.

# Chapter 5: Understanding School Culture

*This chapter views school culture from a social constructionist perspective; it does this by looking at the social factors that shape the professional identity of teachers and which, in turn, ultimately influences the understanding of teacher expertise. This chapter presents a framework for viewing teacher expertise that is derived from organisation theory and is based on the related concepts of school culture, structure and power.*

## 5.1 Organisation theory

Teacher professionalism cannot be viewed in isolation from the context in which it occurs (Gu and Day, 2013); it has to be seen in relation to the culture of the school. For it is within the structures and boundaries that are defined through school culture that teacher professionalism is played out. This view is based on the assumption that all school cultures may be different and that they play a key factor in defining what a particular school is like. The cultural factors that impinge on this are twofold:

- External factors – the culture of education that is defined and shaped by a nation's government policy, public perception and the media;
- Internal factors – the particular determinants of the culture of an individual school.

In order to fully understand issues of school culture and other related concepts it is useful to view schools through the lens of organisation theory (Bennett et al., 2003).

The key questions that organisation theory is concerned with are: 'what is an organisation?' and, 'how should it be analysed?' (Bennett et al., 2003: 45). A systems approach (Scott, 1987) distinguishes between rational, natural and open systems in which:

- rational systems are based around the pursuit of goals and have a highly formalised social structure;
- natural systems are little affected by formal structures and where participants share a common interest in the survival of the system ... engaging in collective activities to secure this end;

- open systems are strongly influenced by their environment, which reduces the organisation's structural fluidity.

Hanna (1988) argues for a tighter and more structured definition of an open system in which a key dimension is the interdependence of different parts and the complexity of transactions in which 'inputs' become 'outputs'.

One way of categorising organisations is through the construction of a continuum with rational / technicist systems at one end (which are task focussed) and open systems at the other (which are more organic and member focussed). The four basic propositions that need to be considered when thinking about organisations are members, purpose, resources and structures / tasks (Hatch, 2011).

Structures need to be seen as dynamic entities which define the constraints and the formal relationships within which individual members of the organisation take action. As has been noted above the internal structures will also demonstrate and reflect how the organisation's decision makers have responded to external restraints upon the organisation. For a school this would include government policy, Ofsted, health and safety legislation and child protection procedures as well as many others.

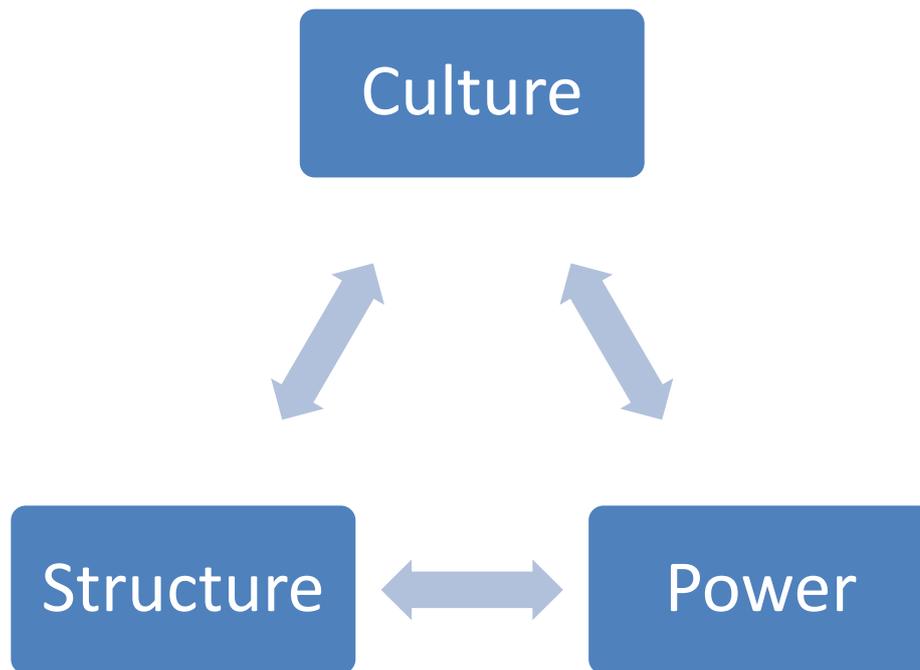
Bennett et al. (2003) argue that organisational structures only start to have any meaning when they relate to individual actions. These actions have to be seen as social in nature and as such these interpersonal relations are not between equals, they are the site of power relations. They go on to state that power relations are dependent on:

1. how central the individual is to the issue under consideration and the decision that has to be taken;
2. the extent to which extent the structure allows them freedom to decide how to act in response to decisions that are taken (a matter of discretion).

To summarise, it can be seen that structures both create and are created by power relationships. Structures are paradoxical in nature in that they are dynamic, static and fluid, fixed and changing.

How an organisation distributes responsibilities and responds to priorities will depend on the beliefs, assumptions and values of the individuals who are involved in deciding how to arrange

its local workings. The ways in which these decisions are made are determined by culture. Before going on to look at culture in greater detail it is important to summarise the key point that is being made here which is that the culture of an organisation cannot be looked at in isolation: culture is determined by its relationship with structure and power (Bennett et al, 2003). Together these three dimensions of organisational operation are summarised in figure 5.1



**Figure 5.1 The three dimensions of organisational operation (adapted from Bennett et al., 2003: 59)**

School culture is at one and the same time easy to recognise (through experience) but difficult to pin down in words. A range of terms are used to describe it: climate, ethos, what is special about a particular school. Broadly defined as ‘the way that we do things around here’ (Bolman and Deal, 1997) school culture ‘expresses itself in the signs and ceremonies in the school, the ways that schools conduct assemblies, define roles and responsibilities and display learning’ (Stoll et al., 2002: 120). Stoll (1998) sees it as ‘one of the most complex and important concepts in education’ which has suffered from neglect. Schein (1985) defines school culture as ‘the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organization,

that operate unconsciously and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment'.

Stoll (1998) makes the following points:

- The definition above is the heart of school culture and that makes it difficult to grasp and to change.
- Culture is the view, or lens, through which the world is viewed.
- It defines reality for those in an organisation.
- It gives support, identity and a framework for occupational learning. Each school will have a different reality.
- It also has its own mindset in relation to what happens in its external environment.
- Culture is situationally unique.

Stoll identifies five ways in which a school culture is shaped:

1. The school's age;
2. The school's external context;
3. The difference between primary and secondary schools;
4. The school's pupils and their social class background;
5. Changes in society pose challenges to a school's culture.

MacGilchrist et al. (1995) argue that school culture is expressed through three interrelated generic dimensions:

- Professional relationships;
- Organisational arrangements;
- Opportunities for learning. (41)

School culture can therefore be seen through the ways that people relate to and work together, the management of the school's structures, systems and physical environment and the extent to

which there is a learning focus for both pupils and adults and the wider community focus, including the nature of that focus. School culture will manifest itself in customs, rituals, symbols, stories and language.

Alongside the explicit and articulated aspects of school culture are the norms that determine the acceptable, expected, aspirational modes of behaviour for staff as well as pupils. Norms are the unspoken rules for what is regarded as acceptable behaviour and action within a school. Provided that behaviour conforms to these unwritten codes then life within a given culture flows smoothly. Should the norms be disrupted or ignored then the ordered reality of life inevitably breaks down (Morgan, 1997). Norms shape the reactions to internally or externally proposed or imposed improvements.

Stoll and Fink (1996) identified 10 cultural norms that influence school improvement. Because norms are frequently unspoken, catchphrases articulate their core message:

1. Shared goals
2. Responsibility for success
3. Collegiality
4. Continuous improvement
5. Lifelong learning
6. Risk taking
7. Support
8. Mutual respect
9. Openness
10. Celebration and humour.

They are interconnected and feed off each other.

As Stoll (1998) points out, whilst culture can be viewed in a holistic sense there is a need to acknowledge that there may be several discrete cultures (or sub-cultures): pupil cultures, teacher cultures, leadership culture, non-teaching staff culture and parent culture.

Teacher culture has been given some attention, particularly in relation to school improvement. Hargreaves (1994) identifies four existing teacher cultures:

1. Individualism: autonomy, isolation and insulation prevail and blame and support are avoided.
2. Collaboration: teachers choose spontaneously and voluntarily to work together without an external control agenda. Forms include 'comfortable activities' such as sharing ideas and materials and 'rigorous forms' including mutual observations and focused reflective enquiry.
3. Contrived collegiality: teachers collaborative working relationships are compulsorily imposed with fixed times and places set for collaboration
4. Balkanisation: teachers are neither isolated nor work as a whole school. Smaller collaborative groups form, for example within secondary school departments and teaching assistants (TAs).

Collegiality has been given considerable attention in the school improvement literature. This is a complex concept which involves mutual sharing and assistance, an orientation to the school as a whole, and is **spontaneous**, voluntary, development-oriented, **unscheduled** and **unpredictable**. The words that have been emphasised imply that the collegiality construct might be considered as social improvisation in action.

Little (1990) identifies four types of collegial relations. Three weak forms:

- Scanning and storytelling
- General help and assistance
- Sharing

And a fourth, stronger form that can lead to improvement

- Joint work

## 5.2 Typologies of school cultures

Any attempt to create typologies of school culture will run into difficulties given that they will not be able to capture all the subtle nuances of individual schools and possible sub-cultures. However, they are able to provide a starting point for a discussion of the different facets of a school culture.

Hargreaves (1994) offers a model based on two dimensions: the *instrumental* domain (representing social control and orientation to task) and the *expressive* domain (reflecting social cohesion through maintaining positive relationships). This produces four types of ineffective school cultures at the extreme ends of the two dimensions.

These are:

Traditional – low social cohesions, high social control – custodial, formal, unapproachable.

Welfarist – low social control, high social cohesions – relaxed, caring, easy.

Hothouse - high social control, high social cohesions – claustrophobic, pressured, controlled.

Anomic – low social cohesions, low social control – insecure, alienated, isolated, at risk.

The *ideal* school culture is in the middle with optimal social cohesion and optimal social control.

The notion of an ideal school culture acknowledges that school cultures are dynamic and susceptible to change. This notion underpins the work on school culture that has been undertaken by Rosenholz (1989) who has devised a ‘moving’ and ‘stuck’ school model. This has been developed by Stoll and Fink (1996) who have determined a model that examines school cultures on two dimensions, *effective / ineffective* and *improving / declining* (see Figure 5.2 below)

	Improving	Declining
Effective	Moving	Cruising
Ineffective	Struggling	Sinking

Strolling

**Figure 5.2 Stoll and Fink’s (1996) model of school cultures.**

A further development of the Rosenholz model has been undertaken by Hopkins et al. (1994) who have developed a model of four expressions of school culture. This is shown in Figure 5.3 below.

Outcomes	Ineffective < > Effective	
Process		
Dynamic	Wandering	Moving
Static	Stuck	Promenading

**Figure 5.3 Four expressions of school culture (Hopkins et al., 1994: 91)**

Hargreaves’s distinction between the *instrumental* domain (representing social control and orientation to task) and the *expressive* domain (reflecting social cohesion through maintaining positive relationships) highlights one of the defining issues of a school culture which is the relationship between structure and agency. This issue is expressed in different ways but reflects the tension between the fixed elements of a culture and those that allow for human agency; Capra (2002) sees this as the dynamic interplay between fixed ‘design’ structures and the fluid and informal ‘emergent’ structures’. This principle is one of the key features of improvisation, as expressed in the working definition used to underpin this research, and therefore brings us to an important defining point, namely the key postulate:

**That as *all cultures* are concerned with, and defined by, the relationship between fixed and emergent structures that they are therefore improvisatory in their social nature and constructed being.**

The impact that cultures have upon all teachers, including ‘expert teachers’, is highly significant. Therefore, it is by looking at teachers within the context of the school culture that we can articulate one aspect of the improvisatory nature of teaching. By viewing expert teaching within the context of school culture provides an important framework in which the social construction

of expert teaching can be explored. In order to do this there needs to be a more detailed understanding of the relationships between culture and structure.

A second key postulate is:

**that as all dynamic cultures are improvisatory through social interaction, this social effort represents new social improvement and advancement through adaptive and incremental progress.**

Discussions about the importance and significance of school culture emerged from the school effectiveness and school improvement movement in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Hopkins et al., 1994). Based on notions of the 'learning enriched school' (Rosenholtz, 1989), where the excitement and motivation of learning is a full part of the daily lives of both teachers and students, the significance of school culture is based on assumptions that schools can be improved *from within* (Barth, 1990). Barth also recognises the need to shift from placing attention on individuals ('what should students, teachers and principals know and do, and how do we get them to do it?') to examining the conditions that elicit and support learning. This leads to asking 'Under what conditions will Principal and student and teacher become serious, committed, sustained, lifelong, cooperative learners?' (Barth, 1990: 45).

It is the culture of the school that allows the conditions, alluded to above, to flourish. Without addressing school culture in a direct way there is little chance that school improvement will be achieved (Hopkins et al., 1994: 85). This requires holistic thinking and the recognition that "a school's culture is dynamic and constantly evolving despite the dominant perception of stability" (Ibid: 86). There appears to be an agreement that the culture of a school holds the key to improving the quality of student learning (Hopkins, 1994: 86) and therefore the same could be said about teachers' professional learning and the emergence of teacher expertise (which is understood in the UK context as advanced professional practice).

### **5.3 Culture and structure**

Hopkins et al., (1994) give attention to the sociological distinction between structure and culture, two interdependent concepts that have a dialectical relationship. Structure influences culture and culture influences structure. Hargreaves makes the point that "*it is not possible to establish productive school cultures without prior changes being effected in school structures*

that increase the opportunity for meaningful working relationships and collegial support between teachers” (n.d.: 28). This suggests that culture is concerned with the degree of agency that teachers have; social structure and agency being another pair of related concepts within sociology. Accordingly the notion of school culture can be further developed by seeing it as the domain(s) within which the dynamic relationship between structure and agency is played out.

Hopkins et al. also cite Schein (1985) who, in his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, outlines common meanings of the word ‘culture’. These are presented in Table 5.2 below against examples of data that could be used to provide evidence of these meanings.

**Table 5.1 The data that could provide evidence of Schein’s meanings of culture**

Schein’s meanings	Data / evidence
Observed behavioural regularities	Teacher interaction in the staffroom Language used and rituals Teacher interaction in the classroom Structures used in lessons
Norms	What working groups of teachers do Planning lessons Monitoring progress
Dominant values	What headteachers and teachers say Aims and mission statement Prospectus Policies
Philosophy	Dominant approach to teaching and learning Relationship to national policy
Rules of the game	“What would I have to know if I was going to start here as a new teacher?”
Feeling or climate	Social space and aesthetics: Entrance hall and foyer Displays of students work in corridors Photographs of shared spaces, classrooms, corridors, entrance foyer etc.

Schein is clear that these meanings *reflect* the culture but they are not the essence of culture.

The term ‘culture’ should be reserved for the deeper levels of *basic assumptions and beliefs* that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment.

The assumption of Hopkins et al. (1994) is that the interaction between structure and culture gives school leaders and staff members **a great deal of control** (my emphasis) over the school

culture they inhabit. If so, are they created or 'open to modification' (Rutter et al., 1979: 145). If actively (or socially constructed) they are therefore political and dynamic. They are influenced by tacit agreements that affect staffroom and classroom processes throughout the school. Hopkins (1990) argues that there is evidence to suggest that the quality of school culture is related not only to enhanced teacher performance in the classroom, but also to higher levels of teacher self-esteem.

Hatch (2011) views culture from a social constructionist position. Culture is as a 'system of intersecting meanings to orient themselves to one another and coordinate their activities' (62). This meaning system is socially constructed where meaning emerges from the interpretations that people give to their life together.

Looking for 'culture' in an organisation means looking at the particular modes of *behaviour* that people exhibit as well as *things* (objects, events and words). So culture can be perceived as the repository for symbols and artefacts its members produce, also the product of their collective sense-making and the context in which meaning is made and remade. Culture, therefore, has to be seen as a dynamic construct, continually changing and a social construction.

Hatch (2011) suggests that culture is, in a way, a repository for the symbols and articles that people produce as well as being the product of their collective sense-making and, at the same time, the context within which meaning is continuously made and remade. According to Schein culture is:

The pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning in order to be able to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 1985: 6).

Schein's definition encourages research on culture (as opposed to internal integration). By looking at organisational culture we are reminded that it simultaneously enables both stability and change. As Gagliardi (1986) says 'organisations change in order to stay the same'.

His model of organisational culture saw a relationship between *artefacts*, *values* and *assumptions*. Assumptions are manifest as the values that guide our behaviour and culturally influenced behaviour, in turn, produce artefacts that realise (make real) cultural values and the assumptions that underpin them.

This framework provides a useful starting point for an initial analysis of the data that has been collected. The starting point is with artefacts as these are visible. However, they are often undecipherable and so require the interpretation of those within the culture.

Table 5.2 presents the different forms that *artefacts* can take within a school culture.

**Table 5.2 The different forms of artefacts within a school culture**

Category	Examples
Objects	Art / design / logo Architecture / décor / furnishings Dress / appearance / uniform (both staff and students) Products – newsletters / prospectus Displays of students work Signage
Verbal expressions	Jargon, names, nicknames Explanations / theories Stories, myths and legends Superstitions and rumours Humour and jokes Metaphors, proverbs, slogans Speeches, rhetoric, oratory
Activities	Ceremonies / rituals / rites of passage Meetings / retreats / parties Communication patterns Traditions / customs / social routines Gestures Play / recreation / games Rewards / punishments.

## **5.4 Summary and conclusions**

This chapter has looked at the importance of school culture as a concept in its own right and as the milieu in which the social construction of teacher expertise takes place. This chapter concludes the first part of the thesis which has reviewed the literature and outlined the key theories that underpin the research. The next chapter presents a justification for the principles and processes that shape the methodology of the research.

# Chapter 6: Methodology

*This chapter provides a justification for the research design based on the previous analysis and describes the methodological background for the study. The reasons for combining a case study approach with grounded theory are stated and arguments are presented for the particular kind of case study selected. The methods used to gather and analyse the data are explained and the ethical issues involved in selecting and researching expert teachers are outlined. The proposed theoretical outcomes from the research are stated with suggestions regarding the potential contribution to knowledge.*

## 6.1 Philosophical position and assumptions

The process of making methodological decisions is one of the essential choice moments in qualitative research (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). These choices are informed by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 21) who suggest that *'ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques'*. This will consequently inform issues of instrumentation, data collection methods and approaches to analysis. Methodological choices are also shaped by axiology, the values and beliefs that we hold (Cohen et al., 2011). In the introductory chapter of this thesis the philosophical stance of this research was located within a social constructionist paradigm in which the purpose is to explore inter-subjective views of teacher expertise from an empirical and historicist viewpoint. This is based on an idealist ontological assumption that views reality as subjectively and mentally constructed (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). The central endeavour of the research is *'to understand the subjective world of human experience'* (Cohen et al, 2011, p17) and therefore is located within an interpretative paradigm.

Before articulating the methodological choices it is important to distinguish how the terms *research methodology* and *research methods* are used within the context of this research. This is particularly important as these terms are often used interchangeably within the literature. Newby (2010) outlines three different approaches taken by authors:

1. those who use the terms *research methods* and *research methodology* very precisely and with different meanings;
2. those who see little distinction between the two terms and use predominantly one or the other to refer to what the first group refers to as *research methods*; and
3. those who are 'flexible' in their use of terms and use them interchangeably. (49)

However, these two terms have fundamentally different meanings and these need to be taken into account within each research context. Within this research the term *research method* is as defined by Clough and Nutbrown (2012: 31) 'the tools through which data is collected and analysed'.

Defining what is meant by *research methodology*, on the other hand, is much more problematical and this term can be applied in a number of ways: the assembly of research tools and the application of appropriate research rules (Newby, 2010: 51); the overall design of the research, 'the theoretical questions and issues related to a given body of methods and the principles that underlie the investigation' and which are justified through locating methodological choices within established research traditions (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013:333). Clough and Nutbrown, (2012) view research methodology as an operational description, based on ontological and epistemological assumptions and related to the ethical issues of the research. Methodological issues are evidenced through a clear, logical reflexive relationship between research questions and field questions and which provide deliberate and careful consideration of ethical questions (ibid: 39). A 'good' methodology therefore is seen as a *critical design attitude* that permeates research and is not confined to a chapter called 'Methodology'.

Within this research, *research methodology* is the blueprint for the design and thinking that represents the strategy and actions for data collection. This involves a process of justification that is employed throughout the research through a critical reflexivity of the research process.

## 6.2 The research questions

This project is an example of educational research which Bassey (1999) describes as '*critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action*' (p.39). Furthermore, this is an empirical study which attempts to understand

a particular phenomenon and through description, interpretation and explanation arrive at some form of theoretical conclusion. Consequently, the approach is neither evaluative nor designed to bring about any change (as would be the case with action research). Instead the purpose of the research is to understand and illuminate through the generation of concepts and new social theories derived from (or grounded in) the data.

All research is driven by issues, problems or hypotheses which then generate research questions. The stated purpose of this research is to observe and understand the practice of expert teachers in order to answer the overarching research question 'what is the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation?' Given the key postulates from chapter 5 this will involve understanding the situated practice of 'expert' teachers; to find out how they behave in the classroom, how their expertise can be classified and how they became acknowledged as 'experts'. Of particular importance is what has been described as the craft knowledge of teaching:

that part of their professional knowledge which teachers acquire primarily through their practical experience in the classroom rather than their formal training, which guides their day-to-day actions in classrooms, which is for the most part not articulated in words, and which is brought to bear spontaneously, routinely and sometimes unconsciously in their teaching (Hargreaves, 1997: 17).

The purpose of the research is expressed in the principal research question 'what is the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation?' This is supplemented by six further research questions:

1. How do teachers (and headteachers) describe and identify expert teachers?
2. How do teachers come to be identified as 'experts' and what processes in schools enable this to happen?
3. To what extent do 'expert teachers' perceive themselves to be expert?
4. How is teacher expertise displayed in the classroom?
5. In what ways do expert teachers improvise?
6. To what extent is improvisation a conscious and intentional facet of their expertise?

The research is located within a social-constructionist paradigm that seeks to derive understanding of the situated practice of teacher expertise within a social context. Both the research problem and the philosophical stance have led to methodological assumptions that favour case study and grounded theory. These choices are explored and justified below.

### **6.3 Case study as methodological frame**

A case study is 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (Stake, 1995: xi). It is an empirical enquiry:

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the enquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytic frame an– object – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explains (Thomas, 2011: 23)

It is a bounded enquiry which is studied in context (Gillham, 2000: 1) and whilst it is important that what constitutes 'the case' is clearly defined there is recognition that the boundaries between the phenomenon to be studied and the context may not be clearly distinguished. Indeed, this ambiguity between case and context is part of the scope and purpose of the research. Case study is appropriate when a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (Yin, 2003, p9).

The main prima-facie question that motivates this research is 'what is the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation?' and this is to be answered through looking at how expert teachers are identified and the nature of their practice in specific school contexts. The case therefore is 'the expert teacher'. The appropriateness of case study in order to explore this phenomenon is based on the relationship between researcher and the 'case': there is no intention to control the individuals and events that are observed; in fact the hope is that the participants will be able to 'be themselves' and to understand the range of factors that impinge upon their professional practice. The research questions are concerned with the 'how' and 'why' of expert teaching. How do certain teachers become experts? How is their expertise demonstrated within different school cultures? How do they move from being a non-expert to

becoming expert? By looking at a number of expert teachers in different schools it will be possible to compare and contrast different experiences.

Thomas (2011) makes the point that there are two parts to framing a case study – a subject and an analytical frame. This is addressed through seeing the subject of the case study as ‘the expert teacher’ and the analytical frame being the culture of the school. A secondary line of enquiry is concerned with gaining insights into the way in which expert teachers use improvisation, the extent to which this can be seen as a factor that contributes to their expertise and how this influences the school culture that they operate within.

There are a number of critical objections to case study as a methodology. To start with there is the contention that it cannot be classed as a methodology (Stake, 2005) or a method (Thomas, 2011) at all. Instead it is seen as the choice of what is to be studied: ‘it is a focus and the focus is on one thing, looked at in depth and from many angles’ (Thomas, 2011: 9).

Yin (2003) identifies three main prejudices:

1. case study as a research method lacks rigour and is not systematic;
2. a case study provides little basis for generalisation; and
3. case studies take too long to complete and result in massive unreadable documents.

Any intention to engage with case study, therefore, has to address these prejudices in order that the outcomes of the research can be judged to be of value. Consequently, the quality of the research process is of paramount importance. If a case study is to have any claims to producing significant knowledge there needs to be clarity and precision in the definition of key terms and concepts, evidence of a systematic approach and a logical process linking the research questions to the data to be collected.

Attending to Yin’s three prejudices means:

1. making sure that all evidence is reported fairly and not used to make a point;
2. recognising that a case study does not represent a sample and therefore findings cannot be generalised to populations or universals. However it is possible to generalise findings to theoretical propositions (a distinction that is important to bear in mind when

considering sampling). Instead the aim is to use the case study to expand and generalize theories. Finally:

3. seeing case study as being different from ethnography and participant observation. Yin counters the argument that undertaking a case study takes too long by suggesting that this view arises from confusing case study with ethnography and participant observation, and that there is a need to separate a case study methodology from these approaches.

Having acknowledged the problematical nature of case study as a research method claims to using this approach will be made through answering the above questions. The starting point, however, is that in spite of the criticisms and challenges, undertaking a case study is a creative enterprise with the possibility of revealing deep insights into otherwise complex educational practice with the ability to provide 'a rich picture with many kinds of insights coming from different angles, from different kinds of information' (Thomas, 2011, p21). In respect of the challenging nature of this research approach a pilot case study was used in order to explore and gain first-hand experience in order to refine the main case study.

An important decision within case study research is concerned with selecting the cases. As a methodology a case study is not concerned with pre-defined processes or procedures; there is an acknowledgment that each study will be unique. This allows considerable scope for the researcher to develop creative approaches to the selection, collection and analysis of the data. However, in order for a case study to be able to make claims that it has produced findings that are of value, and furthermore to be able to counter the prejudices held against case study (Yin, 2003), there needs to be clarity and precision in defining what actually is being attempted and, specifically, the kind of case study that is being proposed.

A framework created by Thomas (2011), derived from summarising the ideas of leading theorists on case study, has been used to articulate the precise nature of the approach being taken in this research. Thomas's summative overview is organised under four headings: subject, purpose, approach and process. 'Subject' refers to the type of case that is being selected, 'purpose' relates to why the case study is being undertaken, 'approach' refers to how the researcher goes about doing the case study and 'process' is concerned with issues of structure. This summary of the kinds of case study is shown in Table 1.

**Table 6.1 Summary of the kinds of case studies. (Thomas, 2011: 93)**

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Special or outlier case	Intrinsic	Testing a theory	Single
Key Case	Instrumental	Building a theory	Multiple
Local knowledge case	Evaluative	Drawing a picture, illustrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nested</li> <li>• Parallel</li> <li>• Sequential</li> <li>• Retrospective</li> <li>• Snapshot</li> <li>• Diachronic</li> </ul>
	Explanatory	Descriptive	
	Exploratory	Interpretative	
		Experimental	

Thomas (2011) identifies three different kinds of case study:

1. A **key case** is a good example of something, a classic or exemplary case;
2. An **outlier case** is one that shows something different because of its difference from the norm;
3. A **local knowledge case** is an example of something in your personal experience about which you want to find out more.

The different purposes for undertaking a case study fall into two main categories: *intrinsic* and *instrumental* (Stake, 1995, p3). In an *intrinsic* study, the subject is being studied for its own sake, out of interest and without a secondary purpose in mind. This differs from an *instrumental* study which is undertaken with a purpose. This research is located within an instrumental frame in two ways. The pilot project is instrumental in that it is being used to define the parameters of the main study though defining the relationship between the subject of the research (the teacher) and the analytical frame (the culture of the school). One of the ethical and moral purposes behind the research is to support and promote the professional autonomy of teachers which could have the potential to inform policy on what constitutes effective teaching.

Having made a distinction between intrinsic and instrumental studies, Thomas identifies three further purposes: evaluative, explanatory and exploratory. An evaluative study (research that is designed to see how well something is working or has worked) is not an appropriate purpose for this particular research project. However the other two (explanatory and exploratory) are appropriate. Explaining is probably the most common purpose of a case study (Thomas, 2011, p101) and an explanation of the ways in which expert teachers demonstrate their expertise would be an entirely appropriate purpose for the research. Through gathering data from a range of sources it is thought possible to explain the relationship between a teacher's expertise and the culture of a school as well as exploring the secondary issue of the ways in which expert teachers improvise. However, the most appropriate purpose, certainly in relation to the pilot study, is an exploratory one.

Thomas suggests that an exploratory case study is most appropriate when faced with a perplexing problem or issue which invites the researcher to find out more. Within the context of this research project there appears to be anecdotal evidence, derived from common-sense that suggests that expert teachers are good at improvising. The purpose of the pilot case-study is to explore this possibility and, on the basis of what is discovered and the questions that arise, to inform the purpose of the main study. The exploratory purpose of the pilot case study will therefore be to find out how teachers demonstrate their expertise, the extent to which they improvise and the extent to which they are aware of their ability to improvise.

The different approaches to undertaking a case study are defined by their relationship to theory. Is the approach concerned with testing or building a theory; or is it illustrative, interpretative or experimental? The issue of what constitutes a theory is problematical but for present purposes it will be seen as 'the development of systematic construction of knowledge of the social world' (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p20). An approach that is based on theory testing will presume that there is already an explanatory framework available for the phenomenon that is being focussed on. The alternative view is that ideas and concepts are developed from the data and that this leads to the creation of a 'grounded' theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The approach taken in this case study is closer to the latter view.

Finally, the approach will be interpretative, as opposed to merely illustrative or experimental, drawing on ethnographic approaches and participant observation. This approach recognises that the world is constructed by each individual in a unique way and therefore the world may be

interpreted by different people in different ways (Cohen et al., 2011: 17). This requires specific approaches to collecting and analysing data and is particularly appropriate for generating new social theory from the evidence that is obtained.

The process of case study research is concerned with the number of cases that are to be studied and, in the case of multiple case studies, how they relate to each other. The pilot project comprised the study of a single case and the outcome of this informed the methods in the main study.

Within the main phase of the data collection process multiple case studies were undertaken in order to provide the opportunity for comparative analysis of the phenomenon of teacher expertise. Stake (2005) defines multiple case studies as a number of cases that are studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition. This approach is viewed by Thomas (2011) as a form of instrumental case study where the focus is on the phenomenon of which the case is an example. Each case is less important than the comparison that it offers with others, what Schwandt (2001) refers to as 'cross case analyses'.

There are two forms of multiple case studies: parallel or sequential studies. In the first, the cases are all happening at the same time, whereas in the second the cases are sequential. This is based on the assumption that what has been discovered in one case will in some way affect the next. There are many desirable reasons to undertake sequential case studies in that the particular characteristics of one case can influence the choice of other cases in order to get a variety of experiences; for example in the types of setting, phases of education, age, gender and experience of the expert teacher. There are also a number of problems associated this approach. At what point is it possible to determine that sufficient data has been collected from one case study in order that the researcher moves onto the next one? A practical consideration that will influence this choice is concerned with the amount of time that is available for data collection. This makes sequential case studies the more feasible approach whilst also allowing issues raised within one case study to be explored in others.

Yin (2003, p46) argues that the evidence from multiple case studies is often considered more compelling. The choice of each case needs to be carefully selected so that either a) that it predicts similar results, or b) it predicts contrasting results but for a predictable reason.

The pilot case study for Phase One of the research was based on a local knowledge case with the purpose of undertaking an instrumental and exploratory inquiry. As a single case it was designed to provide an interpretive account of expert teaching. At this stage there was no attempt at building a theory from the findings but merely to clarify the position of the researcher (and the assumptions underlying the research) and to gain experience of data collection and analysis in order to provide a clearer methodological framework for Phase Two of the data collection. The design for Phase Two of data collection is outlined in Table 6.2 below.

**Table 6.2: Mapping the design for the case studies in Phase Two of the research (based on Thomas, 2011: 93)**

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process
Special or outlier case	Intrinsic	Testing a theory	Single
<b>Key Case</b>	<b>Instrumental</b>	<b>Building a theory</b>	<b>Multiple</b>
Local knowledge case	Evaluative	Drawing a picture, illustrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nested</li> <li>• <b>Parallel</b></li> <li>• Sequential</li> <li>• Retrospective</li> <li>• Snapshot</li> <li>• Diachronic</li> </ul>
	Explanatory	Descriptive	
	<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>Interpretative</b>	
		Experimental	

The decision to pursue a theory-seeking case study approach in this research raises questions about the nature of that theory and the way that it will be derived. A common approach in qualitative research is to generate theory that is ‘grounded in the data’. Within case study, for example, the constant comparative method of data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is often suggested (Thomas, 2011). This use of this method, derived from Glaser and Strauss (1967), needs critical justification. Is it being deployed merely as a tool for data analysis or does it play a more significant role in the overall approach that the research is taking? Put another way, is the decision to use grounded theory concerned with method or methodology? Answers to these questions came from undertaking the pilot case study.

In the pilot case study a constant comparative method (Thomas, 2011) was used to analyse the data. Urquhart (2013) makes a distinction between two uses for grounded theory: either as a coding technique or as an approach to building theory. Within the definitions established earlier the former would be a research method (a tool to analyse data) whereas the latter has methodological implications in that it impacts upon the overall design of the research process and informs decisions about what activities take place and in what order. The methodological implications of grounded theory are considered in the next section.

## **6.4 The analysis of data: grounded theory**

Given the assumption that grounded theory is to be seen as a research methodology, what implications does this have for the overall design of the research? Firstly, it is clear that grounded theory complements a case study approach in that it is concerned with the structures, concepts and processes associated with human behaviour (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). However, grounded theory also carries its own defining features that influence particular choices that the researcher will make and which can be summarised as follows. A grounded theory methodology is concerned with:

- collecting 'rich data' from a wide range of sources; typically this will include semi-structured and open interviews, observations focus group discussions;
- analysing data throughout the research process (not after all the data has been collected);
- using the analysis of data to determine further data collection;
- undertaking the literature review during, or after, the initial data analysis;
- writing up from the first point of data collection (initially through the process of writing theoretical memos).

The literature on grounded theory offers a range of different approaches to the analysis of data and they tend to use slightly different terms for what is essentially a three-stage process that progresses from the initial coding of data to the generation of categories (focused coding) and

then to the creation of a conceptual or theoretical understanding. The process has been developed for this research in the following way.

The collection of data fell into two broad categories; semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and field notes of lesson observations. All of the interviews were fully transcribed and then subjected to a process of initial coding. This was undertaken in a quick and spontaneous manner in order to generate fresh ideas about the data (Charmaz, 2006) and, following Glaser's suggestion (1978), utilized gerunds to help detect processes and keep the codes close to the data. This first step of coding was conducted on a line-by-line basis.

The second stage of data analysis involved looking for connections between the initial codes, comparing data sets and grouping them in order to create categories or focused codes. It is these categories that are refined and tested against the data. They are then, in the third phase of coding, related to each other within a conceptual framework; the process of theoretical coding. It is these codes that give rise to the 'grounded theory': a conceptual account of what is happening within the data. The development of theory, and what it might constitute, will be discussed in the next section.

A number of criticisms have been levelled at grounded theory and these are principally concerned with whether the product of the analysis can truly rise to the level of theory (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). Thomas and James (2006) have dealt with these critical issues in detail, arguing that grounded theory is "a product of its time" (p 790) and is subject to three broad critical objections. These are that grounded theory:

1. over simplifies complex meanings and inter-relationships in data;
2. constrains analysis through putting procedure before interpretation (the cart before the horse);
3. depends on inappropriate models of induction and assents from them equally inappropriate claims to explanation and prediction (ibid. 768).

Their argument is that grounded theory cannot deliver explanatory and predictive theory through following the procedures and methods as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This is based on the Popperian view that science advances not by induction but by a process of

conjectures and refutations whereby imagination and creativity generate real scientific theories. Consequently, they view grounded theory as a methodology that stifles creativity and that this therefore restricts what can be discovered from the data. Further criticisms are focused on the nature of 'the ground' (challenging Glaser and Strauss' (1967) view that you can go into the field without preconceived ideas) and the notion of 'discovery'. The latter reveals epistemological assumptions that there is a truth 'out there'. These criticisms raise three important issues for this research project.

1. What kind of theory is proposed to be generated from the grounded data?
2. To what extent does the process of grounded theory inhibit the findings or impose certain patterns on the data?
3. Does the choice of grounded theory as a methodology preclude or inhibit creativity and creative thinking?

These questions are centred on the kind of theory that is being proposed.

Locating the research within an interpretative paradigm acknowledges that it is not possible to generate a theory that predicts human behaviour or necessarily explain what is happening. Instead, understanding and description are at the heart of the analytical process and this suggests a reporting of findings as narrative. However grounded theory offers the possibility of going beyond narrative through demonstrating an understanding of the data at a conceptual level (as opposed to the literal or narrative level). A conceptual account of the empirical study has something to offer that other forms of conclusions may miss out on. It is perhaps the possibility of theory that is more important than the actual achievement of explanatory or predictive outcomes. The view of theory that is proposed in this research, therefore, is not concerned with explanation or prediction, but is a means of presenting the findings at a conceptual level. This view of theory as a purpose, not as an end result, is based on Bourdieu's notions of theory as a set of *thinking tools* 'a temporary construct which takes place for and by empirical work' (Bourdieu cited in Thomas, 2011: 179).

To what extent does the process of grounded theory inhibit the findings or impose certain patterns on the data? Thomas and James (2006) argue that the processes which lead to the generation of grounded theory inhibit rather than liberate discovery. Their criticism is based on

a view of science as a creative and imaginative enterprise and that creativity is stifled by following particular processes. The counter argument to this view is that it is based on a false notion of creativity, one which sees creative thought and action increased when barriers or frameworks are taken away. An alternative view is that it is within structures and rules that creativity and critical thinking can be encouraged. Therefore, the processes and procedures offered by grounded theory are the means by which a systematic and creative approach to viewing the data can be both scaffolded and encouraged. The particular aspect of grounded theory methodology that encourages creativity is the writing of theoretical memos. During the process of initial and focused coding the writing of theoretical memos is encouraged in order to advance thinking and increase the level of abstraction of ideas. Charmaz (2006) encourages a spontaneous approach to memo writing that 'forms a space and place for exploration and discovery' (81). Such an approach allows the researcher to develop their own creative thinking and imaginative response to the data analysis process as it is happening. It is this process that encourages different patterns and different interpretations to be acknowledged and captured. 'If one is freed from methodological constraint one is in turn freed to depend more on one's own experience – on all things of the mind in the world' (Thomas and James, 2006: 788).

## **6.5 Ethical issues.**

The design of this research was undertaken in the light of Issues and Principles of research ethics that are outlined in the Bath Spa University Graduate School Research Degree Handbook (Bath Spa University, 2009). The issues were addressed in the following manner.

### **The value of the research**

All of the principal stakeholders (the headteachers and the identified expert teachers) were informed at the outset of the value and aims of the research. This information was summarised in a letter that they were given (see Appendix 2).

### **Informed consent**

Initially informed consent to undertake the research in the school was gained following a meeting with the headteachers. They were asked to sign a letter that asked for their consent and which outlined the extent of the research activities. Informed consent was gained for all the

teachers who participated in the project and they also signed this letter prior to any information being sought from them. A copy of the letter was given to the headteacher or teacher.

### **Openness and honesty**

At all times the research process was transparent with no hidden or covert objectives.

### **Right to withdraw without penalty**

It was explained to the participants in writing that they were at liberty to withdraw from the research at any time without any penalty. None of the participants requested to do this. They were also free to request that their consent be withdrawn retrospectively and that any accrued data regarding them will be destroyed.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

The data is stored only on the researcher's computer and associated electronic hardware, and as part of the submitted thesis for examination. Field notes were kept in the researcher's study at home. The schools and the participants were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. In situations where data was used for academic purposes (conference presentations and papers), participants were made anonymous.

### **Protection from harm**

As a researcher I understood that my responsibility was, and is, to ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not affected in an adverse manner by the research. On one occasion a participant shared personal information with me and, at a later date, a discussion was held with them to decide whether this information should be included in the research report and, if so, how it would be reported. This research was conducted within a school setting, and issues surrounding the well-being of the children involved were fully in accordance with the ethical and moral responsibilities of the researcher in a professional teaching role.

### **Briefing and debriefing**

All participants were briefed about the research project and asked if they agreed to have their interviews recorded. A final debriefing meeting took place with all of the teacher participants in

which the general findings of the research to date were discussed. A final presentation of the outcomes will be offered to the participants.

### **Reimbursements, payments and rewards**

The possible benefits of participating in the research were outlined to all of the participants. No payments or rewards of any kind were given to the school, teachers, children or their parents. In return for the schools involvement in the research project the researcher offered to contribute an in-service training session to interested staff on a mutually agreeable topic. One school accepted this offer.

### **Suitability/experience of the researcher**

As an experienced secondary school teacher and headteacher the researcher was appropriately competent to carry out this research both in terms of teaching and classroom based research experience.

### **Ethics standards of external bodies and institutions**

The ethical standards and codes of the school and English Local Authority were fully adhered to.

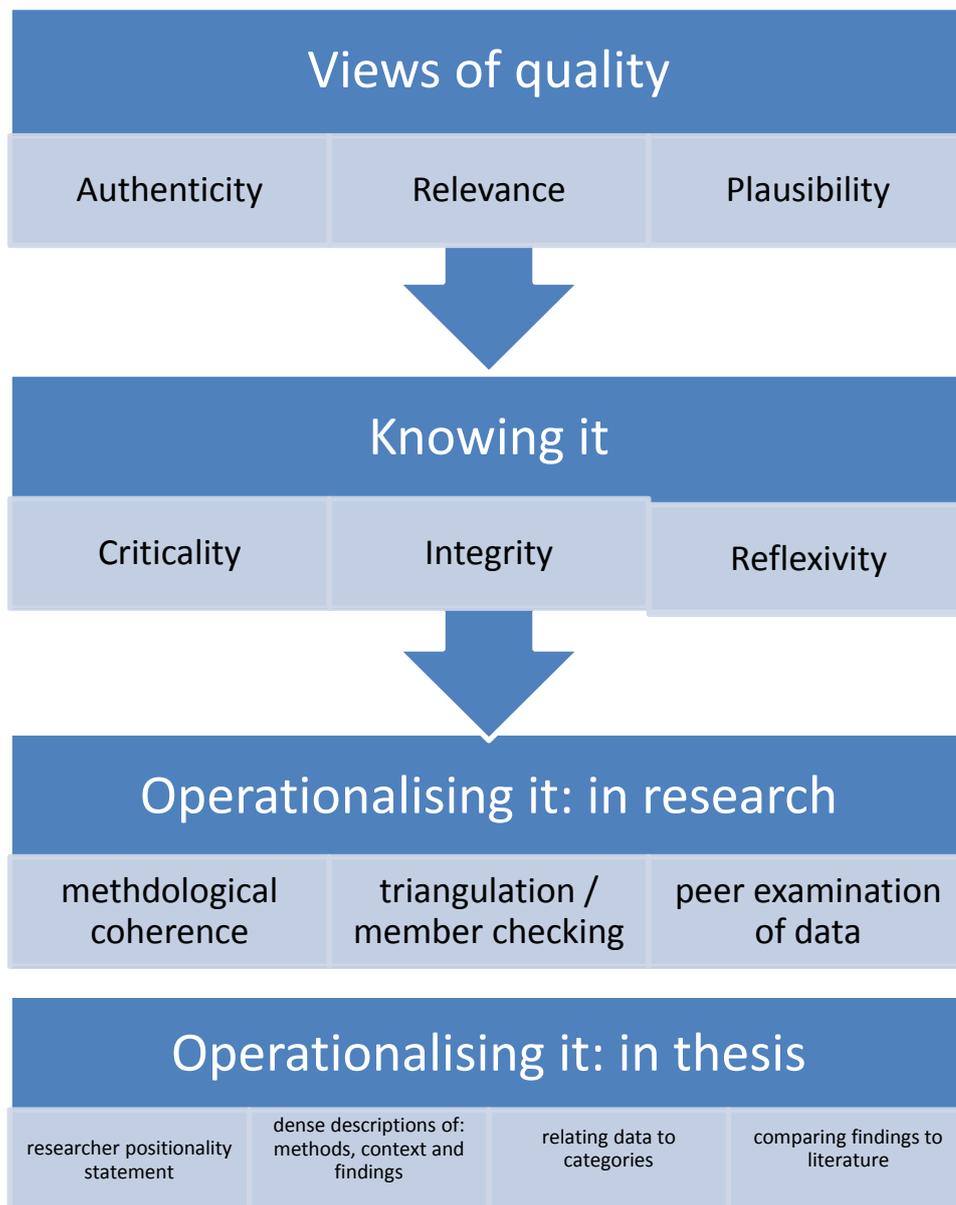
## **6.6 Methodological conclusions and claims for quality**

In conclusion what claims can be made for the quality of the research and what criteria could be used to determine this? Savin-Baden and Major (2013) argue that there can be no specific viewpoint or set of criteria that can be applied to qualitative research as this will depend on the philosophical position of the researcher. The traditional approaches for demonstrating the quality of process and outcomes in quantitative research have been validity and reliability, but it is contested as to whether these criteria are appropriate for qualitative research. The basis for this argument is that 'a tension exists between embracing subjectivity while establishing 'objective' criteria for demonstrating quality' and that the majority of qualitative researchers (including Hammersley, 1993; Kuzel and Engel, 2001; Yin 1994) do not apply the terms validity and reliability (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013).

Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the position of the researcher in relation to ensuring and documenting quality. The process for ensuring and documenting quality in this research can be summarised by the following sequence of questions (from Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 469):

- 1: How is quality viewed?
- 2: How will it be accomplished?
- 3: What strategies will ensure quality?

The criteria that are appropriate to this study are presented in Figure 6.1



**Figure 6.1 Summary of the approach taken to achieving and documenting quality in the research**

Table 6.3 outlines where these issues can be found in the thesis

**Table 6.3 Location of issues relating to quality in the thesis**

Issue	Location
Views of quality Authenticity Relevance Plausibility	Methodology
Knowing how it will be accomplished Criticality Integrity Reflexivity	Throughout the thesis Interpretations grounded in data Reflexivity interludes / chapter and use of 1 <sup>st</sup> person to foreground voice of the researcher
Operationalisation: in research process Methodological coherence Triangulation Member checking Peer examination of data	Methodology Findings Findings Findings
Operationalisation: in thesis Researcher positionality statement Dense description of methods Dense description of context Dense description of findings Relating data to categories Comparing findings to literature	Introduction Methodology Findings Findings Findings and analysis / discussion Analysis / discussion

## **Conclusion and summary**

This chapter has outlined the principles and processes of the research methodology. The research is based within an interpretative paradigm using local knowledge and key case studies to develop a comparative view of teacher expertise.

The data is analysed using a constant comparative method with the intention of producing a grounded theory. In the next chapter the methodology and research questions are tested in a pilot case study of a local knowledge case.

# Chapter 7: The Phase One pilot case study

*The purpose of the first phase of the research was to identify the characteristics of expert teachers and to investigate the relationship between the phenomenon of 'teacher expertise' and the ability to improvise. The chapter is in two parts: Part One provides a summary of the rationale and the findings whilst Part Two reviews the methodology in the light of the lessons learned during Phase One.*

## 7.1 Purpose and approach taken in the pilot case study

The decision to undertaking a pilot case study was an important stage in the research process: an opportunity to test the methodological approach, to practice and refine the collection of data and to engage with the process of data analysis. The findings that emerged from the pilot case study, the initial answers to the research questions, were used to inform and direct the consequent research process. Yet there are deeper and more fundamental gains that emerge from the pilot phase.

The intended aims of this pilot case study were primarily to gain experience of going 'into the field' in order to:

- trial the operationalisation of the aims of the research;
- practise data collection methods (specifically semi-structured interviews and observations);
- gain experience of constant comparative method data analysis;
- engage with the process of coding the data;
- explore ways of reporting the case study findings.

The intended outcomes of the pilot case study were to:

- gain some answers to the initial research questions;
- refine the research questions and focus;

- identify some concepts and themes that will inform further data collection;
- clarify the assumptions underlying the research and the stance of the researcher.

The aims and purpose of the research and the initial research questions are summarised in Table 7.1

**Table 7.1 The purpose of the pilot case study and the initial research questions**

Purpose	P1	To see if there is a correlation between teacher expertise and the ability to improvise in order to determine the extent to which improvisation is a facet of expert teaching.
	P2	To find out whether expert teachers perceive themselves to be improvisers.
	p3	To see how the findings of the research challenges, extends or complements existing notions of what it means to be an expert teacher.
Initial questions	Q1	What are the qualities that define an expert teacher?
	Q2	How do teachers become identified as 'experts'?
	Q3	To what extent do 'expert teachers' see themselves as experts?
	Q4	How do expert teachers display their expertise in the classroom?
	Q5	In what ways do they improvise?
	Q6	To what extent is improvisation a conscious and intentional facet of their expertise?
	Q7	Is there a positive relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise?

The process of undertaking and writing up this part of the research also led to a revision and clarification of the assumptions on which the research is based. This is acknowledged as an essential step in the development of researcher confidence (Hamilton and Corbett Whittier, 2013: 31).

The following methods were used to collect data in the pilot case study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and lesson observations of an expert teacher. Post-observation reflections were captured through open-ended interviews following the lesson observations. Broader perspectives on teacher expertise were arrived at through asking the expert teacher to narrate their professional life history. Further contextual data was collected through school documentation and visual images along with both formal interviews. Informal conversations with other members of staff were recorded in my field notes with the permission of the individuals concerned.

Data was captured in a number of ways. Observations were recorded through the use of field notes in order to minimize researcher effect on the setting. Audio recordings were made of the semi-structured interviews with the headteacher and the expert teacher. Full transcripts were then obtained in order to analyse the data.

Table 7.2 shows how the initial research questions were operationalised and identifies how the data was used to provide answers to those questions.

**Table 7.2: Key research questions and data to be collected**

Research question	Research data
Q1: What are the qualities that define an expert teacher?	Interviews with headteachers Interviews with 'expert teachers' Observations of expert teachers Analysis of documentation
Q2: How are teachers identified as 'experts'?	Interviews with headteacher / expert teachers / other staff
Q3: To what extent do 'expert teachers' see themselves as experts	Interviews with 'expert teachers' General observations recorded in field notes

Q4: How do expert teachers display their expertise in the classroom?	Lesson observations Post-observation interviews
Q5: In what ways do expert teachers improvise?	Lesson observations Interviews with expert teachers
Q6: To what extent is improvisation a conscious and intentional activity of expert teachers?	Interview with headteachers / expert teachers
Q7: Is there a positive relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise?	Interviews with expert teacher Lesson observations Analysis of all data.

The data was analysed using a constant comparative method (Thomas, 2011) in order to generate a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), a theory that is ‘derived inductively from the analysis of, and reflection on, the phenomenon under scrutiny’ (Cohen et al., 2011: 598). This approach sees theory as:

- *Emergent* rather than predefined and tested;
- Emerging from the *data* (as opposed to theoretical constructs being imposed on the data);
- Theory generation is a consequence of, and partner to, *systematic* data collection and analysis;
- Patterns and theories are implicit in data, waiting to be discovered;
- Grounded theory is both inductive and deductive, it is iterative and close to the data that gave rise to it. (Cohen et al. 2012: 598)

One of the criticisms of grounded theory is that it fails to acknowledge the implicit theories which guide the research in its early stages (Silverman, 1993:47 cited in Cohen et al., 2011: 602). Data cannot be viewed as theory-neutral but as theory saturated, a criticism that is particularly relevant for this research project which has been driven by a ‘hunch’ or hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between ‘expert teaching’ and improvisation. This problem can be resolved through clarifying the purpose of the research. Instead of trying to ‘prove’ the hypothesis, and engage in theory creation, the research is concerned with exploring how the

perception that improvisation as a positive facet of expert teaching is shared by the teachers within the case studies and how this is reflected in their practice.

Given that this is a pilot case study a further question arises as to whether it is appropriate to develop an initial grounded theory from the data at this stage in the research. How far should the process of data analysis go? Gillham (2000: 12) advises against this: “bide your time – don’t rush in and analyse and theorize at too early a stage”. Therefore, the focus on analysing the data is to conduct an initial coding from which focused codes and themes can be derived (Charmaz, 2006). These can then be used to focus the collection of data in Phase Two of the research, a process of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Urquhart (2013) sees this as ‘deciding on analytic grounds where to sample from next. In this way the theory can be quickly developed based on emerging concepts’ (194).

#### **A note on the voice of the researcher**

The pilot research project had two main objectives: to generate findings and responses to the initial research questions and to reflect on and adapt the methodology and the overall research design. These two objectives can be seen as both outcomes focussed and process focussed. The second of these objectives involved a process of reflexivity characterised by an internal dialogue and questioning of the research process as it was happening. In order to bring this reflexive narrative into the research report sections of this chapter will be written in the first person. This choice has been made in order to situate the researcher within the research process in order to report directly on how the pilot case study was selected, how access was granted and how the research was carried out. Many of the decisions that were made came about as a response to the particular research setting and the relationships that developed with the participants. The advantage of using the first-person is that it makes the author accessible to the reader as they are in effect situated as another character within the research (Bowler, 2006 cited in Savin-Baden and Major 2013: 492).

A criticism of using the first person voice is that the reader perceives that the researcher does not possess any extra information that is not directly observed. Therefore, researchers can only convey what they know directly and avoid inference. Furthermore, there is the danger that the undue attention is given to the researcher’s role and away from the reporting of the findings (Savin-Baden and Major 2013: 92). Given that researchers can switch between the first and the

third person the *process* of undertaking the case study will be reported using the first person and the *findings* reported using the third person.

## 7.2 The selection and context of the pilot case study

I made the selection of the school for the pilot case study on the basis of it being a local knowledge case (Thomas 2011). Using my own professional networks of contacts my choice was guided by data, empirical evidence and intuition of where I would be most likely to find an expert teacher. Given that case studies are concerned with particularisation and not generalisation (Stake, 1995, p8) I did not consider it necessary to consider issues of sampling. A case study is a particular instance where it is accepted that generalisations cannot be made, and therefore it is argued that techniques of sampling found in other kinds of research are not relevant (Thomas 2011: 3).

The priority for me was to gain access to a school that would be hospitable to my research proposal. The headteacher would inevitably be the gatekeeper for the study and it would be through them that I would need to identify and select the case: an 'expert teacher'. It would be inconceivable to engage on the process of observing and interviewing a teacher that the headteacher did not deem to be 'expert'. My access to the pilot case study school was negotiated through a professional colleague, a headteacher. I have chosen to call him Derek and within this report have given his school the name of Blake' School.

I have known Derek since the early 1990s; we met briefly when we were both deputy headteachers: we became reacquainted in 1997 when I was appointed as a headteacher to a school in the same Local Authority (LA) and he was already head at Blake's School. Derek and I have developed a fruitful and positive professional relationship since then. He has gained a national reputation and profile for innovative approaches to curriculum development and latterly has successfully led a project to rebuild the school. He was extremely interested in this research project and offered his school as a location for the pilot case study:

Derek: *it would be good for them (the teachers) to talk about it (expert teaching).... It would be really good for us; you can have a free hand and a free rein.*

This offer provided an ideal research opportunity. As Stake says (1995: 4) 'if we can, we need to pick cases which are easy to get at and hospitable to our inquiry, perhaps for which a prospective informant can be identified and with actors (the people studied) willing to comment on certain draft materials.'

#### Context and culture of Blake's School

The following description is based on data derived from documentation which includes school-generated documentation (prospectus and other publicity material) and Ofsted reports.

Blake's School is an oversubscribed 11-18 comprehensive school on the outskirts of a market town and surrounded by countryside. It serves a rural catchment area and about half the students arrive by bus each day. Almost all the students are White British and the proportion eligible for free school meals is low: in 2013 this was 4% of pupils. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is well below the national average. Almost a third of these students have moderate learning difficulties. A unit on the school site makes specialist provision for students with specific learning difficulties, mostly dyslexia.

The school became a specialist school in 1998 and a second specialism was added in 2006. It is a lead practitioner school. In 2009 the school was relocated from a split site provision into new buildings which the headteacher stated were "designed to provide a first class learning environment" with dedicated specialist facilities and purpose-built classrooms for every subject. The school converted to academy status in September 2012.

In 2009 the school had 1500 pupils and this increased to over 1700 by October 2012 (approx. 780 in years 7 – 9, 540 in years 10 and 11 and 400 in years 12 – 14).

At the last Ofsted section 5 inspection (in 2009) the judgements were good overall as outlined in Table 7.3

**Table 7.3: Section 5 inspection judgements for Blake's School in 2009**

Area of judgement	School overall	16-19
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Achievement and standards	2	2
Personal development and well-being	2	2

Quality of provision	2	2
Leadership and management	2	2

The following quotes are taken from the report of the most recent Ofsted inspection that took place before the transfer to the new school buildings.

- Teacher and support staff enjoy working in this very inspiring, creative atmosphere with opportunities for regular, motivating professional development.
- Staff have a common sense of purpose because of the collegial style of management.
- Standards are above the national average ..... because the quality of teaching is good, and the curriculum is creative and well matched to students' needs.
- The innovative curriculum in years 7 and 8 focuses on developing students' generic skills for learning as well as their subject knowledge. The strategies that teachers use in these lessons are very effective, because they allow students to be actively engaged in their learning (Ofsted report 'Blake School', 2009).

#### Culture of the school

A number of documents were analysed in order to identify how the culture of the school is articulated. The following themes emerged:

- The child (pupil) is at the centre of all that the school does
- The most important relationship in the school is that between the teacher and the child
- The primary function of those with management responsibility is to support this relationship
- For all staff the most important concept is collegiality. "As professionals we are all equal, have an equal voice and are trusted"
- The culture of the school is summarised by being "an organizational culture which involves shared understanding and expectations between, or of, all participants"

The long term commitment by the headteacher has been to change the culture of the school and his proactive role in this, appealing to the higher ideals and moral values of the staff places him as a transformational leader rather than a transactional one (Northouse, 2012) within the school.

The process of selecting the expert teacher

One of the significant problems that I faced with this research was deciding how the 'expert teachers' would be selected. What process would be used to identify the individuals who would be the focus for each of the case studies? My initial thoughts were that I ought to have some form of objective criteria in order to evaluate the choices. This could justify the choices I have made and which could provide answers to the question 'how do you know this actually is an expert teacher?'

There were a number of options to choose from:

1. Use the characteristics derived from the analysis of the literature on expert teaching
2. Use external and independent criteria derived from the teachers' standards and performance indicators; for example the standards required by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), which became the National College of Teaching and Leadership on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013, to determine Excellent or Advanced Skilled teachers.
3. Select teachers that have been graded as 'outstanding' according to Ofsted criteria, either during an Ofsted inspection or during a school's own performance management processes. However it is not axiomatic that such standards or judgments necessarily constitute or define what expert teaching is and to be restricted by this approach would limit the range of teachers who might be considered to be 'expert'.

One of the assumptions underlying this research is that "generalisable knowledge about teaching and learning will never fully reflect or be reflected in the individual cognitive framework of practitioners" (Atkinson and Claxton, 2000: 4). A further assumption that has driven this research is that such policy interventions have actually distorted our notions of what it means to be an expert teacher.

4. Create own criteria.

Berliner (1986), whilst not sure that the issue of identifying expert teachers had been satisfactorily solved, developed his own selection process based on three criteria: reputation, classroom observations by three independent observers and performance in laboratory tasks. For the pilot study these criteria have been adapted; they are presented in Table 7. 4.

**Table 7.4: Criteria used to identify ‘expert’ teachers.**

1. endorsement by the headteacher
2. validation of choice by other staff and pupils in the school
3. at least three lesson observations by the researcher
4. triangulating the evidence gained from lesson observations with other descriptors of ‘good’, ‘expert’ or ‘outstanding’ teaching.

Consideration was given to devising a list of criteria that could be used by the researcher in order to determine whether the teacher concerned could be considered to be ‘expert’. This option was rejected on the grounds that it was inappropriate for the researcher to engage in the discourse of defining essentialist notions of teacher ‘expertise’, especially given the chosen case study / grounded theory methodology. Furthermore this option produced a circular argument: the aim of the research is to determine what the characteristics of expert teachers are, but decisions are being made in advance in order to select the expert teacher to be studied.

The solution to this dilemma was resolved in the process of collecting the data. The ‘expert teacher’ that was used in the pilot case study was identified by Derek (the headteacher) during the initial interview in which I negotiated access to the school as a research site. I explained the research aims and we began to discuss ideas about expert teachers. Derek then said:

*Derek: We passed one of those people en route, with the year 11 law class, Anne. It doesn't matter where she is, what she is doing, who's watching her or who she's with, she expounds the highest professional standards but has the most immense empathy with students who she's with. It's not about teaching them but engaging in a learning journey together. I'll introduce you to Anne and I think you'll have a fantastically interesting time. If I had to choose someone who is*

*100% dedicated, probably about 100% the best teacher I've ever seen and 100% into the whole thing we call learning, blended into the child's experience – she's it.*

It was at this instant that the problem of how to select the expert teachers was resolved. I realised that there was no need for external criteria to validate the choices or to 'prove' that these teachers were experts against generalizable or objective viewpoints. Instead I became curious about the processes by which teachers came to be viewed as 'experts'. This gave rise to questions such as 'in this school (or culture) who is considered to be an expert teacher, and why?' 'How do they become an expert teacher within this context?' 'How does their observed behaviour inform our understanding of what it is to be an expert teacher?' The development, or emergence, of teacher expertise within a specific school culture draws attention to the social construction of teacher expertise. Within the context of the overall research design of comparative case studies it leads to asking 'how does one example of the social construction of teacher expertise compare with another?'

### **7.3 The data set of the pilot case study**

The data set for the pilot case study can be divided into four categories: documentary evidence, interviews, conversations and observations. These are defined as follows:

- documents included prospectus and other school produced literature, Ofsted reports, published material, photographs;
- an 'interview' is a pre-arranged meeting with an individual (or a group of people) with the agreed purpose of undertaking a semi-structured or unstructured interview;
- A 'conversation' is an informal, and unplanned encounter or exchange that provides information, insights or opinions pertinent to the case study;
- An 'observation' is a pre-arranged opportunity to observe a participant undertaking their professional duties.

The total data set for the pilot study is presented in Table 7.5

**Table 7.5: Data set for the pilot study**

	Name	Date	Form of data
interview 01	Headteacher	20/09/2011	audio recording
interview 02	Headteacher	11/11/2011	field notes
interview 03	Teacher A	11/11/2011	audio recording / field notes
conversation 01	Informant	11/11/2011	field notes
observation 01	Teacher A	11/11/2011	field notes
observation 02	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
conversation 02	Teacher B	25/11/2011	field notes
conversation 03	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
interview 04	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
observation 03	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
observation 04	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
interview 05	Teacher A	25/11/2011	field notes
observation 05	Teacher A	08/11/2011	field notes
observation 06	Teacher A	08/11/2011	field notes
observation 07	Teacher A	08/11/2011	field notes
conversation 04	LSA	08/11/2011	field notes
observation 08	Teacher A	08/11/2011	field notes
interview 06	Teacher A	09/12/2011	audio recording and field notes
observation 09	Teacher B	09/12/2011	field notes
conversation 05	Headteacher	09/11/2011	field notes
observation 10	Teacher A	09/12/2011	field notes

#### Analysis of the data

The data was analysed using a constant comparative method. There was an initial (open) coding of the data which then led to the development of focused (axial) codes. The intention was to arrive at the identification of core categories (selective coding). Given the amount of data collected in the pilot phase it was difficult to know exactly where to start. Yin (2003) points out that analytic difficulties are more likely to occur if there is no general strategy and suggest that 'playing with the data' could be an appropriate starting point.

Einstein's view of the scientific process is that 'there is no logical path, but only intuition' (cited in Thomas, 2011, p190). This encouraged me to follow my creative intuitions in devising a process for analysing the data that 'felt right'. For the interview with the headteacher, Derek, I fully transcribed the audio recording and then allocated initial (open) codes from which a number of focused codes were derived. At a later point I returned to this data and reanalysed it from a narrative perspective focussing in particular on four themes that were evident in the interview transcript. These were; the qualities of expert teachers, the ideological and personal views held by Derek, the metaphors that he used and the narratives that he told to illustrate the points that he was making.

With the teacher, Anne, I decided to take one lesson from the nine that I observed and present it as 'a narrative text that has been constructed from field notes into a third person, continuous narrative prose' as suggested by Cohen et al (2011, p581), employing what Bruner describes as an 'omniscient authorial voice' (Bruner, 2004, p70 cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p581). Thomas supports Bruner's contention that narrative is at the heart of meaning making and argues for the importance of narrative in providing 'a storyline' within case study reports. He recognizes that narratives function to unite in a whole all the threads and fibres of a case study (Thomas, 2011, p184). Narrative is also suited to capturing the particularity of a case.

As well as allowing the data to be presented in a holistic fashion it also enables the reader to 'see' Anne for themselves; such a narrative picture has the intention of engaging the reader in the process of verification. This allows for variant interpretation, enabling the reader to make sense of the narrative of a case and agree or disagree with the researcher. Stake (1995: 87) suggests the inclusion of 'accounts of matters the readers are already familiar with so they can gauge the accuracy, completeness and bias of reports of other matters'. Furthermore the reader can discern the typicality and relevance of as a basis for generalisation (Stake, 1995: 53).

This approach to select a single lesson and treat it in a narrative fashion is underpinned by a number of principles which inform a strategic approach to the analysis of the data. Selecting the field notes for one lesson observation allows an opportunity to look at some of the 'best' data. Stake (1995: 84) recommends spending the best time on the best data acknowledging that full coverage is impossible: 'equal attention to all data is not a civil right'. The criteria used to select this particular lesson were that:

- I had already observed this group and so I had an initial understanding of the context of the lesson and the relationship between Anne and the group;
- There had been an opportunity to have a discussion with Anne before the lesson and so I was aware of some of her intentions for working with this class;
- I had a greater familiarity with the subject matter of this lesson (English) than that of other classes where Anne was teaching GCSE and A-level Law;
- There was an opportunity to interview Anne about the lesson afterwards.

The narrative text of the lesson provided a 'baseline' from which to view the data collected in other observations. Having allocated initial coding to this lesson the field notes of the other observations were analysed to discover the extent to which the same issues were replicated in other observations, triangulating the analysis of the initial observation with other findings, noting if these issues, events or behaviours were present in other lessons. Similarly aspects that were observed in other lessons, but were not present in this particular lesson, were noted and conclusions reached concerning how representative the chosen lesson is.

The findings are presented in the form of two theoretical memos that were written following the coding and analysis of data. The first memo is based on an interview with the headteacher and the second is based on an observation of a lesson taught by the expert teacher. The data is presented in the chronological order that it was collected.

## **7.4 Findings: interview with 'Derek', the headteacher**

The interview took place in Derek's office and the semi-structured interview formally began after his agreement that the research could take place in the school and he had identified Anne as the teacher that could be the teacher for the pilot case study. The purpose of the interview was to explore Derek's views of the qualities that defined an expert teacher. This interview was analysed twice using a different approach. The first approach involved fully transcribing the interview and coding it using a constant comparative method to identify some key themes. The second analysis reviewed the transcription of the in the light of four themes:

- The qualities of expert teachers
- Ideological issues / personal views (of Derek)

- Metaphors
- Illustrative narratives (stories told about others and about the self)

The findings are reported under these four headings. The codes are presented using a **bold font** and direct quotations from Derek are presented in *italics*.

Theme 1: The qualities of expert teachers.

Derek gave a very full, detailed and eloquent account of the qualities that he thought were to be found in an expert teacher. On analysing and re analysing this interview one of the significant features of the description was the sequence in which these qualities were mentioned and described. The following presentation of the data reflects this and, as much as possible, uses the words of Derek himself.

Derek began by pointing out that some of the qualities are *so simple. For a start you've got to really like children*. The relationship between the teacher and the pupil is seen as being of paramount importance. *It's about working with, not working on. Every time you walk into a classroom you have to establish a relationship where the child is important. Everything is around the advancement of learning*. Being able to establish meaningful relationships is seen as being of great importance. These relationships are characterised by the ways that expert teachers are able to create an *immense empathy* and where *their humanity is at the forefront of all they do*. The ability of the expert teacher to empathise with pupils was clearly very important to Derek as it was one of the first things that he had said earlier about Anne: *she has the most immense empathy with the students who she's with*. His view of the relationship between teachers and their pupils is that it is based in values of humanity and empathy, that teachers need to show and share a compassion and love for working with young people. This view is affirmed in the next comment.

The next aspect of expert teaching that Derek identifies as being of importance, *the other thing that is really at the heart of it*, is having a sense of humour; *the most important thing after love is laughter*.

This leads him to mention the importance of subject knowledge. This is not seen as being sufficient in itself but needs to be accompanied by the ability to see the subject through the

eyes of the pupils *of being able to go back to square one* and to be able to relate the learning to individuals.

Other personal attributes that are seen to be important include passion, which is seen as being *critical*, risk taking and knowing how far that pupils can be pushed; *the expert teacher knows where to stop that pushing, knowing the boundaries and then just going a little further all the time.*

Expert teachers need to show determination - personal ambition. And it not just about rising up the ladder but it is the ambition to being better than you were the day before. They are also willing to give time to people.

When asked how long it took for a teacher to become an expert his view was that they never become an expert but that this is a goal that teachers are continually working towards. However there are degrees of expertise.

## Theme 2: Ideological views

Accompanying Derek's description of the expert teacher was a range of other ideas and stories that provided a contextual background to his views. The first of these has been coded as ideological views. The term ideological is being used in the sense of describing the body of ideas that reflect the social needs and aspirations that Derek holds as an individual (and not specifically in the sense of being aligned with any explicit political ideology).

His educational views were located within a broader societal perspective; *I think that this is how society should progress, to invest our total selves in the next generation. Imparting everything that we can, the construction of a learning environment, ever improving, ever advancing. Learning is seen as a transformative activity that can change lives.*

He acknowledges that his own view of education is at variance with current political ideology and government policy. *Unfortunately the prevailing political view doesn't really understand education at all. Education is doomed to a cycle, in my view, of deficiency and underachievement because of the way that politicians view the ingredients of what makes a successful school.*

Having said that he qualified this statement with regard to Free Schools in that they were free from statutory curricular prescription: *will they become more like education could be?*

## Theme 3: Metaphors

Derek employed an interesting range of metaphors to illustrate his ideas and beliefs that were based around movement. Learning was seen as *a journey* and the expert teacher needed to be able to *go back to square one* (of their own learning journey) in order to help pupils to travel towards where the teacher is in their knowledge and understanding. The expert teacher is able to *translate that journey to them*. As well as being a journey of knowledge and skills acquisition it is also an emotional journey in which the teacher is able to *shift the atmosphere from very serious and deep to very light and spontaneous* as the learners *moved through the space*.

Within this journey the learners need to be challenged and so the job of the teacher is to encourage risk taking, *always pushing people towards a zone where they will be uncomfortable*. Of course there is also the need to ensure that pupils do not fail (or fall) *and then to provide a safety net*. The importance of pupils having confidence in the teacher means that high expectations can be made in order that *they can't sink because you are there*.

Finally there is the metaphor of the teacher as a sponge who lives their lives and *absorbs all the messages that come their way and they channel that into the way they teach*. However, investing one's life in the next generation and continually wanting to improve brought its own challenges: *you might be wrung out after 40 years*. The journey to becoming an expert teacher was seen as a *holy grail*.

The skill of an expert teacher is that they make their pupils feel that they have done the work themselves. *There is a Chinese proverb 'When great leaders have done their work the people say we did it ourselves'*. Derek feels that this is the case with expert teachers. *They are almost an invisible layer across the planet and people relish their time with them but then move on*.

#### Theme 4: Narrative illustrations

During the interview Derek told stories from his own experience to illustrate his ideas. There were six stories (or narratives) in total and they have been labelled as N1 to N6.

N1: an example of the passion for learning

*One of the things our art teachers talk about, they talk about being practising artists, and it's one of the questions that comes up in interviews 'how do you talk about passion? They talk about drawing, selling their paintings and looking for inspiration – learning has never stopped for you'.*

N2: this was supported by an example from Derek's life – reading Physics Today in the dentist's waiting room:

*I force myself to understand it. It's about a thirst for knowledge but also in other fields. I'm interested in architecture and other cultures – it's about pushing yourselves in other contexts.*

Both of these stories are concerned with maintaining a passion for learning, for continually being curious about new ideas and for sustaining an engagement in learning.

N3: a story to illustrate the differences between a novice and an expert teacher

The story compares a novice teacher who lacks tolerance and understanding of others with an expert teacher who displays a warmth, a depth of humanity and the ability to inspire from saying very little. Without having an empathy and understanding of others Derek does not feel that she will ever be an expert teacher.

N4: a story to illustrate the difference between an experienced teacher and an expert teacher

This story uses the example of a teacher who has spent a considerable amount of time at the school and who works hard, valued by staff and pupils alike and has good subject knowledge. However he lacks determination and the ambition to do his absolute best. *He has a cosy life.*

N5: a story to explain the commitment of Anne

She has 25 periods on the timetable and she teaches 28 and she teaches two lunchtimes because "if I don't do it who will?" I say I'll find somebody and she says "who will do it as well as I will?" "Well nobody."

*I literally see her 2-3 times a week; I make sure I bump into her just to test how things are and to check that she is OK. I know as the term goes on she gets tired and she needs me to say stop, sit down, take a rest, I'll sit in with that class.*

N6: a story to illustrate the importance of passion to leaders

*That's what I expect in my leaders: they will be passionate about something. [Name], has been here 22 years, passionate about children, and (his subject) education but passionate about children. Bloody irritating, challenges, annoys me but I forgive him all this because I know where his heart is. So I think that there is an interesting conversation to be had around leadership and expert teaching.*

#### Theme 4: Expert teachers and leadership

Derek introduced this theme in the interview by asking this question of himself: *'are headteachers by and large expert teachers?'* His criterion for appointing staff to his leadership team is that they are *first class teachers*. *You have to love teaching and you have to be more at home in the classroom than you are in the office.*

Derek knows that expert teachers will give time to people and that is also a characteristic of leaders. One thing that leadership requires is that no matter how busy you are you have to give time to people; to sit with them for however long it takes whilst they make that journey to the next thing they have to do. You have to be there and they need to know that you will be there when they come along to talk to you.

For Derek expert teacher and first class leaders are the same.

However, there is also a tension with expert teachers between wanting to undertake a leadership role and then, as a consequence of this choice, having to spend less time in the classroom.

*And Anne is an interesting case in point. There's a tension between wanting to do this (leadership) and tearing herself away from this bit (teaching).*

#### Summary

Derek's view of an expert teacher can be summarized as being based in relationships and empathy. He recognizes and values the total humanity and warmth that they (Anne) has, everything that they are as a human being. A detailed knowledge of individual students allows the teacher to determine the appropriate degrees of challenge and support. There is a complete engagement in the process of teaching and learning which occurs within a broad vision of the transformative power of education, both for individuals and for society as a whole.

Table 7.6 provides a summary of the themes (focused codes) that have emerged from an analysis of the initial interview with Derek concerning the qualities of an expert teacher and the categories (initial codes) that exist within each theme.

**Table 7.6 Summary of themes: the qualities of expert teachers**

Overarching theme	Description of categories within overarching theme
Liking students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathising with pupils</li> <li>• Seeing every pupil as important</li> <li>• Placing pupils at the centre</li> <li>• Giving them time</li> </ul>
Establishing relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working <u>with</u> pupils</li> <li>• Having a warmth</li> <li>• Non-threatening</li> <li>• Showing humanity</li> <li>• Developing mutual confidence and trust</li> <li>• Having a sense of humour</li> </ul>
Prioritising learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing learning as transformative</li> <li>• Seeing learning as life-long activity</li> <li>• Focusing on the advancement of learning in every lesson</li> </ul>
Loving teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting everything into their teaching</li> <li>• Having really good subject knowledge</li> <li>• Making subject accessible to students</li> <li>• Being passionate</li> <li>• Being inspirational</li> </ul>
Having the highest expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging students</li> <li>• Encouraging risk taking</li> <li>• Knowing boundaries for individual students</li> <li>• Building and rebuilding confidence</li> <li>• Encouraging independence</li> </ul>
Changing the emotional mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using humour constructively</li> <li>• Establishing different moods</li> </ul>
Working over and above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working hard</li> </ul>

expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being determined</li> <li>• Being personally ambitious</li> <li>• Continually learning</li> </ul>
Role modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For other staff (modelling best practice)</li> <li>• For students (modelling learning)</li> </ul>
Expertise as an ongoing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continually engaging in learning</li> </ul>

## 7.5 Findings: observing ‘Anne’: an expert teacher.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and post-observation interviews are presented under the following headings, principally derived from five of the key research questions in the following sequence.

Q3: To what extent do ‘expert teachers’ sees themselves as experts?

Q4: How do ‘expert teachers’ display their expertise in the classroom?

Q2: How are teachers identified as experts?

Q5: In what ways does the expert teacher improvise?

Q7: Is there a positive relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise?

Background information on Anne

Anne was open and receptive to the idea of being the focus of this pilot case study. A vivacious, outgoing and articulate woman, she is very proud of her American background. She initially trained in Law and taught Paralegal Studies in the USA where she also worked as an attorney. She has been a teacher in the UK since 2000 teaching English and Law and for most of that time has taught at Blake’s School. She readily engaged in discussing ideas and issues relating to teacher expertise.

Q3: To what extent do ‘expert teachers’ sees themselves as experts?

What were Anne's views on the term 'expert teacher'? On our first meeting she voiced reservations about applying the term to herself; *I don't think I'm an expert*. This raised an interesting point about notions of expertise; is it possibly easier to apply it to other people and more difficult to apply this status to ourselves? If 'expert teacher' was not an appropriate term, then what was? Anne's preference was to be called *an established teacher*. However she was able to outline the qualities that she thought defined an expert teacher: *a mutual respect of staff and students, a good sense of humour, subject knowledge and relationship with colleagues*.

Sensitivities concerning the word 'expert' resurfaced on my second visit to the school during a conversation in the staffroom between Anne, myself and one of Anne's colleague teachers, 'Brian'. Brian asked me what I was doing and Anne replied *'I'll let you explain that'*. I explained that I was doing research on expert teachers and this led into a discussion about what this term meant. Afterwards I asked Anne if this was an appropriate way to explain what I was doing. She replied that she wasn't really comfortable with being described to her colleagues as 'an expert teacher' *and probably I'll get my leg pulled about this*. I stated that in the future I would say that I was exploring the practice of experienced teachers and she agreed that this was acceptable to her. Consequently when we were talking together we acknowledged that the word 'experienced' was synonymous with, and code for, 'expert'.

Q3: How do 'expert teachers' display their expertise in the classroom?

In what ways did Anne display her expertise in the classroom? There were two main ways in which it was possible to observe Anne's expertise: the way she built relationships with the students and her pedagogy that was built around dialogue and discussion. Each will be looked at in turn.

Anne's approach to building relationships with students was based on knowing them and treating them as individuals. She clearly liked the students and from the outset it was clear that knowing about them was extremely important and her constant interactions with them could be seen as one of the key indicators of her expertise. She held great store in knowing *the backstory* of each student which included knowledge of their parents and other siblings that she had taught or who were in the school. This was a pool of knowledge that had been built up over a considerable period of time as Anne had taught at Blake's School for over 10 years. *You can read them (the students) like a book. That's what we are talking about when we talk about experienced teachers*.

Knowing the students as individuals happened in a range of ways and in each lesson observed there were distinct exchanges and events that were focused on getting to know the students. It was significant that many, but not all, of the observations were of sixth form classes and the greater maturity of the students, combined with the fact that she had possibly taught them for longer enabled a greater familiarity. The beginnings and ends of lessons provided especially important opportunities to engage with students and show an interest in what they were doing outside of school. Students were welcomed with a 'how are you?' when they entered the classroom. Anne would usually stand by the door and this greeting often developed into a brief conversation about what they had been doing since the last lesson. Often students would ask if they could talk to Anne after the lesson and this time was readily given. One of the ways in which Anne developed her relationship with students was through these impromptu encounters.

Anne was also prepared to share appropriate information about herself as a person and this self-disclosure demonstrated that building relationships with individuals was a two-way process. This also was a way in which she presented herself as 'a human being' as opposed to being 'just' a teacher.

How were the relationships with students established? Central to the relationship with students was the creation of an informal atmosphere in the classroom. Anne had a range of 'endearments' which she used to address students (*sweetie, honey pie*). These deliberate Americanisms were used with humour yet genuine affection. Her body language was also very informal; sitting on the corner of a desk, talking with her hands and using humour to maintain interest in the lesson or to manage (minor) behaviour issues. This generated a warm, non-threatening atmosphere that allowed her to challenge and push students in their learning.

The knowledge and understanding of students as individuals was not viewed as an end in itself but was used to inform both the planning and delivery of her lessons as the following incident makes clear:

Extract from field notes

Walking along the corridor towards the staffroom Anne explained that the previous day the 6<sup>th</sup> form had attended a Police Road Safety Show which had contained graphic descriptions of road accidents. She was aware that this would have had an emotional impact on the students,

including the class that she was about to teach. She didn't want to ignore their response to this event so she intended to find out what the students felt about it and to link this to their work on 'The Great Gatsby'.

This example illustrates how Anne adapts her lesson plan in response to the emotional needs of her class. This raises the question as to how critical emotional intelligence, especially having an empathetic outlook is a significant factor in her teacher expertise. What I am not sure about was the extent that she was also making this decision on the basis of her knowledge of the topic of the lesson which was the novel 'The Great Gatsby'. One of the key incidents in the novel is a horrific car crash and for someone who had a detailed understanding of this book, *Gatsby is a favourite text*, this might be an obvious connection to make.

Approach to teaching: encouraging dialogue

A second area of expertise could be seen in Anne's approach to teaching which was based on discussion and dialogue. The core of Anne's pedagogic practices was noted in the Sixth Form lesson on 'The Great Gatsby' that was analysed in detail. The dominant pedagogic practice observed was based on the encouragement of dialogue and discussion with the students and this was a common feature of all the lessons I observed, including those with younger pupils. Every opportunity was taken to engage students in sharing their own opinions and engaging them in the lesson. On a number of occasions the lesson was built up around their responses and ideas. The start of this lesson involved students being handed a post-it note as they entered the room and asked to write on it their response to the previous days Police Road Safety Show. These notes were then stuck on a wall and a student read them out whilst Anne summarized the points raised on a white board. When Anne asks them to make connections between the words on the board and 'The Great Gatsby' one girl replies "It's like the car crash in the novel".

The main activity of the lesson was focused around a PowerPoint presentation that Anne had prepared in order to help the students prepare for their assessed presentation at the end of the term. Each slide becomes a point for discussion with Anne providing guidance, for example on the kind of vocabulary the students needed to demonstrate: *you need to use words like 'lexus'*. The following extract from my field notes shows how dialogue is used and developed through her teaching style:

Extracts from field notes

Slide 4: "Gatsby" - this slide has a number of quotes about the character of Gatsby on it.

Anne asks the students to think about these quotes. She chooses three people to answer and hears what they have to say in turn. She then brings in other students to add their contribution. She is building up ideas, developing the themes that emerge. She gives students positive encouragement as they share their ideas, *Very good! Yes, very good!*

Slide 5: "Gatsby 2" – further quotes

*These are really difficult quotes she says. They get more difficult as they go along.* She is raising the level of challenge in the lesson. Students are now picking up on other points that they consider to be important, they are building on ideas, contradicting what has been said, developing a line of thought. It's like collective thinking.

All the students were brought into the learning and engaged in the lesson. In my role as an observer I found the atmosphere in this lesson (and other lessons that I observed) to be compelling. One of the subjective comments that I made in my field notes was that it was very difficult not to join in the lesson, in fact following on from this particular lesson I went away to read 'The Great Gatsby' as I had not read it before.

What had the students learnt from this lesson? In the post-observation interview Anne considered that they had made progress in their understanding of the text, developed a higher order vocabulary, glimpsed at hidden layers of meaning, explored symbols and themes used in the novel and prepared for their own presentations. However, my view was that this was achieved in a way that did not follow the formula of a 'well taught lesson'. For example on several occasions the students and Anne were so involved in the lesson that the endings were often rushed. Lessons did not follow a sequence of pre-planned events yet from the outset all students were engaged in the learning and encouraged to contribute their ideas. Often students would ask a question out loud (without raising their hand), or would challenge what Anne had said. All of this was in the spirit of wanting to improve their understanding and was not an act of disruption.

Q2: What are the processes in the school that enable the teacher to be an expert?

This question is essentially concerned with the impact that the culture of the school has upon the 'expert teacher'. As an expert teacher Anne is allowed a great deal of autonomy to teach in the way that she feels is best; she is able to 'be herself' and this is accepted and encouraged by the culture of the school. Her expertise is not measured according to objective measures or the replication of an external view of 'good practice'. Instead she is valued on her ability to relate to the students that she teaches. As Derek says *'It doesn't matter where she is, what she's doing, who's watching her or who she's with she expounds the highest professional standards but has the most immense empathy with students she's with'*. Anne is therefore accorded a high level of professional trust and it appears that the agency and autonomy she is accorded is through being acknowledged as an 'expert teacher'. The relationship between Anne and the headteacher (as well as the other senior leaders in the school) is an important one. The culture of the school clearly influences what is deemed to be 'expert teaching' and the way that it is demonstrated. Anne's expertise is supported through permission and not mandate. The relationship with the leadership of the school, and specifically the headteacher, is a two way process. Anne made the following comment about the headteacher: *Derek allows the staff to be different; the National Curriculum is just a starting point. Some staff play safe but I'm at the edge of what Derek expects.* Anne feels confident that she can have an open discussion with Derek. If she didn't agree with something then she would not hesitate to go and see him and talk things through. She respects the headteacher but does not fear him. Trust is at the heart of her understanding of how the school works and, for Anne, runs throughout the culture of the school. *Derek trusts the staff, the staff trust the kids and the kids trust themselves.*

Q5: In what ways does the expert teacher improvise?

Q7: Is there a positive relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise?

The fundamental motivation to undertake this research was to see if there is a positive relationship between teacher expertise and the ability to improvise. This raises a number of questions that are pertinent to the research. Are there particular ways in which expert teachers improvise and if so does this contribute positively to our understanding of what it means to be an expert teacher? Does Anne improvise and, if so, in what ways does she improvise? To what extent does Anne meet the criteria of improvisation outlined in the working definition?

Improvisation is a mode of intentional creative action that has unpredictable and uncertain outcomes, derived from "real time" interactions (with other people or materials).

Improvisations are determined by spontaneous and intuitive decisions arriving from the dynamic interplay between fixed and informal, generative structures.

To what extent is Anne's teaching characterised by her intentionally engaging in spontaneous creative action? To what extent does she rely on intuitive judgements? To what extent is she interacting with her students? What evidence is there of the interplay between fixed, formal structure and informal generative structures?

Anne's teaching is essentially dialogic in nature and, in part, this is the consequence of the emphasis she places on developing her relationships with the students. She is continually eliciting or receiving responses from her students and allowing the direction of the learning to be influenced by them. This is an intentional part of her practice as a teacher and is principally interactive. This approach to teaching is something that she has always done. In one of the interviews she talked about how she first became involved in teaching whilst working as a paralegal, *a kind of legal executive*, in the United States.

*Anne: So I taught paralegal studies at a university college on Saturdays. Although I got bored of hearing my own voice so I did things that were unconventional and nobody checked up on me.*

At the point when she could have commenced a further two year programme to train as a solicitor Anne decided that she would prefer to become a teacher having relocated to England to be with her partner.

*Anne: I'm done with the training, I'm done with that and I enjoyed teaching; on the Saturdays, on trips, and I enjoyed the interaction. So I went to Bath University and applied for the PGCE course and ..... ooh, the name of the woman there .... She was absolutely lovely. Really maverick and she thought there was someone to take a chance on. Whereas the English professor there was a little more sceptical. I wasn't the traditional English literature first from Oxford or Cambridge, 'let's go be a teacher' type. So she decided to take a risk.*

For Anne the decision to see teaching principally as interaction and dialogue comes from a personal experience and the view that this is the best way to teach. Intuition and experience inform her practice as opposed to theory. There is also the view that the way that she teaches is different to the norm, that her approach is unconventional. In her training she responded to a tutor who she saw as being *a maverick*. Her first teaching practice was at Blake's School and the

approach to teaching that was characteristic of the school, the breaking down of subject boundaries for example, strongly appealed to her.

*Anne: So I came to Blake's on teacher training for my first placement which at that point had not started (the major restructuring of the key stage 3 curriculum), but the people that started that are the people they are and always will be. And Mary was my tutor, form tutor, and she is so holistic in her teaching and her approach and that just seems to be the way to go.*

Anne's approach to teaching was nurtured and supported by two people that were very influential to her throughout her training and this encouraged her to develop her interactional approach to pedagogy. Her use of linguistic interaction with her pupils can be analysed through looking at the dialogue from two dimensions; the dialectical and the dialogic. The dialectic approach can be traced back to Socrates and what has become known as 'the Socratic method': through careful questioning by the teacher students come to realize the truth of a situation without being told it directly. This approach was later formalised by Hegel into a more abstract notion of a dynamic logic proceeding from thesis to antithesis and then to thesis (Ravenscroft et al., 2007: 40). Bakhtin was critical of this process in that he saw the apparent differences between voices to be subsumed within a more complexly integrated synthesis (Wegerif, 2008: 350) and he saw a clear distinction between dialectic and dialogic.

This distinction is explored in detail by Wegerif (2008) who views dialectic talk, as used by Vygotsky, as being within a modernist interpretative framework. This claim is supported through reference to Toulmin's account of modernism as 'privileging a formal, abstract and universal image of reason over an image of reason as situated in real dialogues' (Toulmin, 1990 cited in Wegerif, 2008: 249). On the other hand Bakhtin's view of dialogism is that meaning always implies two voices and that there is an underlying assumption of underlying difference rather than identity. This view reflects an ontological perspective for Bakhtin; he sees the world as being essentially dialogic with the implication that meaning cannot be grounded upon any fixed or stable identities but is the product of difference (Wegerif, 2008: 349).

There are a number of related points that can be derived from this distinction. To begin with there is the view that Anne's teaching is principally dialogic in that she encourages and allows the different voices of the students and acknowledging that there will be different views that might not be assimilated or synthesised. She encourages learning through a process of social construction in which a range of ideas are brought together to create a bigger picture and it is

this process of *working with, rather than on pupils*, (as described by Derek) that she finds to be so satisfying as a teacher. The social construction of learning is an uncertain process; Sawyer notes that whilst a number of social constructivists that have found ‘the unpredictability of multiple competing voices is what makes discussion a uniquely effective teaching tool’ (2004: 189) many teachers find the ambiguity of open discussion a source of anxiety and therefore use interactional sequences and strategies to remain in control of the situation (ibid: 189).

Of particular significance for this research is the assumption that ‘constructivist teaching is fundamentally improvisational, because if the classroom is scripted and overly directed by the teacher, the students cannot co-construct their own knowledge (Baker-Sennett & Matusov, 1997; Borko and Livingstone, 1989; Erikson, 1982; Rogoff, 1990; Sawyer, 1997 cited in Sawyer, 2004: 190). As has been suggested, the evidence from the data shows that Anne’s dominant pedagogic practice is dialogic and this identifies the ways in which she improvises and that this is a conscious and intended approach.

In order to look at the ways in which Anne improvises in greater detail I have looked at this aspect of her teaching from the perspective of a jazz musician. At the heart of collective musical improvisation is the interactive concept of ‘call and response’, one player will make a musical statement and another will improvise a response to it. Through coding all nine of the lessons observed there is evidence that Anne has a wide range of interventions (calls) designed to stimulate learning and reactions (responses) to student contributions. These are presented in Table 7.7

**Table 7.7: List of ‘call and response’ strategies observed in Anne’s lessons**

Calls (teacher intervention strategies)	Responses (teacher reaction strategies)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing direction (identifying the end product)</li> <li>• Asking questions</li> <li>• Providing challenge</li> <li>• Expanding and developing thinking</li> <li>• Lesson input (e.g. PowerPoint)</li> <li>• Starting / developing a dialogue</li> <li>• Sharing ideas</li> <li>• Giving tasks to individual students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Summarising</li> <li>• Clarifying</li> <li>• Encouraging</li> <li>• Explaining</li> <li>• Making links</li> <li>• Looking at details</li> </ul>

Classroom management Learning Teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing / monitoring behaviour</li> <li>• Engaging all students</li> <li>• Changing the mood of the lesson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> </ul>
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The overall structure of the lesson is also subject to improvisatory practices. Lessons are adapted and planned in accordance with where the students are at or plans are abandoned if the planned content does not match the students understanding.

## 7.6 Discussion of findings: lessons learnt from the pilot case study

Undertaking the pilot case study has brought a greater focus to the research through engaging in the process of collecting and analysing data. Stepping 'into the field' problematised a range of theoretical and practical issues. Resolving these issues will hopefully improve the quality of the research process and the consequent findings. These problems can be grouped under four headings:

1. Problems relating to the assumptions (ontological, epistemological and axiological) that underpin this research;
2. Problems concerning the findings of the research (what do the findings tell us and how do they help answer the research questions);
3. Problems relating to the methodology, data collection methods and data analysis;
4. What the next steps in the research should be.

### 1. Problems concerning the assumptions

The process of undertaking and writing up the pilot case study has highlighted inconsistencies in the initial assumptions that underpinned this research. These initial assumptions were based

around essentialist notions of teacher expertise; that external criteria of what constitutes expert teaching can be derived and that these qualities can be used to verify the data that is being collected. This approach is based on the assumption that it is possible, and that there is a need, to provide external evidence that the expert teachers within the case study really are expert teachers.

A further assumption contained within the initial research design is concerned with the correlation between expert teaching and improvisation. This was initially expressed in the terms that improvisation was the defining characteristic of expert teachers, hence the working title of this research being 'in search of the improvising pedagogue'. There are a number of problems with this assumption. From undertaking the observations it is clear that improvisation is not the preserve of expert teachers. All teachers engage in improvisatory activity and therefore improvisation can be seen as a commonplace activity, part of the everyday 'cut and thrust' of teaching and of having to think on your feet. Yet the experience and reflection that characterises expert teaching brings with it a greater confidence to respond to 'real time' events in the classroom and to incorporate these events into the process of learning. What the pilot case study has illustrated is that the intuitive 'tacit knowledge' of the expert coupled with a desire to relate to students as individuals leads to a classroom culture that is based on dialogue and discussion. So, whilst improvisation is not the defining feature of the expert teacher, it is clearly an important facet of expert performance. The experience and understanding that expert teachers accumulate allows them to make 'in the moment' decisions within the classroom that they know will support the learning of their pupils. Their greater confidence as a teacher along with having a range of strategies of 'what works', combined with a detailed knowledge of their pupils, allows a greater improvisatory potential that they know they can use. Whilst this might not be explicitly articulated as an intention to 'improvise' it can be seen as a deliberate intention to respond to what happens during the course of a lesson. Therefore, the ways in which expert teachers improvise and the locations in which they consciously and intentionally use improvisatory strategies is of interest and value to understanding the nature of advanced professional practice.

The resolution of the problems concerning these assumptions has been to view expert teaching as a socially constructed phenomenon. The empirical investigation has highlighted the interactive, dialogic and relational nature of the world of the 'expert teacher, a view of the social world that is compatible with social constructionism. This view holds that knowledge is

socially and culturally constructed (Kuhn, 1962 cited in Savin-Baden & Major, 2013: 28), a view developed in the social sciences by Berger and Luckman (1966). Locating the philosophical position within social constructionism leads to greater clarity of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this research. This can be expressed as follows: a nominalist ontology which holds that 'objects of thought are merely words and that there is no independently accessible thing constituting the meaning of a word' (Cohen et al., 2011: 5) informs an interpretivist epistemology in which human agency and social structure are viewed holistically. These assumptions have influenced the structure and design of Phase Two of the research.

## **2. Problematising the findings**

Locating this research within a social constructionist position reinforces some of the conclusions that emerged from the findings. Firstly, the study of expert teachers needs to take into account the context in which that expertise is demonstrated and that notions of expertise will be shaped by the culture and context of the particular school. Therefore, an important dimension of the research will be to explore how teacher expertise is defined within specific educational contexts and how this is influenced by the culture of the school. An important factor is the culture of the school and how it has been intentionally developed by the head / leadership team as well as how leadership within the school permits and develops professional autonomy. This shift moves away from an essentialist view of expertise that is concerned with discovering the essential characteristics of expert teachers to asking 'what counts as expertise within this particular educational cultural setting?'

Secondly the following concepts have emerged from the data derived from the interview with the headteacher and observations of the expert teacher. They are presented in table 7.8. Further case studies would determine whether these concepts are found in other settings and / or if there are other concepts that can be added to this list:

**Table 7.8: Summary of focused codes derived from the headteacher and the expert teacher in the pilot case study**

Headteacher	Expert teacher (from observations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liking students / empathy with students</li> <li>• Establishing relationships</li> <li>• Focus on learning</li> <li>• Humanity</li> <li>• Laughter</li> <li>• Really good subject knowledge</li> <li>• Passionate</li> <li>• Willing to take risks</li> <li>• Developing confidence and trust</li> <li>• Continual improvement</li> <li>• Determination</li> <li>• Giving time over and above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on students as individuals</li> <li>• Gaining and using 'long term' knowledge of individual students</li> <li>• Giving time to individuals</li> <li>• Encouraging an informal learning environment</li> <li>• Teacher disclosing / sharing information about self</li> <li>• Encouraging dialogue and discussion</li> <li>• Promoting dialogic teaching</li> <li>• Intervening to provoke learning</li> <li>• Responding to student input</li> <li>• Adapting lesson planning and delivery</li> </ul>

Thirdly, the pilot study suggests that there is a relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation. The improvisational nature of Anne’s teaching was seen in two main ways. Her intentional pedagogic strategy is essentially dialogic which means that she is continually responding and reacting to the unexpected. She has a repertoire of ‘call and response’ strategies that she regularly uses. The second way was the improvisation of lesson design, the ‘in the moment’ decisions to adapt or abandon a lesson plan if there is a perceived mismatch between content and student understanding. This suggests that this could certainly be fruitfully explored in other cases.

However two problems emerged as a consequence of undertaking the pilot case study that need to be resolved. One problem is concerned with a key area of the research which is to explore the correlation between expert teaching and improvisation, which had initially been expressed as the question ‘is an expert teacher an ‘improvising pedagogue’? Establishing a correlation between these two concepts is problematical and therefore it is perhaps necessary to consider disconnecting these two ideas. What is evident is that improvisation is not the

exclusive preserve of expert teachers, all teaching is to some extent improvisatory. However if all teachers engage in some kind of improvisatory activity this does raise questions about what might be unique about the ways in which expert teachers improvise. Possible alternative research questions could be to 'how does expertise emerge and express itself within different school cultures?', 'what are the qualities that define expert teaching?' and 'to what extent and how do expert teachers improvise?'

One of the advantages of this change of focus is that it would resolve the potential of criticism, often directed at grounded theory research, which is that the theory should arise out of the data. The initial hypothesis that guided this research was that expert teaching is, by definition, improvisatory; suggesting that the expert teacher is an improvising pedagogue. This change in focus, however, does not abandon the notion of improvisation as an element of this research but instead changes the relationship between the concepts of improvisation and 'expert teaching'. The solution to this problem is to reverse this relationship: instead of looking 'at' expert teaching in order to determine the extent to which it is improvisatory it is viewing it 'from' an improvisatory perspective, the perspective of social constructionism. This can be achieved through looking at the data in two stages. The first stage would be to identify the characteristics and qualities of expert teachers within different school contexts. Having established what makes a teacher an expert, the second stage would be to determine the ways and extent to which improvisation is a facet of expert teaching.

### **3. Methodology, data collection and analysis**

Some of the most significant learning from the pilot case study has been concerned with reviewing the methodology, methods and data analysis. This has resulted from making a precise distinction between methodology and methods and specifically by looking critically at the relationship between case study and grounded theory. Research methodology is concerned with the overall design and approach to the collection and analysis of data (Newby, 2010: 658), 'the assembly of research tools and the application of appropriate research rules, (ibid: 51). Research methods are the research tools themselves. In different circumstances different researchers will use these terms in different ways and this is particularly the case with grounded theory which can be viewed as a methodology as well as a method (Arthur et al. 2012).

This distinction can be explained through seeing grounded theory as a coding technique (a method of data analysis) or as the means to build a theory (a methodology guiding the overall

research design and the approach to the collection of data. Within this research I am using grounded theory as the methodology within a case study design. One of the characteristics of this methodology is that the research process is imbued with ambiguity and uncertainty and one of the important lessons from the pilot project has been concerned with valuing and tolerating the ambiguity of the data analysis process and not rushing towards theorising what has been observed. Hence, the findings from the pilot study have been limited to identifying the key concepts (focused codes) that have emerged from the data. I am now in a better position to understand and develop my own systematic approach to this fluid and ambiguous methodology to be able to see how to go about generating grounded theory from the data.

Specifically this means that I will begin to analyse data as soon as it is collected, using theoretical sampling to determine what data I need to collect next. Theoretical sampling, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is concerned with using the analysis of one source of data to determine where to sample next in order to develop theory based on emerging concepts (Urquhart, 2013: 194). In the pilot case study I viewed data collection and data analysis as two separate processes. This caused problems when starting the analysis as I had so much data to look at and I was unsure where and how to begin. In the end I employed a process that I have called 'retrospective theoretical sampling' through starting off with one observation and then choosing what data is needed to be looked at next.

I also now can see that writing and rewriting are also part of the analytical process as 'each successive draft grows more theoretical and comprehensive' (Charmaz 2006: 154). Writing for me is the process of finding out what I need to write and it is through writing that theory, as the thinking tools that can explain findings (Thomas, 2011), can emerge from the initial and focused coding. The writing of theoretical memos (Glaser, 1978) supports the development of ideas that arise from the codes that are being worked on and contribute to the generation of theory as the explanation of relationship between concepts (Thomas, 2010).

## **7.7 Summary: implications for Phase Two of the research**

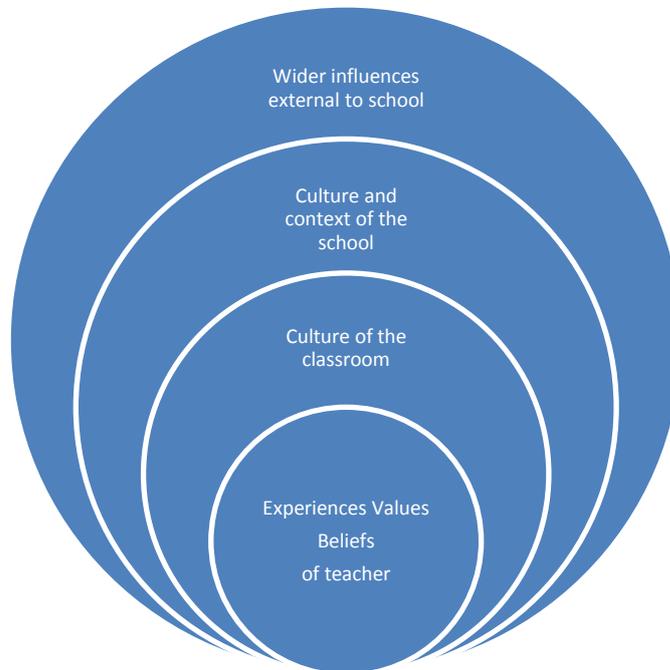
The following recommendations to inform the next stage of the research have emerged from this case study:

1. Express the key research question research as 'how does teacher expertise express itself in different school cultures?'
2. Explore teacher expertise from the philosophical position of social constructionism.
3. Design the research around a grounded theory methodology using a case study framework.
4. Focus the research on teachers in secondary schools in order to gain different views of what it means to be an expert teacher.
5. Use special knowledge cases to select further cases.
6. Limit the scope of the research to five other teachers, each working in different schools.
7. Use theoretical sampling to ensure that a range of secondary schools are represented in the sample.
8. Observe five lessons of each teacher plus a post-observation interview with each.
9. Through immediate data analysis decide on further information to be elicited from teachers e.g. their understanding of improvisation, life history, definitions of teacher expertise.
10. Aim to have all data collected by the first week in June 2013.

Undertaking this pilot case study has provided the overall research design with a philosophical position based in social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and a clearer articulation of the assumptions that lie behind the research focus. Adopting a constructionist view of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to inform the methodology reinforces theory seeking, rather than theory proving, as the purpose of the research (Bassegy, 1999). The research will be based around five comparative case studies of five teachers in five different schools. The quantity of school samples will be restricted in order to explore the case studies in greater depth (Thomas, 2010).

The research questions will be reformulated in order to gain an understanding of the context in which teacher expertise is socially constructed. Whilst keeping the idea of the teacher as the case attention will be given to wider concentric circles of influence, starting with the self and

moving outwards to include the classroom, the culture and context of the school and then influences beyond the school. This is shown in Figure 7.1



**Figure 7.1 Focus for data collection and analysis for Phase Two**

In the next chapter the findings from Phase Two of the research are presented in order to explore how teacher expertise is socially constructed.

# Chapter 8: Phase Two: the findings

*In this chapter I present the findings from Phase Two of the research and analyse them in the light of four themes that emerged from the pilot case study. These themes are the views of expertise held by the teachers, the culture of the classroom, the impact of the school culture and influences beyond the school. The latter influences include the impact that the research has had upon the participants. The chapter concludes with a proposed grounded theory model of teacher expertise.*

## 8.1 Revisions of the research questions

In the light of the experience of the pilot case study the research questions have been revised for Phase Two in order to reflect the nested and concentric circles of influence that impact upon the social construction of teacher expertise. Phase Two of the research is driven by the following four research questions:

1. How are notions of teacher expertise influenced by and expressed by the personal experiences, values and beliefs of teachers?
2. In what ways are these values and beliefs embodied in the expert teacher's classroom practice? In what ways do they improvise?
3. How does the context and culture of the school impact upon and influence teacher expertise?
4. What wider influences beyond the school impact upon and influence teacher expertise?

This sequence of questions begins with focussing on the individual teachers notions of self and identity and then moves outwards to take in wider aspects of the culture of their classroom practice, the impact of school culture and climate and, finally, influences beyond the school. These four themes will be used as headings to present the findings, an approach that allows for cross-case comparisons. A fifth theme explores the impact that the research had on the participants. The headings and the cross-case themes are outlined in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1 Headings and themes for the presentation of the findings from Phase Two of the research**

Heading	Cross-case Themes
The expert teachers: their views	Notions of the expert teacher Views of self as expert Values and beliefs Shaping influences Professional practice Views of improvisation
The culture of the classroom	Creating a climate for learning Developing a community of learners Structuring learning (time and physical space) Sharing / exchanging personal information Giving time to individuals Strong content knowledge Strong examinations / assessment knowledge Effective across the ability range
Culture of the school	Structures within the school School ethos Views of the headteacher Relationship between the expert teacher and headteacher and other staff Extra-curricular activities
Influences beyond the school	Expert teachers' work beyond the school Influence of parents and community Influence of government policy
Influence of the researcher	Impact of the research

## 8.2 Introducing the participants

Six teachers participated in Phase Two of the research working in four secondary schools across the South West of England: two schools are in Wiltshire, one in Hampshire, one in Somerset and one in Devon. The sample group comprised three women and three men. All participants, and the schools that they work in have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and these are presented in Table 8.2 in order to provide the reader with a 'who's who' guide that they can refer back to. The details given were accurate at the time of writing (February 2014).

**Table 8.2 Names used in the reporting of findings of Phase Two of the research**

<b>Name of expert teacher</b>	<b>Name of school</b>	<b>Name of headteacher</b>
Barbara	The Milton School	Ben
Helen	The Wordsworth Academy	Charles
Eleanor	The Geoffrey Chaucer Academy	Alan
Harry	The Shakespeare Community School	William
John	The Shakespeare Community School	
Richard	The Shakespeare Community School	

The following pen portraits introduce the teachers and the schools in which they work. The information about each school has been taken from their most recent Ofsted report (source protected), their prospectus, website and other publicity material that exists in the public domain.

**Barbara: The Milton Academy**

Barbara has taught English and Media Studies at The Milton Academy for twelve years and this is the only school that she has taught in. She was appointed as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) of English and subsequently also taught Media Studies. She is currently the subject leader for Media Studies and is second in the English Department.

The Milton Academy is a larger than the average sized mixed secondary school and holds specialist status for science. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. A very small number of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with that found in most schools. The majority of these students have specific or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school meets the government's current floor standards for academic performance which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. The school has boarding provision for 26 students, of whom a few are from overseas.

The headteacher, Ben, has been at the school since 2008 and was deputy head at the school prior to his current appointment. Since 2010 the school has worked in partnership with Bath Spa University on a Masters accredited continuing professional development programme which is still ongoing. The relationship that has developed as a consequence of this programme allowed the researcher to request and be granted access to the school as a research site.

### **Helen: The Wordsworth Academy**

Helen has taught Modern Languages at The Wordsworth Academy since 1994 and she is currently an Advanced Skills Teacher with the remit to support the quality of teaching and learning in her own school as well as other local primary and secondary schools.

The Wordsworth Academy is a larger than average mixed secondary school and has a specialist school status for technology. In March 2010 there were 1,237 pupils on roll of which 161 were in the sixth form. The school converted to Academy status on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010.

A very large proportion of pupils are of White British origin and a very small number are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with special educational needs and / or disabilities is above average and their needs include specific learning, severe learning and speech, language and communication difficulties. The school holds a number of awards which include Investors in People and Healthy School, and the Financial Management Standard in Schools accreditation. (Ofsted: March 2010).

The last full Ofsted inspection took place in March 2010 and the school was judged overall to be grade 1 (outstanding).

The headteacher, Charles, has been at The Wordsworth Academy for 13 years having previously been the headteacher for five years in another school in the county. When he arrived at the school he considered that the school was at risk of failing an Ofsted inspection and required a completed overhaul in terms of the leadership, structures and culture.

### **Eleanor: The Geoffrey Chaucer Academy**

Eleanor has been teaching for 30 years and has spent 20 years at The Geoffrey Chaucer School. She is a member of the Senior Leadership Team and is the Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for Teaching and Learning and teaches English and Media Studies. In 2011 Eleanor

participated in a Master's level work-based action enquiry project with Bath Spa University. As a consequence of this project she agreed to participate in this research.

Eleanor left The Geoffrey Chaucer School in December 2013 in order to take up a headship position.

The Geoffrey Chaucer School is a larger than average-sized mixed secondary school and is one of three secondary schools serving a town with a population of around 30,000. It became an academy in April 2012. Prior to becoming an academy the Geoffrey Chaucer Academy was judged to be 'good' when last inspected by Ofsted. In April 2013 there were 1,271 pupils in the school and a further 168 pupils in the sixth form. The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for looked-after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals) is average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average. The school uses alternative, off-site provision for a small number of students and receives Year 7 catch-up programme funding for just over 50 students who did not attain Level 4 in reading and/or mathematics at the end of primary school. The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress (Ofsted, 2013).

The headteacher of the Geoffrey Chaucer School is called Alan. This is his second headship and he moved from an 11 – 16 school in order to be head of an 11 – 18 school. Although when he arrived at the school it was deemed to be 'satisfactory' by Ofsted the school had experienced an unsettled time and he felt that *'the depth of the cracks in the school needed a lot of healing'*. He sees the character of the school population as being challenging and acknowledges that teachers need strong inner resources to deal with the issues faced in this kind of school.

#### **Harry, John and Richard: The Shakespeare Community College.**

Harry is a Science teacher who is 41 years old. He came to teaching after a career as a research scientist where he gained a PhD and he was 34 when he took his PGCE. He has been teaching at the Shakespeare Community College for six years and this is the only school in which he has taught.

John is a teacher of Drama who is 29 years old. He has been at the Shakespeare Community College for 3 years and this is the first school that he has taught in. He has a professional theatre background and prior to being appointed at the college had worked in theatre in education.

Richard is the Head of Drama and Director of Arts and is also a Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Lead practitioner for Drama. He is 47 years old and has been at the Shakespeare Community College for 8 years. He qualified as a teacher in 1993 and has spent 20 years working in schools. He has co-written a book on the ways in which drama can be used to promote authentic learning in secondary schools.

The Shakespeare Community College is a popular mixed comprehensive school serving a rural town and the surrounding villages. In 2008 there were 1,318 pupils in the school and a further 294 pupils in the 6<sup>th</sup> form. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or with a first language other than English. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, although the proportion of these students with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. Science specialist status was granted in 2004, followed by Leading Edge in 2006 and Arts in September 2007. At the last Ofsted inspection in 2008 the school was judged to be 1 (outstanding) in all categories (Ofsted: 2008). The Shakespeare Community College became a 'converter' academy on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

'The College aspires to be one of the best schools in England and this marks the next phase in its upward spiral of development.... The College was offered the chance to become an Academy by the Department for Education because of its outstanding track record of results and its outstanding Ofsted inspection' (Shakespeare Community College website: accessed 5.1.2013).

The headteacher, William, has been at the school since 1998. When he arrived the school had just received an Ofsted inspection and was deemed to be good with outstanding features. William's ambition was to make the school outstanding overall. He has a national profile as a school leader and writes on leadership for the National College and the Times Educational Supplement.

The research undertaken by Day et al. (2006), 'Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness' (the VITAE project), identified six professional life phases that related to experience rather than age or responsibilities. These six phases are summarised in Table 8.3.

**Table 8:3 A summary of the six professional life phases from the VITAE project (from Day et al., 2006)**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
0 - 3	Commitment: support and challenge.	Developing a sense of efficacy in the classroom. A phase of high commitment. Support of school / department leaders crucial.
4 - 7	Identity and efficacy in the classroom.	Increased confidence about being effective teachers. Additional responsibilities for majority in this phase (78%) further strengthen emerging identities.
8 - 15	Managing changes in role and identity: growing tensions and transitions.	A watershed phase with 80% of teachers having posts of responsibility and there were many decisions to make about career progression.
16 - 23	Work-life tensions: challenges to motivation and commitment.	As well as managing heavy workloads many face additional demands outside school. Work-life balance is an issue. Risk at this stage of career stagnation linked to lack of support in the school and negative perceptions of pupil behaviour.
24 - 30	Challenges to sustaining motivation.	Maintaining motivation in the face of external policies and initiatives, which were viewed negatively, and declining pupil behaviour.
31 +	Sustaining declining motivation, looking for change, looking to retire.	For the majority of teachers this was a phase of high commitment and motivation.

In a later paper Gu and Day (2013) reduced these six phases into three broad groups: early career teachers (0-3 and 4-7), middle career teachers (8-15 and 16-23) and late career teachers

(24-30 and 31+). Table 8.4 shows the teachers in the Phase Two research sample in relation to these categories.

**Table 8.4 Teachers in Phase Two research sample according to professional life phases**

<b>6 phases (Day et al., 2006)</b>	<b>3 groups (Gu and Day, 2013)</b>	<b>Teachers in research sample</b>
<b>0 - 3</b>	<b>Early career teachers</b>	<b>John</b>
<b>4 - 7</b>		<b>Harry</b>
<b>8 - 15</b>	<b>Middle career teachers</b>	<b>Anne, Barbara</b>
<b>16 - 23</b>		<b>Richard, Helen</b>
<b>24 - 30</b>	<b>Late career teachers</b>	
<b>31 +</b>		<b>Eleanor</b>

There are a number of issues that arise from this. Whilst John had only been teaching for three years (he started in September 2011) it was evident from observing him teach that he had certainly developed both his confidence and his efficacy as a teacher and displayed the characteristics of teachers in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> years of their professional life. If we take into account the view that expertise is achieved through 10,000 hours of practice (Gladwell, 2008) then, taking into account the initial training of teachers, this would mean that expertise would be expected within the 4 to 7 year phase. This would take into account experience and understanding of the longer time scales of education; the school year, the length of a key stage and (in secondary schools) the five year passage from year 7 to year 11.

### **8.3 The findings**

The findings from Phase two of the research is presented to show common themes that have been drawn out of the data. Given that the one of the aims of the research has been to privilege the voices of teachers and other professionals extended quotations from the participants are used to provide a rich description of their understanding of teacher expertise.

### 8.3.1 The views of the expert teachers

This section explores the attitudes that the teachers have towards teacher expertise and the term 'expert teacher'. As has been previously noted, the term 'expert teacher' does not commonly feature within educational discourse partly because teachers themselves do not like this word when it is applied to teaching (Goodwyn, 2011: 1). This attitude was identified in the pilot case study where Anne displayed a reticence to apply this term to herself. Not only did she not see herself as an expert but she did not want to be referred to using this term and this resulted in a compromise that I would use an alternative term 'an established teacher'. To what extent were these concerns raised with the other participants? A range of views were expressed about this. Barbara, for example, recognised the challenging nature of being an expert teacher, emphasising that it is about continual improvement.

*Barbara: It's a tall order; it's someone who is learning the whole time, already thinking about the next lesson to ensure the progress of all children....I don't think that there is a tick list of what makes an expert teacher in terms of solid proof but there is a more reflective approach.*

She went on to expand upon this point that expertise is a process of continually evolving and improving.

*Barbara: a real expert teacher is a self-reflective teacher .... They put changes into planning and teaching immediately rather than wait.*

This viewpoint shows the importance of self-reflective / critical knowledge (Habermas, 1972) and also reflects his view that this knowledge impels action. Whilst rejecting essentialist notions of 'the expert teacher' Barbara was able to list some important characteristics. This list follows the order in which she thought of these ideas and suggests a form of prioritisation. Like Anne, in the pilot case study she thought that knowledge of the pupils was a significant area of knowledge.

- Knowing pupils (*very important*);
- Knowing the qualifications (meaning the syllabus and grading requirements);
- High expectations;
- Atmosphere in the classroom (*you need to be positive and leave your life at the door*);

- Having a mutual respect for pupils (*and vice versa in that they will respect you*);
- Risk taking ('open mindedness in the way you teach');
- Taking ideas from other people ('and manipulating them to your own benefit').

With the exception of 'knowing the qualifications' the qualities that she mentions are all concerned with the relationships with the students, approaches to teaching and learning from other members of staff. These are all social qualities and, interestingly, no mention is made of content knowledge. This seems to be a characteristic of expert teaching that is taken for granted.

The importance of reflection and having opportunities to learn from other teachers was also raised by Helen. For her expertise was something that you were continually working toward and, because of this, she felt that it was important for teachers to be pro-active in seeking opportunities for development.

*Helen: I think that .... I don't think that anybody can ever be an expert teacher but I think you can be an aspiring expert and I think that denotes knowledge and skill and I think that one of the things that I learnt as I became a teaching and learning coach is that you have to be proactive in seeking that knowledge and then that can help you to develop your skills. So I was at a stage in my teaching probably about 10 years ago where I was getting very good assessments but I didn't know how to pass that knowledge onto other people because I didn't know what it was about my practice that was good. And so I have spent the rest of the time since, and I will spend the rest of my teaching career probably, continuing to develop that knowledge and then practising those skills so I can actually develop my own practice towards expert. Like I said, I don't think I'll ever get there. I don't think anyone can ever get there because there is always more to learn there's always more to develop and the job changes so often so there's always other directions to keep you interested and keep you moving forward so there's that side of it but also then being able to pass that on to other people.*

Helen's understanding of her own professional development was seen in relation to working with other teachers, a social process of mutual learning. She also saw the development of expertise as an ongoing process determined by the changes within the educational world.

Harry also did not consider the term 'expert teacher' as one that he would use when thinking about teaching: *I probably don't think of (the term) an expert teacher.* He developed his ideas

about what an expert teacher might be. He did begin by recognising the importance of subject knowledge but acknowledged that pedagogical content knowledge was more significant.

Harry: *I suppose it's what is teaching: a) having subject knowledge (and I probably am) and b) practice in classroom, being good at getting it across to young people. You can be good at b) with a little of a). You need to be a good people person, to cajole, inspire and enthuse. To be a true expert you would bring the two together.*

Harry went on to say that there was no one approach to being an expert teacher, *no golden bullet*, but that you needed to modify what you are doing for different people. He thought that it was important that teachers should be honest with pupils as to why they are being asked to learn particular things and that teaching should allow them *an opportunity to manipulate a concept in their brain*. He also identified the importance of humour (*I do try*), honesty and *being interested in the kids in the middle, the invisible one's who are expert at not being spotted*.

Richard had a similar view to Harry in that he also saw expertise as combining the two elements of subject knowledge (which he referred to as the technical element) and communication, being able to *'sell it to the students'*. As a drama teacher he saw the technical element as being derived from theatre skills and the more experiential 'drama in role' approach.

The view of teacher expertise that emerges from the findings is that expertise is seen as a process of 'working towards' rather than a state that is arrived at. In other words the view of the teachers was that there was no defined mature or final state and this fits in with the view of a Transformative Teleology which focusses on 'moving towards'. There is a clear preference for the identity of 'a teacher with expertise' over 'an expert teacher' as the latter is seen as being unobtainable. Expertise is arrived at through having the motivation to continually learn through reflection and to be willing to adapt and change your practice.

Through reflection these teachers are able to develop specific skills and are able to achieve things that other, less experienced teachers are unable to. There is openness to modifying their practice, perhaps with immediate effect and an awareness of the importance of constantly practising the skills required of a teacher. Learning from other teachers is seen to be very important and this is a two way process: there is much that is learnt through supporting other teachers. Whilst content knowledge accepted as being important pedagogical content knowledge was given greater significance. A further area of important knowledge was having a detailed knowledge of the examination systems and this seems to represent a distinct form of

knowledge that is not accounted for in other accounts of teacher knowledge. A further essential aspect of teaching was seen to be the ability to form positive relationships with pupils.

These ideas reflect Habermas's notion of a critical / self-reflective knowledge (1972) that leads to action. Adaptation is impelled by self-knowledge and the findings show a connection between knowledge and action. The importance of relationships and the need to have a detailed understanding of pupils reflected the findings of the pilot case study and reinforced Lovat's (2013) argument for the significance of values based education within Habermas's theories. This is understandable given that self-knowledge leads to a greater understanding of others.

Derek, in the pilot case study, spoke about the importance of being able to establish meaningful relationships in the classroom and thought that expert teachers had the capacity to create an *immense empathy* where *their humanity is at the forefront of all that they do*. This point of view recognises the 'humanness' of teaching, the values of benevolence and kindness. The implication of this is that as a teacher you recognise the importance of seeing your pupils as human beings and, likewise, they need to see you as being human. The relational aspect of teaching is clearly important and the ability to create positive relationships with pupils as individuals is an important aspect of teacher expertise. This approach to teaching goes beyond the instrumental and seeks to be 'authentic' through being based in emotional values.

For Barbara this meant that she wanted to be recognised as a human being, as *a person with equal challenges in life, in and outside the classroom*. This means that she is aware that her own performance as a teacher can be variable, that she might not always get it right ... *I'll try something new .... see if it works .... on other days I think I'm useless today*.

There was also evidence of the way in which the life experiences of the teacher shaped and influenced their professional identity and their classroom practice. Helen disclosed to me that she had experienced an abusive childhood, both physically and emotionally and that this life experience had had a significant impact upon the way that she teaches. In my final interview with Helen I double checked with her as to whether I should include this information in my thesis and, if so, how it should be reported. She replied that this information was *most important* and that she wanted it to be mentioned. There was also another story that Helen told me that was of significance to her. She has a twin sister and they went to the same school. They both did exceptionally well, her sister was always first in the class and Helen was second.

According to Helen both of these experiences have had a profound impact on her work as a teacher and have informed her values, beliefs and her professional practice.

*Helen: I learnt what it would be like as a student in my room if I was saying negative things to them. All my teaching is about .... my philosophy is just making people comfortable in my classroom (making them feel) that they are worth something. I can develop their confidence and make them feel worthy as a human being. No matter what their background or intelligence I'm acutely aware of that all the time I am in the classroom – not to damage them emotionally.*

*I don't show anger or ever get wound up because I'm used to taking all the rubbish. Out of something horrendous came something fantastic.*

*Because .... All of that horrible period growing up has been really worthwhile because now I have a life with a job that absolutely I love .... I come to school and it's like doing a hobby. Sometimes I think 'why is (the head) paying me to do this?' because I absolutely love it.*

Being a teacher has provided her with a professional identity and a space in which she can embody her values and beliefs that have been shaped by her traumatic childhood. In effect she has used this experience to shape the lifeworld (Habermas 1987) of her classroom. Other teachers also mentioned the importance of having a respect for the pupils and having an understanding of the difficulties that they might be going through and taking account of this in their teaching.

### **Views of improvisation**

All of the teachers agreed with the suggestion that there was a link between expert teaching and improvisation. They perceived that the ability to improvise was dependent on experience and the confidence that teachers gained over a period of time. Barbara recognised that expertise gained through experience means that she does things without thinking about them.

*Barbara: I think a lot of your expertise over time becomes second nature. So whilst when I started I might plan lessons in great detail, write down every question I was going to ask, I think of these questions immediately now.*

One of the characteristics of expert performance is that experts are able to access a broad repertoire of responses to situations, over time they develop an automaticity to what they do,

drawing on their tacit knowledge. She also acknowledged that being able to improvise was a confidence issue which was also linked with taking risks.

Barbara: *With experience there is less fear that things will go wrong and that it is OK to chuck an idea out into the open and run with it..... I think there needs to be an element of things coming on automatic pilot.*

Harry also agreed that there was a link between expert teaching and improvisation. Like Barbara he saw improvisation as being related to how much planning needed to be done.

Harry: *I'm totally with you on that, it's (i.e. improvisation) really important. But it's obvious really. If we go back to the PGCE student, strict plan .... timings, this hinders .... Over planning can limit.*

He went on to reflect on how experience was necessary in order to be able to improvise successfully, specifically drawing attention to having an understanding of the longer time frames that were involved in teaching.

Harry: *It can only happen when you know how long it's going to take to teach the course. (You need to be) confident that the time you spend now is worth it. (The) sub conscious expert level, it's very valuable. You'd be brave to do it in PGCE or the first and second year of teaching. You need to go through the course a number of times.*

This supports the idea that expertise can only be developed over a period of time and that teacher expertise includes having experience of the cycle of terms, school years and key stages. This suggests that whilst some teachers might demonstrate outstanding performance in the early phase of their career, expert practice may not be seen until they have spent between four and seven years working in schools (Day et al., 2006).

Richard talked about how the way that he reacts to his classes in order to influence the learning. He explained that there was an expression that he used with his drama classes: *'I can tell from the sounds that you are making that the work is not going in the direction I want it to go in'.* Through experience he is able to understand the 'tone' or 'sounds' of the students. *'Is that improvisation?' he asked 'It's changing direction I suppose but its reacting isn't it, whereas teachers who are less confident will let it run because that is what the plan is.'* He made an interesting point about the impact of being observed. *'I like a plan, don't get me wrong' but I like to take it in a different direction if William (the headteacher) is not watching me'.*

John also '*definitely agreed*' that there is a link between expertise and improvisation. He considered this to be about moving away from the lesson plan.

John: *I'm very strict with my planning but once I know what I'm doing I can then improvise slightly. If students need a bit more time then I can give it to them because I know where I can come back in. I won't lose the plot of the lesson or the arc of where I'm going.*

He also recognised that an important aspect of improvisation in the classroom was the way in which it can bring about a shift in the power relationship between the teacher and the students.

John: *If you have a strict agenda then it's your agenda, it's not the students' agenda, it's not what they want. If there is an aspect of the lesson that they want to explore in greater depth you've got to be prepared to take that step with them and allow them.*

He thought that this approach would not be acceptable for every teacher as there would be some who would not be comfortable in deviating from their plan.

John: *I think improvisation is massively important .... It's the difference between teaching a student and showing a student (what to do).*

The point that he is making is that improvisation is about the interactions that a teacher has with their students as opposed to simply showing, or telling, them what to do.

However, within the sample of teachers that I interviewed there was one who, initially, did not see herself as an improviser. In her first interview with me Helen explained her views on expert teaching and improvisation.

Helen: *I wouldn't say that I'm an improviser. But I suppose it all depends what you mean by improvisation. If you mean that it's a lesson where it is taking you one way and you then change it and improvise with the students then I'm not that person really. If you mean the kind of person that will go out and try new ideas, yes that's me. But it always has to be in quite a planned format for me.*

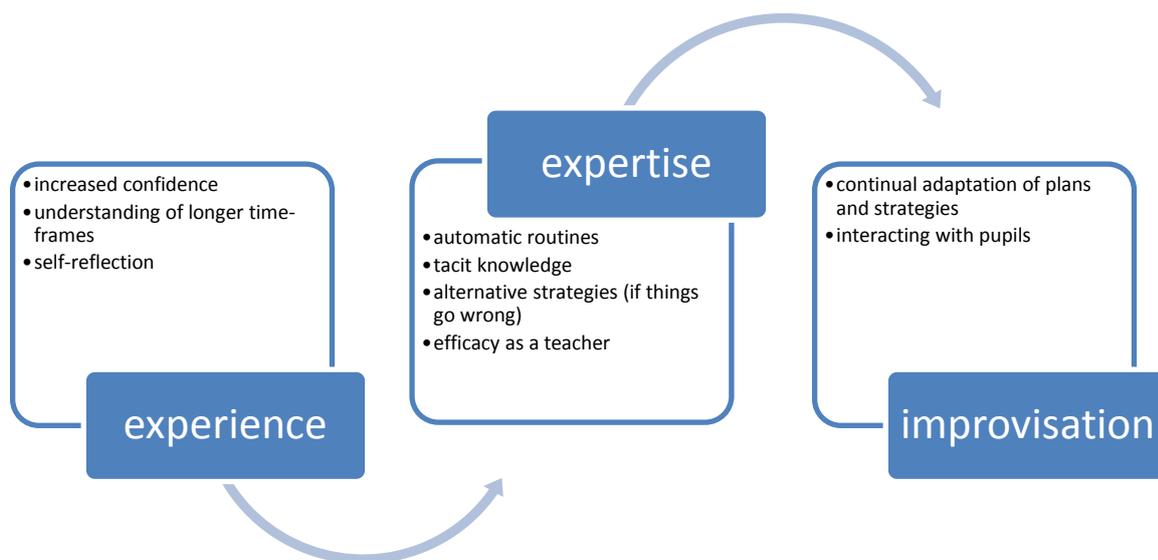
Essentially Helen planned in advance every aspect of the lesson making sure at every step of the way that she was clear about what she was going to do and that all the resources required for that particular lesson were in place. She felt that you needed to be very competent in order to improvise. Whereas she didn't see herself as an improvising teacher she recognised this as a positive quality in other teachers; *the best teacher (in the school) is a history teacher and he is*

*an improviser*. Whilst Helen did not acknowledge improvisation in the classroom she did see that she improvised with her lesson plans (outside of the classroom).

From these views it is evident that improvisation within the classroom was seen to be very important to all of the teachers, that it was a positive and desirable aspect of teaching and was associated with teacher expertise. I have used these findings to create a theoretical framework, a grounded theory of improvisation within the context of teacher expertise.

Improvisation in the classroom occurs in two main ways: deviating away from or adapting a lesson plan 'in the moment' and interacting with students and responding to them. These two activities are linked as interacting with students will inevitably lead to a revision of predetermined lesson plans.

The ability to improvise is dependent on experience which results in having greater confidence in the classroom. Necessary experiences would include having an efficacy in the classroom, a repertoire of strategies that work with a range of students and an understanding of the longer time-frames of the educational year and the cycle of key stages. Many of the routines of teaching and interacting will be automatic, relying on the tacit knowledge which allows the teacher to 'sense' when and how to intervene to change the direction or focus of the learning. Greater confidence allows for teachers to take risks in their teaching, knowing that if something doesn't work there will be a way of rescuing the situation. As teachers feel able to respond to the needs and interests of their students there is the potential for a shift in the power relationship between teacher and pupils. The findings suggest that the ability to improvise is an important aspect of teacher expertise which is dependent on the acquisition of automaticity and tacit knowledge which, in turn, arises out of experience. This relationship is articulated in the theoretical model shown in Figure 8.1.



**Figure 8.1 Theoretical model showing the relationship between experience, expertise and improvisation**

### **8.3.2 The culture of the classroom**

The previous section of the findings has looked at teacher expertise, values and beliefs and the importance of improvisation through the eyes of the teachers. In this section the data collected from undertaking lesson observations is analysed in order to examine how the views of the teachers are expressed through their practice and the ways in which the culture of the classroom reflected the relationships that they had established with their students. This data is viewed from the perspective of the researcher as participant observer in order to answer the questions:

- In what ways do the teachers demonstrate their expertise?
- What examples are there of improvisation?
- What evidence is there to support or contradict the views that they expressed about themselves?

All of the teachers offered what I have called a key statement, or headline, that summarised their view of what expert teaching was all about. These are shown in table 8.5

**Table 8.5 Headlines of teacher expertises**

Teacher	Headline
Anne	<i>knowing the backstory, that's what expert teaching is all about.</i>
Barbara	<i>that's the nature of expertise, it's the dialogue in the classroom.</i>
Harry	<i>enthusiasm (for the subject)</i>
John	<i>relationships with students</i>
Richard	<i>What expert teachers do is bring a technical element to classroom practice (the technical skills and associated subject knowledge). Selling it to students is another skill, to communicate why and demonstrate how. Expert teachers I have come across have both skills.</i>
Eleanor	<i>high expectations for all</i>
Helen	<i>My philosophy is just making people feel comfortable in my classroom, feeling that they are worth something. I can develop their confidence and make them feel worthy as a human being.</i>

In what ways did these dominant ideas influence the culture of the classroom?

The teachers were very aware that positive relationships with pupils had to be built and also maintained and that this could be a lengthy process. The lesson observations for Phase Two of the research took place between February and April 2013, at which point the school year was well underway. Two of the teachers (Helen and Eleanor) remarked that if I had come to see them in September I would have seen a very different kind of teaching.

The field notes of the lesson observations for each individual participant were subjected to a process of open coding. This identified specific areas of expertise for each of the teachers. Following on from this a cross case analysis was undertaken to look for common areas and themes. Eight areas of expertise were identified and they are:

1. creating a climate for learning;
2. developing a community of learners;
3. structuring learning;
4. sharing / exchanging personal information;

5. giving time to individuals;
6. having strong content knowledge;
7. having strong knowledge of the examinations and assessment procedures;
8. being effective across the ability range.

A distinction can be made between the climate and the culture of the classroom. For the purposes of the research the term climate is being used in relation to those aspects of the classroom that are controlled and directed by the teacher whilst the term culture is being used to refer to the shared beliefs and the social behaviour of both the teacher and the pupils within the classroom situation. All of the teachers observed had made clear decisions about how their lessons would begin and end. They had well established routines however they differed in the extent that they were formalised. Barbara had very clear and formal expectations for the start of all of the lessons. As the pupils entered the classroom they sat in places that were determined by a seating plan and copied the learning objective and the homework set into their exercise books. A very different approach was used by Eleanor who used background music to create a relaxed atmosphere. Many of the teachers used the very start of the lesson, as the pupils entered the classroom, as an opportunity for humour. Other aspects of the climate established by the teacher included high expectations of behaviour, a sense of trust and respect for the pupils and an expectation that this would be reciprocated. Whether the lesson started with a greater or lesser degree of formality the pupils were engaged in learning at the earliest opportunity.

Another common theme was the ability of all the teachers to create a community of learners, emphasising the social nature of learning and setting cultural expectations that pupils would learn from each other and support the learning of their peers. This was particularly evident in a year 10 English lesson that was taught by Barbara. The lesson was based around a speaking and listening activity in order that Barbara could assess them for their GCSE examination. The examination board required evidence of interrogating, sustained listening skills and challenging assumptions. Three students at a time went to the front of the class and, in role, presented their case as to why they should stay in the balloon. The pupils were encouraged to ask questions not only to provide evidence of their own speaking and listening skills but to help others to improve on their target grades.

The teachers showed skill in the way that the lessons were structured. Routine activities were well embedded and this ensured that activities such as taking the register did not disrupt or detract from the learning. Some teachers took the register whilst the lesson was underway whilst others, Helen for example, used the register as a way of engaging every member of the class in the lesson. In her German lessons the register was taken in German and the pupils, after they had replied that they were present, had to answer a question that was based on the starter activity such as stating what the next step in their learning was going to be.

A common feature of the structure of lessons was the alternation between teacher directed activities and group, pair or individual work. This variety of activity gave the lessons pace and time was used very economically with clear indications as to how long each group activity would take. Teachers had different techniques for indicating when an activity was due to come to an end.

The division of the lesson into different activities not only reinforced a culture where learning was a cooperative and shared activity but also gave the teacher time to work with individuals. Eleanor, in a year nine media lesson, established group tasks and then went round targeting individuals who needed the most support. She made sure that she spent time with H as he was behind with his coursework and also because he has been away from school. Pupils welcomed the opportunity to choose what they were going to do and also appreciated that Eleanor 'didn't get in the way of the learning, we can just keep going'. However they also commented that she would always help if a pupil was stuck.

One of the foundations of teacher expertise is strong content knowledge and this was often backed up by experience of working in other professional contexts. Richard and John, both drama teachers, had experience of working in theatre in education and Harry had worked as a research scientist before coming into teaching. Barbara, Helen and Eleanor all had extensive experience of working in education. The subject knowledge came through in the way that they developed the vocabulary and the concepts that were appropriate to the subject. However it was noticeable that many of the teachers displayed detailed knowledge of the examination system, in some cases this was derived from their role as an external examiner or moderator or the consequence of training received from specific examination boards. A key theme in many of the lessons that were observed was the detail given to developing examination answers and the ways in which pupils were shown how to get the maximum points from a particular question. A feature of Barbara's lessons was that she would try to get her pupils to get into the mind of the

examiner. At the end of a year 11 media studies lesson she asked 'if there was a question in an exam that required you to think about scheduling what would the question be? It would be a 10 mark question'.

A further characteristic of these teachers is their ability to teach effectively across the ability range. In two cases, Barbara and Helen, I saw them teach classes that represented the most able and the least able pupils in their respective schools. The approach that they had was broadly consistent although with the less able was that the learning was structured to a much greater extent in order to show them that they could make progress.

One aspect of the trust and respect that the teachers developed in their classrooms was concerned with the way that they shared personal information about themselves with their pupils. One of the characteristics of Anne that was noted in the pilot case study was that she shared a great deal of personal information about herself with her pupils. Whilst this is an important way in which a teacher can build a relationship with their pupils, it is also problematical. There are boundaries that need to be observed and, on both sides, there is an element of trust. I observed other teachers using this approach.

Barbara, for example, in a year 11 Media lesson, began talking about one of her favourite television programmes, 'Hollyoaks'. This reference was evidently a running theme with the class. There had been other occasions where I noted that she had included personal stories in her lessons. A year 10 English lesson concluded with her telling a story about an event she had attended with her husband for servicemen and women who were leaving the Army. She explained that each person who was leaving had to have an advocate to speak on their behalf. One advocate had been very fluent and funny whilst another had not been so coherent. She used this story to illustrate the importance of developing speaking skills for 'real life' situations. In the post-observation interview I asked her if she felt that talking about herself was important.

*Barbara: Well that's funny because I was thinking about that when we were talking earlier. When I trained, I studied at UWE (the University of the West of England) I remember distinctly being told off about referring to my personal life in front of the class; that was seen as bad practice. But actually I find it really helpful and I do it a heck of a lot. I did it this morning with the year 10 class. I do it an awful lot because a) it makes it relevant, b) it humanises me and it helps the relationship.*

Barbara is aware that she uses these personal stories in different ways. The 'Hollyoaks' references, *'it's a bit of a joke now'*, provide Barbara with the chance to connect with a lower ability student *'it's my tap-in'*. On other occasions stories illustrate real life contexts for the skills and knowledge that the pupils are learning. Allowing the pupils to see her as a real person is also motivational, which she relates to the way in which she is motivated by her headteacher.

*Barbara: It helps you to come across as likeable and human, like the head. You are motivated by him because he is a human being. It's really important that you are not some kind of robot.*

Another use is when dealing with incidents of misbehaviour. She talked about responding to a sarcastic comment from a pupil. She shared that she was not feeling on top of the world but *'look, I bothered to come into school today'*.

For Barbara these personal stories are helpful, a useful response when required. Through humanising herself she is aligning herself with her pupils and the engagement in a *'common cause'*. Her expertise in using these stories is based on her experience as a teacher which enables her to gauge the level of what is, and what is not, appropriate to share.

Alan recognised the importance of self-awareness:

*I actually think that an expert teacher is actually somebody who is very self-aware, that they are almost a self-expert. Because in my experience, I think, that those teachers who struggle are often people who are not particularly in touch with themselves .... They don't come across to the children as being complete or whole or ..... There's a person standing in front of them.*

*The old rule you don't smile until Christmas and all of that, well for me that's always been crazy. But it's indicative that you don't show the child yourself, whereas I've always argued no you let them know who you are as quickly as you can. You don't tell them your life story and stuff. But a bit of advice I give to teachers that are struggling sometimes is to put on their laptop screen, so when the children come into the room .... and they have a picture of themselves jumping off a high diving board all rock climbing or something so the children get the sense that there is this person in the classroom but actually there is a person beyond this classroom.*

The teachers observed had all developed a unique climate for learning within their respective classrooms. Their personalities and approaches to teaching, combined with the way that they shared personal information about themselves, and took an interest in their pupils as individuals

### 8.3.4 The impact of the school culture

#### The headteachers' perspectives

School culture, as defined by Schein (1985: 6), is 'the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken-for-granted' fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment'. This makes it one of the most complex and important concepts in education (Stoll, 1998) shaped by numerous factors: history, context and people. When the teachers were asked about this they invariably mentioned the importance of the headteacher in defining the culture of the school.

How are notions of what it means to be an expert teacher influenced and shaped by the culture of a school? The research explored one significant influence on school culture through interviewing all of the headteachers in the selected schools. A headteacher plays a significant role in determining and shaping the culture of a school and many of the teachers who were interviewed stated how important the headteacher was in determining the direction of the school and having an influence on the way that they taught. An interview was undertaken with the headteacher of each of the schools in the research sample in order to explore these issues in order to provide a broader context in which to understand teacher expertise.

The headteachers had each been at the school for varying periods of time ranging from three years to fifteen years. For some this was their first headship whilst others had gained previous experience of the role. The headteachers also gave their personal view of the state of their current school when they were appointed. This information is summarised in Table 8.5. I have also included Derek, the head of the school in the pilot case study in this table as a point of comparison. My own analysis of the state of the school at the start of the headship is placed in square brackets and uses Hopkins et al. (1994) four expressions of school culture (91)

**Table 8.5 Summary of experience of the headteachers interviewed**

<b>Name and school</b>	<b>Years at current school</b>	<b>Previous headship and for how long</b>	<b>State of current school at start of headship</b>
Charles Wordsworth Academy	13	Yes – 5 years	Critical “would fail an Ofsted inspection” [stuck]
William Shakespeare Community School	15	No	“Good with outstanding features” [moving]
Alan Geoffrey Chaucer Academy	10	Yes - 3 years	“at quite serious risk” [stuck]
Ben The Milton School	3	No but had been deputy head at the school for 3 years prior to being appointed head	“coasting” [promenading]
Derek The Blake School	15	Yes -3	“coasting” [promenading]

As Table 8.5 demonstrates each of the schools were at very different stages when the headteacher was appointed, nevertheless whether the school required significant improvement within a short space of time or wanting to be ‘outstanding’ issues of culture needed to be addressed. All of the headteachers talked about the need to update systems and structures within the school and that this organisational change helped to reorientate, define and refocus the culture of the school.

Asking the participants to define what the term ‘school culture’ meant proved to be a challenging question to answer and the heads took their time in coming up with an answer.

*Ben: it’s the .... it’s the .... I don’t know .... It’s the question that I ask candidates on interview all the time! You get a sense of the values, when you walk through the door you get a sense of the values of the school, the idea, the vision for that school, the ethos of the school. You get a sense of what is unique about the school environment.*

Charles saw it in terms of the things that you do, and don’t do, in a school.

Charles: *it's interesting, when you try and define it. It's really difficult. It's almost the default setting, the culture is ..... I can't remember the last time that I heard someone shouting at a pupil, it's an absolute taboo, you know you just don't do it.*

He thought that it came down to the one or two key priorities that define the way that the school operates. The notion of having key principles to focus the development of the school was common to all the participants and they expressed broadly similar aims: putting a focus on the pupils, high expectations that all can achieve and a focus on the quality of teaching and learning.

All the heads gave examples of the ways in which their behaviour was significant in sending out signals that defined the culture that they wanted to develop. Alan described an incident that he witnessed when he visited the school prior to actually taking up his post, seeing eight children being forced to stand with their faces to the wall because they had refused to go to a detention.

Alan: *So I actually went into the hall, I had no role whatsoever in the school at that time, and I said to the assistant headteacher "Can I have a word with the children?" I sat them down and asked what the situation was and I'm so glad that I did it. Boy, it sent shock waves through the school!*

Likewise Charles in his early days at the school went down to the place where the smokers hung out.

Charles: *the word went round and by the end of an hour the whole school knew that the new head had been down to where the smokers were. Nobody had been down there because it was so bad .... so you start to do things and this immediately begins to change the culture. And then when a child swears at a teacher you deal with that effectively and the word goes out, and in the past those things haven't really been responded to.*

Ben made the point that as a headteacher he wanted to be seen to model the qualities that he expected in his staff. He was keen to promote a culture whereby teachers would feel secure in taking risks so he encourages risk taking in the way that he will try different approaches to organising the school day.

Three aspects of school culture were seen as having an impact on the development of teacher expertise: having a focus on teaching and learning that encourages reflection, providing teachers with a degree of autonomy and encouraging a culture where it is acceptable for teachers to acknowledge when they are having problems. All of these rely on the development of a level of trust between the leadership team and teachers as well as between teachers themselves. This can be illustrated through looking at the issue of teacher autonomy.

William sees that allowing teachers to have a degree of autonomy is an aspect of a school culture that places a high value on relationships.

Nick: *And you are saying that it's (the school culture) about placing relationships at the heart of things.*

William: *Very much so, and we combine that with distributed leadership so basically we let people get on with the job. We're not at all bureaucratic. So we don't say you must plan lessons in this format, we don't say we want to see your lesson plans. We are very laissez-faire in that respect. We don't tell them how to run their departments but we look to the results. So we provide a framework, we provide the support and we are rigorous on the outputs.*

The assumption behind this approach is that whilst satisfactory performance can be achieved by mandate *to go beyond that you need to release people's creativity*. However William also acknowledged that whilst this is approach may be appropriate *for certain staff that have been in the culture for a long time* it does not take account of new members of staff coming into the culture. He thought that this approach allows too much variation in practice and there was a need *to pull people back towards a common baseline and then release them again*. The idea that emerges from this statement is that there is a stage in a teacher's development when they can be allowed a greater degree of autonomy. This relates to the notion of an apprenticeship period from which teachers progress. The point of progression relates to level 4 (proficiency) in the Dreyfus model (1986) and the second professional life phase (Day et al. 2006) in which the teacher develops an identity and efficacy in the classroom.

How did the headteachers perceive 'the expert teacher'? What are the kind of things that they look for? Below are the summaries of the main characteristics that each teacher mentioned.

*Alan: I actually think that an expert teacher is someone who is very self-aware, they are almost a self-expert. Because, in my experience, I think that those teachers who struggle are often people who are not particularly in touch with themselves. They don't come across the children as being complete or whole or ... that there's a person standing in front of them.*

*Someone who the children enjoy and want to work for.*

*A lifelong love (of their subject).*

*They dress sensibly.*

*Expert in gaining the childrens' trust.*

*Understanding the meaning of their words to the inner part of the child that is facing them.*

*The ideal would be .... To have an expert in information (subject matter) with an expert in human relationships and motivation.*

William saw that there was a difficulty in using the term 'expert teacher' and that he had resisted using it in his school. He felt that terms such as 'expert teacher' implied a hierarchy and that this was in conflict with the idea of collegiality and he felt that the gains that you might make in using the term were not worth the losses in terms of staff collegiality. In spite of this he recognised that the introduction of performance related by the Coalition government meant that the need to define expert teaching was now back on the agenda as there was now a requirement to determine the criteria by which some staff would be paid more than others. He added that *in some ways I am more comfortable with the idea that some people are expert teachers that work hard than I am with the notion of an expert teacher.* His view was that very few teachers are expert in every aspect of the job but that certain teachers developed expertise in particular areas. This supports the idea that we perhaps ought not to be talking about expert teachers but rather teachers with expertise.

For Charles the starting point in defining an expert teacher was emotional intelligence which was then followed up with the need for strong subject knowledge. However he thought that subject knowledge was *pretty useless unless you have a really good understanding of how children learn, of how people learn*. An expert teacher would need to understand the learning journey that their pupils need to go on and is able to facilitate that. He also thought that the emotional intelligence of the expert teacher enabled them to build relationships: *if the kids like you and listen to you and they'll enjoy learning about the work pretty well for you*. He thought that Helen was able to build a culture in her classroom, which he suggested is maybe what all expert teachers are able to do:

Charles: *they create a culture in their classroom where the kids know what to expect and they know it's about learning and they know they are safe. They know they are going to learn.*

I picked up on the idea that each teacher creates their own culture within their classroom and asked him whether he felt that this implied that teacher expertise was a personalised phenomenon, that expert teachers did not fit the same mould.

Charles: *Well the kids don't like it (i.e. teachers being the same), they want variety. They don't want to go from one Helen to another Helen to another Helen. They want to go from a really good lesson to a really good lesson to a really good lesson.*

This reinforces an earlier point that one aspect of teacher expertise is the ability to create their own 'lifeworld' in the classroom. Charles also picked up on the relationship between the development of the culture of the school and the development of expert teachers.

Charles: *The culture of the school allows the expert teacher to create the right culture in their classroom. And as a school this is interesting because as you see the journey that we've been on, as the school's got better and better you can see that some of the teachers got better and better and better. And some of it is the CPD, concentrating on assessment for learning and all those things and some of it is the whole culture and tone of the school that supports them.*

He thought that the culture of the school *forced (teachers) onto the road of expert. In other words they've been forced to constantly analyse practice of theirs and others and to identify*

*next steps. If you get the culture right then more of your staff can be experts.* However, he also recognised that a teacher might prove to be very successful in one school culture and yet might not do well in another, giving the example of a very strong teacher who left to work in another school. The change of school turned out to be a disaster and they were able to return back to the Wordsworth Academy. Charles was asked if a headteacher and senior colleagues from another Academy could shadow him and his senior colleagues. He commented that they may well see practices that were not significantly different from their own school but the culture of the school might make a difference.

Ben saw expert teachers as having an absolute passion for their subject, able to constantly enthuse the pupils about the subject and create a sense of *awe and wonder*. He went on to say that he thought that they were passionate about every child making progress.

*Ben: so they know the children inside out, they know their strengths and weaknesses; they know their background, where they've come from. They don't adopt a one size fits all. They are determined to focus right down to the individual pupils and to provide high-quality learning opportunities for every pupil that they come across.*

He also noted the importance of the culture of the classroom; *the classroom climate is very important, that sets the tone.*

The personalisation of learning relies on teachers being able to adapt to what is going on around them and to be flexible in their approach. These qualities were seen by Ben as characterising the ways in which expert teachers improvise.

*Ben: I think you've got to know the subject so well that you can be flexible and think on your feet and adapt to what they are coming back with or where they are going .... You need to be confident to allow children to lead.*

The ability of teachers to be perceived as co-learners within a classroom situation was viewed as a powerful quality that developed mutual respect between teachers and pupils. Yet this relies on the teacher having a degree of confidence to allow this to happen.

*Ben: You've got to have a very professionally secure footing to be able to do that. I think that's where all teachers should get to.*

William also recognised that improvisation came about through responding to the prior experiences and needs of a class of 30 pupils; *things never go quite as you planned*. The word that he would use in this situation is creativity: *Now I suppose that you can plan creativity but you can't plan improvisation*.

William: *Because if you're saying that improvisation is about having to work with whatever you're given then you might find that on an individual level in the lesson. Because a child has not understood something in the way that you had thought they were going to understand it or that they are in an emotional state that you hadn't predicted that they were going to be in. The teacher that is able to improvise will be able to think, they probably won't even think about just responding automatically in a way that, okay this isn't what I was expecting, I can't just plough on with what I was going to do, I have to respond to what I'm given. So that might happen on an individual level or it might be the whole class. I think we all know as teachers that something that works on one occasion won't work on another occasion because the class, for whatever reason, there is a collective mood which is completely different. They've just come from a wild lesson, maybe the winds blowing, maybe they're dreaming, maybe it's the end of the day. So I think that good teachers improvise in the sense that they accept that as a given and then respond appropriately. A bad teacher will say 'I planned what I was going to do, it's all going wrong. Help!*

Alan too felt that the ability to improvise comes from a confidence which then allows the teacher to allow their personality to come through. Confidence might come from a range of factors: intellectual ability, having taught for a long time or from subject knowledge. His view is that there is a place for the teacher to show that they are a person and that this is a valuable way to build a positive relationship with the students. I asked Alan if there was a connection between this point and an earlier comment that he made that the expert teacher is someone who is aware of being 'in the moment' and is responding to the events that are happening around her or him. He replied that *I think that of all the things that I have said in the last hour that has been the nugget! .... Because if you're there in the moment and the child is kicking off, you're there for them and they sense you will be able to give them a bit of time*.

Charles also had a clear view on the relationship between expert teaching and improvisation.

Charles: *Improvisation is one way of putting that, intuition is another. If you are formulaic, no matter how well you do it, eventually the kids are going to say 'oh no we know what can*

*happen', so you can't do that and also, because you're dealing with individuals, they will have different responses. Different situations will arise so you have to be spontaneous. And you have to be intuitive and decisive and therefore I suppose you've got to improvise sometimes.*

Nick: *That's a very neat answer! (Laughter)*

Charles: *I'm glad it's being recorded, I couldn't say it again!*

Culture is a complex and important phenomenon (Stoll, 1998) and the headteachers have a significant role to play in creating the culture for their school. In this they have some degree of autonomy in that it will be an expression of their values and beliefs. Autonomy for teachers is encouraged and is seen as being desirable. The creation of a personalised classroom climate is seen as being desirable as it offers pupils a variety of learning experiences. Nevertheless this is also seen as problematical in that teachers need to be able to understand the basic expectations and levels of performance demanded by the culture of the school before they can be allowed to develop in their own way. The culture of a school is also the means by which teacher expertise can be encouraged, as teachers are 'swept along' by the schools expectations.

Within a pupil-centred culture improvisation is seen as being important in that it plays a part in the personalisation of the teaching and learning process and it is also something that teachers have to do if they are going to respond to individuals.

### **The importance of sub-cultures**

The impact of school culture on teachers also brought attention to the value of sub-cultures in schools. Evidence of this was noted on one of my visits to The Milton School. Because of the distance I had to travel to the school these visits lasted the whole day and on each occasion I would see two or three lessons taught by Barbara. When I was not observing her I spent the time sitting in the English department resource room. I spent the time reading and reflecting on the observations that I had just made and my intention was to be able to 'disengage' from Barbara in order that she could have a break from having to talk to me. These days were potentially very demanding for her. I also began to reflect on the importance of this room for her and the other teachers in the department. The following notes are taken from my field journal.

Notes from my field journal.

By having my face 'in a book' I am, potentially, disconnecting myself from the social environment. Events are happening around me. Staff enter and leave the room, conversations happen. Teachers are marking books, sharing information about pupils and picking up on details (information about pupils) that they didn't know about. Pupils also come into the room, either to use the computers or to do some photocopying. They (the pupils) seem comfortable about being there. There is a sense that this is a shared space.

I reflect on the importance of this space for the English team. It is clearly 'theirs', a place that they inhabit as opposed to a shared staff room. There is untidiness to the room but also a sense of organisation. Each teacher has a desk of their own; there are shelves and worktops where sets of text books are stored. Facilities for making coffee; a fridge, sink, kettle.

I asked Barbara about the importance of this room and she replied that it was '*extremely important*'. She spends most of her time in this room when she is not teaching engaged in a range of activities: marking, preparing lessons, sharing resources, sharing information about pupils, providing a place for students to work (where they can see the staff working hard). Following this conversation with Barbara I noted that about 7 students came in to use the computers. Another pupil (who was clearly distressed) was sitting talking to another teacher. The room is shared by all members of the English Department; I was introduced to four other teachers who used the room on the occasions I was in the school. The head of department has her own office space that adjoins the staff room.

There were other comments made by Barbara that were related to the importance of this room which offers a safe 'offstage' space for her (and also the other teachers). I asked her about the how the culture of this shared space in the school helps her to be an expert teacher.

*Barbara: The department that I am in is very strong and supportive. This is first and foremost a factor in my success. I can walk out and say 'I don't know how to do this'. Often a less experienced teacher can come up with a good idea. There is no shame in that: asking for help, seeking assistance, asking for ideas.*

Other teachers also commented on the importance of a shared social space.

Harry: *The people in Science are so nice .... It's important to have adult company. The office culture is really lovely, they bring in cakes etc., but there's an awful lot of learning going on, informal stuff .... So important to me in my early years. They are mutually supportive, not just in the science department, that's something that the management are really good at.*

There are two important points that emerge from this. One is that within the overall culture of a school it is important that teachers feel that it is acceptable to say that they have problems and that they have somewhere to go in order to find help and advice. Second, it is clear that there is an important role to be played by sub-cultures within schools that can share more localised and focussed information about specific groups of students and the issues that arise from teaching particular subjects. These sub-cultures operate within their own terms of reference, developed through informal networks and reflecting the beliefs and values of the particular staff that inhabit the spaces. Whilst conforming in broad terms to the overall culture and ethos of the school they develop their own customs and practices. For example, the English Department's resource room at The Milton School has developed as an interface between student and staff work. There is easy and accepted access to this space by pupils that would not be the case in more conventional staff rooms.

### **8.3.5 Beyond the school: wider influences**

Only one of the teachers, Helen, had a professional role that extended beyond the boundaries of her school. She had become an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) which involved her in sharing her expertise and developing good practice in other schools. This role had developed out of her long career in the school

Nick: *How long have you been at this school?*

Helen: *Too long probably, since 94, but every time that I've tried to leave (the head) has found me something else to do to keep me out of mischief.*

When the post of AST was advertised Helen knew that it was the job for her because she always knew that she wanted to help colleagues. Initially she worked with three teachers who had asked her for help; due to the success of this session she then had 25 teachers who came to her for support and advice. This then led to working in other schools.

Helen saw this role as being important 'because if I don't do that (coaching colleagues) I only have the experience of being in my own classroom. If I can help colleagues then I have a wider network. She describes the opportunity to share her practice as 'hugely rewarding' Sharing her own practice is a partly about seeing the impact of her expertise:

*Helen: I found the whole school were using my practice and that the children were learning better because of it, and partly about picking up ideas from other teachers and then disseminating them elsewhere.*

Helen is very open about her practice, wanting to find ways in which she can improve what she is doing and acknowledging that expertise is something that she is working towards continuously. She describes this as a progression from having an intuitive approach to teaching which needs skills in order to move forward. This is the process of developing conscious competencies out of the life experiences that teachers bring to their professional work.

*Helen: The learning experience for me is very important, to move towards being expert .... Because you need to work beyond that intuition or otherwise you will remain static.*

Her approach when supporting teachers in other schools is based on giving confidence and by appreciating the expertise that other teachers have.

*Helen: If you boost staff morale and confidence then they are going to work much better. When I'm observing a lesson I'll always make a list of what they can do well, of what we can work on and things we need to work on immediately.*

*Nick: No negotiation!*

*Helen: Yes!*

Helen saw that a distinction could be made between an AST and an expert teacher and that not all ASTs could be called expert teachers:

*Helen: I think that's really interesting. My answer is I think there's probably a very small minority of AST's who actually are expert teachers. Generally when they first started to appoint ASTs there were other agendas going on. So for example if there was the literacy strategy they would need an English teacher .... I think the difference with an expert AST is that experts have that real love of what they're doing. They love it so much they want to develop and run. I think reading is a big part of being an expert, being willing to look at the latest research and when the*

*new Ofsted framework comes along look at it in great detail. You think what does this mean, not in terms of Ofsted but what it translates into the stuff what we can do already.*

Understandably all of the headteachers referred to Ofsted as a, if not the, most significant external influence on the school. The development of the school culture was driven by this either because the school was in danger of 'not passing an Ofsted inspection' or having to sustain developments that went 'beyond outstanding'. Alan acknowledged that there was a connection between the headteacher, their beliefs and the culture of the school. However:

*Alan: part of that scares me a bit, because the culture that we seem to have within the government and Ofsted, there seems to be an expectation or a belief that cracking the whip is the way to do it. We seem to be returning to the days of the headteacher on the charger, the hero headteacher, and that scares me witless because I actually still don't believe that is sustainable.*

William also noted that there was a *closing down* of many educational initiatives that he thought were promising: the removal of year 9 SATS, the QCA and RSA projects that encouraged the redesign of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, the development of 'learning to learn' strategies such as Building Learning Power (Claxton, 2002).

*William: There was a great flurry of interest in all of that and what I sense from the Coalition government is that all of that is shutting down again and we are going back to a much more compartmentalised, academic, exam focussed curriculum and a kind of .... there's a panic in schools, there is a desperation around results.*

## **8.4 Participants' reflections on the impact of the research**

One of the ethical responsibilities of the researcher is not only to negotiate access to the field but also to 'close down' the research with the participants in order to ensure that they have had positive feelings about being engaged in the research and there are not any unanswered questions or issues that have not been dealt with. Once the writing up of the research report was underway I arranged a final interview with all the participants in order to thank them for

their participation. These were semi-structured interviews that were built around three main questions or issues.

- Clarifying their view of what it meant to be an expert teacher;
- Asking them about the impact that the research had upon them;
- Asking for their comments and response to the theoretical model that I was developing in order to analyse the findings. These comments are reported in Chapter 9.

I kept these interviews as informal as possible, making notes of their comments in my field notebook and encouraging them to draw a mind map or annotate the theoretical model. In this section I am going to present the views of each of the participants regarding the impact that the research had upon them. This focus also shows the different ways that they engaged in the research and the different relationships that developed with myself as the researcher.

### **Helen**

The final interview with Helen took place in November 2013 when I returned to talk to her about the impact that the research had had upon her. Her reply included the following comments.

*Helen: It has had a huge impact, right from the start. I feel a lot freer in the classroom. I still plan but I am more flexible. My teaching has become more of a dialogue with the class. I now use a box of teaching and learning ideas (Helen shows these to me) so my lessons are not so structured.*

*Improvisation is the next stage for me. I don't feel so constrained. Students are enjoying the lessons more and so am I. I 'read' the students more, looking for peaks and troughs and then I choose an activity that responds to my reading their mood and behaviour.*

*Nick: Could you explain to me the difference between a peak and a trough activity?*

*Helen: A trough activity is where they are listening or they are silent, working independently. A peak activity is one which is exciting, involving challenge. Expert teaching is about understanding the emotional level of pupils but it goes beyond that. It has led me to research higher order thinking.*

Having a greater understanding of improvisation and by giving herself 'permission to improvise' Helen acknowledges that she has taken her teaching onto a new level. Her planning is now undertaken in a different way. She has the activities planned in advance but the sequencing of the lesson is in response to the emotional mood of the pupils. She has integrated the academic demands of the syllabus with the emotional needs and state of the pupils. In effect she is saying that she does not know how she will start the lesson until she can 'read' the emotional state of the pupils when they enter the classroom. The overall design of the lesson is being created 'in the moment' guided and shaped by pre-planned activities. It is a more playful approach to the structuring of learning dependent on being aware of the needs of the particular moment.

### **Harry**

Nick: *'What impact has the research had upon you?'*

Harry (A): *'None: no impact at all.'* Harry went on to explain that as he was coming from a research background himself he was very happy to participate in the research: *'anything I can do to make things better is worth it'.*

My thoughts on this were that this characterised my relationship with Harry. Having already gained a PhD in his area of science he was keen to help out another PhD student. He was very aware of the research process and the differences in approach between the natural and the human sciences. When we met this morning he asked me how my research was going and shared stories about writing up his own PhD: 'I shut myself away for six months and never saw the light of day'.

I asked Harry what impact I'd had on the lesson observations.

*'When you are given prior warning of a lesson observation .... any other adult in the room will change what you do. I understand the ethical issues of research – but I would like to go into a lesson unannounced'.*

Harry operated on the assumption that I would offer feedback to the headteacher. Presumably this influenced what he told me and was prepared to disclose to me although my sense was that he was being very open and frank with me on all the occasions that we met. I did assure him that I did not provide the headteacher with any feedback other than general comments that I thought that all the teachers I had observed were great practitioners.

When I recapped that one of the themes of the research was looking at the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation Harry showed real interest. It was as if he had forgotten that this had been discussed earlier. He thought that talking about improvisation was really important.

*'A lot of the training we do takes a bloody long time to prepare, improvisation doesn't involve a lot of time. That (acknowledging the importance of improvisation) is brilliant, it's really important. Anything that can improve teaching that takes up less time ... The things that we used to do but now don't have time to do .... Less preparation time'* Harry is concerned about the amount of time that has to go into planning and he repeated that 'any contribution to improving education that has something to say about this is valuable'.

*'A lot of the things I am told to do .... (he changed this) ... suggested to do .... are all great but they take up time, but there are things that you can do 'ad hoc'.*

I asked Harry what he thought was needed in order to be able to improvise. He gave three things: experience, confidence and being trusted in your own space.

I explored the theme of the importance of the culture of the school by asking him what he liked about being in the school. He replied by saying that there was good back up. He sees himself as an 'oddball' but that he is 'tolerated' but acknowledged that there was 'strong' back up from senior staff who he respected. He feels that he is trusted to teach in the way that he wants to.

I explained that one of the key findings was (perhaps unsurprisingly) about the importance of the relationships between the teacher and pupils in the classroom. I asked Harry to summarise this and to identify what was the 'headline' for this. He immediately said '*enthusiasm*'. Between us we drew a mind map of the related ideas. This is the sequence in which Harry developed his ideas.

*Enthusiasm .... as the way to getting through to pupils. Pupils are forgiving, they don't expect teachers to be perfect but they need to see that you are doing your best.*

*Subject knowledge and the ability to tell real stories that help pupils to relate to the subject matter, to make it relevant to them and to bring it to life through linking it to the real world.*

*Being honest with the pupils, being yourself*

*Valuing the pupils: valuing what they do, their attitude and the effort that they put in. It's about the way that you talk to them. 'The more mature and polite that they treat me, the more mature and polite that I can be with them'.*

*Admitting that you are wrong.* Harry gave the example of the introduction of mixed ability teaching in science, an initiative that he didn't think would work. However, he has found that it has worked well. An example was the year 9 class that he was teaching as we were talking.

### **John**

We began by discussing the relationships that John had with his students. He described this as a director / actor relationship which is grounded in treating the students in a professional manner as if they were at a drama school or working in the theatre. For John the relationship is based on professional values, of learning a craft.

He said that this was the basis for the high expectations that he had of the students: 'I am not interested in teaching you how to behave, you behave in order that you can learn this craft'.

I asked him to explain how he saw the power relationships with the students when he was teaching. This was also based on the director / actor relationship in which John's role was that of 'skills giver'. However, he said that there was a continuum with year 7 at one end and year 13 at the other. As the students' progress through the school the power that he holds as the teacher / director is 'rescinded' with greater power going over to the students. He described his role as being adjusted to becoming more of an assistant director, working in a more advisory capacity. He wants the students to take ownership of their work, to say 'this is our piece, this is where we are going'. In his advisory capacity he will make sure that they do not miss out on the exam criteria but allows them to take on the director role.

An example that he gave was of Y12 students directing year 9, he described this as a 'rolling hierarchy'.

He summarised his views by saying that he aims to have a facilitating role where he gives the skills and knowledge, leading by example and modelling good practice and then letting them take over.

What has been the impact of participating in the research project?

John acknowledged that being involved in the research had had an impact upon him. An example that he gave was that he had spent his CPD time going into colleagues lessons and observing them teaching in order to 'steal' good practice. The consequence of this was that he had redesigned the resources that were available on the schools virtual learning environment. These resources were categorised in two ways; lesson planning and content, shared with the teaching staff and learning resources that were shared with the students.

What John has done is to give students the freedom to see all of the lesson content, especially at A level. He considered that this greater transparency with the teaching intentions helped to develop the relationship with the student.

He was also more aware of the benefits of watching other teachers from a non-judgemental perspective *'just to steal the best bits'*.

A final comment about the impact of the research was that it gave him the opportunity to be reflective; *'if you are not being a reflective teacher you are not being a teacher.'*

### **Richard**

Being involved in the research had made Richard more aware of the idea of expertise and how this worked alongside the Ofsted criteria. When he had been observing teachers he had become more aware of the expertise that they have displayed. These were aspects of teaching that might not be picked up if you were solely going by the Ofsted criteria.

He said that it is good to be told that you are an expert and he thought that more could be done with this as it gives teachers confidence and encourages them to take risks. He gave the example of an ITT trainee that he had observed who had used the 'teacher in role' technique. He noted that this was an aspect of their expertise and was something that they could take further.

With regard to the impact of his lessons being observed by myself he noted that 'you always raise your game when someone is in the room'.

### **Eleanor**

The interview with Eleanor took place in her office on the last day of term before the Christmas break. She had informed me at the beginning of November that she had been appointed as the headteacher of a small school in Wales (Eleanor, email correspondence, 1 Nov 2013) and that this was the only time she had to meet with me. So not only was this the last day of term but it

was also her last day at the school. The Learning Support Assistant, 'Pete' who works with her was present throughout. She asked if I minded about this and I said that I didn't. The interview lasted 35 minutes.

The interview began properly with me asking her to state her 'headline' characteristic that summarises teacher expertise. For Eleanor this was '*expectations of excellence for all - including teachers*'. I commented that this was consistent with some of the things that she had talked about during the interviews and what I had seen when observing her teach. As we were talking about this Eleanor began describing about the impact that the research has had upon her.

*Eleanor: The researcher has had quite an impact on me. It's been quite important for me going into headship. At the start of this project I thought I had a clear idea of what I wanted to see in terms of expert teaching. I suppose I was looking for 'mini me's', basically other versions of my approach to teaching. Now I feel that I am more tolerant of teaching approaches that are different to my own. The question that I would ask is 'is the learning happening?' If the learning is outstanding then the approach must be right.*

*My ideas have changed and now I don't think that there is any one way to teach. When we began this project I had a clear idea of excellence but now I don't think these ideas are dependent on there being a right or wrong way to teach. I might have criticised traditional and didactic approaches to teaching. Having really looked at certain practitioners with particular students I can see that sometimes that approach is appropriate. An excellent teacher has all of the tools and they are able to select the right tool for the right students.*

*Thanks to you I now ask the sixth form what they want from me and asked for their views on the way that I teach. The students have said that there are times when we need to be told. I now have a broader view of the teaching styles that I use.*

*Thinking about chalk and talk approaches; I have seen active versions of this. The teaching might be more didactic but the students are actively involved. You can see it in their body language, you can hear it in the dialogue, you can see that it works. This is not what I was saying at the beginning.*

*Another impact is that I now have got into asking students about my teaching. Is this the right approach? Is this what you need? With the sixth form they say what they want.*

Finally I asked her to create a mind map of teacher expertise starting with her headline of high expectations for all.

*Eleanor: First you need to expect respect, this is a two way respect and is about a compliance from the students to go along with you and what you ask. You need to be able to see sustained and rapid progress and you need to make sure that the students are actively involved in the lessons. The teacher needs to have the best resources and methods in order to teach the students and in order to have an impact upon their progress. (Talking about IT). The IT needs to work and you need to have a backup if it doesn't.*

(At this point the LSA Pete interjected: *if you're with me then the IT will work!*)

*Eleanor: You need to know your students. I don't think you need to know them in personal terms as one of your other teachers has suggested but you do need to know who they are and what they need. You need to expect to be flexible, this is where improvisation fits in. It's where you can adapt what you do to meet the needs of the students, adapting specifically to their needs. At times you have to turn on a sixpence. The teacher also needs to be able to communicate their high expectations with clarity so that all the students understand what is required of them.*

At this point I asked how we were doing time. Looking up at the clock Eleanor said '37 minutes'. I thanked her for the time that she had given me and the interview came to an end.

### **Barbara**

In the final interview with Barbara she recapitulated a great deal of the information that she had shared with me on earlier visits. Barbara didn't know what impact the research had had upon her as she said that she always tries to be reflective. However she noted that she had become *more conscious of giving students thinking time* and that our conversations had made her *more conscious of things that I deem to be important*. One of the things that she thought was important was that teachers gave insights into their personal interests even though this was something that she was told not to do when she was on her first teaching practice. A lesson that

she had just taught had involved the pupils in brainstorming about hobbies. Barbara shared information about her interests, *being an honest person*, and feels that it is important for teachers to humanise themselves as it stops pupils putting them on a pedestal and helps to build relationships. She acknowledged that this might not be possible in every school but it was possible at The Milton School as *the clientele of the school was mature and worldly wise*. In an earlier interview Barbara had noted that she felt that the approach to observing the lessons had had a minimal impact upon her: *I felt more relaxed than I normally do when I am being observed – I felt that you saw what I am really like as a teacher*.

### **Anne**

The final interview in the research process took place with Anne, who participated in the pilot case study. Since we last met she had been promoted and was now responsible for the International Baccalaureate. We met in her new office which was located within the administrative centre of the school, away from her teaching area.

She felt that the impact that the research had upon her was reminding her to be reflective about her practice *'which is what this school is about anyway'* and agreed that she was happier with the notion of a 'teacher with expertise' *'That's the way I see it. You know how much I rebelled against the idea of the expert teacher'*.

We discussed the priority that she gave to 'knowing the backstory' (her 'headline' characteristic) and she confirmed that this represented her view of an important aspect of teacher expertise.

Anne: *You have to know the pupils, have to know their stories. You teach them the concepts that they can apply to their own contexts and stories. Intimacy is a difficult word when talking about teachers and students but you do need a level of intimacy. You have to have a safety net, a safe environment. You can't do that if you don't know the backstories of all the pupils in the room.*

I asked her to reflect on what the school meant to her and she said that she felt that this was the school for her *'Who would have thought it, I can't think of any other place I'd rather be*.

She went on to explain why the school was so important to her.

Anne: (The school) *gives you the freedom to create your own bubbles and to work with other peoples bubbles. It takes good management, good kids, space to develop your stuff and the support of your colleagues. You couldn't do this job without the support of your colleagues.*

This gave me an opportunity to ask Anne about the importance of sub-cultures in the school as this theme was raised after the pilot case study was completed. I referred to the sub-culture of the maths staffroom where we used to have coffee. She thought it was important and, following her promotion, was not so much a part of that sub-culture as she was not able to spend so much time there.

*Anne: It's interesting and it's not just me. One of the other teachers who used to hang out in that space is now a college principal. She feels a loss at not hanging out in the staffroom in the maths area. I still spend a break and the occasional lunchtime with those same people. Mary is still there (Anne's initial mentor when she came to the school) I'm still part of that.*

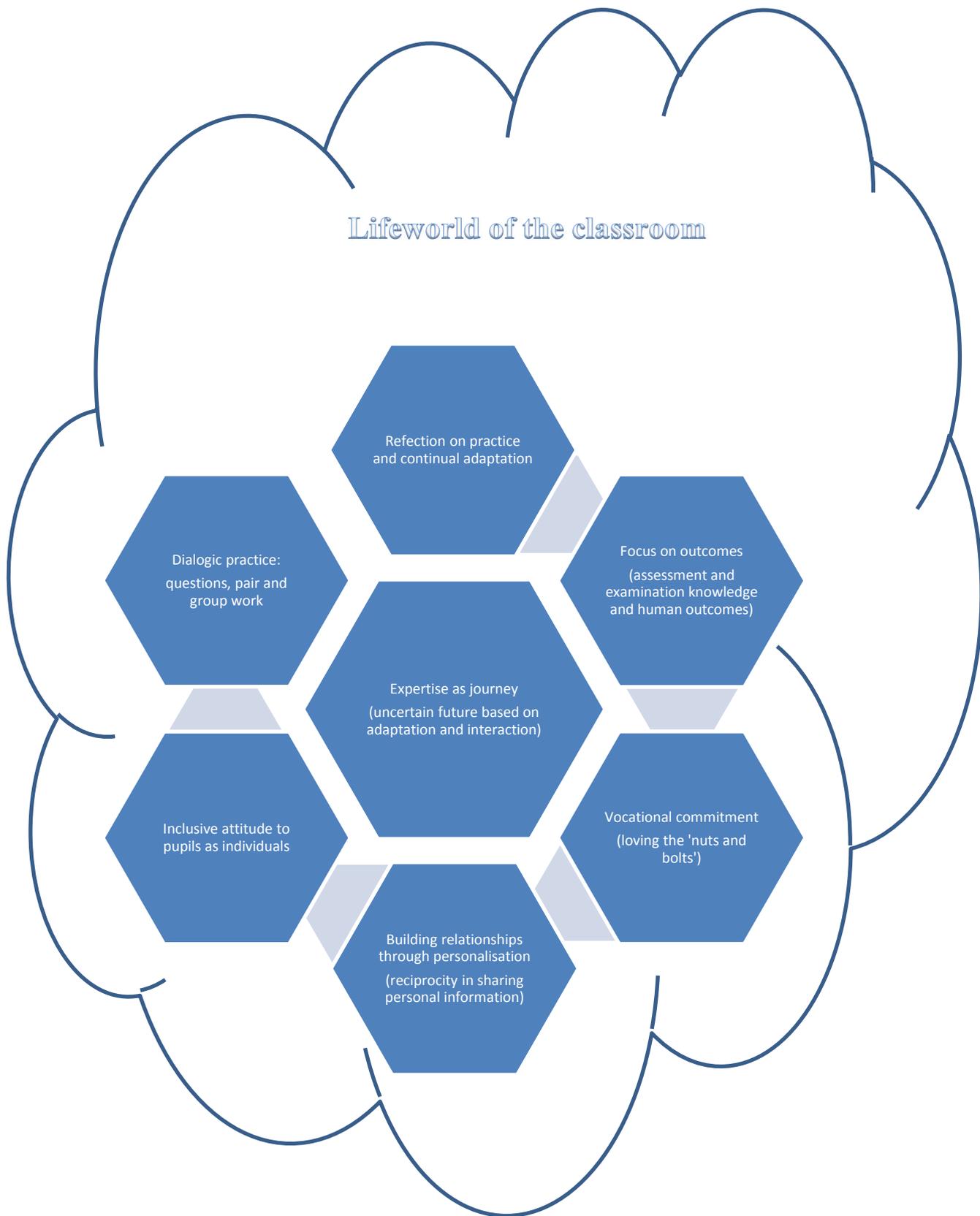
I asked Anne to explain the significance of that space.

*Anne: Is it important? It's very, very important. It's not the official staffroom but it is the most crowded one. It is a place where you know you can get support with problems with a kid, administration or you're just having a bad day personally, or something's happened at home, or you want to celebrate something or you want to check something out. Someone will know. You can't quantify the value of that. But also we are lucky; the kids will tell us stuff.*

She again emphasised the importance of humanity as a significant characteristic of teacher expertise: *it's nurturing, they are not widgets, they need nurturing. Staff nurture and support each other, why else are you're here.* She recognised that external influences, such as Ofsted, have an important part to play in supporting the progress of pupils: *if you take the cynicism away from their language.* However her values extended beyond the instrumental and that progress in terms of academic outcomes was insufficient in her eyes: *I'd be really upset if they didn't make progress as a person.*

## **8.5 Conclusions and summary**

The findings of Phase Two of the research have identified a number of key themes and concepts and these are presented below in Figure 8.2 as a 'grounded theory' model of teacher expertise.



**Figure 8.2: Grounded theory model of teacher expertise**

This model in figure 8.2 locates teacher expertise within the lifeworld of the classroom, a personalised learning environment that is created through the relationships that are developed between the teacher and the pupils. At the centre of the model is a view of teacher expertise as a process towards an uncertain future (as opposed to a defined end state based on an essentialist notion of 'the expert teacher'). Around this core notion are interrelated attitudes and practices that inform the practice. These can be summarized accordingly:

- A continual reflection on practice which is then used to bring about changes in teaching strategies. This is a process of adaptation and 'tinkering' with a range of strategies that are either known to work or experimentations to see if they will work.
- There is a strong focus on attainment, for all, that is based on a detailed knowledge of examination and assessment systems. Whilst attention is given to academic achievement (driven by the external influences of school culture and national policy) there is also an interest in the human outcomes of developing pupils as individuals.
- Pedagogic practice is focused on developing a dialogue with the pupils through asking questions and an interplay between teacher directed activity and individual, pair or group work. This dialogic practice is fundamentally improvisational and can result in the empowerment of pupils within the learning process.
- Dialogic practice is informed by inclusive approaches to education and a belief that all pupils have a worth and are able to achieve.
- The creation of a climate for learning is informed by the creation of strong professional relationships between teachers and pupils. These relationships are based on a detailed understanding of the background of the pupils and there is a reciprocal sharing of information that allows the pupils to see the teacher as an individual.
- The values based practice of the teacher is demonstrated by a vocational commitment to learning, for themselves as well as their pupils and an enjoyment of the 'nuts and bolts' of teaching: lesson preparation, delivery and the processes of assessment. There is also a strong commitment to the school that they are in, acknowledging a correlation between their values and belief and the culture of the school. This is (often) seen through the teacher spending a long period of their career in the school and consequently having a detailed understanding of the characteristic processes and practices. In some cases this commitment to the school has included making a contribution to the improvement of the school from being 'stuck' to becoming 'outstanding'.

In the next chapter this grounded theory of teacher expertise will be examined in the light of theories that have been discussed earlier in the thesis, paying particular attention to the importance of structure, culture and power to the development of teacher expertise.

# Chapter 9: Discussion of the data

*This chapter presents the thesis that arises from the research in the form of tentative conclusions that are derived from the grounded theory of teacher expertise outlined in the previous chapter and the postulates derived from the literature review. The thesis is then discussed from a theoretical perspective with particular reference to three concepts: structure, culture and power.*

## 9.1 The thesis arising from the research

The thesis that is being proposed is based on the following tentative conclusions that arise out of the research and the grounded theory. These five conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. Advanced professional practice is best described through the notion of ‘a teacher with multiple expertises’ and that this is preferable, from a professional perspective, to the term ‘the expert teacher’.
2. ‘Teachers with expertise’ display a range of expertises and, whilst such teachers have much in common with each other they are not necessarily the same. The range of expertises is not necessarily seen to the same degree in all cases at the same time.
3. The range of expertises are interrelated and socially constructed.
4. The practice of ‘teachers with expertise’ is fundamentally improvisatory.
5. The improvisational nature of teacher expertise is derived from four processes
  - the expression of tacit knowledge
  - relational and interactional practice
  - personalisation (of learning, of the teacher and the learning environment)
  - self-reflection leading to adaptation of practice.

Each of these conclusions will be discussed in greater depth.

### **1. Advanced professional practice as ‘teacher with expertises’**

One of the clear messages that came through from all of the participants was that the designation of ‘the expert teacher’ is an unhelpful and inappropriate way of characterising advanced professional practice. This was due to a number of reasons: the views arising from the data suggest that the teachers did not want to ‘stand out’ from their colleagues and they did not

accept that they were 'expert' or that it was possible to become an expert teacher. Instead the argument of the thesis is that advanced professional practice can be perceived as 'a teacher with expertise' and that these expertises are the consequence of a continual striving towards 'what works' within a particular context at a particular time. This view of expert practice is based on assumptions that teaching is a complex activity and that 'what works' is essentially unknowable and unpredictable. However, advanced practitioners use their expertise to adapt and to interact with their pupils in order to create the conditions in which learning can, and does, take place.

## **2. Teachers with expertise have much in common but they are not all the same**

This view of teacher expertise reflects Sternberg and Horvath's (1995) model of the 'prototype' which maintains that there is no well-defined standard that all experts meet but that they bear a family resemblance. This view rejects essentialist assumptions that there can be a category of teachers that can be labelled 'experts'.

The grounded theory of teacher expertise (as outlined in Figure 8.2) proposes what these areas of commonality family resemblances might be:

- Seeing expertise as a journey;
- Reflecting on practice and continual adaptation of teaching;
- Focus on outcomes;
- Dialogic practice;
- Inclusive attitude to pupils as individuals;
- Vocational commitment (to teaching and to the school);
- Building relationships through personalisation.

These areas of expertise have much in common with the findings of Smith and Strahan (2004) who identified six shared tendencies.

1. They had a sense of confidence in themselves and their profession;
2. Talked about their classrooms as communities of learners;
3. Maximised the importance of relationships with students;
4. Employed student-centred approaches to instruction;
5. Contributed to the teaching profession through leadership and service;
6. Were masters of their content area.

My thesis differs from this account in a number of respects. It identifies a distinct area of knowledge that is concerned with a detailed understanding of examination and assessment processes. This form of teacher knowledge is not represented within existing notions of content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge. The emergence of this form of knowledge is presumably a consequence of the target driven accountability culture that is a feature of all schools. Greater emphasis is also given to self-reflection and the continual adaptation of practice. Less attention was paid to content knowledge as an aspect of teacher expertise in the research findings; for many of the participants it was taken for granted but less important than being able to communicate, motivate and enthuse pupils. A further significant factor that was identified in this research was the ability for the teachers to create a unique and personalised climate for learning in their classroom and I have called this the *lifeworld* of the classroom.

### **3. The range of expertises are interrelated and socially constructed**

My thesis also emphasises the interrelationship between these expertises. This interrelationship can be explained as follows. The central assumption of the model is that teacher expertise is a journey towards an uncertain future; it is an aspiration that is continually being striven for. It is based on practices that involve the continual adaptation of teaching strategies as a consequence of interaction with pupils. This improvisational quality is seen as a positive and desirable professional attribute when it is concerned with responding to the needs of individuals and groups of students within the classroom. Around this central assumption are other beliefs and practices that are all linked. A key practice is that of building relationships through personalisation (a reciprocal practice whereby the teacher wants to know the pupils as individuals *and* wants them to know the teacher as a person) which is motivated by a belief that all can achieve. An interest in pupils as individuals encourages an approach to teaching in which they can play a part (dialogic practice). The adaptation of preconceived plans and intentions 'in real time' is also supported by a continual reflection on practice and a willingness to incorporate changes into their classroom practice.

The process of reflection on practice also includes talking about teaching with other teachers and is encouraged by cultures that make it acceptable to talk about failure and encourage risk taking. Reflection on practice is directed by the accountability agenda, specifically a focus on outcomes. This is partly driven intrinsically by the personal belief that all pupils can achieve but is also affected by the extrinsic nature of the accountability agenda. The extrinsic factors have

given rise to a particular form of professional knowledge: a detailed knowledge of examination and assessment systems. The final factor in this model of teacher expertise is vocational commitment which is demonstrated through sustained motivation and interest in being a teacher and particularly both an engagement and enjoyment of the 'nuts and bolts' of teaching. Consequently it can be argued that teacher expertise is a social construction that arises out of the relationships between teacher and pupils as well as the relationships with other members of staff and members of the school community. The argument of the thesis is that teacher expertise is culturally situated and embedded.

#### **4. The practice of 'teachers with expertise' is fundamentally improvisatory**

The argument that teacher expertise is culturally situated brings us back to the first key postulate (see chapter 5: 106). This is that as all cultures are concerned with, and defined by, the relationship between fixed and emergent structures they are therefore improvisatory in their social nature and their constructed being. Consequently, the thesis claims that the practice of 'teachers with expertise' is fundamentally improvisatory. This claim is supported by evidence derived from observations of teaching in which the dominant concern was with developing relationships with pupils, based on assumptions that all are worthy of attention and that all can achieve. A primary concern of the teachers was to employ dialogic strategies in the classroom in order to maximise interaction. The motivation to know the pupils well meant that the teachers were able to adapt their teaching in order to meet the specific needs and interests of their classes, a process of personalising the teaching process. Continually reflecting on how they were meeting the needs of their classes meant that all the teachers were engaged in adaptive strategies, reflecting on their teaching and adjusting what they were doing. In doing so they are engaging in an uncertain future; they are never sure exactly what will work but are prepared and able to change what they are doing.

#### **5. The improvisational practice of 'teachers with expertise' is derived from four processes**

Improvisation, it has been argued, is a feature of all forms of social interaction. Within the domain of teaching it can be seen at all levels. This thesis does not claim that improvisation is only to be found in advanced professional practice but that it takes on a particular form in that it has a positive impact on educational outcomes for pupils, in both instrumental terms (measurable progress and attainment) as well as human terms (as expressed through value

based educational outcomes). The improvisational aspect of teacher expertise can be summarised as being concerned with four processes:

- the expression of tacit knowledge;
- the relational and interactive;
- personalisation (of learning, the teacher and the learning environment);
- self-reflective and adaptive.

This view of teaching is consistent with the working definition of improvisation that has been used in this research: 'a mode of intentional creative action that has unpredictable and uncertain outcomes, derived from "real time" interactions (with other people or materials). Improvisations are determined by spontaneous and intuitive decisions arriving from the dynamic interplay between fixed and informal, generative structures. Improvisations are a feature of all aspects of life and the conditions for improvisational action are dependent on the permission that the improviser gives themselves, or is given, to act in this way.

How do the ideas expressed in the thesis relate to other theoretical views? As has already been suggested the idea that teacher expertise is grouped under a number of common characteristics reflects Sternberg and Horvath's idea of a 'prototype' (Sternberg and Horvath, 1995). Variations between the different teachers can be accounted for due to the cultural and situated nature of their practice.

This view of teacher expertise also reflects many of the features of the Transformative Teleology articulated by Stacey et al. (2000) which they describe as 'the movement towards an unknown form .... a form that is in the process of being formed, to a form that is itself evolving' (2000: 38). Their use of the word teleology is concerned with 'the kind of movement into the future that is being assumed' (ibid: 14) and this can be either towards a known state or an unknown state. The Transformative Teleology sees the movement towards the future as being permanently under construction and that there is no mature or final state that will be arrived at. Instead there is only the perpetual iteration of identity and difference expressed through the everyday micro- interactions. Freedom and constraint arise out of spontaneity and the diversity of these micro-interactions.

Viewing expertise from the perspective of Transformative Teleology acknowledges the importance of social interaction. In this respect Transformative Teleology supports a social

constructionist perspective; ‘another line of development that illustrates what we mean by Transformative Teleology is that of social constructionism’ (Stacey et al., 2000: 176). Consequently teacher expertise can be seen as being socially constructed through ongoing processes of people relating to each other (Burr, 2003; Shotter, 2008; Gergen, 2009). The characteristics of teacher expertise emerge from the interactions between teacher and others (pupils, other staff, leadership and management, parents / carers).

This suggests that teacher expertise should not be viewed entirely as a list of individual skills and competences but as a complex relational activity, which Stacey et al. (2000) refer to as Complex Responsive Processes. This view of advanced professional practice challenges other theories of expertise, especially those that are based on assumptions of individual skills, competencies and cognitive development or assumptions that expertise is a ‘final state’ in a developmental process, for example the theory offered by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Ericsson, 2006). Furthermore, it offers a position to critically challenge the educational policies and practice that are the consequence of a neoliberal ideology. The dominant discourse of managerialism is based on education policies and practice that places an emphasis on the individual, in terms of both freedom and accountability. Neoliberalism, as a theory of political economic practices, advances the idea that human well-being can best be served through ‘liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2005: 2). The focus on individuality and rationality is also underlined by normative assumptions of the future; the movement toward the future is towards a known state: a Rationalist Teleology (Stacey et al., 2000). A comparison between Rationalist and Transformative Teleologies is given in Table 9.1.

**Table 9.1: A comparison of the Rationalist and Transformative Teleologies (from Stacey et al. 2000)**

	Rationalist Teleology	Transformative Teleology
Movement towards a future that is:	a goal chosen by reasoning autonomous humans	under perpetual construction by the moment itself. No mature or final state, only perpetual iteration of identity and difference, continuity and transformation, the known and the unknown, at the same time. The future is unknowable but yet recognizable: the known-unknown.

Movement for the sake of/in order to:	realize chosen goals	expressing continuity and transformation of individual and collective identity and difference at the same time. This is the creation of novel variations that have never been there before.
The process of movement or construction, that is, the cause is:	rational process of human reason, within ethical universals, that is, human values. Cause is human motivation.	Processes of micro interactions in the living present forming and being formed by themselves. The iterative process sustains continuity with potential transformation at the same time. Variation arises in micro-diversity of action, transformative cause.
Meaning:	lies in the future goal	arises in the present as does choice and intention.
Kind of self-organisation implied is:	none	diverse micro interaction of a paradoxical kind that sustains identity and potentially transforms it.
Nature and origin of variation/change:	designed change through rational exercise of human freedom to get it right in terms of universals	gradual or abrupt changes in identity or no change depending on the spontaneity and diversity of micro interactions.
Origin of freedom and nature of constraints:	Human freedom finds concrete expression on the basis of reason and ethical universals	both freedom and constraint arise in spontaneity and diversity of micro interactions; conflicting restraints.

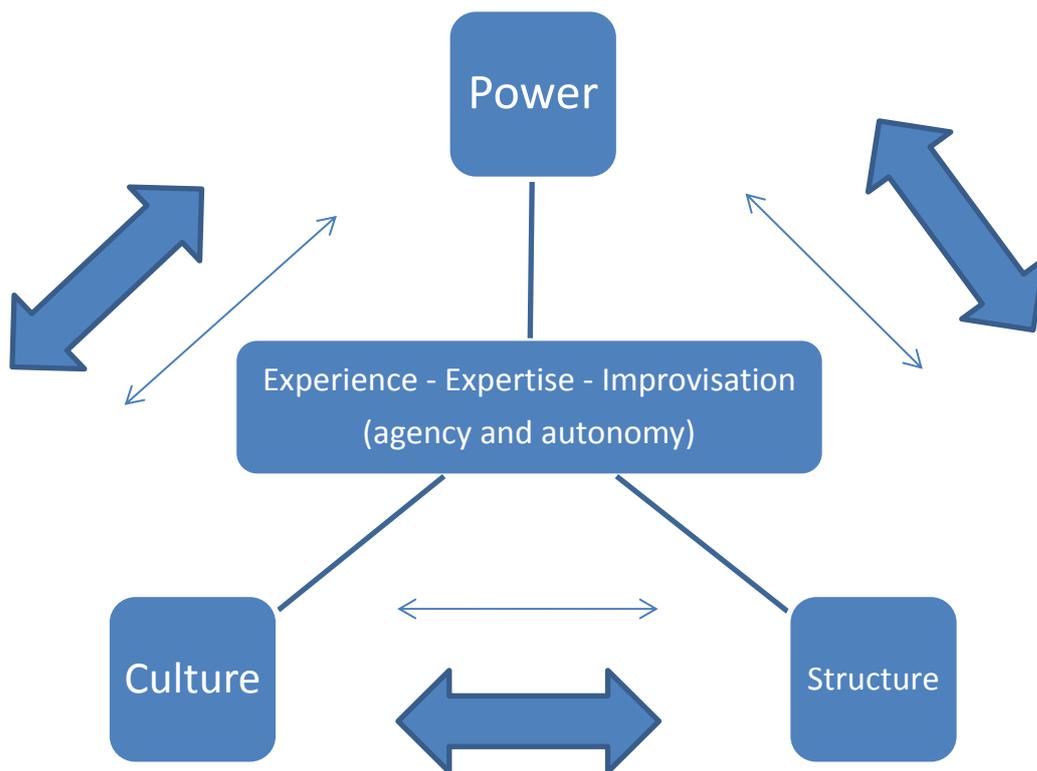
As has been seen in Chapter 4 we can see the implementation of these policies in the priority that the Coalition Government has given to the development of the academies movement (DfE, 2010). This has offered individual schools, headteachers and teachers greater autonomy within a framework of accountability. However, it is the impact of the neoliberal ideology on the question as to what constitutes 'great teaching' (Auguste et al., 2010) that is the concern of this thesis. The argument being presented here is that the dominant discourse of advanced professional practice is based on individualist and cognitive assumptions and driven by the standards and accountability agenda which is based on claims that individual competencies can be categorised into essentialist notions of what an 'expert teacher' might be.

The view of teacher expertise that has been drawn from the findings of this research are, as has been shown, based on very different assumptions: the relational and interactive (as opposed to

the individual) and social constructionism (as opposed to the cognitive). What are the implications of this difference? There are two related issues here. The first is that if the focus of teacher expertise is placed upon relationships then it draws attention to a range of practices that can be seen as being of marginal importance: for example the ways in which teachers get to know their pupils as individuals or the significance of marginal adjustments to practice. A second issue is concerned with acknowledging that the actions of relating and the processes of communication are not neutral or value free. The processes of relating and communication inevitably give rise to power relations. Furthermore, a relational and values based approach can conflict with the rationalist, neoliberal focus on outcomes. How can this tension be resolved?

A tentative claim arising from the research is that this tension is resolved by the teachers themselves. This can be articulated through using Habermas's concepts of 'system' and 'lifeworld'. One of the characteristics of teacher expertise appears to be that they are able to co-create with their pupils a 'lifeworld' in which a consensus is reached. 'These unregulated spheres of sociality provide a repository of shared meanings and understandings, and a social horizon for the everyday encounters with other people' (Finlayson, 2005: 52). This is a personalised area in which space is given for both teacher and pupils to relate as individuals. The teacher presents him/herself as an 'authentic' person and this is demonstrated in their ability to create a secure environment where students feel accepted, secure and valued. The lifeworld of classroom is a holistic and unified space created by a teacher 'whose pedagogy is characterised by the integrity of a supportive relationship and best practice pedagogy as one action rather than two' (Osterman, 2010 cited in Lovat, 2013: 77).

Further theoretical discussion of the thesis considers the wider implications of these ideas by drawing on the organisation theory in order to explore the processes by which structure, culture and power have an impact on the concept of the improvisatory nature of teacher expertise. This discussion draws on a framework which articulates the dynamic impact that structure, culture and power have upon organisations (Bennett et al., 2003), see Figure 9.2.



**Figure 9.1 Diagram of the approach taken in discussion of the findings**

At the centre of the framework is the concept of teacher experience, expertise expressed through improvisational practice, developed from the grounded theory. Sternberg and Horvath (1995) argue that whilst teacher expertise is variable, informed by a 'prototype', it is also subject to context. Organisation theory suggests that specific and situated examples of teacher expertise are influenced by the three concepts of structure, culture and power. These concepts are interrelated and dynamic: the culture of a school is influenced by the structures that are put in place, decisions that are made regarding structural matters (and the resolve to enforce these decisions) are made through power relations.

The three concepts of structure, culture and power operate at both micro and macro levels. For example they are applied by the teacher within their classroom, at a whole school level and also at a local / national level. The thin arrows indicate the relationships between these concepts at an organisational (school) level whilst the larger arrows indicate that the same processes are taking place at a local, national or global level (for example through the influence of Local Authorities, the Department for Education and Ofsted). This approach is in line with a social

constructionist view of teacher expertise in that it highlights the social and interactive nature of the acquisition and development of teacher expertise.

This discussion has two dimensions or strands to it. The first is a discussion of the findings in relation to theories discussed in the literature review as a way of drawing out the theoretical implications of the thesis. The second strand reports discussions of the theoretical model shown in Figure 9.1 that took place with the teachers who were engaged in the research. In their final view all the teachers were shown a copy of this model and asked to respond to it in order that they could be involved in the theorising process.

## **9.2 Theme one: structure**

Structures within organisations define the parameters within which individuals work and interact with each other, determining what work is done and how it is done. Structures are the essential defining characteristics of organisations in that they identify the boundaries between freedom and constraint. They are also crucial to understanding improvisation as they provide the basis for interaction and creativity. As jazz musician Charlie Mingus simply put it 'you can't improvise on nothing, man' (Santoro, 2000: 271). Therefore, understanding how structures inhibit or enable improvisation is of vital importance. Capra (2002) expresses this as the relationship between the fixed 'design' structures and the fluid 'emergent' structures. What the research has shown is that the teachers drew upon two main structural resources when they thought about improvising: the lesson plan and the physical presence of the students in the classroom, supported by the findings of Borko and Livingston (1989). As has been argued earlier, these two areas are interrelated; responding to the needs of the pupils will necessitate adapting the lesson plan.

Whilst all of the participants acknowledged that the lesson plan was a key structural device the level to which they planned their lessons varied. Some teachers would plan the whole lesson in meticulous detail whilst others would have a sketchy outline structure of what they intended to achieve in the lesson; experience had given them a sense of the trajectory of the learning. Their experience meant that they knew where they needed to be at any particular point in the course and they could improvise around this structure in response to the specific needs of the pupils. An awareness of the constraints of the syllabus or the demands of a particular point in the school year determined the extent to which they could follow the needs and interests of the

students or 'pull them back' accordingly. For some teachers their detailed planning was seen as the way in which relationships can be allowed to grow.

There are other structural factors that impacted upon teaching and which need to be taken into consideration. The physical space of the classroom, for example, had a significant influence. All of the teachers had a room in which the majority, if not all, of their lessons were taught. The structuring of the physical space enabled them to determine their own approach to teaching. Helen, for example, arranged the tables in the room so that the pupils were sitting in groups, avoiding rows of desks facing the front of the class. This suited her teaching style that moved between teacher centred tasks and group tasks. The attention that she gave to detail included the structuring of the resources on each desk: dictionaries, pens and pencils, role cards, suggestions for help.

The way that time was structured was also a strong feature of the lessons observed. All of the teachers observed made full use of the timespan of the lesson, ensuring that the learning had pace through continually changing the activity and the focus of the learning. In Helen's case her lessons were structured through the alternation of teacher directed activities and individual, pair or group work. Group work was clearly structured through the use of different roles that the students were expected to allocate to each other. Teachers all had their own way of 'counting down'; signalling that the time allocated to an activity was due to come to an end.

When the teachers were asked to comment on significant structures they drew attention to the structures put in place at a whole school level to support staff in dealing with disciplinary matters were deemed to be significant. Examples of these structures included strategies such as 'parking rotas' (classes where disruptive pupils can be temporarily removed to), a time out room or back up from the Head of Department or the pastoral team.

*Harry: A teacher can put a line in the sand and you'll be backed up.*

*Helen: Teachers are not having to deal with everything themselves.*

These strong structures within the school have an impact on the pupils (their understanding of expectations, the code of conduct) and on staff: *'teachers know what is expected'*.

Eleanor's response to being asked to think about the importance of structure was to reflect on the overall structure of schools, noting that they have not changed since the nineteenth century in spite of the changes in society and the culture of young people.

Eleanor: *The industrial structure of schools, the kind of thing that Ken Robinson was talking about in 'Changing Educational Paradigms'; the fluidity, the ideas such as gifted and talented year seven students learning alongside year 10 students hasn't really come about. The industrial structure that he talks about hasn't changed.*

Eleanor went on to talk about a blog (headguruteacher.com) that she recommended as a source for new ideas *'he's very forward thinking yet he is moving towards tighter structure'*

In this discussion Eleanor highlighted two contradictory views about the overall structure of schools. On one hand there is the argument that schools need to be restructured in the light of the changing needs of society based on a greater understanding of the ways in which people learn. The counter argument sees schools being structured on traditional lines in order to provide clearly defined structures for young people who might lack having the security of a structured home life.

Structures define the culture of the school in that they are a tangible expression of 'the deeper level of *basic assumptions* and *beliefs* that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' fashion and organisations view of itself and its environment' (Schein, 1988: add page). The priority for headteachers who needed to change the culture of their school was to get the structures 'right': this might include addressing the structure of the leadership team, the school day, the curriculum or the expectations for each lesson. A significant finding from the research is that the culture of the school was noted as being extremely important to the teachers interviewed; as Gu and Day (2013) point out 'conditions count'. What is it about the culture of a school that sustains and motivates these expert teachers? What are the factors that make them want to stay in the school? What role does the culture of a school play in the process of professional maturing?

### **9.3 Theme two: culture and context**

One point that came through was that for some of the participants there was a match between their values and beliefs and the culture of the school. This meant that there was a commitment to stay at the school which plays a significant part in the acquisition of experience which is a crucial factor in the development of expertise. Given the length of time that teachers need to be in a school, or schools, to gain expertise, what are the factors that militate against this? At what point do teachers leave the profession? How is this prevented? The headteacher plays an

important part in this and clearly had an influence on retaining teachers that they valued. As Helen pointed out *'every time I thought of leaving Charles found me another job to do'*.

Other teachers commented on the significance of the headteacher and the impact that they have on school culture. What are the characteristics of the headteachers and the approach to leadership in the school that create the conditions through which teacher expertise can flourish? The common characteristic of the culture of the schools visited was a focus on high achievement, on creating an environment for learning where it is not deemed to be *'geeky'* to *be seen as bright'*.

This focus on high achievement extended to the teachers as well: one participant noted that *'teachers cry if they get good from Ofsted and not outstanding'*. However, another aspect of school culture that was deemed to be very important was the recognition that teachers should be supported if they were having problems and that there would be help to resolve any issues that they had with particular classes or individuals. Helen, in her role as an Advanced Skills Teacher, had the remit to support staff who were having difficulties. This was organised on a system of self-referral and was not reported back to the headteacher. The headteacher was only involved if decisions needed to be made about changing the responsibilities or working conditions of the teacher in order to support their development.

A further influence on the culture of the school is determined by geographical location and the cultural norms expressed by the students, especially with regard to developments in technology. Eleanor picked up on this point.

*Eleanor: The student world has changed over the past 10 years. Notions of what it is to be British have changed; things are much more fluid. Values and ideologies are in the state of flux. This is a challenge to me as a digital immigrant. Things (technology) move in a very fast way.*

The culture of the schools was also directly influenced by its catchment area. The majority of schools served predominantly middle class areas and this had an impact on the attitude to school that the pupils held. One of the limitations of the study is in the sample of schools that were visited: it was not possible to gain access to an inner city school or a school serving a deprived catchment area. This offers the possibility of further research.

As has been already mentioned the research evidence suggests that an aspect of teacher expertise is the ability to create a lifeworld in their classroom, an identifiable space that is

shaped not only by the teachers expectations, beliefs and values but also through engaging with the expectations, values and beliefs of the pupils. As a mutually comprehended shared space for learning, the classroom becomes a personalised 'culture within a culture', reflecting the wider cultural assumptions of the school but expressing them in specific ways. This is partly achieved through acknowledging and responding to the personal and lived experiences of the pupils, adapting the teaching in the light of a detailed understanding of *'the backstory'* as Anne puts it. Alongside this the teacher finds appropriate ways to share their own personal beliefs, values and experiences. The extent to which this is a coherent and mutually accepted construct allows pupils and staff to create a meaningful learning environment in which the imperatives of the 'system', at national policy level and school level, are played out within terms that are mutually agreeable. The teacher becomes a credible 'expert' at shaping and forming the conditions in which learning can take place. The classroom becomes a space in which external demands are modified and adapted in order to create a personalised and shared lifeworld.

This was a point that Charles made: *And maybe that's what an expert teacher does: they create a culture in their classroom where the kids know what to expect and they know it's about learning and they know they're safe, they know they are going to learn.*

A number of examples from the data illustrate the ways in which this happens. Andy, for example, thought that it was important that he should 'tell the truth' about what the pupils are learning: whether this is purely for the purposes of passing an exam or whether it has a wider relevance that will be of value later on in life. He saw that it was important that he was explicit about the more instrumental aspects of learning and that pupils should understand why they were being asked to do certain things.

Other teachers created a culture in the classroom that modified or ignored school rules in the light of their own beliefs and values. As one teacher shared with me: *I'm out of order sometimes. You are meant to walk in stand behind your desk and then sit down. I can't do that! Kids get on to the fact that each teacher is different.* This point illustrates that there is a fine line between the personalisation of classroom culture and adhering to expectations of the culture of the school as a whole. This is an issue of power which is explored in the next section.

## 9.4 Theme four: power

Having a degree of expertise infers a level of knowledge, understanding and experience and this confers a level of power. What power do expert teachers have? And how is this displayed? What are the implications of seeing teacher expertise as fundamentally improvisational? This thesis claims that teacher expertise is:

- principally grounded in the relationships between teachers and pupils; and that
- teaching and learning is personalised according to the knowledge that the teachers have of their pupils and the knowledge that they choose to share about themselves.

The relationship between teacher and pupil is one that is based on a range of assumptions about power. One of the qualities that teachers with expertise are acknowledged to have is their ability to be able to establish the conditions through which teaching can take place. This is an attribute that is valued by headteachers as well as their peers. One headteacher referred to one of the participants in this research as being able to *get the pupils eating out of her hand*. The implication of this statement was that all students, across the entire ability range, were able to learn something in this teacher's lesson. What was explicit in this comment was the perceived power that the teacher had over the pupils that she taught.

The way in which this power was gained was not through coercion, both in the particular instance referred to above and in all other cases. The language that the teachers used when talking about the relationships with their pupils was based on concepts of 'respect', 'trust' and 'love'. There appeared to be two processes in which power was demonstrated in the classroom: power 'over' the student by the teacher, in order to ensure that they were engaged in the process of learning, and the empowerment 'of' students through dialogic pedagogies that involved them in the learning process.

The power that the teachers had 'over' their pupils was derived from several factors: the experience and status that the teachers had within the school, their knowledge of how to control classes and their personality. The ability to manage behaviour was achieved through treating the pupils in a respectful manner.

The empowerment 'of' the pupils was derived from more general factors, principally the cultural expectations of the school expressed in terms of *'working with as opposed to 'on' pupils'*

(Derek), not tolerating staff shouting at pupils (Charles), tackling the resentment that pupils feel towards being treated unjustly (Alan) and acknowledging that all pupils have the potential to be successful. These assumptions were also shared by the individual teachers. The teachers liked being with their pupils and this was reflected in their belief that the best way to teach was to involve the pupils. Their vocational commitment to teaching and the interest they had in their classes meant that they wanted to engage in dialogue with pupils and to hear what the pupils had to say. The priority given to dialogic pedagogies was a demonstration of a shift in the power relationship with pupils. As the teachers did not explicitly talk about power in the earlier interviews that they gave I raised this issue specifically in the final interviews that I had with them all and asked them for their views on this concept.

Eleanor felt that her style of teaching involved handing over a great deal of power to her pupils. She stated that this did not necessarily imply a loss of control but, for her, it did raise the issue as to how much power teachers had and, for her, this was an example of the paradoxical nature of power in the classroom.

*Eleanor: Actually as a teacher you don't have any power at all, only expectations. You can't make any students do anything. The punishment thing doesn't work; it's about the things that you expect. If you go in (to the classroom) in a power type mode you are treading very dangerous ground with some students. The trick is getting them to think that you are in control.*

In effect she was making a connection between power 'over' and the empowering 'of' pupils in which the former was achieved through the latter. She rejected an approach based on coercion as being unworkable.

There does seem to be a particular characteristic of the power that teachers have 'over' their pupils that is derived from having the confidence to 'be themselves'. It is expressed through sharing information, opinions and experiences that they have had and letting the pupils see that they are a real person. The research suggests that this is a reciprocal arrangement that arises out of the teachers wanting, and needing, to know pupils as individuals and which, in turn, leads them to sharing aspects of their own lives. Implicit in this approach is the encouragement of a more mutual power relationship within the classroom and this also seems to be a significant feature of teacher expertise.

*Anne: The power relations in the classroom, it's a mutual thing. The more mutual it is the more success that you have. If the students don't feel that they are empowered then I don't think that*

*they will make progress. They have to have a degree of power over their own learning, or power to feel free to explore, to make progress.*

The ability of teachers to create their own lifeworld in their classroom illustrates the way in which they are empowered to exercise their autonomy; being granted permission to 'do things their way'. Charles: *Well actually the kids don't like it, (uniformity of teaching) they want variety. They don't want to go from one Helen to another Helen to another Helen to another Helen. They want to go from a really good lesson to a really good lesson to a really good lesson.*

However, as has been seen in the previous section the personalisation of classroom culture can conflict with the expectations of the school culture when school rules are modified or ignored in the light of their own beliefs and values. When this is viewed from the perspective of power it suggests that a teacher with expertise can be seen as an approved maverick to the extent that individuality is encouraged and their inconsistencies are sanctioned. The empowerment and approval of teacher expertise operates within the context of the power that is exercised by the leadership of the school and especially the headteacher. This is particularly the case when determining the extent to which consistent practices are expected and reinforced. The extent to which inconsistencies can be tolerated was raised by Eleanor. She described the power structure in her school as a pyramid with senior leaders establishing and developing the ethos from the top which included a requirement for consistent practices across the school.

Eleanor: *I feel constrained by the power structure but not in a negative way. Alan (the headteacher) is after consistency and he wants us all to teach on the TEEP model (the Teacher Enhancement Effectiveness Programme). I do my own thing anyway but it is based on TEEP. This is by coincidence but it is what Alan wants. The consistency bit works positively when everybody is going in the same direction.*

Eleanor drew a diagram in my notebook to illustrate this point. This drawing showed a lot of arrows going in the same direction with some arrows veering off to the left or right. The point that she wanted to make was that when everybody is broadly going in the same direction it is possible to tolerate some variation and that there can be some flexibility within the overall constraints. She felt that headteachers need to trust teachers to do things right. However, she qualified this by saying that schools were full of mixed-ability teachers and that the problems with the weaker teachers caused problems for the whole staff.

The dilemma of deciding how to respond to variations in the quality and experience of teachers was raised by William, the headteacher of The Shakespeare School, when he was talking about the way he builds relationships with staff through distributed leadership.

*William: .... so basically we let people get on with the job. We're not at all bureaucratic, so we don't say you must plan lessons in this format, we don't say we want to see your lesson plans, we are very kind of laissez-faire in that respect. We don't tell them how to run their departments but we look at the results. So we provide a framework, we provide the support and we are rigorous on the outputs. But we don't dictate or prescribe the methods. Now that fits with the national strategy in terms of literacy and numeracy, getting everybody at the same level and to go beyond that you need to release people's creativity. I think that what we have slightly lost sight of the past few years is that it is okay for certain staff who have been in the culture for a long time, but actually you have got a lot of new blood that is coming in all the time. And what's happening is those people come in and we have perceived that we have probably become too loose. And there has become too much variation in people's practice and therefore part of the (schools) teaching and learning strategy is to pull people back towards a common baseline and then release them again.*

The implication of this is that the power can only be granted to teachers to be more autonomous after a period of time when they have proved themselves in terms of the outputs of their teaching. The power exercised by headteachers to allow teachers a degree of autonomy was noted and appreciated by many of the teachers.

*Richard: I feel supported by the school and especially by the head; he believes in the Arts and believes in the subject and the life skills and social skills that it develops.*

*Helen: (The head) has given me tremendous power, influenced the way that I teach and given me the confidence to try new things. I feel I have been empowered and have been able to have an influence over other teachers.*

Nevertheless it was the external power and influence of government education policy and the impact of Ofsted that, understandably, had the most significant impact on schools. William (the headteacher at The Shakespeare Academy) expressed it this way.

*William: There was period about five years ago when .... there was a flowering of interest in things like the RSA Opening Minds, things like Building Learning Power.... and there were lots of*

*schools that were starting to dismantle their regular key stage three curriculum, different time blocks, integrated humanities... There was a great flurry of interest in all of that and what I sense with the coalition government is that all of that is shutting down again and we are going back to a much more compartmentalised academic, exam focused, curriculum and a kind of... There's a panic in schools, there is a desperation around results ....a desperation to do whatever you can to gain that extra few percent because the consequences of slipping through the net is the rulebook will be on your head. That's what I would say is happening.*

These pressures were also being felt by the teachers in the school, particularly those teaching subjects such as drama that are not included in the list of 'approved' subjects There was a real sense of anger at the these decisions: '*f-----g infuriating*' as one teacher expressed it to me. The impact of policy changes were felt to be '*unprecedented*' and the pedagogical implications of the changes were felt to be '*inspired by pseudo-political values*' in which certain curriculum areas were deemed to be not academically rigorous.

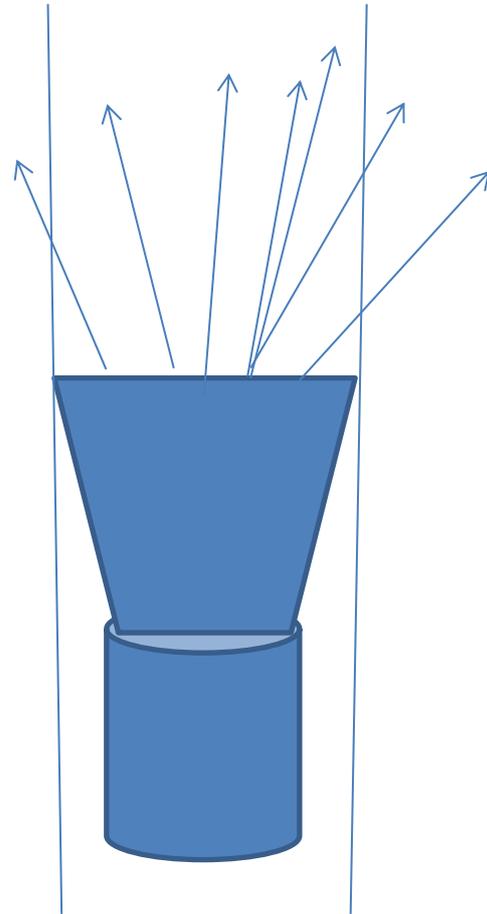
Another aspect of external power mentioned was the power of the parents. This was noted as being particularly strong as the school was situated within a middle class community. It was pointed out to me that the impact of this 'power' on certain teachers was not to be ignored or underestimated and was likened to 'bullying'. The teacher in question said that they were '*lucky to have avoided this*'.

The implications of power for an understanding of teacher expertise suggests that the empowerment of teacher expertise is perceived as going through a number of phases. The initial phase is concerned with gaining efficacy as a teacher within the context and culture of the school and once this has been achieved then the teacher is empowered to 'get on with the job'. This eventually merges into a third phase whereby teachers are licensed to operate within their own frames of reference and it is accepted that this is deemed as appropriate and acceptable practice. Their level of teacher expertise means that they are able to establish relationships with pupils and achieve results that other teachers are not capable of. This process is represented in Figure 9.3

**Improvisatory phase:** teacher expertise demonstrated through improvisational practice and establishment of personalized 'lifeworld' of the classroom. Increased agency sanctioned through empowerment of practice. Some approaches fall outside of the expectations for most staff. 'Maverick' practice sanctioned on evidence of outcomes (exam results and human).

**Developmental phase:** teacher efficacy established, building of confidence, experience and tacit knowledge.

**Establishment phase:** expectations from leadership for conformity to professional and cultural expectations of school.



**Figure 9.2 The phases of empowerment of teacher expertise.**

This model articulates the process of negotiated, cultural change which leads to a mature expression of teacher expertise. This process can be summarised in the third postulate of this thesis:

That the improvisational nature of teacher expertise is viewed as the negotiation of a situated culture, operating as a form of empowerment linked to the created state of social agency.

## **9.5 Conclusions and summary**

This chapter has outlined the thesis of the research that is based on the grounded theory of teacher expertise and the postulates derived from the literature review. This view of teacher expertise has been seen to be consistent with a 'prototype' view of teaching and a Transformative Teleology. The characteristics of teacher expertise have been explored in relation to three concepts: structure, culture and power. The personalisation of teacher expertise was related to Habermas's notion of the lifeworld. External influences on school culture and the practice of teacher expertise illustrate the colonisation of the lifeworld.

# Chapter 10: Conclusions

*This chapter outlines the journey of the research returning to the initial purpose and research questions and summarising the key findings. The claims for knowledge that have been made within this thesis are presented and the implications for professional practice are suggested. A critical reflection notes the limitations of the research and possibilities for future research. Finally there are some thoughts on the place of this research within the current UK educational landscape.*

## 10.1 Summary of the thesis

The purpose of this research, to gain a greater understanding of teachers' expertise and determine the extent to which improvisation is a facet of advanced professional practice, was expressed in the principal research question 'what is the relationship between teacher expertise and improvisation?' and developed in the following seven questions:

1. What are the qualities that define an expert teacher?
2. How do teachers become identified as experts?
3. To what extent do 'expert teachers' see themselves as experts?
4. How do expert teachers display their expertise in the classroom?
5. In what ways do they improvise?
6. To what extent is improvisation a conscious and intentional facet of their expertise?
7. Is there a positive relationship between improvisation and teacher expertise?

The research involved undertaking a pilot case study and six comparative case studies of teachers who were deemed to be experts within their respective schools between November 2011 and April 2013. Final interviews with each of the participants took place in December 2013 and January 2014. The research took the philosophical position of social constructionism and employed a methodology based in case study and grounded theory in order to privilege the voices of teachers (primarily) and headteachers in the contested discourse over the nature of advanced professional practice. The research offered two postulates:

- That as all cultures are concerned with, and defined by, the relationship between fixed and emergent structures that they are therefore improvisatory in their social nature and their constructed being.
- That as all dynamic cultures are improvisatory through social interaction, this social effort represents new social improvement and advancement through adaptive and incremental progress.

The findings of the research propose the following tentative conclusions that arise out of the grounded theory and the postulates. These five conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. That advanced professional practice is best described through the notion of 'a teacher with expertises' and that this is preferable to the term 'the expert teacher'.
2. That 'teachers with expertise' display a range of expertises, whilst they have much in common with each other they are not necessarily the same. The range of expertises is not necessarily seen to the same degree in all cases at the same time.
3. The range of expertises are interrelated and socially constructed.
4. The practice of 'teachers with expertise' is fundamentally improvisatory.
5. The improvisational nature of teacher expertise is derived from four processes:
  - the expression of tacit knowledge;
  - relational and interactional practice;
  - personalisation (of learning, of the teacher and the learning environment);
  - self-reflection leading to adaptation of pedagogy.

The findings of the research were that the designation of 'the expert teacher' was not a useful way of describing advanced professional practice and that 'teacher with expertise' was a more appropriate alternative. This suggests a theory of teacher expertise that is based on the variation and adaptation of a 'prototype' model (Sternberg and Horvath, 1995). This view of expert practice is based on assumptions that teaching is a complex activity and that 'what works' is essentially unknowable; however advanced practitioners have the expertise to adapt and interact with their pupils in order to create the conditions in which learning can, and does, take place. The main claim that the research makes is that improvisation is a significant feature of teacher expertise that is based on assumptions that teacher expertise cannot be described as a 'final goal' but is a process of continually working towards honing a range of skills within a personalised learning culture (or 'lifeworld'). This suggests a third postulate:

- That the improvisational nature of teacher expertise is viewed as the negotiation of a situated culture, operating as a form of empowerment linked to the created state of social agency.

## 10.2 Contributions to knowledge

This research makes a number of claims to new knowledge. First it offers a theoretical conceptualisation of improvisation as social action to complement our understanding of improvisation as a mode of artistic expression. This has provided a way of studying improvisation within educational contexts that could be transferred into other settings which can contribute to the emerging field of critical studies in education (Heble and Waterman, 2008; Lewis, 2008).

Likewise this research builds on the understanding of expertise and expert performance, specifically within the contested debate within education on the nature of advanced professional practice. The grounded theory builds on non-essentialist approaches to understanding teacher expertise and extends the work undertaken by Sternberg and Horvath (1995) and Smith and Strahan (2004). Further contributions are made to the work of Hattie (2009) and Goodwyn (2011) by articulating the ways in which improvisation is a facet of teacher expertise.

The unique methodological approach, blending case study with grounded theory, has deliberately privileged the voice of teachers in order to bring their insights and understandings into the debate on what constitutes 'great' teaching. This approach offers an insight into the theory that is developed through practice. Whilst the findings from the research are not generalisable they do offer a form of *exemplary* knowledge (Thomas, 2011). The knowledge, insights and theory derived from the examples in this research can be viewed and understood from the perspective of another context. The example is not to be taken as representative or typical, and neither as an example to be followed. Rather it offers a representation from a particular context to be understood within that context. It can be interpreted by others within the context of their knowledge.

Finally it has made contributions to my own research projects in that it has provided a theoretical basis for articulating the concept of 'the authorised teacher' and provided empirical evidence for reconceptualising the phases of teacher development.

## 10.3 Implications for practice

The findings of this research have a number of implications for practice especially in relation to the continuing professional development that supports advanced professional practice. School leaders and CPD coordinators need to 'give the best the best'. Often this occurs through getting expert teachers to work with other teachers, generally less experienced teachers possibly in a scheme where they are targeted at supporting the teachers deemed to be inadequate or only satisfactory. There is much to be commended in this practice but there is also a need for expert teachers to be working and sharing practice with other advanced practitioners. The continuing development of teacher expertise is a priority since 'expert teaching is central to the movement towards excellence in education' (Jegade et al., 2000: 305).

The work of sharing outstanding practice would support reflexivity through acknowledging 'the complexity of what we do spontaneously, without prior deliberation, problem solving, interpretation, or other intellectual working out' (Shotter, 1994). One of the outcomes of this process would be to recognise improvisation as a 'conscious competence' (Schön 1987) and could be facilitated through networks of support for outstanding teachers. A specific area of attention should be given to reflecting on the ways in which practice is adapted and personalised 'in the moment'.

One of the findings of my research is that the professional development of teacher expertise needs to recognise this occurs in two distinct phases. The first is the 'enabling phase' of which the intention is to support the emergence of the expert teacher and the second is the 'sustaining phase' which is concerned with the support given to these teachers that acknowledges their expertise.

There are also implications for headteachers and policymakers regarding the thesis that teacher expertise is best expressed as an ongoing process of learning and self-development '*always striving to be better than you were the day before*'; a process and not an end state. There is a need to understand the impact that school culture has on teacher expertise and the ways in which teachers develop the lifeworld of the classroom through building relationships with pupils and the personalisation of teaching strategies. This relates to the level of trust and autonomy that is accorded to the expert teacher. Part of their journey of continual improvement is actually about the ability (and the permission) that they have to improvise, to take risks and try things

out. This has implications for the cultural assumptions that determine the environment in which expert teachers work. Both headteachers and teachers who participated acknowledged the need for risk taking and experimentation. One headteacher talked about wanting '*unsafe lessons*' as an antidote to formulaic, tick box approaches to the planning and delivery of lessons in which learning is uniform and predictable. Expert teachers need to have the space to 'break the mould'. For school leaders there is much to be learnt about the cultures that support and encourage expert teachers; school cultures that are based around values of personalisation, risk taking, authenticity and improvisation.

Another implication for the CPD of expert teachers is through acknowledging their holistic approaches to pedagogy in which their 'humanity' is at the forefront and their concerns are evident for all of their pupils *as individuals* as much as it is for educational outcomes. In Habermasian terms this means that their expertise is not restricted to technical learning (the *techne*), the transmission of knowledge in order to pass exams although this is a significant part of their approach. The teachers that were seen demonstrated a commitment to more authentic notions of pedagogy in which the social agency of pupils is seen as being of equal value to the outcomes.

There is an issue concerned with the relationships between professional practice and theory and the way in which praxis (theory generated through reflection on professional practice) can be developed. My argument is that this area is the site where schools and the academy need to be engaged in a professional partnership in order that a critical praxis can be developed that enables teachers to look beyond their own particular circumstances in order to co-create their identity as 'expert teachers'. There is a role for the academy in supporting teachers to view their expertise from different theoretical perspectives and thereby to extend the ways in which they can articulate their expertise and to become critical autonomous agents of an authentic education, an education that has a social and ethical purpose as much as it has an instrumental purpose.

## **10.4 Limitations of the research**

There are a number of limitations to the research and some of these have been addressed in the discussion of methodology in chapter 6 and in the review of the pilot case study in chapter 7. This was a self-funded individual research project using a sample of teachers across a wide

geographical area. Access to the schools was made on the basis of headteachers who were already part of the researcher's professional networks. All of the schools provided environments that were conducive for teachers to establish positive relationships with their students. At the time that the research took place all the schools in the sample were judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. It was not possible to gain access to inner city or urban schools or schools that were in challenging circumstances. These environments might have given a different picture of teacher expertise.

All the participants in the research (teachers and headteachers) were white Caucasians so the findings do not account for the diversity amongst the teaching profession as there were no black, Asian or ethnic minority teachers represented. Another limitation of the sample of teachers concerned the six teachers involved in Phase Two. Whilst there were three female and three male teachers all of the male teachers came from the same school. All the headteachers interviewed were male.

Time limitations also had an impact upon the process of reviewing the data. It was not possible to have an independent and comprehensive peer review of the process of analysis and subsequent interpretation. Similarly it was not possible to gather all the participants together for them to review the research findings and conclusions. This was an opportunity that several of the participants would have liked to have engaged in.

Consequently the findings of the research are presented as provisional as they are based on the particular interpretation of the researcher. They are, however, open to the interpretations of other researchers who may arrive at different conclusions concerning the characteristics of teacher expertise. These limitations however do afford opportunities as they raise questions about the possibilities and scope of future research. These possibilities are dealt with in the next section.

## **10.5 Possibilities for further research**

There are a number of possibilities for further research that could explore facets of the improvisational nature of teacher expertise. These can follow two main lines of enquiry. One would be to focus on the impact of school culture on the development of teacher expertise through an ethnographic study. This could explore the ways in which the lifeworld of the classroom is socially constructed and the relationships and interactions that bring this into

being. This could also give attention to the processes through which teachers with expertise gain, or are given, autonomy.

A second line of enquiry would be to focus on those practices where teachers intentionally use improvisation in order to develop greater proficiency and skill in this area. An intention of such research would be to articulate the tacit knowledge that teachers have in order to extend the repertoire of intuitive practice. This approach would be ideally suited to a participatory action research methodology.

## **10.6 Final thoughts**

One of the defining features of a neo-liberal ideology is the assumptions that it holds about self-interested individuals and the superiority of free markets. A consequence of this is the centralised control over schools which has led to the intensification of teachers work, the de-professionalisation of teachers as their autonomy and their judgements have been restricted and the development of a performative culture in which teachers align their practice to external targets and evaluations (Passy, 2013: 106). The potential for isolationism and vulnerability that an accountability culture places on individual teachers is significant. Therefore the findings of this study, located within a social constructionist paradigm, offer a critical alternative to the neo-liberal agenda. Social constructionist approaches that take account of the transformative power of school culture can provide an additional dimension to the transformative expectations of individual teachers to make a difference to all the pupils that they teach. This reinforces the importance of a school context in which teachers can develop a resilience to continual change and sustain a long term commitment to the profession (Gu and Day, 2011).

This research began on a personal note and perhaps it is fitting that it ends in the same way. The prime motivation for undertaking this PhD was the acknowledgement that my Masters study on improvisation within the Arts generated a number of unresolved questions particularly regarding the role of improvisation within social contexts. This research project has provided me with an opportunity to engage with these issues and allowed me to articulate a position from which I can offer a critical perspective on policy and practice. A further (misplaced) motivation to engage in doctoral research was that it would provide me with an opportunity to offer a summative account of the beliefs and values that I have come to hold as a consequence of a professional life working in education. I acknowledge that this was a naïve and unrealistic

expectation. However what I do recognise is that through undertaking and completing this research I have gained a network of contacts within the fields of professional development and critical studies in improvisation that promise opportunities for possible collaborations and future research. Whilst this research falls short its summative intent it has succeeded in a formative function in that it has provided me with a clearer philosophical position from which I can view the social world as an improvisational phenomenon. This research will inevitably lead to further enquiries. Wherever I go next it has provided me with a clearer sense of where I am starting from.

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