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Potential Theoretical Approaches to Support the Critical Exploration of ‘The Problem(s)’ of Preparing, Recruiting and Retaining Headteachers in Scotland

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Chapter 6

Potential Theoretical Approaches to Support the Critical Exploration of ‘The Problem(s)’ of Preparing, Recruiting and Retaining Headteachers in Scotland

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Abstract

This chapter adopts a critical perspective designed to develop alternative, more diverse understandings of factors behind longstanding international concerns over an apparent headteacher recruitment crisis (Bush 2008a). Despite policy rhetoric in Scotland, the case study country, understandings are limited with little interrogation or framing of key ideas (Forde and Torrance 2021). The development of the constructivist theoretical design foundations from which this research project is constructed, has at its core narratives of educational leadership within a participatory action research approach (PAR). This coming together of distinct methods provides a multifaceted approach, designed to stimulate new thinking by involving participants in the research design and analysis of findings: at macro level, with policy constructions around the problem(s) of ‘headship’ using the Bacchi approach; at the meso level, with communities of practice using the Delphi technique to map out underpinning concepts of headship development; and at a micro level, from life history through narrative autobiographies, harnessing experiences and motivations. Here our methods of data gathering and of data analysis seek to build a participatory approach leading to the co-production of knowledge in which we use a combination of thematic and creative analytical approaches. Our intention is to raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice, in order to generate a provocative dialogue in educational leadership, by presenting 'different' knowledge co-produced by researchers and participants and presenting this knowledge 'differently'. And in so doing, to enrich an ongoing conversation (Barone 2007).

6.1 Introduction

In narratives of educational leadership, Scotland provides a rich case study where - despite the policy rhetoric - understandings of ‘the problem(s)’ of preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers are limited, with little interrogation or framing of key policy ideas (Forde & Torrance 2021). This leads the authors to ask why, despite the cohesive policy environment and established framework of developmental support, is the role of the headteacher not seen as attractive by more teachers in Scotland? And, alongside this, whether formal headship preparation programmes represent a significant barrier to headteacher recruitment? Or, whether it is the role of the headteacher itself that presents a significant barrier? Such questions inform this critical exploration of the future of headship.

There has been a longstanding international policy and research interest in this area (Hanbury 2009; Rhodes & Brundrett 2008). Indeed, a large-scale study of the recruitment and retention of headteachers in Scotland (MacBeath et al. 2009) provided some insight into barriers and enablers to headship. However, the use of surveys and semi-structured interviews

in that study with data analysed using statistical testing and thematic analysis, limited the exploration of lived experiences. In order to stimulate new thinking, three constructivist theoretical methods within a participatory action research (PAR) approach are harnessed in this new study of ‘the problem(s)’ of headship in Scotland, which may have implications for other international contexts: the Bacchi approach; the Delphi technique; and from life history, narrative autobiography. The utility of these methods within a PAR approach resides in the manner in which they encourage critical exploration and collaborative learning, since “treating problems as self-evident can pose a risk for evaluation practice” (Archibald 2020, p. 2) where different perspectives come together to produce knowledge. This chapter explores the combination of these approaches to data gathering and analysis in building a PAR project. The PAR design of this study challenges methodological conservatism and its rigid norms which have historically skewed the methods endorsed and taught, the value attributed to projects and their findings, with corresponding implications for research funding and ultimately, for how we see the world (Lincoln & Cannella 2002 with wider discussion in Bailey 2019, p. 96): “All norms have power to fix thinking, to occlude and foreclose conceptual possibilities, and to reproduce hegemonic power relations”.

Participatory action research (PAR) is a variant of action research, where the research is co-constructed within a social constructivist stance, underlined by the principle of reciprocity (Maiter et al. 2008), where participants and researchers reflect on outcomes collaboratively (Leitch & Day 2000) within a rigorous and systematic approach, to ensure that the outcomes are both trustworthy and useful. Additionally, PAR is a powerful way of building a development agenda, building agency leading to social change and improvement in relation to the area being investigated (MacDonald 2012; Selener 1997). A defining feature of PAR is that research is *with* rather than research *on* participants, premised on the idea that there are multiple perspectives in any context, allowing the sharing of different perspectives between researchers and participants as a developmental tool “resulting in rich explanations and interpretations” (Jacobs 2016, p. 50). The approach foregrounds the importance of the lived experience of participants through which knowledge and practice to address issues within context can be developed, combining theory and practice (Jacobs 2016). Each stage of PAR comprises a cyclical process of research, analysis, reflection and action. The three methods identified support a collaborative approach enabling researchers and participants to explore in-depth the lived experiences and practice realities of headteachers and those aspiring to the role.

Bacchi’s (2012a) Foucauldian (WPR) approach provides a means of critically analysing what the policy problem(s) is/are and in turn, what ‘the problem’ identified is intended to address. Through critical reflexivity, the political dimensions of policy and practice are scrutinised to enhance understandings of regimes of power, both political and professional, exploring the process of problematisation (deep level scrutiny), enabling us to critically scrutinise relevant literature and policy documents, and to identify “possible deleterious effects they set in operation” (Bacchi 2012a, p. 7). The Delphi method offers a flexible research technique, particularly when knowledge about phenomena is incomplete or contested as it is about prompting and supporting interaction between participants; building, clarifying and reflecting on ideas collectively and subsequently, agreeing an agenda for development. The strength of a narrative autobiographical approach combining elements of ‘life history’ and ‘narrative analysis’, lies in its use as a reflective tool, with researchers collaborating with participants to review and appraise events, experiences and influences on their journey, useful where identity is in transition such as with the journey to headship.

This union of less conventional research methods signals the adoption of critical perspectives in order to develop alternative, more diverse understandings of educational leadership. A central concern of the project is to engage with participants in the co-production of knowledge and so we look to engage participants in both the generation and the analysis of

data. At the macro policy level, constructions of ‘the problem(s)’ of headship will be interrogated through Bacchi analyses. At the meso level, drawing from the policy analysis, insights from communities of practice will be co-constructed using the Delphi technique. At the micro level, practitioner narrative autobiographies will add depth to new understandings. Here in particular the use of a creative analytical approach will enable us to explore in depth the day-to-day lived experiences of headteachers. Our intention is to raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice, in order to enrich an ongoing national and international conversation (Barone 2007).

6.2 Situating the Case Study for Exploring the Problem(s): Scotland’s Education System

Of Scotland’s population of 5.46 million (NRS 2020), 697,989 are school pupils with 398,794 catered for in primary schools, 292,063 catered for in secondary schools and 7,132 catered for in special educational provision (Scottish Government 2019a) 96% of pupils are educated within state (rather than private) schools (Woods et al. 2020a). Scotland represents a relatively small education system within a cohesive policy community (Woods et al. 2020b) which is arguably overly cosy (Humes 1986), rather than constructively critical to generate provocative dialogue (Bhattacharya 2021). Within that macro level and in relation to headteacher/principal preparation, an established and evolving (responsive, rather than inert) national policy supports a relatively comprehensive professional development framework and funding.

The dynamic nature of the Scottish education policy environment reflects that education in Scotland is complex, shaped by continuous reform and defined by tensions and dilemmas associated with issues of governance, performativity and accountability, with cultural, structural and socio-economic diversities and inequities. This complexity is reflected in the twin aims of Excellence and Equity (Mowat 2018) underpinning contemporary policy ambitions for the school education system. The accountability agenda is supported by an annual National Improvement Framework (NIF) (Scottish Government 2019b), and a national programme (HMIe) of school inspection and local authority (LA) inspection where “headteachers and Local Authorities are partners, each contributing and supporting each other and respecting the different role each plays” (Education Scotland 2019). Scotland’s 32 diverse and largely hegemonic hierarchical LAs – that gain most of their funding from central government with only 15% raised from local taxation - are charged with securing the annual improvement of school performance. Six Regional Improvement Collaboratives were established in 2018 to enhance system collaboration - with “a political requirement to be seen to make progress” (Scottish Government 2019c, p. 32) – intended to support the empowerment and agency agenda for headteachers, teachers and the communities they serve to: “Bring together local authorities and Education Scotland [a national agency] to develop different ways of working, build capacity across a region and add value through collective efforts” (Scottish Government 2019c, p.1).

As part of the current reform programme in Scottish education which seeks to ensure enhanced outcomes for all learners through system-level and system-wide improvement, the role of the headteacher is perceived as a central. This spotlight on the headteacher role in the delivery of national policy aspirations has intensified in recognition of a pervasive poverty related attainment gap, for which significant government funding has been allocated directly to schools. Among proposals in the recent policy set (Scottish Government 2017a,b,c) was for a *Headteacher Charter*, representing one of a number of policy solutions, presented as a way of increasing headteachers’ autonomy (Scottish Government 2017a) with greater power particularly in the areas of curriculum, improvement, staffing and funding (Scottish Government 2018, p. 2), also constructed as a means of bringing about ‘over-

responsibilisation' (Forde & Torrance 2018). The Headteacher Charter provides a mechanism for holding headteachers increasingly to account, changing their responsibilities by altering the relationship between headteacher and the local authority (Scottish Government 2016, p. 3), bringing about changes to the governance of education (Torrance et al. 2021a).

Within contemporary perspectives on the development of the Scottish education system the role of the headteacher remains key, with corresponding funding for the pre- and post-appointment development of heads remaining a policy priority. System leadership (Hopkins & Higham 2007) forms part of this policy discourse, the expectation being that headteachers contribute to policy deliberations and system-level improvement, for the benefit of *all learners*. However, despite the policy rhetoric, understandings of system improvement are still at a relatively early stage, with limited interrogation or framing of these ideas within key policy documents, including those most referenced by the teaching profession (Forde & McMahon 2019; Mowat & McMahon 2019). This reduces the potential of such policies impacting on system-level improvement (Forde & Torrance 2021). However, school leadership continues to be perceived as embodying a key mechanism for progressing national policy intentions (Davidson et al. 2008), particularly in relation to the educational outcomes for marginalized pupils (Scottish Government 2016).

6.3 What do we know already about the Problem(s)?

Understandings of the role of the headteacher in enhancing school effectiveness have significantly developed over the past thirty years. Internationally, leadership development and more specifically headteacher development, has become the preoccupation of those charged with strategically targeting school improvement efforts constituting, "a major national policy priority of governments" (Davidson et al. 2008, p. 68). A perceived global headteacher recruitment and retention crisis (Bush 2008a; Rhodes & Brundrett 2008) in particular relation to inner cities and rural communities (MacBeath et al. 2009), alongside considerations of succession planning (Hanbury 2009) have focused discussion further, as to what constitutes effective preparation for headship to encourage and support aspiring headteachers to move into the role. Continuing professional development (CPD) is recognised as an ongoing requirement for HTs as their needs change through different career stages following first appointment (Earley & Weindling 2007). Arguably, university headship preparation programmes have been perceived by some - internationally and nationally - as presenting a significant barrier to recruitment and retention, a deterrent to potential headship candidates who may perceive them as disconnected from school realities (Torrance 2013).

The trends in Scotland reflect international concern about the recruitment and retention of high-quality school leaders. Moreover, whilst acknowledging the considerable and longstanding focus paid to the professional development of aspiring HTs in Scotland, concern was raised over a lack of focus on the needs of relatively new heads and of those with more experience (Woods et al. 2007). Two significant national research projects have been conducted in this area in Scotland. The first, *The Recruitment and Retention of Headteachers in Scotland* research project was commissioned by the Scottish Government in December 2007 (MacBeath et al. 2009). The purpose of the study was to make recommendations on issues related to the recruitment and retention of headteachers in a context where there was firstly, an emerging pattern of difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of experienced and suitably qualified teachers to headteacher posts and secondly, a demographic pattern which meant that within a period of five to eight years, a substantial proportion of serving headteachers were anticipated to retire. The sample included serving headteachers plus, as a strand of the research, data was also gathered from a sample of suitably qualified and experienced deputy headteachers. The study identified systemwide issues regarding succession planning and

recruitment pipelines, with a paradox identified between headship being the hardest of jobs and the best of jobs. One of the critical issues that emerged from the study was that whatever the pathway to headship, the experience of being ‘the ultimate authority’ was a shock for which few headteachers felt they had been adequately prepared, in particular relation to the complex multiple accountabilities with which headteachers grapple. This perception of the demands of the role seemed to influence teachers’ decisions whether to pursue a career in headship. Among the deterrents identified by the ‘career deputes’ - who at that point, had chosen not to apply for a headteacher post - were the multiple accountability and administrative demands made of headteachers and, a perception that the role was distant from teaching and learning and from young people (Forde and Lowden 2016).

The second significant Scottish project, the *Headteachers’ Professional Development* research project was commissioned by Learning and Teaching Scotland (now Education Scotland) in March 2007 (Woods et al. 2007). The background to this research was a perceived need to identify and respond to changing needs at different career points, recognising the increased complexity of the HT role, complicated by changing role conceptions (Begley 2006; Woods et al. 2007) to include contributing beyond the HT’s own school, to system leadership (Hopkins 2007). The purpose of the study was to enhance understandings of headteachers’ (HTs) perceptions of how appropriate existing provision for their professional development was across Scotland, in terms of how well it supported their role. The sample included serving headteachers plus LA personnel. Through analysis of the findings, key principles of good practice in headteacher professional development were highlighted, along with priority areas for enhancing provision and four suggested areas for future research.

The Recruitment and Retention of Headteachers in Scotland research project (MacBeath et al. 2009) was a substantial study with data gathered using online and postal questionnaires, interviews and focus group meetings. However, the methods of data gathering and analysis it employed were very conventional, perhaps not encouraging ‘blue skies thinking’. The *Headteachers’ Professional Development* research project (Woods et al. 2007) was also designed to be comprehensive. However, despite inviting all HTs in Scotland to participate, only 11% completed the online survey, although other data was generated including telephone interviews with 36 headteacher across a wide geographical spread. While both studies provided some insight into the lived experiences of headship, in the subsequent decade there have been significant changes to the role. That said, issues related to recruitment, retention and professional development remain a concern (ADES 2016) leading to the Scottish Government - as part of The Empowerment Agenda (Scottish Government 2019d, p. 4) in the current reform programme - launching a recruitment campaign ‘Heading in a New Direction’ in 2018.

6.4 What do we not yet understand about the Problem(s)?

There has been a longstanding international policy and research interest, nevertheless, understandings of educational management - and subsequently of leadership - are still developing and are heavily contested. This reflects tensions in conceptual underpinning, originating from understandings gained in the field of management and business, despite public sector organisations differing from private services in relation to customers, markets, pricing and products (Kinder 2011). This perhaps explains why “a significant amount of the field’s understanding of [educational] leadership is grounded in highly dubious and problematic assumptions” (Gronn 2003, p. 269).

The rise of leadership in education reflects similar interest in wider public service organisations, with leadership gaining prominence since the 1980s. Leadership is now perceived as facilitating change either to improve quality and/or organisational performance

(Pratt et al. 2007), or to progress government-driven reform (Wallace 2011). Management in public service organisations has been consigned to maintenance activity (Rowing 2011; Thorpe et al. 2011). Consequently, education like other public-funded services such as the NHS, have embraced government endorsed leadership development programmes.

Arguably – although a contested assertion - a distinction can be made between organisational leadership with its roots in business management and leadership of public sector organisations, with educational leadership characterising a field in its own right (Gunter & Ribbins 2003; Gunter 2005). The management of schools is unique compared to other public sector organisations, due to “high degrees of organizational autonomy and external penetration” (Wiseman 2004, p. 166). Moreover, school leaders are distinguishable from leaders in other organisations by their drive to enhance students’ learning and development: “They explicitly seek and want to make a difference to the schools they lead” (Davies 2005, p. 75). Indeed, this was a key factor identified by Hay McBer Ltd. (2000) in giving evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee in 1998, concluding:

...highly effective head teachers were the highest performing leaders when compared to other groups of senior managers in public and private sector organizations ... The role of the head is one of the most demanding ...because of the sheer range of management and leadership accountabilities.

Little wonder then, that there is international concern for the preparation, recruitment and retention of headteachers. In Scotland, concern is intensified against the backdrop of recently introduced legislation identifying the national programme *Into Headship* as mandatory for new headteachers from August 2020. There are concerns about the potential effects of this, with some looking for alternative ways to prepare aspirants for the complex role of headship in today’s school contexts.

6.5 How can we develop new understandings about the Problem(s)?

Despite the policy rhetoric, understandings of ‘the problem(s)’ of preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers in Scotland are limited, with little interrogation or framing of key policy ideas (Forde & Torrance 2021). Our intention is to draw from what is already known and to build a research project designed to stimulate new thinking, to raise significant questions and to construct narratives around prevailing educational leadership policy and practice, in order to generate debate and new ways of thinking (Barone 2007). There is considerable material available to work with, using new lenses to critically analyse the relationship between policy expectation and assumptions, theory and lived experience. In exploring the lived experiences of headteachers, particularly their day-to-day experiences in that role, we look to draw on the potential of a creative analytical approach. Conceptual analysis underpins this research design, “where concepts, their characteristics and relations to other concepts are clarified” (Nuopponen 2010, p. 4). Narratives - illustrative of the interrelatedness between themes and ideas – will be aligned and organised within a refined, evolving and increasingly sophisticated conceptual framework. This framework provides a dynamic tool, intended as a device to provide coherence and conceptual distinctions to the complex phenomenon (Mitchell 2019), with “deeper, and more integrative understanding of the topic and concepts central to the study” (Ravitch & Carl 2015, p. 38).

Table 6.1 Building Knowledge Collaboratively

Method	Collaboration	Building knowledge
Critical policy analysis: Bacchi's WPR method	Using Bacchi's questions to critically probe with 'expert groups' policy problems, solutions and alternatives	identifying key issues for further exploration through the Delphi method
Delphi Methods	Co-constructing meanings/ building consensus through participants responding to guiding questions and then analysing their collaborative responses in a series of feedback loop rounds	Identifying key questions for use with further Delphi groups; providing parameters for headteacher life history interviews
Life History Narrative Interviews	Participant and researcher collaborate to co-construct a life history narrative through the interview and a series of feedback loop rounds Researcher generates semi-fictional accounts of specific encounters and participant responds	Co-authored individual life history narratives exemplifying overarching themes of experiences. Data for use in cross-sample thematic analysis. The day-to-day experiences of headship

These methods encourage critical exploration and collaborative learning , since “treating problems as self-evident can pose a risk for evaluation practice” (Archibald 2020, p. 2). Table 1 sets out how researchers and participants collaborate in both the generation and analysis of data. Through harnessing three innovative and less conventional theoretical approaches, there is potential to both identify root issues and to explore lived experiences differently, to surface new understandings particularly in the life history narratives.

In the following sections we discuss these research methods. We briefly outline the purpose and process of firstly, the Bacchi-based critical policy and literature review and secondly, the Delphi Method. However, our main focus for this chapter is on the life history narratives and the challenges in developing collaborative approaches especially to data analysis, which have led us to trial a creative analytical approach.

6.6 The Bacchi Approach: Structured Critical Literature and Policy Analysis

The Bacchi technique can be harnessed in two ways to provide a specific means of critically analysing what ‘the problem(s)’ is/are in preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers in Scotland and in turn, what ‘the problem’ is intended to address: first, through critical analysis of relevant policy documents; second, through critical analysis of other texts such as policy critiques, scholarly discussions and empirical studies. Bacchi (2012a), drawing on Foucault’s (1977) argument about the significance of exploring why and how things become named as problems - ‘problem representation’ - provides an approach to the critical reading of key texts, providing a means of “disrupting taken-for-granted truth”, based on “a basic premise - that what we say we want to do about something indicates what we think needs to change and hence, how we constitute the ‘problem’” (Bacchi 2012a, p. 4). That is, how the problem is identified, classified and regulated. As Carson contends (2018, p. 1):

The ‘WPR’ approach serves as a necessary interruption to the presumption that ‘problems’ are fixed and uncontroversial starting points for policy development, and it

reminds us that the banal and vague notion of ‘the problem’ and its partner ‘the solution’ are heavily laden with meaning.’

Conventional policy analysis can omit to acknowledge underpinning assumptions, resulting in policy only being capable of solving a particular group’s issues. Policy discourse analysis using Bacchi’s (2012a) WPR framework, enables the examination of persistent policy problems in new ways, analysing how realities and solutions to perceived issues are shaped, identifying (discriminatory) policy silences, encouraging unthinking and rethinking of policy solutions, as well as how policy implementation is evaluated (Allan & Tolbert 2019).

The critical analysis of texts comprises four stages, combining Bacchi’s (2012b) WPR framework with a thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun 2018), to problematise the way problems specific to preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers are presented. This set of texts is first be analysed to generate broad themes to sort items into clusters. Second, references to the perceived problem(s) (such as issues and tensions) and to the perceived solution(s) in the extant system are extracted. Third, these extracts are analysed thematically, using Clarke and Braun’s (2018) six stages to categorise, with the codes of meaning interpreted within the texts. Overarching themes are identified. Finally, these findings are subjected to Bacchi’s (2012b) ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) framework of six questions to explore the policy problem, through analysis of the data to prepare a critical commentary on this body of scholarship. The next stage is to utilise Bacchi’s (2012) six questions through a Delphi process to co-construct with participants, understandings of policy intentions and to explore alternatives.

6.7 The Delphi Technique: Participatory Knowledge Creation

The Delphi method is a flexible, effective and efficient research method (Skulmoski et al. 2007), originally developed in the United States as a way of forecasting future scenarios (Iqbal & Pison-Young 2009; Skulmoski et al. 2007) but is also useful where knowledge about phenomena is incomplete or contested, as it can be used to: determine the range of opinions; test relevant questions; explore consensus. Delphi is participatory in nature (Maxey & Kezar 2016), used to gather and analyse the perspectives of experts through an iterative process of questionnaires (or meetings) and feedback, designed to enhance understandings and/or identify a dearth or incomplete knowledge (Skulmoski et al. 2007). In this research, ‘expert’ covers a range of roles: policy developers and actors, teacher educators, aspirant and serving headteachers.

A typical Delphi Method is in the form of questionnaires where the Round 1 Questionnaire (R1Q) is formulated, kept open-ended to encourage brainstorming / problem solving and taking around 30 minutes to complete. Data analysed from the R1Q is used to construct the Round 2 Questionnaire (R2Q). Participants are given the opportunity to: check the researchers’ interpretations of their responses; verify or change/expand their Round 1 responses to ensure that they reflect their views in relation to the other panellists’ responses which are shared with them (and so the researcher should check whether any changes have been made, requiring the data to be re-analysed). Participants then complete the R2Q, with the process for each iterative round repeated until either the research question is answered, consensus is reached, theoretical saturation is achieved or when sufficient information has been gleaned (Skulmoski et al. 2007).

As a method, Delphi is adaptive and responsive to the context and needs of the study. Using an adaptation of Green’s (2014) structure, the first step has been to bring together a group of experts to generate ideas about the current challenges around headship and headship preparation, asking for feedback on emerging understandings (Torrance et al. 2020) and to use these for further questions.

Table 6.2 Delphi Method Co-Constructing Questions

Round 1 Questions	Emerging Issues	Round 2 Questions
In what ways do current policy and expectations of head teachers influence teachers in their decision-makings about a career in headship?	The role and expectations of headship: notwithstanding the consensus among the main stakeholders, there remain tensions in this role.	What tensions are evident in the design and practice of the headteacher role?
Why is the role of headteacher not attractive to more teachers in Scotland?	Increasing policy expectations....is there the political will to facilitate a paradigm shift in policy development, allowing for the establishment and sustaining of links across the education system?	What role should headteachers have in national policy development?
In what ways might formal headship preparation facilitate or hinder progress to headship?	Rather than formal headship preparation, it is current perceptions of the complex nature of headship and the range of demands made daily and long term on the role, which hinder progress to headship.	In what ways can the positive facets of the role of headteacher be represented to nurture a career aspiration for more teachers?

Through this approach of working with communities of practice to identify key questions and collectively review and evaluate responses, we are strengthening the participatory approach in both the initiation of the project and the analysis of data as a means to co-produce knowledge. This collaboratively mapping of the evolving role of headteachers through the Delphi Method is then utilised in the co-construction of life history narratives.

6.8 Narrative and Life History Approaches: Insights from Experiences and Perceptions

Historically, researchers have generally been viewed as objective, outside the set of experiences being investigated rather than being an insider practitioner. Interest in narrative in social research has developed substantially since the 1980s. Cortazzi (2003, p. 200) identifies at least four reasons behind the importance of narrative analysis with its focus on: experience and meanings; concern with providing representation; ability to tap into the “humanity of teaching and learning and of its leadership”; and ability to explore research activity itself. Life history and narrative approaches can take different forms within an autobiographical approach to research (Forde et al. 2009). Narrative inquiry is particularly useful in this research study with its PAR approach, as it involves the telling of the story in full, giving participants voice, highlighting issues of power and collaboration in the research process as researcher and participant co-construct the story (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). The story - as with all lived experiences – evolves. Narrative responses can be developed into a coherent story or alternatively, searched through for key underlying and perhaps comparative themes. These responses can be drawn on to illuminate specific episodes from this lived experience. In this study a narrative approach is, for example, to explore participants’ journeys to headship, generating a set of qualitative case studies illustrative of and providing depth to key themes in the findings. In the process of analysis, we have looked to combine methods that enable us to

explore the overarching themes emerging from across the sample of narratives of the journey towards as well as exploring the day-to-day lived experiences of becoming and being a headteacher.

Narrative is often utilised within constructivist **life history** research which as a methodology, consists of a collective of life stories comprising the main data source, challenging the idea of a universal truth (Wright 2019). A life history is more than a life story (a rendering or interpretation of a lived experience) as it goes beyond an individual story recounted, drawing on other stories, theories, contexts and interpretations to add richness and depth (Goodson & Sikes 2001; Wright 2019). In so doing, life history research can capture the complexity of people's lives, exploring subjective realities, potentially providing transformative experience, allowing participants to reflect on and gain enhanced understandings of decisions and actions taken as they talk (Smith 2012). In order to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding, the researcher utilises an interpretive frame, adopting an emic (insider) rather the more common etic (outsider) positionality (Jones 1983; Wright 2019). In so doing, 'emic issues' or research questions revealed by actors emerge (Stake 1995), enabling minority communities to challenge the hegemonic discourses embedded in Eurocentric research methodologies (Wright 2019). Life stories and life histories are well used feminist methodologies, employed to explore the lived experiences of women (Smith 2012).

One of the criticisms of life story methodologies is that of validity. From a constructivist perspective, traditional validity is not perceived of as important, as researchers are not searching for an objective or universal truth (Dhunpath 2000). Life history is based on an acceptance of the validity of other people's experiences and truths, with participant 'voice' kept central and through listening, the researcher/narrator remaining aware of (reflexive, rather than denying) their own perceptions and bias, throughout the co-construction and sense-making processes to ensure participants' voices are not obscured or misrepresented (Smith 2012). As such, the researcher's experiences should be open to critical and public scrutiny: "Validity is established by demonstrating that sociological explanation is congruent with the meanings through which members construct their realities and accomplish their everyday practical activities" (Jones 1983, p. 152; Wright 2019, p. 186). In so doing, trustworthiness is enhanced with a more considered depth of analysis reached, whilst recognising that stories "are actively and inventively crafted" (Gubrium & Holstein 2009, p. 30). In this PAR study, the principles of life history method could provide a means of firstly, collaboratively generating stories and secondly, inviting participants to reflect on emerging themes from the cross-sample analysis, balancing these overarching findings with individual perspectives (Heilbrun 1989) and balancing broad processes of the journey with the day-to-day experiences.

6.9 Writing the Narrative

The attraction of this family of narrative methods is to gain a better understanding of the social reality and so, it is the story itself as well as the context leading up to the story and surrounding the story that is of interest (Atkinson 1998). Our focus is on the lived experiences of participants as leaders in school, including 'their journey' to their current leadership role and their aspirations regarding future developments. In so doing, insights are sought in relation to defining participants' "place in the social order of things and the process used to achieve that fit", as well as explaining their "understanding of social events, movements, and political causes", and how they perceive the relationship between their experiences and their ongoing development (Atkinson 1998, pp. 13-14). In adopting a constructionist approach (Elliott 2005) each headteacher/middle leader would be considered 'an artful narrator', the aim of each narrative interview being to stimulate their 'interpretive capacities' in activating the production

of narratives. The interview would therefore comprise a site for data production as well as an opportunity to collaboratively explore meaning.

This goes part way to explain why narrative inquiry attracts criticism by those, “making the claim of co-optation of voice” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. 75). Life history attracts criticism because of its positioning of the life history within historical context, preventing it from becoming “uncoupled from the conditions of their social construction” (Goodson & Sikes 2001, p. 17). Narrative approaches make particular demands on researchers but this helps to reinforce its participatory underpinnings. The ability to “listen attentively and beyond what is actually being said” and to “ask pertinent questions in a non-threatening manner” is centrally important, along with being “the sort of person that people want to talk to” (Goodson & Sikes 2001, pp. 20-26). Active interviewers “converse with respondents in such a way that alternate possibilities and considerations come into play” (Holstein & Gubrium 2004, p. 151). Through so doing, the researcher seeks to hear and understand another person’s story, telling it back to them, “in a new way” (Hooks 1990, p. 151). The researcher has to listen, “in an emotionally attentive and engaged way... demanding as it does an abandonment of the self in a quest to enter the world of another” (Riessman 2008, pp. 26-27); exemplify “the ability to be humane, empathic, sensitive, and understanding”, be “the best listener possible” and develop “a bridge of trust... and acceptance” (Atkinson 1998, pp. 28, 33 & 35). In so doing, “turn taking is disrupted, or suspended, for a time and the other conversational participants give the storyteller privileged access to the floor (Coates, 1996; Sacks, 1992)” (Elliott 2005, p. 10) with “longer turns at talk than are customary in ordinary conversations, ... requir[ing] investigators to give up control” (Riessman 2008, p. 24). Narrative research with its emphasis on *trustworthiness*, offers a pragmatic alternative to validity and generalisability. Trustworthiness is the preferred construct for a number of authors (Atkinson 1998; Bush 2003; Lincoln & Guba 1985 in Bassey 1999; Elliott 2005; Mishler 1990; Riessman 2008). Transparency becomes key in terms of making methodological decisions clear, describing the production of interpretations and the availability of primary data. In adopting a life story approach, personal truth is acknowledged from the subjective point of view (Atkinson 1998; Riessman 2008), internal consistency, coherence and plausibility becoming important quality checks.

6.10 Collaborative Analysis

There is a tension between the integrity of each life history and the cross-sample analysis. Smith (2012) made a clear distinction in her study of women teachers’ careers; once she had sent the transcripts to the participants who could amend and add to the material, there was no longer any involvement in the process of analysis and development of the data. However, in our study we are working collaboratively to ensure that the interviewee has both an active role in the construction of the life history and is also actively reflecting on the cross-sample data. The stages of this collaborative process are mapped out in Table 3.

Table 6.3: Co-authoring life histories

Stage in data analysis	Roles	Outcome	Defining and agreeing codes and themes
Independent review	R & I individually review recording/transcript	set of codes and possible themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > headteacher leadership style > reluctance to move into headship > confidence in leading small projects > opportunities from CPD...

Working collaboratively	R & I explore emerging codes	agreed themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > influence of headteacher > professional development > growing sense of self as a leader > relationships and purposes...
Cross-sample analysis	R generates a 'code book' and compares and contrasts emerging themes; all Is reflect and comment on codes and analysis.	sample of life histories - thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > influence of headteachers > impact of professional development > external pressures > own vision and values...

Roles: R = researcher; I = headteacher interviewee

Our initial approach was to gather narratives of headteachers' journeys to and experience of headship through interviews using a set of semi-open ended questions. To analyse the data collaboratively, two researchers and the participant independently reviewed and coded the recording/transcript of the interview and then held a three-way discussion. These were intensive discussions where the meaning of key codes/themes (Clarke & Braun 2018) were examined with researchers and participant working collaboratively to capture the participant's meaning and define the key themes. In the pilot phase, this step was then followed by two further discussions to test the applicability of the themes, and then reflect on the process, this time between the two researchers and two participants (who had a dual role as participants and researchers). From the discussion, it was evident that for the participant researchers, this process - the interview and the discussions agreeing the codes and themes - had been a very positive experience. Each participant researcher indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to 'tell their story', to be affirmed in this, to reflect on what they saw as pivotal experiences and indeed, to make sense of their journey to and in headship. They also reported that, though lengthy, through these discussions they felt assured they were able to tell their story rather than this being interpreted by researchers.

In these discussions, a significant issue emerged related to how we would maintain the significant experiences of the individual life history and the authenticity of the participant's voice and at the same time, how we would look across the sample to generate understandings. The typical process of moving from each individual set of data would be to discuss the themes using verbatim quotations from different interviews as illustrations. However, there was a sense that this process was inadequate, as we would lose the importance of the stories they told of their day-to-day experiences.

6.11 Illuminating the Lived Experiences of Headship: A Creative Analytical Approach

These life history narratives are individual accounts of the journey to and in headship which can, to a degree, be regarded as fictive in that the participant selects what they regard as the significant experiences in this journey. There is a dramaturgical element with participants recounting key tensions and turning points. What is also evident is that these are 'peopled' accounts, peppered with references to encounters, often seemingly minor, with others. These interactions and relationships are of critical importance in understanding these headteacher life history narratives, given that leadership is a relational practice (Eacott 2019) where leading is influencing through engagements with others. The use of a thematic analysis framework helped surface some of these references to others. However, we looked for a way of capturing and

exploring these critical encounters in these ‘peopled’ life history narratives by trialling a creative analysis approach using semi-fiction (Whiteman & Phillips 2006).

The peopled nature of the narratives presented in the transcripts is of interest to us, where leadership is being exercised in day-to-day, often fleeting, encounters which are of great significance for the participant, given that they selected these moments/encounters in their accounts of their experience of becoming and being a headteacher. The interview data pointed to how much of being a headteacher, is relational (Eacott 2019). The data also pointed to the acute nature of these seemingly everyday encounters. It was here we looked for different ways in which we could analyse the data and turned to the idea of a creative analytical approach to capture these encounters.

Watson (2011) notes that narrative research is used across social science as a tool but in this, there is little use of fictional narratives in which to present content. However, as Watson (2011, p. 396) notes “the artful nature of all narrative constructions” where all narratives are made up, suggests that this may be a fruitful approach in the exploration of lived experiences. There is an increasing interest in the use of literary forms to explore the lived experiences of individuals within a social setting, particularly an organizational setting (De Cock & Land 2006) where narrative fictions are presented as research texts. Of the three modes of using literature in organization studies, De Cock & Land (2006) propose, mode 2 seemed to have potential for us. Mode 2 is the use of literary genres as a way of representing organizational knowledge. De Cock & Land (2006, p. 11) argue that the use of literary genres can “radically critique [a] social organisation” surfacing and making explicit the lived experiences of individuals and their encounters with others. In doing so these semi-fictional texts can be provocative and lead to further reflection on these experiences. This approach can be used to present a nuanced version of these experiences, thereby having the potential to challenge unquestioned beliefs and to surface what is assumed.

Whiteman & Phillips (2006, p. 6) argue that using different strategies to write accounts of experiences in organisations, allows us to “shape organizational knowledge in different ways”. The consonance of Whiteman & Phillips’ focus on organisation studies with the study of the role of the headteacher, suggested that producing semi-fictional texts was a possibility. Whiteman and Phillips propose two different types of stories which are utilised in research - those produced by members of an organization and collected as data and those stories created by researchers to present data. In this study of headteachers’ journey to and in headship, we looked to combine these approaches with the headteacher participants providing their story and the researchers drawing on this data to create semi-fictional accounts of specific critical incidents. In this, we looked “to produce texts that present theoretical insight into organizational phenomena” (Whiteman and Phillips 2006, p. 14). Mifsud (2016) used a creative analytical approach to explore the mismatch between what principals narrated and their behaviour in meetings. We wanted to explore another mismatch in these encounters: the mismatch between the perceptions of the headteacher and those of the person they were engaging with. These encounters were, for the participants, laden with meaning and the tension often related to a gap between their perceptions and the views of the other person. Indeed, the life history narratives suggest that bridging this gap is a daily task for headteachers as they engage with a wide variety of people.

6.12 Creative Methods of Analysis: Constructing Scenes

The use of vignettes (Towers and Maguire 2017) as a means of representing these encounters was considered - short accounts of these critical encounters provided by the participant. However, such texts would be limited to the perspective of the headteacher narrator. We decided to explore these encounters from the different perspectives of the people involved in

these by constructing short scenes. The purpose in generating these dramatic scenes is partly to illuminate how headteachers “construct and perform their identities” (Mifsud 2016, p. 866) by constructing the other (Watson 2011). Therefore, we looked for some means to explore how headteachers in the positioning of others, constructed their identity through their narration of a specific encounter. We looked to underline the differing perspective by including firstly, a dialogue between the participant and the other person and secondly, the inner monologue of each party in this dyadic encounter. By introducing the voice of ‘the other’ into the life history narratives as well as a third voice, that of the researcher by constructing these scenes allowed us to “trouble the commonsense understanding of data” (Mifsud, 2016, p. 867) and gain insights into the significance of these fleeting encounters. Once the texts were written, participants were asked to reflect on these. We chose this approach of selecting specific encounters rather than a longer dramatic narrative because in the transcripts/recordings, there were multiple encounters over the lengthy journey to and in headship. These encounters appeared to be highly significant, given that the participants selected these in the life history narrative but they were episodic in nature. Therefore, rather than detailing one long semi-fictional narrative or drama, we sought a way of crystalising these often fleeting encounters.

The interview questions had lent themselves to the construction of a linear story and so our starting point in developing these scenes was to look for an overarching framework so we could contextualise these encounters at a particular point in the headteacher journey. Earley and Jones (2010) provide a schemata of the phases of headship - (1) early career leadership (2) preparation (3) early headship (4) experienced headship (5) headship and the wider system - which we used to identify the critical phases of the journey. The transcripts/recordings were reviewed and specific encounters selected for each phase. Once the encounters had been selected, one of the researchers then constructed a short scene. We illustrate these semi-fictional accounts with two scenes from the participants’ experiences in early headship.

In the interview from which the first scene is based, the headteacher spoke about the considerable pressure she had experienced in the local authority (LA) which tended to be directive about school improvement planning, in contrast to her previous experiences in another LA. The scene presents a dialogue between the headteacher and the LA officer and the inner monologue of each party. The scene was then explored with the participant who was asked to record her response to this scene. Our focus was on how the participant constructed the gap between the perceptions of a headteacher in relation to their role and the perceptions of others about this role.

Table 6.4 Scene 1: What’s important?

Perspective 1 Local Authority Officer	The encounter	Perspective 2 Headteacher 1
getting off to a good start	<p>LGO: “So what have you been doing since you started?”</p> <p>HT: “Things have been going well. It’s being great, I’ve been easing myself in, finding out about the school...”</p> <p>LGO: “Well, that’s doesn’t seem very much... You know there’s a lot to do here in this school.”</p>	this has to be about the school community

<p>there is a huge agenda for this school</p> <p>need to prioritise attainment - that's the job</p> <p>The LA provides this support.. HTs need to follow</p>	<p>HT: "Well for me, spending the time getting to know the staff, the children, the community, that's really important"</p> <p>LGO: "Of course, but there much more that needs to be done, the improvement plan, the LA has several areas to be addressed by the school"</p> <p>HT: "Yes, I am seeing things that need to be improved, taking a note of these, but developing a sense of community, for me, that's vital,</p> <p>LGO: "This is a critical time, need to hit the ground running in a new school. Attainment has to be your focus"</p> <p>HT: "Yes there are many things to address but for me I am about building a community here.</p> <p>LGO: "What that risk assessment? The LA's guidance was sent out. Have you completed ...?"</p>	<p>we can only improve together</p> <p>this is what I am about as a headteacher</p> <p>- building shared values, working together - not paperwork!</p>
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The reflection from the participant:

This still makes me feel uncomfortable even reading it now. I can completely understand the different perspectives here and the 'support and challenge' role of the local authorities. However, for me, it is imperative that a relationship of trust should be developed between LAs and HTs. It's very easy to make HTs, especially those who are new in post feel undermined rather than encouraged and empowered. If we want to attract and keep the best school leaders in HT positions, fostering a culture where HTs feel trusted, respected, and supported would seem to me to be vital. The relational aspect of this should not be underestimated.

In this scene what has been added is the perspective of the other, exploring why this first headteacher might have commented in the way she did. What this scene helps to point up is not just the mismatch between what each perceives as the priorities for the headteacher but the underpinning construction of headship. In the life history narrative, there was a strong sense of the exchange between the participant and the LA Officer with the participant quoting some of this exchange. However, in the life history narratives there are also more fleeting moments. The scene below depicts one of these fleeting moments from the second headteacher.

The topic to be discussed in this encounter was less important than the mode of interaction. In this interview, the participant had spoken about how overnight she became the 'Headteacher' in the eyes of the staff even though she had worked with these colleagues for ten years. The participant reflected in the interview that she realised that some staff did become more distant but this was to do with their perceptions of the role of the headteacher rather than necessarily changes she made.

Table 6.5 Scenario 2: Becoming Ms McBeath

Perspective 1: Principal Teacher	The Encounter	Perspective 2 Headteacher 2
Need to discuss this with the headteacher - need a decision	Sorry to bother you. I know you'll be busy, Ms McBeath	
	Oh, come on in - just getting sorted	It must be serious otherwise why 'Ms McBeath'
This is <u>the</u> headteacher	You see Ms McBeath n,	He has been calling me Fiona for ten years.
	It's Fiona....	I've not changed
This needs to be formal with the headteacher	Ms McBeath, it's about....	
	Okay, let's talk about....	I have not changed but this is not about me , it's about the role itself.

The reflection from the participant:

This fleeting interaction illuminates a number of challenges of novice headship, particularly when moving to Headteacher role in my current school, leading colleagues with whom I had worked closely for over ten years.

In early interactions as the headteacher I realised I was viewed differently by some colleagues and that there was greater distance and formality from some individuals and groups of staff. I was initially uncertain about my identity and position as the headteacher. I had strong, positive relationships with the staff team and I didn't want this to be undermined simply because of their view of the role - the Headteacher title - in a system that is traditionally hierarchically structured. I was conscious of how I was being perceived and felt in some ways that it would have been easier to go to a new school as a Headteacher. I had to accept that there was a difference; while I had not changed as a person, there was a leap in responsibility and 'status'. Through conversations with staff, I realised the formality was about the respect for the position and giving me my place.

Both these scenes were crafted from the discussions with the participants in the interviews. Both scenes relate to the first few months of headship and illustrate some of the issues faced by headteachers as they become established - both in the school and in terms of their growing identity as a headteacher. The two scenes are contrasting in that scene 1 relates to a formal meeting - though these were the 'casual' exchanges at the beginning of the meeting - and scene 2 relates to the type of exchange headteachers have every day. These episodes were recalled by the participants in their interviews many years afterwards and so clearly had been significant. Many issues are evident in these scenes which are pertinent to the development and support of novice headteachers, their vulnerabilities and their own coming to terms with the role and the development of their identity as a headteacher. Underpinning each of these encounters, is the gap between understandings about the purpose and role of the headteacher

but also implicit, is the issue of power by coming to terms with the scope but also the limits of their power and influence, along with the way in which novice headteachers have to negotiate their position and what they see as their purposes.

6.13 Tensions in Exploring Experiences in Becoming and Being a Headteacher

The *Future of Headship* research project is based on a social constructivist stance where knowledge is perceived to be socially situated and is constructed through social exchange. In this research project, we want to both represent the authentic voice of the life lived and also to theorise about these experiences, in order to better understand headship. In looking to ensure authenticity of voice and a sound theoretical framing of these experiences, at one and the same time, we need to find ways of representing understandings of these lived experiences. This process of co-producing knowledge, particularly the life history study of the journey to and in headship, has led us to explore different ways of gathering and analysing the data collaboratively. In the *Future of Headship* project, we are holding in tension a number of aspects:

- individual and collective - the agency of the individual leader (at all levels) but situated in an organisational space
- narrative and analysis - the stories of the lived experiences of individuals and the systematic analysis of these lived experiences to understand the role of the headteacher
- experiential and theoretical - the life lived and the bodies of knowledge which these lived experiences interrogate and augment
- practice and critical - the everyday actions in leading and the revealing of the assumptions underpinning these practices; the exercise of power through these practices and the consequences of this use of power.

These tensions are evident in the purposes and epistemological underpinnings of the study and the methods used to gather and then analyse data. These tensions have led to firstly, the blurring of the boundaries between researchers and participants and secondly, the exploration of ways in which these experiences, views and stories can be told, in order to contribute to the generation of different knowledge differently. An underlying tension exists between the voice of the participant in narrating their views and experiences, and the representation of data by the researchers. These tensions are evident in the data gathering methods as well as in the methods used for data analysis in the life history narratives. Our first step had been to adopt a typical qualitative data analysis method of thematic analysis, drawing from Clarke and Braun (2018) but we have now developed this as a collaborative process with the participant. Smith (2012) in her study of the careers of women teachers, worked with the participants to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. Thereafter, Smith drew from this data to write up the analysis. We wanted to push this boundary, by engaging participants in the analysis of the transcript/recording, and to collaboratively define the themes. Here, the initial intention was then to use these themes to analyse the experiences of the journey to and in headship. However, in this we were in danger of losing not only the powerful individual account of the lived experiences of the participants, but the very immediate and transitory nature of their experiences as aspirant and serving headteachers in encounters with others. It was here that we drew from a creative analytical approach to produce semi-fiction accounts of these encounters which enabled us to further reflect on these experiences with the participants reflecting on experiences “in this playful yet potentially penetrating activity” (Whiteman & Phillips 2006, p. 21). These scenes may well serve an additional purpose in the evolution of the research project, being used as stimulus material in interviews or focus group discussions. The methods of data

gathering and analysis used in this project are intended to produce different knowledge, differently. There is an urgent need to develop such insights about the role of headteacher.

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6.14 Conclusion

The recently published report from the Review of Educational Leadership, Management and Administration in the United Kingdom (BELMAS, Woods et al. 2020, p. 17) recognises key tensions relevant to this multi-faceted study exploring ‘the problem(s)’ of preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers in Scotland:

Firstly, there is the evolving headteacher role with changes to the balance of increased responsibilities, autonomy and accountability. There are tensions around whether headteachers can be genuinely characterised as policy actors or rather, simply implementers of externally mandated reform. The second challenge is the degree of centralisation being exercised by extant political leadership, the Scottish National Party Government. Educational improvement remains central to government policy (and political ambitions) and so is highly politicised. ... The third challenge relates to strengthening the link between leadership and learning ... the relationship [being] not fully understood nor realised consistently.

The generation of provocative dialogue could be perceived as a challenge to orthodoxy. Or it could be embraced as a genuine effort to contribute to the further development of educational leadership in constructive ways. Perhaps it can be both. Indeed, perhaps it needs to be. Without a fundamental examination of the role of the headteacher as it currently stands, the identification of enablers and barriers to and in that role, and the identification of the core purpose(s) of headship with refined role definition(s), it is likely that the role of the headteacher will continue to seem all consuming and unattractive to teachers and deputes, regardless of remuneration or promised developmental support. With that, debate is needed in relation to the capabilities required of contemporary school leaders and how best to support their leadership (and management) development. Otherwise, it is likely that we will be having the same conversations in another twenty years about ‘the problem(s)’ of preparing, recruiting and retaining headteachers in Scotland.

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