Raising the curtain

on relations of power

in a Maltese school network

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Acknowledgements

My doctoral journey throughout these three years has been incredible: a vortex of moments of enlightenment, discovery, reasoning, extreme joy, doubt, anxiety, scepticism, uncertainty, guilt … which had a transformational impact on my being/s, especially on those around me, without whose constant and unending support, realizing my dream would not have been possible.

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Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with …

[Foucault, 2002c, p. 458]

I am an experimenter and not a theorist … I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before.

[Foucault, 2002b, p. 240]

What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing … if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture … in which I can lose myself

[Foucault, 2002e, p. 17)

Abstract

This study concerns school reform in Malta. Under the policy framework '*For All Children to Succeed'* (Ministry of Education, Youth & Employment, 2005) [henceforth referred to as FACT], Maltese state schools embarked on the process of being organized into networks called 'colleges'. These consisted of primary and secondary schools according to geographical location, under the leadership of the Principal – a newly-designated role hierarchically above that of the individual Heads of School. The purpose of my research is to explore relations of power in a Maltese college. My study gives prominence to both theory and methodology. The theoretical research question investigates how networking unfolds among the various leadership hierarchies in school governance in a Maltese college. This is explored through the performance of policy-mandated collegiality; the circulating relations of power; and leadership distribution.

My study is framed within a postmodern paradigm and adopts a Foucauldian theoretical framework, more specifically his concepts of power, discipline, governmentality, discourse, and subjectification. Data for my case study are collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews; observation of a Council of Heads meeting; and a documentary analysis of FACT. Narrative is not only the phenomenon under exploration, but also the method of analysis, and mode of representation. Thus, I attempt to answer my methodological research question that investigates the ways a researcher negotiates the methodological tensions and contradictions in the conduct of qualitative inquiry in order to construct knowledge differently.

The Maltese college is viewed as a surveillance mechanism by both the Principal and the Heads, with collegiality being regarded as a straitjacket imposed by the State through a policy mandate. However, there is unanimous agreement on conscription

being the only way forward for Maltese state schools. Different degrees of 'support' and empowerment exist, according to the directives of the Principal and the State. College setup is problematized on geographical clustering and college streaming, due to which it may end up defying the primary aim of networking by clustering students from particular areas in isolation, resulting in social injustice and educational inequality. This study exposes a strong sense of sectoral isolation among the Heads – a situation being mirrored at macro-level with very few opportunities for inter-networking among colleges. There is an asymmetrical power flow among the college schools, both within the same level and across different levels. Despite the policy FACT mandating distributed leadership, hierarchical forms of accountability are still inherent within the system, bringing out a tension between autonomy and centralization.

Keywords: autonomy, collegiality, crisis of representation, decentralization, distributed leadership, Foucauldian theory, narrative dramatization, relations of power, school networks, writing process.

List of Abbreviations

AfL	Assessment for Learning
CoH	Council of Heads
CP	College Principal
DG	Director General
EO	Education Officer
FACT	'*For All Children to Succeed*'
HOD	Head of Department
NMC	*'National Minimum Curriculum'*
SDP	School Development Plan
SMT	School Management Team

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Chapter One: Setting the stage for my doctoral study (and my emerging 'selves' in the process)

> I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think you would have the courage to write it?…The game is worthwhile in so far as we don't know where it will end.
>
> (Foucault, 1988b, p. 9)

Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to my research story by presenting a documentation of the various stages as the drama around my doctoral journey unfolds. I set my study within the Maltese educational scenario by outlining the policy background for the reader who is not familiar with the local education system. I present an autobiography of my professional history in education, focusing on my specific interest in educational leadership which led to my embarking on my doctoral trajectory. I provide a warrant for my research, while addressing this specific knowledge niche in educational leadership. I subsequently describe the purpose of my research and outline my theoretical and methodological research questions, exploring them while providing a justification. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

Setting for the study

This study is set in Malta, where the education system throughout the compulsory school years right up to the tertiary level, along with the examination system, closely follows the British model (Sultana, 1997; Zammit Ciantar, 1993; Zammit Mangion, 1992) due to our long years of colonization under their empire. It is a tripartite system of state, church and independent schools. Education is free of charge for those students

who attend the state system, a section which constitutes seventy percent of the compulsory school age population.

The political change that took place in 1964, when Malta acquired independence from British rule, triggered a number of revolutionary reforms that the Maltese education sector has been experiencing ever since. These last two decades have been extremely significant for the Maltese educational scenario due to several major measures and restructurings that have been implemented. These underline attempts to augment the country's intellectual capital and provide improved quality education with the aim of enabling all Maltese children to succeed.

Policy background

The Maltese educational system has been undergoing a structured, gradual but steady change in terms of decentralization and increased school autonomy, with the main aim being that of renewal – modernizing it in line with global policy development. This was initiated by the publication of '*Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures'* (Wain *et al.,* 1995) – this document indicated a starting point for an examination of current policies and practices in light of the demands made by a fast-changing world. This government document established a set of agendas and strategies for tomorrow's schools, aiming to develop a 'new culture of learning and of effective learning environments'. Most importantly, it envisaged a shift of educational governance from a 'top-down' bureaucracy to 'communities', where parents, teachers and administrators come together to develop a sense of purposeful educational leadership.

'Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures' (Wain *et al*., 1995) as a consultative document paved the way for a revised *National Minimum Curriculum*

(NMC) published in 1999 – this document established compulsory schooling as the start of a lifelong process of education. This initiation of the decentralization process in the Maltese educational system was meant to provide schools with more flexibility and power to make decisions on matters related to educational aims, human resources, financial planning, and curriculum matters. Through greater school autonomy, it was hoped that schools would be in a better position to cater for the needs of their students through an enhanced teaching and learning process. In contrast to previous policy documents that were aimed at *restructuring* the Maltese educational system, the 1999 NMC can be regarded as the first concerted effort at the *reculturing* of the system:

> The NMC calls for *radical changes* in the whole culture of philosophical and pedagogical practices towards *collegiality and collaboration* among students, educators and stakeholders. This may prove to be the hardest to achieve since this calls for *a paradigm shift* in our value systems, beliefs, norms, attitudes and skills (Bezzina, in Giordmaina, 2000, p. 456, emphasis added).

This inbred culture of dependency owes its origins to centuries of colonization under different rulers. Malta has been enjoying independent status for less than half a century, but the mental and psychological shackles are still hard to throw off.

The '*NMC Strategic Plan*' (Ministry of Education, 2001) outlined the need to introduce new structures and fresh approaches, stressing that schools need to co-operate, pool and share experiences and ideas in a systemic way, that is, to network. Locally, the origins of the school networking concept can be traced back to the document '*Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures*' in which Wain *et al*. (1995) had recommended the abolishing of national examinations, streaming and the 11+ examinations, thus providing students with continuity through the principle of vertical and horizontal integration. Furthermore, Farrugia (1999) suggested structural and organizational changes – the most essential reform being a reorganization of state

primary and secondary schools to form combined entities. The '*National Minimum Curriculum*' (1999) recognized the importance of creating a smooth transition: 'a sense of continuity would enable students to realize that education is a *process* and not a series of disconnected episodes' (p. 33, emphasis added). All this paved the way for the basic principles underpinning '*For All Children to Succeed*' (2005).

The reform process that Maltese education has been going through since 1964 has, in the last decade, reached an extremely significant stage in its journey. These reforms were intended to ensure that education in Malta would cater 'for the specific needs of the student as an individual' (Galea, 2006, p. 4). They were also meant to reinforce the implementation of the decentralization policy, made public in the government's programme when outlined by the then President of Malta, his Excellency Prof Guido de Marco, in 2003.

However, centralization still features highly in some areas in the Maltese education system, in certain cases as strongly as it did in the past. Evidence of its highly centralized and bureaucratic nature is documented by Farrugia (1992), Wain (1991), and Zammit Mangion (1992). For example, the Government has the right to establish the National Minimum Curriculum of study for the schools (Ministry of Education, 1998). This notwithstanding, for the last two decades, the Ministry for Education and Employment has been promoting decentralization, fostering a policy that carries 'with it the promise of igniting dynamic processes and proactive behaviour that could make the school more responsive to its community of learners' (Sultana, 1997, p. 103).

The college reform in Malta: school networks and networking
The document '*For All Children to Succeed*' (2005)[henceforth referred to as FACT] set out the Government's strategy to transform the existing educational system into one

that would foster new professional identities ready to embrace innovative changes that may be introduced, as well as *learning communities* that would provide the appropriate scenario to ensure a *quality education for all*. This document argues that through school networks, all children can be helped to succeed. School networks are considered as learning communities better equipped to meet the needs of the Maltese students through working in partnership with one another, joint problem-solving, resource-sharing, and the creation of new practices within the specific and particular context of a school cluster forming a single college.

Under the reform, Maltese state schools were organized into ten colleges. 'College' is the legal term chosen to denote the network of schools. The setting up of all the ten colleges followed a three-year foundation plan between 2006 and 2008, with the colleges presently being at different stages of their development. The first three colleges were founded in 2006, the following four colleges were established in 2007, while the remaining three colleges were set up in 2008. By February 2008, the remaining vacant post for College Principal was filled, raising the full complement to ten.

Organizational restructuring generated by the college reform

College organization in Malta

The decision taken by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2005) has been to network by region – schools have been organized into colleges mainly depending on their geographical position on the island, with primary schools feeding into secondary schools. This is meant to ensure that children will begin and finish their education in the same college, ensuring a smooth transition across levels through internal exams, control, and accountability.
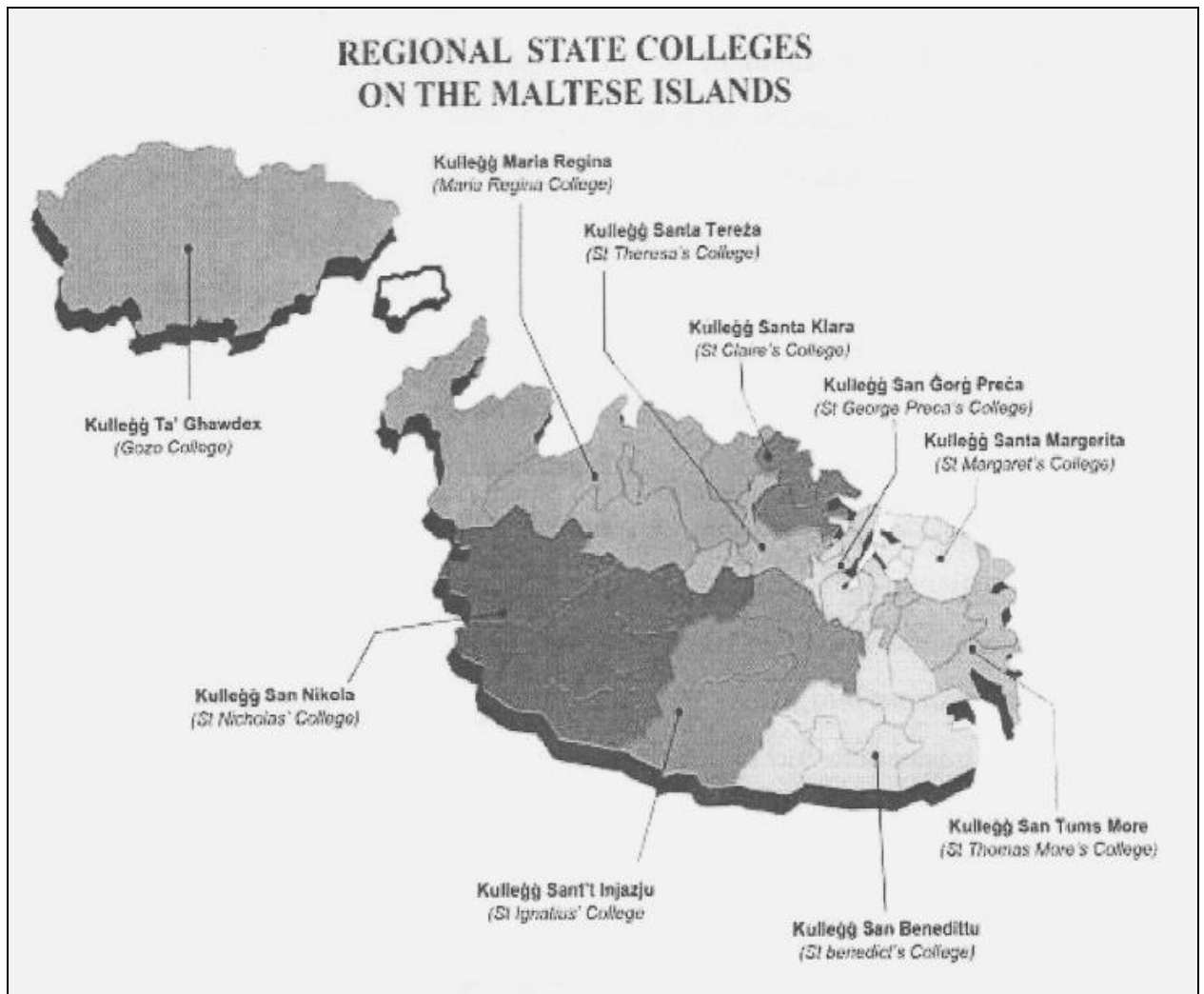
Figure 1.1: The location of the ten colleges as sanctioned by The Education Amendment Act[2006] (Borg & Giordmaina, 2012, p. 32)
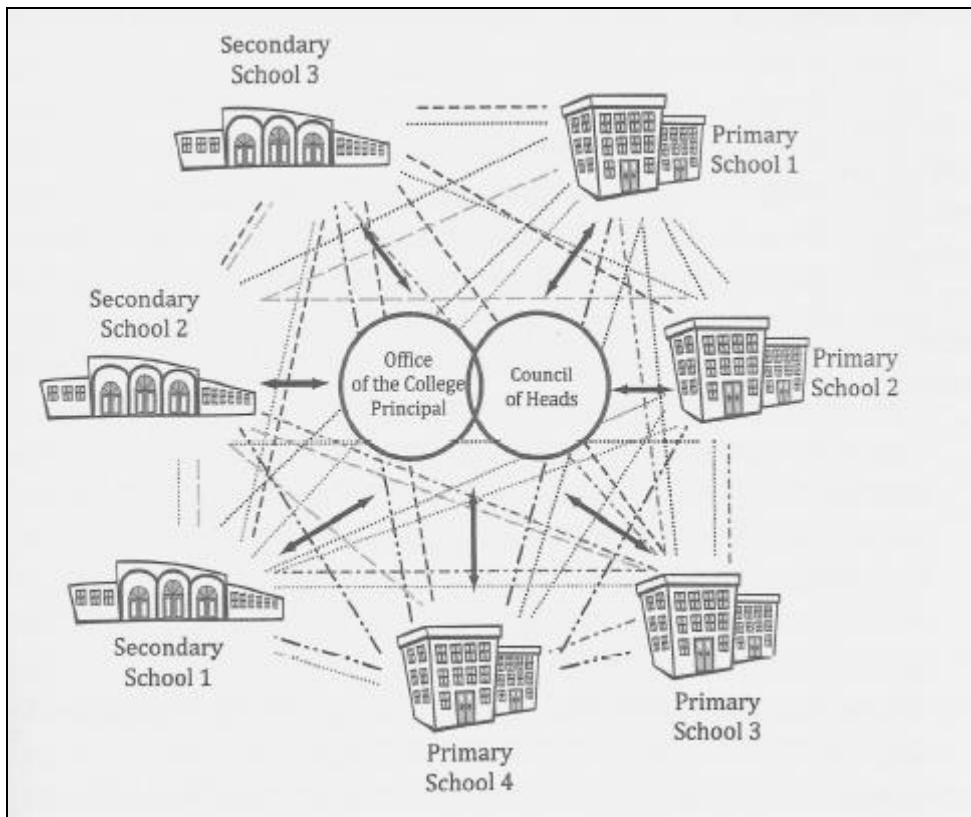
Figure 2: Operative structure of the state college (Fabri & Bezzina, 2010, p. 31-2)

This shift towards partnership working (where Heads collaborate with other Heads within the college) in the Maltese educational arena represents a defining trend in schools in the twenty-first century in various countries around the world (for example, the United Kingdom, Portugal, and the United States, among others), reflecting 'a shift from competition to collaboration, from top-down control to organizational autonomy' (Hopkins, 2009, p. 2). The founding of colleges is part of the government's drive to implement system-wide educational reform in the Maltese islands, with change being embedded in this new networking system which in turn serves as a 'cross-over' structure (Hopkins, 2005) for all the other aspects of change – networks will serve as the vehicle through which restructuring is driven.

The policy document FACT considered school networking as the main organizational reform which can bring about the process of transformation in the Maltese educational

system, advocated for by the 1999 NMC. Networks were regarded as an organizational structure that can replace the traditional top-down approach to reform previously used in the Maltese educational system with a more lateral approach, where ideas do not emanate solely from above but also from the schools who would eventually have to implement those ideas.

The college has a number of statutory functions that are outlined in the Education Act (2006). Among these, it should ensure the 'continuous and smooth process of education' to all children, as well as 'the responsibility and the accountability of whosoever is involved in the schools', in order to ensure 'the improvement of the quality of the educational provision…by promoting, achieving and maintaining high results and standards'. It is also expected to 'promote dialogue and a team culture among the Heads and school staff', as well as to 'ensure that the National Curriculum Framework is translated into an appropriate curriculum for college students'. It is also expected to ensure 'the promotion and dissemination of a culture of evaluation…internal educational auditing and full participation in the external quality assurance processes'. The college also has the responsibility to ensure 'the supply of resources, services and facilities', as well as 'the timely recruiting of human resources', ensuring that the latter function effectively to promote 'a healthy culture of good conduct and of discipline'. One of the most significant roles of the college is to 'promote and encourage…a positive attitude towards change' (Art. 51, p. 617-619).

Leadership roles in the college

This major reform necessitated the introduction of new roles and new responsibilities, amongst which was the deployment of the College Principal, designated to be the educational leader of the college as a whole. The Principal, a role which the Education

Act (2006) makes provision for, is described as the 'Chief Executive Officer of the College…who will be responsible to the Directors General as regards the performance of his functions and of the college according to respective issues' (Art. 52, 1). The various functions s/he is expected to perform are listed both in the policy document FACT and in the Education Act (2006). Besides ensuring 'an effective and efficient dialogue with all Heads of School and stakeholders', s/he is also 'expected generally to execute and implement efficiently the policies of the College' (FACT, 2005, p. 73). Additionally, the Principal

> provide[s] guidance, direction, and support to the schools, through their Heads, in pursuit of their aims and functions and will facilitate the coordination and organization of common activities, programmes, projects and specialization at the level of the college or each individual school (FACT, 2005, p. 45).

The Education Act (2006) compels the Principal to hold a monthly meeting for all the Heads of school in the college, which is legally known as the 'Council of Heads'[henceforth referred to as CoH], in order for all the leaders to *build* and *maintain* open channels of communication *within* and *beyond* the school community. Among the various functions listed in the Education Act (2006), the CoH is expected to 'nurture a spirit of collegiality in the running of the college while developing a common ethos and identity'; 'ensure an exchange of experiences'; 'ensure that the national policies on matters of education…are well understood…and being effectively followed'; as well as ensure that 'schools share the resources, facilities, and services' (Art. 55, p.621-2).

On the other hand, the Head of School who, according to the policy document FACT, is expected to lead and manage, is explicitly required

> to collaborate with other Heads of College Schools…in a manner that maximizes networking *under the leadership of the Principal* and according to

the *direction* and *guidelines* established by…*other competent authorities* (p. 74, emphasis added).

The overall purpose of the headship position is 'to provide professional leadership and to ensure the implementation and development of the National Curriculum' (ibid, p. 74). The main responsibilities of the Head are concerned with curriculum development; student matters; teaching personnel; home-school-community links; administration; and finance.

The policy document fosters a strong belief in 'shared or co-leadership', which is important for the distribution of the leadership function across more than one school location, thus offering the potential of generating 'healthy dialogue and debate' while fostering a 'satisfying and fruitful team spirit'. While advocating distributed leadership, FACT justifies the need for senior leaders – 'Distributed leadership only thrives where there is effective senior leadership' (ibid, p. 39).

Article 57 of the Education Act (2006) makes provision for a certain degree of autonomy for the colleges, stating that,

> The Minister and the Directorates shall promote the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the management and administration of the Colleges, within a framework of decentralization and autonomy of the educational operation and services given by the Colleges and their schools according to the priorities, targets and national strategies adopted by the Government (Art. 57, 1).

However, this is a limited form of 'autonomy' to be granted as long as the colleges work within the limits of the national targets and strategies as set out in the national policy. It is the Minister who 'delegate[s] in a clear manner educational functions to the Colleges and establish[es] the parameters of the function and the effective accountability of every officer or employee involved in the exercise of the delegated

function' (ibid, 2). The Education Act (2006) supports the interdependency of autonomy and regulation as depicted in FACT which states that,

> Autonomy is not to be confused with complete deregulation…autonomy and decentralization predicate a grasp by the Education Ministry and the central education entities (p. 29).

It further states that this school networking system 'needs to have a firm and solid hub to hold together and prosper' (ibid, p. 30). This 'firm and solid hub' is to be found in the two Directorates (Directorate for Educational Services [DES] and Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education [DQSE] (whose roles are explained in the next section of this chapter on p. 12), under the direction of the Minister.

Subsequent reforms in the Maltese education system

The FACT policy document led to further reform aspects, being closely followed by an amendment to the Education Act (House of Representatives, 2006) and the recent agreement between the Government of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers (July 2007), paving the way for the setting up of ten colleges. Furthermore, as a result of the schools college reform, in November 2008, the Ministry of Education published a policy document about the transition of students from primary to secondary schools under the college system, '*Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta*' (Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment, 2008). This proposed mixed-ability classes throughout the primary school years, eliminating the hitherto streamed primary classes in the final two years, followed by the phasing out of the 11+ examination – thus enabling a smoother flow from one level of education to another.

Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures	1995
National Minimum Curriculum	1999
The National Minimum Curriculum Strategic Plan	2001
For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organization for Quality Education in Malta	2005
Amendment to the Education Act	2006
Agreement between the Government of Malta and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT)	2007
Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Malta	2008

Table 1: Documents outlining the major reforms in the Maltese state educational system

The networking reform also involved restructuring the governing body of the education system (November 2007), with the ex-Education Division undergoing a transformation into two distinct yet complementary juridical entities: the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education regulates, generates policies, sets standards, and monitors the whole system to assure quality in all state and non-state schools. The Directorate for Educational Services acts as operator and co-ordinates those services that can be more effectively and economically rendered centrally, namely school resources management, human resources development, and student services. Each directorate is led by a Director General, with the subsequent departments falling under six Directors with their individual Assistant Directors. The rationale behind the constitution of these two directorates is to ensure that the operator and regulator were distinct entities. The Education's central authority could no longer assume the dual role of operator and regulator, as it had always been in the past. Moreover, the restructuring of the Education Division was meant to bring the central authority closer to the realities of the schools while simultaneously strengthening the Education Division.

Another structure which came into being as a result of the setup of colleges is the Educational Leadership Council (ELC), an entity which FACT fails to make reference to. Although this council does not have a statutory status, it is recognized as an official entity which brings together the top officials within the education sector: the Directors General, Directors, and Principals. This council, which is led by the Directors General, meets to ensure 'synergy' as well as the 'common' understanding of national policy. The ELC convenes on a regular basis and provides a forum to work on a collegial manner on current issues, realities, and challenges, as well as to set policy direction on a national level with direct input from all the colleges and the different departments in the Directorates.
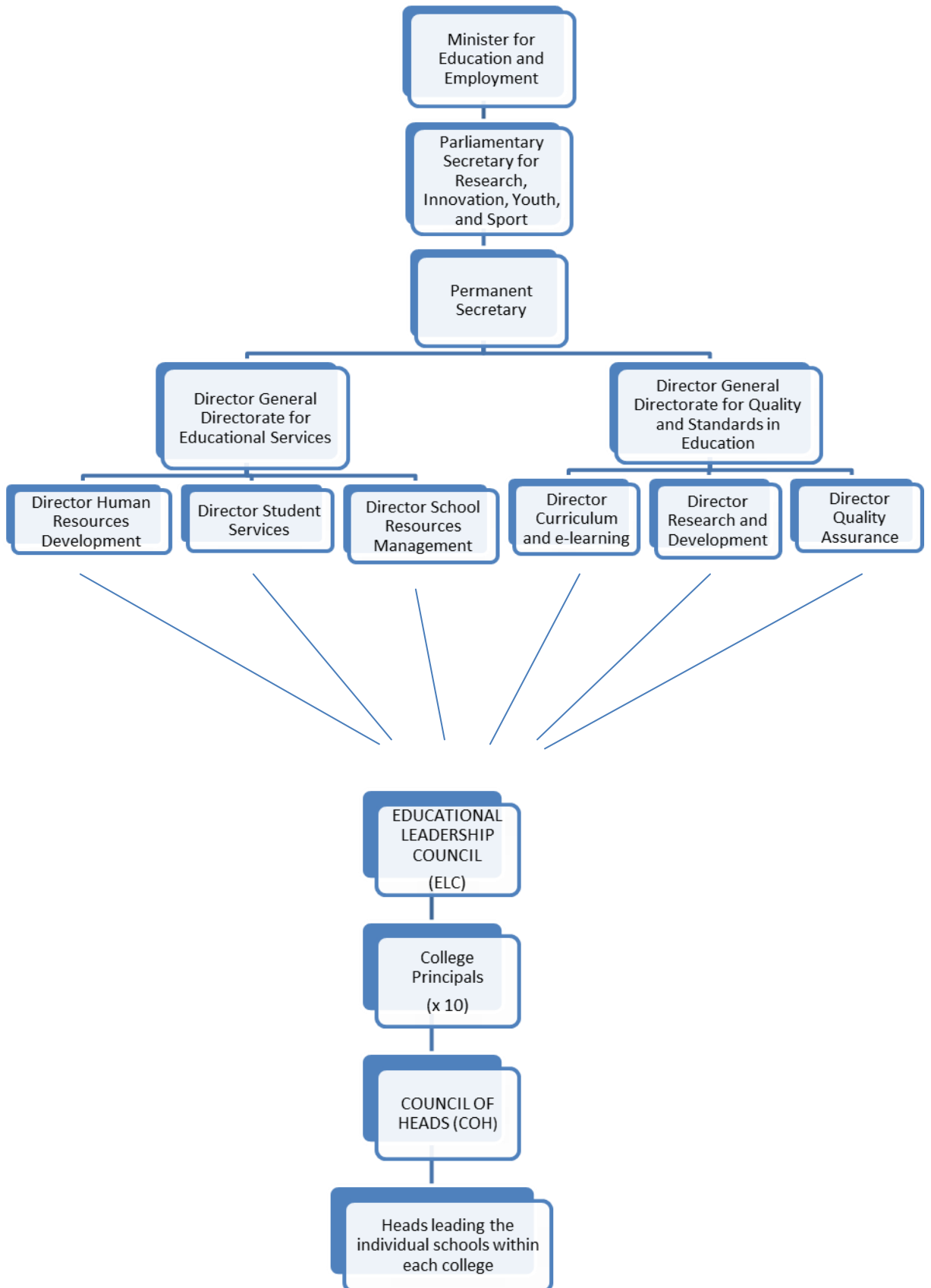
Figure 3: Organization structure of governance within the Maltese education state system

I now present an autobiography of my professional history in education, tracing my career from school teacher to deputy Head to aspiring academic, focusing on my specific interest in educational leadership (that constitutes the focus of my research) which led to my embarking on my doctoral journey.

My place in the research

My particular interest in educational leadership

My fervent interest in researching the leadership aspect inherent in local school networks, more specifically, the relations of power unfolding among educational leaders in a school network, can be traced back to 2007 – the year I was working on my MSc dissertation entitled '*Secondary School Leadership Styles: A Study of Schools in Malta*'. Back then, school networking was still in its embryonic stage – although a lot of positive aspects emerged, in that a substantive number of school Heads claimed that they would benefit from consultation, collaboration and the widening of vision, there was still a lot of uncertainty about this new setup. School leaders expressed the obvious fear of the unknown in the face of this education reform. I wanted to find out whether those initial fears have been realized, six years on.

In the meantime, I kept wondering about the newly-created leadership role of the College Principal and how the Heads, who had been used to years of autonomy ('autonomy' in the sense that they could make decisions about their school without consulting the Education Division, the latter being distant from schools in terms of help and contact) had adapted to this hierarchical leader and to a mode of collaboration and collegiality with other schools, who had before been considered as competitors. I decided to carry out a case study of a single college via in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary analysis for an exploration of the relations of power

among the leaders as they unfold within their everyday leadership dynamics. This decision was mainly arrived at through my own experience as a direct stakeholder in the pilot college as well as through a thorough review of the literature which led me to identify a gap my research could explore.

I now present a very brief autobiography of my professional and personal history in the field of education to provide some insights into the underlying reasons why I have chosen to do what I have done in my doctoral journey.

From school teacher to Deputy Head to aspiring academic

As both student and teacher, I was subjected to the discourse of isolationism ('solo' work was best) and competition (to be the best and come first in everything) prevalent in the pre-college days – discourses the FACT policy attempted (and is still attempting) to oust through its proposed discourses of collegiality, collaboration, and distributed leadership. I very vividly recall the strong sense of competition instilled in me as a student, in every scholastic activity, be it exams, sports, extracurricular activities…where there was no sharing or collaboration whatsoever, in order for 'our school', or better still, 'our class' to be the best. Classroom windows were literally covered in brown paper and we were not allowed to venture into other classes – the deep sense of competition among teachers as to whose class was going to obtain the best grades in exams was almost palpable. In my very early years as a teacher of English at a secondary school, I am ashamed to confess that I exhibited a similar behaviour. My teaching was driven by a sense of competition and notes were never to be shared, with attempts at collaborative paper setting[1] abandoned not only among

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[1] In the pre-college days, Annual exam papers were issued by the Education Division, being the same for all state schools at the various stages on a national level. The Half-Yearly exam papers were school-based and prepared by the subject teachers of each individual school. Before the existence of colleges,

teachers from different secondary schools but also turning out to be a near-impossible task with the teachers at my school. This strong sense of competition led to a pervading discourse of isolationism which became a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 2002h, p. 132) for the majority of the stakeholders concerned. Things then started changing. As a teacher, I was very wary of the proposed benefits of networking when our school formed part of the *Gozo College* back in 2006. As direct stakeholders at the chalkface, we were barely given any information about these colleges, let alone invited to attend consultation meetings. I have experienced various educational reforms along the years, but school networking was the one with the greatest impact and most widespread repercussions.

I must also confess to having an ambivalent relationship with colleges myself, considering myself as a simultaneous 'insider' and 'outsider'. I consider myself to be an 'insider' as I formed part of a college in the past and I conducted research in the college under study, spending long hours with the individual leaders. However, I also feel like an outsider in that my school does not belong to a college (due to it being at post-secondary level).

After outlining my particular interest in the research, I now provide the rationale for my study, thereby positioning it in relation to the current narrative on educational leadership.

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there had been attempts for the English Language & Literature paper to be prepared 'co-jointly' with the teachers of the girls' secondary school (I taught at the boys' school) but this was discontinued after the first attempt turned out to be unsuccessful due to resistance to 'co-operation' and 'sharing'.

Rationale for doing the research

Network leadership as an area of research is as yet under-explored, and therefore under-theorized. Lima (2010) highlights network dynamics as the least well-known aspect of networks – a limitation my study attempts to explore in order to simultaneously address the proposition put forward by Harris and Beatty (2004):

> The current policy drive towards collaboration, partnership and networking among schools inevitably will mean new and potentially different forms of leadership practice, possibly more horizontally figured and distributed in their nature. It would seem particularly important therefore to explore the forms of leadership that are emerging within these school partnerships, chiefly because so little is known about leadership across multiple sites (p. 244).

This places my research in context as I explore the emergent, fluid leadership in a network.

Youngs (2009) identifies a gap in literature surrounding distributed leadership in school settings – the absence of in-depth critiques of power relations – where there is no focus on the political agenda behind the leadership dynamics, or latent tension that is not easily observed. He argues that 'distributed leadership is tending towards an uncritical position that is…predominantly silent on how power relations at the local school level shape leadership activity' (p. 377), proposing that 'A critical theorisation of distributed leadership has yet to emerge where power is integral throughout the theorising' (p. 387). Both Fineman (2003) and Crawford (2011) are of the opinion that concentrating on leadership alone is not enough – analysing the organization, especially social relationships within it, serves as a means for comprehending leadership practice.

Harris (2007) laments the 'conceptual confusion and empirical reticence' (p. 315) surrounding the 'distributed leadership' field, suggesting that 'if distributed leadership theory is to have any explanatory or predictive power this can only be achieved through

empirical investigation' (p. 316). Due to this 'empirical reticence', a number of important questions remain unanswered, some of which are set out by Storey (2004): '…how widely should leadership be 'distributed'? Is the governing principle a fair share all round or is there some other operating rule? And who determines the distribution?…how will it fare in practice when competing against the dominant cultural model of the top-down leader?…What are the other implications of the distributed mode?…What dynamics are unleashed when leadership is exerted at multiple points?…' (p. 253-4). My research attempts to provide an answer to these 'important, unanswered questions' and to many more.

I now explore the research purpose of my study, outlining my research questions, their explanation, and justification.

Research purpose

The purpose of my research is to explore relations of power in a Maltese college among the 'key actors' involved, namely: the Minister for Education, the Directors General, the Principal, the Heads, and the FACT policy document.

Research questions

My study gives prominence to both theory and methodology, thereby addressing two main research questions. The theoretical research question is:

How does networking unfold in school governance in a Maltese college?

This research question explores three main thematic areas:

1. How is collegiality, as a policy-mandated reform, performed within the Maltese education scenario of gradual, but progressive decentralization?

Here I explore the leaders' conception of collegiality; their reaction to the implementation of the FACT policy; and its 'effects', especially through the discourses generating in the college as a result.

2. What relations of power flow in the dynamics among leaders both within and across the various levels of the leadership hierarchy?

In this question, I investigate the underlying relations of power among the top educational leaders, namely the Directors General and the Principal, the Principal and the Heads of School, and among the Heads of School themselves, and also the 'effects' of these relations of power.

3. How is leadership distributed among the leaders constituting the college?

Here, I examine the notion of distributed leadership as perceived by the leaders, especially their reception of its presentation in FACT as *the* leadership discourse; and its eventual (non-)enactment at both school and college level.

I position my work exploring the power flow among leaders in a school network within the current research narrative on educational leadership described in this chapter (p. 18-19). The significance of my research lies in the potential contributions my findings can make to theory, potential practical application, and revision of policy. Notwithstanding, I consider the main implication of my research to be theoretical – I provide a theoretical reconceptualization of leadership as it unfolds in networking and what emerges is a case study of network leadership that jars with people's received assumptions and completely overthrows the received notions of educational leadership as presented in literature. I illustrate how networking is 'not working' as laid out in the policy discourse, how it is fostering isolation rather than bonding between different sectors,

and how it is channelling the network towards insularity via 'intranetworking'. The power flow is uni-directional in a downward manner most of the times, overthrowing the notion of bi-directionality and decentralization commonplace in network concepts. Distributed leadership does not unfold as directed by FACT – it is a 'delegated' type of leadership with strong central control. My 'findings' may lead to a problematization of leadership by the reader, moreover, being presented in a way they are not expecting me to, in my rather unconventional narrative dramatization. These 'findings', which brought forward mismatches between the leaders' narrative in the interviews and their performance in interaction during the Council of Heads (CoH) constituted a 'moment of epiphany' in my thesis. This led to my 'dramatic' decision of representing my data in a three-act drama, what I consider as a 'play within a play' which is my thesis.

I now explore the context within which my methodological research question came into being during my 'un/becoming' as a doctoral researcher.

The conduct of qualitative inquiry

Qualitative research as a field of inquiry occurs, and continues, in 'transitional space' (Harris, 2011, p. 730). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have set out eight 'moments' since the beginning of the twentieth century, 'moments' which overlap and operate cumulatively through time. Various concerns have been associated with the nature and process of qualitative inquiry (McGettigan, 1997). Key issues are the place of researchers in texts (Schwandt, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997b,c); the voices of those the texts claim to represent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); and the position of the audience/s (Denzin, 1994; Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005) for whom the researcher/author 'creates' the 'textual representation'. This tension between language and representation constitutes

the *crisis of representation* (1986-1990) - the fourth 'moment' in qualitative research identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2005).

It is within this contradictory, and somewhat turbulent scenario that I situate my methodological research question exploring the conduct of qualitative inquiry:

How does a researcher negotiate the methodological tensions and contradictions in qualitative inquiry in order to construct knowledge differently?

This research question further explores three main methodological issues in my thesis:

1. How can the 'inescapable' problem of data representation be confronted by the qualitative researcher, considering the problematic link between lived experience, its textual representation, the subject/s, and the author?

Being caught within what Koro-Ljungberg (2008) terms 'the tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation' (p. 231), I consider how representation will always remain incomplete. Who determines when the 'research picture' is 'adequate'? In depicting my 'research picture', I subsequently come to understand my unique voice in research and what my contribution as an academic is going to be.

2. How can 'validity' and ongoing puzzlement and discussion associated with the quality of qualitative research influence current research practices and reporting?

Problematizing the conceptualization of validity that extols a reductionist view of knowledge and data, I instead argue for a continuous and radical reconceptualization, exploring validity as unpredictable and undecidable, a validity that redirects its focus on the researcher (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010), and ethical issues (Lincoln, 2009) – a validity that can never be completed or concluded. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) write about

the troubling of the concept 'method' - I therefore trouble the notions of transcription, translation, and 'verbatim' in my research.

3. Following the 'crisis of representation' and the troubling of foundational concepts, in other words, the 'undoing' of 'conventional' qualitative inquiry, in what ways must researchers re-think the function of writing in qualitative research?

As a researcher embarking on a journey that would finally end with the representation of qualitative inquiry to an audience, I acknowledge the importance of textuality and recognize the significance of the writing *process* in my research, rather than just the *product* (distinction made by St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 408) of my inquiry. Furthermore, I use reflexivity as a way of thinking about my doctoral study as a finding out about research, exploring it, and coming to understand it.

A few clarifications: setting the boundaries

Before embarking on the rest of the trajectory that will take you along the various steps of my doctoral journey, I would like to set the boundaries for my research. I present a case study of a particular college which in no way claims to be representative of the Maltese education system, in terms of the role of the Principal, the collegiality that unfolds, and the practice of leadership distribution, in other words, the translation of the FACT policy at practitioner level. My study explores relations of power spanning three leadership hierarchies: the Directors General, the Principal, and the Heads of school, however only the Principal and the Heads are direct participants – I have not involved other stakeholders at higher or lower levels directly in the research. Although this might have enabled me to explore different aspects of the college, that was not the main intention of my research, which was to explore relations of power as they unfold within college governance. It covers the state system in Malta, not church or independent

schools. I do not study the individual schools constituting the college, but leadership practised by the individual leaders as it unfolds within the dynamics of the college – 'networked interaction'. I do not seek to measure the success or otherwise of FACT at practitioner level – I explore its reception by the leaders and its implementation in a particular college, more specifically, the aspects of networking, relationships, and distributed leadership. I do not seek to explore gender differentials present in leadership. I am not interested in thinking about leadership characteristics, or the individual traits or aspects as distinguished by gender. This facilitated the representation of the characters in the analysis, enabling me to embody all as one gender, partially solving the ethical issue of anonymity.

I now set out to give a brief overview of the remaining chapters which constitute my thesis.

The structure of the thesis

Chapter two, **'Analyzing *For All Children to Succeed* (2005): rationale, discourses, rhetoric and discursive framework'**, provides a documentary analysis of the FACT policy through an exploration of its rationale, issues of discourse, language, and agency, as well as the policy's discursive framework on autonomy, distributed leadership, school networking and the respective roles of the College Principal and Heads of School.

Chapter three, **'Reviewing the literature around networking and leadership with a focus on the education context'**, considers the literature which has influenced my thinking and choice of research topic, as well as aided me in the formulation of my research questions. I consider the literature on networking discourses, school networks, the leadership concept, leadership in school networks, as well as distributed leadership

in order to explore how relations of power unfold among educational leaders in a school networked setting.

In Chapter four, '**Methodological *moments* along my doctoral research journey'**, I outline the methodological and theoretical frameworks underpinning my research. My paradigmatic lens was informed by postmodernism, in order to explore the micro-relations unfolding in a college setting. I explore Foucauldian theories of power-knowledge, discipline, governmentality, discourse, and subjectification which served as 'scaffoldings' to explore the power flow in the college.

Chapter five, **'Research design issues: choices, rationale and implications'**, moves on to outline the research design, that is, my research strategy, the research sample, the data collection tools, and the ethical considerations involved. I also write about the crisis of representation in qualitative inquiry, and my response to it in terms of my engagement with issues of validity, transcription, and translation. I further describe my data analysis method and mode of representation.

Chapter six, **'Raising the curtain on *Polyphonic College'***, introduces the analysis of the data in my case study as well as the representation of the research in the form of a play. Data collected from the interviews and the observed meeting set against the discursive framework of the FACT policy is represented in a narrative dramatization where I stage a play in three acts. This chapter, which functions as the Prologue, gives a preamble to the play *Polyphonic College* while introducing the cast of characters and the setting.

Chapter seven, **'The performance of collegiality'**, presents Act 1 that explores the performance of collegiality as a policy-mandated reform within the Maltese education scenario of gradual, but progressive decentralization.

Chapter eight, **'The fluidity in the emerging relations of power'**, which constitutes Act 2, considers the relations of power flowing in the dynamics among leaders both within and across the various levels of the leadership hierarchy present in the college.

Chapter nine, **'The unfolding of leadership distribution'**, presents the third and final act of the play. It constitutes an analysis of leadership distribution by the voices among whom leadership is 'distributed' and who concurrently narrate themselves as leadership 'distributors'.

Chapter ten, **'Bringing down the curtain on *Polyphonic College'***, is the epilogue of the play. I provide closure by discussing the main issues that unfold during the three acts, simultaneously opening up the research through rhetorical questions, thus provoking problematization.

Chapter eleven, **'The quasi-final stage: presenting the conclusions of my research'**, is where I present the conclusions that emerged from my research in relation to my theoretical and methodological research questions and the subsequent sub-themes that emerged. I consider the limitations of my study, as well as implications for future research.

Chapter twelve, **'Reflexivity revisited'**, concludes my research. As a reflexive researcher, I reflect on the overall trajectory of my doctoral journey, revisiting some of the decisions made in the process. I finally consider the impact that being a doctoral student has had on my personal and professional lives.

Chapter Two: Analysing *'For All Children to Succeed'*(Ministry of Education, Youth & Employment, 2005): rationale, discourses, rhetoric, and discursive framework

> I should not like to have to enter this risky order of discourse; I should not like to be involved in its peremptoriness and decisiveness; I should like it to be all around me like a calm, deep transparence, infinitely open, where others would fit in with my expectations, and from which truths would emerge one by one … discourse belongs to the order of laws … we have long been looking after its appearances … a place has been made ready for it, a place which honours it but disarms it … if discourse may sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it.
>
> [Foucault, 1981, p. 52]

Introduction

This chapter presents a documentary analysis of FACT – the policy mandating the setting up of school networking in Malta. I start off with a very brief overview of my approach to policy analysis, followed by an outline of the policy document, and the rationale behind its conceptualization. I then move on to analyse the rhetorical devices and discourses present in the document, in addition to other issues related to the setting up of school networks. I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that besides the analysis presented in this chapter, other aspects of FACT are actually covered in two other areas of my thesis: in the Introduction (Chapter 1) and in the play *Polyphonic College* (Chapter 7-9) where FACT is introduced as a character, therefore being analysed in the Interpreter's words after each scene. The analysis of FACT is a key chapter in my thesis as it provides a strong indication of what 'should be' happening at both school and college level. I position it as 'the' directive voice in the play, thus serving as a backdrop against which the leaders' narratives and performance play out, enabling the stark contrast between what *is* actually happening and what

should, in fact, be happening emerge more effectively, thus bringing out the dysfunctionality and contradictions in the college.

My understanding of policy and its analysis

'There is no recipe approach for doing policy analysis' (Taylor *et al*., 1997, p. 36)

– this reflects the stance I adopt in my analysis of FACT. A more detailed account of my approach to policy analysis is found on page 118-120. Both policy content and implementation are of particular interest to me, in an attempt to uncover the 'adhocery, serendipity, muddle and negotiation' (Ozga, 1990, p. 360) that goes on in policy making, and even more so while being translated at institution and practitioner level. I include both macro and micro-level analysis, which involves more than a narrow concern simply with the policy document, comprising background, context, historical antecedents, relations with other texts - 'for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings' (Codd, 1988, p. 239).

I am making meaning and constructing my own response to policy – an interpretation that has been developing since 2005, the year of issue, in which I was a direct recipient of the first so-called 'pilot' college. I use my insider knowledge from my position as ex-teacher, researcher, and educator – this insider view recognized by Fairclough (2005) as a valuable means of interpreting texts, as it is only through access to insider perspectives in particular locations that one can assess how discourses are materialized, enacted, and inculcated.

Presenting FACT: An outline of the policy document

The 82-page policy document is divided into five chapters, and further includes a list of appendices which expand on certain issues mentioned in the document. The first two chapters set the background of achievements and challenges within the Maltese educational system, together with the restructuring of the Maltese education authority, while the final three deal specifically with a range of aspects and factors pertaining to school networks. Although all the chapters will be subject to analysis throughout various chapters in my thesis, the focus will specifically be on Chapters 3, 4 and 5 that deal with networking, thus providing the necessary backdrop against which to set the leaders' narrative and performance.

Chapter 1, 'Ten Achievements and Ten Challenges', presents a list of 'ten major achievements' (p. 23), which according to the document, present the same number of challenges to be faced in the very near future, due to the 'number of defects, weaknesses and deficiencies [that] grew around the system' (p. 23). Among the fields in which Maltese education has demonstrated marked progress, according to the document, are Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the European Union, the National Curriculum, Inclusion, Governance, Autonomy, Transition, an Early Start, Higher Education, and the Local Community.

Chapter 2, 'Central Education Entities', which focuses on the Central Education bodies, presents the mission statement of the Ministry for Education in the transformation of the Maltese education system and the main functions of the two Directorates: the Directorate for Educational Services (DES), and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE). These are explained in detail on page 12 of my thesis. The review of the education system necessitated both finding the 'best

possible formula' to provide continuity along the child's educational journey, as well as provision for 'accountability' along that journey.

Chapter 3, **'Networking of Schools'**, addresses the proposed college networks. The areas dealt with include the relevance of networks in twenty-first century Maltese society, factors that play a role in successful networks, their child-centred focus, as well as the need for effective leaders and managers for the successful operationalization of networks.

Chapter 4, **'Creating a Shift: From Centralization to Decentralization'**, deals with the shift from centralization to decentralization, the benefits of networking envisaged for Maltese schools, as well as the proposed characteristics of Maltese colleges. Networks are regarded as an 'assurance' of 'smooth transitions' between different levels in the years of compulsory schooling for each individual student.

Chapter 5, **'School Networks Models'**, outlines seven school networks models that are presented graphically, along with a very brief description. Models 1 to 4 depict both vertical and horizontal networks, with the only distinction being the number of schools at each level. Models 5 to 7 depict horizontal networks among mainstream state secondary schools, as well as networks among special needs schools, in addition to those of the performing arts. Recurrent reference is made to the existing school building stocks presenting an obstacle to the complete enactment of the models.

Appendix 1, '**Characteristics of a College'**, defines the term 'college' in broader terms through details of its legal personality and its functions; in addition to related issues of accountability and proceedings. **Appendix 2**, **'Functions of Key Personnel within the College'**, outlines the functions and responsibilities of the Principal, the

Head of School, as well as the Teacher. The functions, role and responsibilities of the Head of School are further subdivided into: overall purpose; main responsibilities; curriculum development; student matters; teaching personnel; administration, and finance. **Appendix 3**, **'The Council of Heads'**, gives a brief, but concise account of the composition and function of the CoH. **Appendix 4**, **'Guarantee of Vested Rights of serving Public Officers'**, which as the name implies, involves issues related to law. The status of public officers is explored under the issues of pay, pension, promotion and transfers, in addition to appointment of new staff.

The rationale behind FACT and its origins

Bacchi (2009) argues that policy works by creating a problematization of an existing phenomenon and providing a solution. The aim for the structural and organizational reform mandated by the policy is spelled out in the very title: *'For All Children To Succeed: A New Network Organization For Quality Education in Malta'*. This policy centers around the main premise of a 'quality education for all' and of 'changing *whole systems* radically', with the main aim being that of 'transformation' (p. xi). The policy presents the main rationale for networks and their function – having a structure to accommodate effective dissemination strategies.

FACT places Maltese schools within the global discourse of networking by admitting to a superior existence through 'partnerships based on shared responsibilities' (p. xii). This '*big* policy for a small world' (Ball, 1998) became embedded in the local education scene, following the trend for policy convergence within the recognition of the contextual effects (Lingard, 2000; Ozga, 2005) of the Maltese education system. This indicates the differing degrees of local 'policy inflection' of this 'travelling policy' of networking found in 'local' spaces (Ozga & Jones, 2006).

The envisaged benefits presented in the text are commensurate with those described in international literature. FACT mentions an aspirational purpose for the unity of all school communities, a focus on student learning, the creation of opportunities for adult learning, as well as 'dedicated leadership and proper management' (p. 38), among the desired operational characteristics for the colleges. FACT presents networking as *the* only 'valid' truth claim to be practised in the Maltese educational scenario within the globalized discourse of 'networking' and the 'network society'.

The evidential basis for FACT is the result of an

> in-depth reflection on the workings of the present system and in the light of how schools network in other countries (p. xii).

It is a policy trajectory that is pre-occupied with the construction of a 'knowledge economy' and 'learning society'. The school leader is ultimately mobilized as the protagonist who will 'transform' and 'deliver' what is required for a successful outcome (Gunter, 2012), with limited scope for improvisation.

A lot of attention seems to have been focused on 'structure' rather than 'agency', an issue reiterating Ball's (1994) call for a rethinking of the structure/agency dichotomy, a task which Harker and May (1993) identify as central to Bourdieu's sociology: 'to show how agency and structure are implicit in each other, rather than being the two poles of a continuum' (p. 177). In the policy document, it is the college structure that is emphasized rather than ways of fostering 'networking' itself. Emphasis is placed on outlining the roles of the Principal and the Head of School, and on the structural aspects of the reform and expected benefits. There is the underlying assumption of the adjustment of Heads of school and context to policy as the 'regime of truth', but not of policy to context – all this amounting to 'a privileging of the policy maker's reality' (Ball, 1994, p. 19). The policy gives prominence to network morphology (structure)

over network nodes (relationships) – it could be that local policymakers view 'networks' in terms of configuration as distinct from 'networking' – the process of collaboration and communication (A distinction identified by McCormick *et al.*, 2011).

FACT exhibits 'intertextual compatibility' (Ball, 1994, p. 19) with the previous policies and texts in circulation, in that its enactment does not inhibit, contradict or marginalize others. Although there is no direct citation of other policy texts, it does not suggest that the truth of the matter resides wholly within the document itself. FACT implies knowledge of the preceding policy texts, the past education scenario in schools, as well as the discourses of globalization, partnership, and networking in the twenty-first century. It is assumed that the reader (that is, the educational leader) has a thorough awareness of these matters. The way this policy is based on previous developments, following a similar ideology and basic line of thought is a clear example of what Taylor *et al.* (1997, p. 46) label as 'incrementalism' in policy production. The proposals in FACT may be considered as a natural extension of the decade-long reformation process – education restructuring did not take place suddenly but was a gradual process whose idea was born in 1995 with the publication of *'Tomorrow's Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures'*, and put into action more than a decade later.

The rhetorical devices in the policy

> Policy texts are characterized as official texts which operate to influence public perception of a policy agenda. They thus seek to change the specific setting of a practical action and in the process change the way policy is received by practitioners (Scott, 2000, p. 18).

This is done through the use of various semantic, grammatical and positional devices to suggest to the reader that they are authoritative – devices including the ascription of their evidential base as incontrovertible, the concealment of their ideological

framework, and the attempt to convince the reader that the policy text is the careful sifting of evidence compelling the writer to develop one set of policy prescriptions over others.

Ball (1994) suggests that although authors cannot control the meanings of their texts they do make concerted efforts to 'assert such control...to achieve a *correct* reading' (p. 16). According to Scott (2000), the reader is not just presented with an argument, but 'positioned within a discourse' (p. 27), which if it becomes 'common sense' (ibid) constrains the reader from understanding the world in any other way – this is done to persuade the reader of the truthfulness and credibility of the arguments being deployed. FACT works at the discursive level by persuading its readership that it offers a solution, indeed the only solution, to the shortcomings in the Maltese education system.

The use of the future tense 'will' renders the text very 'readerly' and prescriptive, presenting the various proposals as a 'fait-accompli'. It is a very commanding language, sort of putting the reader under certain obligations – 'it is imperative to stop and take stock of progress' (p. 44). The same applies to the frequent repetition of the verb phrase 'will be expected' – this commensurates with the high level of accountability throughout. It can be regarded as a taken-for-granted assumption in order to make the reader accept the foregone conclusion – that the policy is sure of its successful outcomes. Rhetorical questions are even included in the document, which seem pointless when the answer is already a foregone conclusion. They are constructed in such a way to set the mindset of the reader into blind acceptance of what is being proposed. A typical example would be:

> Is it wise to devolve all educational services and operations that are currently being handled, at the centre, by the Education Division? (p. 29).

The wording and structure of the question convinces the reader that devolution would be an 'unwise' move. Use of the conditional tense implies a cause and effect situation – the education system will only be successful if networks are put in operation – 'schools will only be able to meet the needs of all learners *if* they work in partnership' (p. 37). Use of the verb 'to assume' reveals both doubt and taking things for granted on the part of the policy authors. A lot of assumptions are made – that all school leaders want to join a college, that they all want to improve student experience...without their opinions ever having been sought. The policy makes use of the collective pronoun throughout, 'each and every one of us', 'we all want to give', 'let us all together' (p. xiii) – issuing a call for a concerted effort, for involvement, perhaps, or to give a sense of ownership. The document ends on a very definite and assertive tone,

> One thing is clear – individual schools cannot achieve this alone (p. 62)

On its own, this statement is convincing enough to make readers believe that networks are a must rather than an alternative. These linguistic devices may be considered as an example of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) notion of 'magisterial discourse', which Rizvi and Kemmis (1987, p. 277) describe as a style in which the speaker's authority is 'unidirectional' in nature, as 'it commands and instructs', requiring the reader to take note of what is being said.

According to Scott (2000, p. 20), 'most policy texts contain contradictions, inconsistencies and unfinished arguments' – elements also present in FACT, which leads to it being viewed as a fragmented policy text, an accommodation to a number of authors with different perspectives and different policy prescriptions. It is rather prescriptive and authoritative, asserting the 'truths' of the central education authorities and the privileged view of those at the crux of the Maltese education system. The

ideological framework of the policy text offers a viewpoint, at times explicit and at others implicit, giving out both 'open' and 'closed' messages. The 'excellent' value of school networking is explicitly recognized throughout the document, while the power relations among the different hierarchical levels of the leaders are implicit in the way they are presented and the space allocated to them in the text. FACT is both generic and directed – with its main focus being the students, while indirectly serving the interests of the central authorities and College Principals by keeping the power flow within that inner circle.

Discourses prevalent in the policy document

The policy document FACT is constructed around more than one strand of discourse. The policy stresses the need to 'build new professional identities and new professional learning communities' (p. xi). The whole text is embedded within the discourse of transformation, of 'radical innovation', 'educational reform' (p. xi), and the need for changing, with claims being made for an urgent renewal of the education system in order to retain its relevance.

This discourse of transformation and change is embedded within one of efficiency, accountability and subtle centralization. References to 'frameworks', 'efficiency', 'performance', 'accountability', 'outcomes', 'standards' allude to a conditioning, regulatory discourse and an achievement-oriented system, where everything has to unfold within a framework of liability, seemingly leaving no space for autonomy, steering more towards centralization rather than the decentralized system this whole reform process is supposed to work towards. Autonomy is defined in the policy as 'a greater say by schools in determining their own management' (p. 25). There is an interplay of autonomy and accountability, where schools will become 'more

autonomous operating within a stipulated, agreed framework which also ensures accountability' (p. xix). Although school leaders are not expected to be given full autonomy, it also depends on how much freedom remains within that 'stipulated, agreed framework'. The issue outlined in this paragraph is further developed in the narrative dramatization that follows in Chapters 7 - 9.

The policy authors hint at an economic discourse, especially in the chapters directly related to the colleges, making education sound like a business transaction, with words and phrases such as 'marketplace of knowledge exchange', 'traded, refined and verified' (p. 38), a 'top management mindset' (p. 71), 'business plan', 'estimated budget', 'customer care', 'complaint handling mechanisms', 'relevant returns', 'auditing' (p. 72) – all echoing managerial discourse, leading to a service-oriented view of education. The text goes so far as to label the College Principal as the 'Chief Executive Officer' of the college.

The setting up of school networks: related issues

The proposed college networks

FACT locates school networks within the macro context, revealing educational needs based on the wider society, school demands mirroring the outside world. While there is a widening of the micro focus of the school context, an emphasis on personalization and individuality persists. The policy concludes that the success of networks in the outside world provide the rationale for the trajectory to school networks, stating that networks are becoming 'an organizational principle of *choice*' (p. 37) across all sectors.

This reform is presented through the metaphor of a journey with the document providing 'clear signposts and directions' (p. 62), with the allusion to non-rigidity which is inconsistent with the prescriptive framework presented throughout the text.

FACT is presented to the educational leaders as an attractive reform to be embraced and discursively practised as the norm in schools, leading Heads into believing that a contingent application of the policy is possible and desirable, when the discursive framework proves otherwise, as 'leadership' is directed 'from above'. Emphasis is placed on the predictable and the practical rather than on creative preparation for the unforeseen and the unknown.

The proposed leadership in networks

In FACT, leaders and leadership are discursively situated as the solution to everyday organizational and professional problems (Gunter, 2001). The performance of leadership is expected to take place within a setting in which there is a specific public purpose and a deliberate casting to ensure agreed outcomes are met through careful adherence to the policy script. Politicians find educational leadership an attractive concept because it places responsibility for success or failure largely in the hands of professionals (Humes, 2000). Heads are *promised* a sole focus on the provision of 'professional educational leadership' (p. 42), with other issues to be handled by appropriate and qualified personnel. Qualifying leadership in these ways may serve to make it more palatable to the potential leaders and deflect attention from its directive aspects.

Power and control remain centralized – a fact that had previously been noted in literature in Strain (2009) and Smyth (2011). Additionally, the tactics of decentralization have co-opted leaders to act for and on behalf of the State - government–driven reform that requires leaders to enact policies at school level is no less than the downward delegation of the managerialist project, where leaders become the deliverers of reform (Gunter, 2001, 2012).

School network models

Every school belonging to a 'college' is on an equal footing, there is not just one of them at the helm, there seeming to be no one co-ordinating hub, with each member of the network acting as a cross-linked node. Thus, Maltese networks appear to be very highly knitted with symmetry to the interconnections. A conspicuous fact about the policy document is that out of three chapters dealing with school networking, from a total of five, one is dedicated to describing the intricacies of seven network models, all following the same basic principle, showing a common hierarchical administrative structure and a similar flow of power and role positions for the proposed network leaders, the only difference being in the composition of schools constituting the college. This fact seems to be contradicted by Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010) who claim that networks do not necessarily have to follow some formulaic organizing structure, but rather 'it should be recognized that networks need to maintain a flexible model with the capacity to incorporate diverse elements' (p. 206).

Conclusion

The policy document covers school networks, rather than networking, in terms of challenges in the Maltese education system that led to their setting-up; the transformation in the structure of the education system and school governance; the relevance of networks in the twenty-first Maltese society; the shift from centralization to decentralization; vertical and horizontal networks; the characteristics of a college; the function of key personnel, as well as the central importance of the Council of Heads.

FACT works at the discursive level through various rhetorical devices, by persuading its readers that it offers the only solution to the shortcomings in the Maltese education system – networks are presented as the 'normative truth'. Furthermore, there is an

inherent tension between autonomy and regulation, where 'autonomy is not to be confused with complete deregulation' (p. 29), as power and control remain centralized within the Education Ministry and the central education entities: the Directorate for Educational Services and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education. The contradictions inherent in FACT seem to be mirrored in Polyphonic College itself – centralization, decentralization, control, autonomy, accountability – the positioning of the whole college structure is driven by these interesting tensions and contradictions.

This policy analysis addresses all three subsidiary theoretical research questions exploring the unfolding of collegiality, relations of power, and leadership distribution. FACT sets out the framework of how colleges should be functioning, thereby allowing me to explore the leaders' reaction to the policy implementation and its effects. The policy discourse places the leaders at distinct hierarchical levels, thereby enabling the investigation of their positionings and re-positionings, and the resulting power flow. FACT presents distributed leadership as *the* leadership discourse of the college – I examine the leaders' perception of this fact and its eventual (non-)enactment.

Chapter Three: Reviewing the literature around networking and leadership

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest … To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy.
>
> [Foucault, 1988a, p. 155]

Introduction

A review of the literature surrounding my research topic enabled me to identify 'blank spots' and 'blind spots' (Wagner, 1993) in areas related to research around which I constructed my research questions, namely: the unfolding of collegiality; relations of power among the leaders; and the leadership distribution patterns across multi-site school collaboratives. This selective critical review explores two major areas of literature: networks and networking in school organizations; and leadership in school networks with a particular emphasis on distributed leadership.

The first area of the literature review explores networks and networking with a particular focus on the education scenario. This chapter first presents the deployment of the network metaphor in the field of education. The emergence of school-based networks is then explored, mainly their perceived benefits, but also their 'dark side', as well as the tensions accompanying their implementation. Lima (2010) suggests that leadership processes in networks are difficult to capture, proposing that rather than viewing leadership in networks as 'a mere activation of the powers with which certain actors are formally endowed', it should be regarded as 'a property that emerges from processes of social interaction among network members' (p. 12). He further states that network dynamics is the least well-known aspect of networks – a limitation this present

study attempts to address. Lima (2010) also voices his opinion that network shortcomings is one of the least pursued themes in network research, involving patterns of behaviour related to dysfunctions, destructive conflicts, exploitation, and other parasitic modes of conduct. This is one of the 'blank spots' (Wagner, 1993) my research investigates. This section enables me to explore the performance of collegiality as a policy-mandated reform within a Maltese college in terms of the leaders' reactions to FACT and how networking unfolds in an 'imposed' setting.

The second area of the literature review explores educational leadership in school networks. The romanticized notion of leadership is critiqued, with due emphasis being put on the concept of distributed leadership which is specifically outlined as the model to be followed by Maltese educational leaders in the policy document FACT. The emergence of distributed leadership is explored, as well as its various definitions and its relation to school networks, in addition to challenges encountered by its implementation. Dynamics around power in organizations and contextual factors in leadership scenarios are under-researched, according to studies conducted by Bolden (2011). Moreover, Storey (2004) states that distributed leadership incorporates a degree of power and conflict, leading to questions of identity and power issues which are as yet unexplored, and therefore, according to Crawford (2012), under-theorized in the educational leadership literature. This section of the literature review lays the groundwork for the second research question, thus allowing me to situate my investigation of relations of power among leaders in a college, within this narrative of school networks.

Storey (2004) argues that while the rhetoric related to 'distributed leadership' has proliferated, little empirical work has been carried out on its meanings and implications,

with much of the analysis remaining at the conceptual level. Storey (2004) suggests addressing 'the dynamic of *competition between leaders*' (p. 249, emphasis added). I take this further to explore *how* and *whether* leadership is distributed *across* schools and *within* the network. Likewise, Heck and Hallinger (2005) argue that 'the field has been long on intellectual critique, but short on sustained action…creat[ing] a crisis of credibility' (p. 239). Spillane *et al*. (2011) emphasize the practice aspect, describing how, '*Interactions*, not just actions are central to investigating practice' (p. 161, emphasis added). This is the narrative within which I locate my third research question in which I examine leadership distribution practices within the college and their effects.

Networks and networking in education

Networking in the twenty-first century

Here I provide a very brief explanation of the network concept and its proliferation in the twenty-first century in order to provide the global background for the emergence of school networks. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, networks, networking and the 'network society' (Castells, 2000a,b) have become an increasingly dominant social and cultural paradigm. Castells (1996) thinks that the dominating societal processes are network-like, defining a network as 'a set of interconnected nodes; a node being the point at which a curve intersects itself' (p. 470). Eriksson (2005) regards Castells' (1996) concept as serving a task: that of exploring complex, irreducible, and heterogeneous phenomena uniformly, while maintaining their multiplicity. Castells (2001) notes how networks have been classified as *the* organizational form of the information age, further considering the network as an opposing model to hierarchy, decentralizing execution and decision-making. Urry (2003) deems Castells' network analysis to be very significant due to its moving away from the idea that the global is a

finished and completed totality, thus emphasizing contingency, openness, and unpredictability. Moreover, networks of power produce networks of resistance – the 'power-resistance attractor' (Castells, 1997, p. 362) – with the strength of networks resulting from their self-organizing and short-term character rather than from centralized hierarchical direction. Urry (2003) also highlights the rise of the network, noting that it is 'a dominant metaphor for global times' (p. 51). Friedman (2005) suggests that advances in technology may have led to this. Eriksson (2005) proposes that its dominance may be due to its simultaneous bi-directionality: enabling a 'totality' of communication (a system of interrelationships between nodes and lines), while denying the consistency of this 'totality'; resulting in a tension that empowers the 'network'.

Castells' (1996) network theory, with its emphasis on decentralization, fluidity, and lack of boundaries, besides helping me understand the discursive context in which school networking was set up, also helps me to make sense of the fluid relationships between and among educational leaders in a network. I am not trying to criticize the Maltese network by drawing comparisons with Castells' (1996) perfect conceptual notion – the differences in conceptualization between this very 'academic' theorization of a network and the policymakers' views and assumptions have emerged in the previous two chapters. I have alluded to the irony that the Maltese network is not a fluid, self-organizing network as outlined in theory, but is still very much under central control. I am just trying to give a very brief outline of the emergence of Maltese networks in the surroundings where networking has become a global metaphor for our age.

Networking within the educational context

Different forms of networks, collaboratives, and federations have become an established part of many educational landscapes and have arisen for a number of reasons. Hadfield and Chapman (2009, p. 1) explain that some have been 'imposed' on schools, others have been 'incentivised' by the offer of external funding, but many have arisen because of the efforts of educational leaders who want to 'make a difference' in their locality, which assumes their essential 'good'. It appears that the Maltese policy desire is that of a major organizational reform achieved through 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994) in order to ensure the smooth transition of students across their mandatory school years, thus providing a quality education for 'all' children to succeed. Church *et al* (2002) explain that active participation is precisely what distinguishes networks from other organizational forms: 'Participation is at the core of what makes a network different from other organizational or process forms. *Who* participates…*how* they participate…*why* they participate…and for *how long*…' (p. 14). A tension appears to exist between 'contrived collegiality' and participation, with implications for the functioning of the Maltese college system.

Hadfield and Chapman (2009) argue that due to the sheer plasticity of the term, 'network' has been applied to a wide range of social and technological phenomena. They explore its various applications in education: to professional networks of individuals (Little, 1993; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996); networks of personal relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002); or to groups of schools with very different foci (Wohlstetter *et al*., 2003). The OECD (2003) places an emphasis on knowledge transfer, professional learning, and their position between central and local education structures in its definition of 'Networked Learning Communities'. Thompson *et al*.

(1991) define the network as: 'a collection of essentially equal agents or agencies which are in informal relationships with each other based on affiliation' – emphasizing an egalitarian and democratic notion of networks associated with trust, appreciated relationships, openness of information flows, and shared benefits. In the words of Hanford *et al*. (1997)*,* '…the collaborations are so varied as to make categorization nearly impossible' (p. 41). Not wanting 'to add to the very long list of definitions', Hadfielde and Chapman (2009) conclude that 'all networks share a set of common features: structures, interactions, agency, and purpose' (p. 3). In fact, the features of 'interaction' and 'agency' prove to be of utmost significance in my case study.

Despite the argument put forward by Carmichael *et al.* (2006) regarding the influence of the 'network' concept within the education sector, the word is still poorly defined for many. Various terms are used to refer to networking as a novel form of organization based on collaboration among schools. These have been compiled in two lists by Atkinson *et al.* (2007) and Lima (2010), which I combine. These are: alliances, clusters, coalitions, collaborations/collaboratives, collegiate/colleges, confederations, consortia, development groups, extended schools, families, federations, groupings, joint planning, learning communities, partnerships, school 'families', territories, trusts, twinned schools, and zones (Atkinson *et al*., 2007; Lima, 2010). In my research, I use the term 'college' as this is the legal nomenclature assigned to Maltese school networks (Education Act, 2006). Different types of inter-school collaborations exist, varying in scope, structure, extent, and depth. Within the English education system, 'federations' are regarded as 'an innovative strategy for improving schools' (Chapman *et al*., 2010, p. 54) through structures and processes, with each federation configured to meet local conditions, therefore being responsive to the particular educational challenges of a

community. Chapman *et al*. (2010) set out a continuum to categorize the different forms of federations of schools, moving from 'network' at the loosest end of the continuum, through 'partnership' and 'federation' to the full 'integration' of one or more organizations. Chapman *et al.* (2010) further state that the terminology becomes problematic as it is difficult to fit collaborations neatly between the terms due to overlapping characteristics and blurred lines of demarcation among the various 'federations'. Hopkins (2007) notes that the word network 'is a concept open to a high degree of conceptual pluralism' (p. 118).

Despite the common factor of multi-site collaboration, this proliferation of 'terms' has been problematized by Lima (2010) who argues that:

> Terminology options are not innocent choices; each term conveys a particular set of meanings…the term 'network' is used normatively to advocate what organizations must become, rather than to describe what they are…the notion is totally trivialized and applied indistinctively to very dissimilar phenomena (p. 3).

Lima (2010) concludes that 'most network participants hold varied and unique understandings of why a particular network exists, who is involved in it, and why they, as individuals, are involved' (p. 546–7). This seems to allude to the distinction that Kerr *et al*. (2003, p. 46) make 'between the terms *network* [which is about *structure*] and *networking* [which concerns *process*, *action* and *activity*]', and it is the latter concept that I emphasize in my case study. These two points concluded by Lima(2010) and Kerr *et al*. (2003) are important issues in relation to my thesis as they provide the backdrop against which Maltese 'contrived collegiality' unfolds.

Nohria (1992) regards the loose application of the term as a threat to its meaning, explaining that this relegates it to the status of an 'evocative metaphor' (p. 3).

Furthermore, Carmichael *et al*. (2006), claim that assumptions about networks can conceal their poorly-defined and under-theorized characteristics. O'Brien *et al.* (2006) suggest that an unquestioned consensus around such conceptualizations may lead to an assertion of an intellectual dominance over the policy arena of education to ward off opposition to structural reform, in turn closing off debate with those very stakeholders at the receiving end. This may lead to a lack of problematization by the educational leaders who have to implement 'networking' as a policy-mandated reform due to the potentially encompassing meaning of the concept.

Leonard and Leonard (2001) argue that despite this 'apparent' difficulty of terminology proliferation, discussion around the forms of successful collaboration is still possible. Lima (2010) argues that the concept of the 'network organization' has been heavily promoted in business and management milieux and is also rapidly gaining ground among educational researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers. Lima (2010) voices his concern that at present, educational literature references based on faith about the positive potential of networks place an emphasis on their advantages and positive outcomes rather than their negative consequences or failure.

He also bemoans the fact that network dynamics is the least well-known aspect of networks, while simultaneously acknowledging the difficulties of conducting research around dynamics - a shortcoming this present study will attempt to address. Networks are moving systems that may be constantly rebuilt and reshaped by the actions and interactions of their members, rather than just fixed sets of actors and static relations. O'Brien *et al*. (2006) reiterate that 'the network' cannot be assumed to be a democratic organizational form merely by virtue of its decentralized character, due to the emergence of networks 'dysfunctional' to their original purpose. In fact, the present

study explores the interactional aspects of network life, both within and across networks.

The deployment of the 'network' metaphor in the field of education

Frankham (2006), one of the critics of the deployment of the 'network' metaphor in education makes claims to the 'institutionalized utopianism' (Riles, 2001) of 'the network' and how networks are presented as an unproblematized solution to knowledge development and dissemination. She further expounds the commonplace nature of the declamatory language association with the transformational potential of the network. Consequently, Riles (2001) describes network theory being held up 'as an exponentially more powerful analytical tool due to the *perceived* analytical connections the network allows the theorist to make' (p. 63). Frankham (2006) further attributes the 'ubiquity and utility' of the term as the main reason behind the increasing deployment of the language of the network, simultaneously subjecting the notions of conventional network thinking to critique by illustrating how due to its malleability and flexibility, the discourse of networks has been applied to learning, equating 'learning networks' with the discourse of the commodification of knowledge, of its easy transfer across domains and of claimed future benefits.

Globalization discourses lead networks towards the 'cradling'(Frankham, 2006, p. 665) of the global and the local and their connection, emphasizing the inter-connections while underlining the accompanying tensions and problems resulting from this connectedness. Riles (2001) suggests that in such a context, the network acknowledges these underlying tensions while positing itself as the local solution. The network is capable of holding both 'tight' and 'loose' structures, allowing order and fluidity. 'There is no clear beginning or end to the network, nor can the inside/outside distinction

be made with confidence' (Bowers, 1992, p. 119). Angus (2004) voices his concern over the 'learning network' thus becoming a 'totalizing structure which imposes its will without much, if any, consideration of agency, local politics or resistance' (p. 24). Frankham (2006) thus takes up the suggestion proposed by Riles (2001, p. 5-6) to turn the network 'inside out', questioning the network 'in terms of what is *not* being said' (p. 670, original emphasis), mostly in relation to new forms of governmentality and their associated 'power markers', 'power-holders', and 'gatekeepers'. Frankham (2006) problematizes the discourse used in association with networking (partnership, collaboration, community, connection, flow) that she claims 'all suggest unproblematic notions of equality within groups, obscuring the inevitable power/relations that exist' (p. 672-3). This is a crucial feature in my research which emerges in the FACT policy discourse as a friction around the notions of individuality, autonomy, and decentralization.

In a paper exploring the changing forms of education governance in England, Ozga (2009) argues how recent attempts to 'rebalance' steering through 'intelligent accountability' invoke network principles, thus giving the appearance of deregulation, while the 'centre' retains control through decision-making.

> Political analyses of new governing relations may reveal discursive shifts, but it is important to be attentive to the underlying systems thinking that is data driven and data dependent. Such thinking is a reflection of a constant search for more complete state knowledge, for a 'bridge', that allows panoptic visions and strategies while ensuring compliance (Ozga, 2009, p. 160).

Ozga (2009) explores the 'decentralization' of performance management to local education authorities and schools, stating that this governance turn in no way implies the decline of elite influence on policy, or the emergence of a stronger democracy, but rather strong central steering through various policy technologies, including curriculum

control, standardization, and quality benchmarking. She emphasizes the fact that 'the state does not *go away* in this process of changing governance – rather, it works in new forms and through new processes' (p. 258). Consequently, LEAs and schools find themselves in what Ozga (2009) describes as 'a hybrid position…[as] they appear to be caught in a mixture of older mechanisms (centralization and bureaucracy) and new forms (heterogeneity and distributed control)' (p. 160). This is pivotal in relation to my research as the State exercises a subtle, yet heavily-felt presence through diverse political technologies and rationalities in the Maltese college.

Fenwick (2010) draws attention to challenges raised by Frankham (2006) and Ozga (2009) over the conception of networks in policy studies, thus illuminating the tensions embedded in the 'network' metaphor's promise of democratic, decentralized governance, and its associations with trust, flexibility, and responsiveness. Fenwick therefore questions the assumptions that 'a network signifies benign distribution, depoliticized 'flows' or connections of consensus' (p. 117).

It has been suggested that the most vital criterion for judging network success is the network 'workings' rather than the connections or structures. Strathern (2002) claims that people's behaviour in a network is what matters most. Hetherington and Law (2000) voice their concern regarding the all-too-encompassing nature of the network metaphor which can take a firm hold on all the layers, folds, and constituents of a phenomenon, assuming that everything that exists is drawn into the network web. Keeping in line with Strathern's (2002) concern, it is the network workings that I explore – the leaders' behaviour in the multiple worlds constituting the network.

The emergence of school-based networks

Chapman (2008) makes the point that the principles behind the concept of school-based networks are largely borrowed from the North American business literature. Hopkins (2009) agrees and remarks that 'the shift from competition to collaboration, from top-down control to organizational autonomy has been quite remarkable' (p. 2) in the twenty-first century. This has been taken up by schools and, Chrispeels and Harris (2006) claim that networking and collaborative school improvement programmes have emerged in diverse cultural contexts, ranging from Australasia to North America and Asia, as well as in Europe.

It is evident that in many educational systems there has been a partial dissolution of the traditional single school model towards more flexible modes of organizational link-up, taking the form of increased collaboration among schools. Chapman *et al*. (2010) argue that the current climate of rapid technological change creates a need for collective knowledge creation and information sharing at classroom, school, and system level. Evidence suggests that this can be achieved through school-to-school networks and partnerships (Church *et al*., 2002). Collaboration and networking among schools have been actively promoted both in the United Kingdom and internationally as a means of promoting school improvement and developing new types of service delivery. Chapman and Hadfield (2010) claim that this novel organizational structure is not simply regarded as 'a strategy for change but as an end point of this particular wave of change…to become a truly networked education system' (p. 223).

Chapman and Aspin (2005) suggest that within education, networks are regarded as one of the most promising levers for large-scale reform due to their potential to reculture both the environment and the system in which policy-makers operate through increased

co-operation, interconnectedness, and multi-agency. Ainscow and West (2006) note that one of the main stated reasons behind the creation of school networks is that of school reform, the generation of equitable improvement. Chapman and Fullan (2007) illustrate that this occurs through the reduction of the polarization inherent in the education system, considering this as proof of these governments' commitment to a social justice agenda translated in education policy and legislation. Recent policy directions have incorporated a shift to decentralize decision-making. This is an illustration of the rationale behind the Maltese policy directive – that of decentralization through the organizational reform of networking in order for 'all' children to succeed, notwithstanding their ability, family background, and geographical origin. Fullan (2004) describes how this decentralization unfolds 'by working together differently, with a goal of producing quality ideas and practices on an ongoing basis and inspiring collective effort to the extent that it becomes possible to achieve breakthroughs never before experienced' (p. 6). Ainscow and West (2006) explain that this facilitates innovation and change, while contributing to large-scale reform. Chapman and Fullan (2007) argue that school networks lead both to the transfer of existing knowledge as well as the generation of context-specific 'new' knowledge (p. 207), thus contributing to capacity building across the education service through the production of multiple solutions for potential, multi-faceted and intractable problems.

This drive for reform through the rise of school networks is a policy mandate. For example, Clarke and Newman (1997) claim that local public services are caught up within a 'cascade of change' as global social shifts demand responses in policies – evident in the setting up of networks worldwide. Chapman and Hadfield (2010) regard the setting up of networks across the globe as a complex mixture of threats and

opportunities, pressures, and incentives – a forward-facing dynamic that has underpinned the central governments' reform agenda in many educational systems. It seems that school leaders have to respond to centrally mandated changes in some aspects of their practice and work from the 'bottom up' to create uniquely 'local' responses on certain issues. This is an important point in relation to my thesis because Maltese heads find their unique modes of adaptation to centrally mandated networking via subjection, indifference, isolation, or strong bondage.

The upsurge in school networks was also urged on by a growing disillusionment with both market-based models and target-driven reform focused on individual schools. Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010) state that at a time when schools around the globe are being inundated with mandatory, top-down reforms, grassroots approaches, such as networking, provide intriguing alternatives. As already stated elsewhere, however, Maltese networking resulted from a top-down, mandated policy through the implementation of FACT that was imposed on schools. As Hadfield and Chapman (2009) state, 'It would seem that to network has become the orthodoxy rather than a minority activity' (p. ix).

There are various 'stated' functions of education networks in literature dealing with school reform. According to Hopkins (2007), networks can aid the process of re-structuring and re-culturing in educational organizations, thus ensuring a sustainable progression of evolution and improvement. He further states that through networks, schools can provide a curriculum that is closer to individual students' needs. Hargreaves (2003) describes how networks can accelerate improvement, as well as generate the stimulation of innovation by encouraging schools to foster curriculum diversity, extended services, as well as professional support. Hopkins (2007) proposes

another 'stated' purpose of networking: the creation of new units of service delivery through the close collaboration of schools who take responsibility for all their children. Other 'expected' outcomes relate to the teaching profession. Hargreaves (2003) explores the sharing and rapid transfer of good practices among teachers, as well as their empowerment which leads to enriched professional practice and better professional pride. As Lima (2010) states,

> there is nothing inherently positive or negative about a network: it can be flexible and organic, or rigid and bureaucratic; it can be liberating and empowering, or stifling and inhibiting; it can be democratic, but it may also be dominated by particular interests (p. 2).

FACT acknowledges networks as 'an increasingly important feature of contemporary life' while recognizing their adoption as 'an organizational principle of *choice*' across all sectors (p. 37, emphasis added). Maltese policy-makers acknowledge the high degree of conceptual pluralism revolving around the network concept and the policy document clarifies that it adopts a working definition of networks in education as developed by Hopkins (2005):

> Networks are purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on standards and student learning. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between *centralised* and *decentralised* structures, and assist in the process of *re-structuring* and *re-culturing* educational organisations and systems (p. 37, emphasis added).

FACT rationalizes the choice behind this working definition: 'We are adopting here a working definition…for the type of network in education that has *a chance of realizing the aspirations* many have for them' [for the networks] (p. 37, emphasis added). According to FACT, the purpose of colleges in Malta are: the pooling of resources and sharing of experiences in order to facilitate decentralisation and empowerment; the

provision of support to individual schools; the provision of professional educational leadership; the sharing of best practices; as well as the facilitation of horizontal and vertical linkages between and among schools.

The attractions, benefits and attributes of school networks

According to Black-Hawkins (2004), the purposes of networks fall in two broad categories: a 'moral' purpose as defined by Lieberman (1999), with the drawing together of practitioners for the collaboration and enhancement of the daily practice of teaching; as well as a 'structural' purpose by which Hopkins (2000) regards networks as instruments of system change. Hopkins (2005) illustrates how networks can serve as 'cross-over structures' for the much-needed school reform, serving as the vehicle by means of which innovation takes place: 'networks are the essential unit of organization as we leave behind the false dichotomy between *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches to educational change' (p. 5).

Despite there being no single blueprint for operation, consistent agreement seems to exist among various researchers (Bentley, 2005; Cole, 2001; Hopkins, 2000; Jackson & Burns, 2005; Lasater, 2007; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996) who present the features of 'desirable' educational networks. These authors claim that networks foster innovation, providing a test bed for new ideas while offering a platform for gradual innovation, distributing the risks and the workloads among different schools. According to Day and Hadfield (2005), they offer a clear purpose and direction with flexibility regarding the goals, allowing for the participation of a diverse constituency and for the fostering of what Castells (2001) terms 'a creativity culture'. Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) view networks as providing the opportunity for building collaboration, consensus, and commitment. Moreover, the deepening of professional knowledge takes place via

activities and relationships sponsored by networks. Sachs (2000) claims that networking promotes 'professional activism' (p. 82). Thereby, in addition to fostering trust and mutual knowledge, networks may provide the necessary space for leaders to challenge each other – providing capacity building, reflective practice, and an inquiry frame of mind. Most importantly of all, according to Atkinson *et al*. (2007), inter-school collaborations serve to raise achievement and enhance student outcomes through the sharing of resources and professional expertise. In the words of Katz *et al.* (2009), 'The network is not simply the broker of a parasite-host relationship where schools take from a network…the relationship between network and school is a bidirectional, recursive one…' (p. 16). It is therefore claimed that networks enable schools to overcome their isolationism and move beyond to form community relationships. Chapman and Fullan (2007) argue that the crucial question is how school networks foster and further enhance the foundations of systemic reform, through ownership, coherence, capacity, and system presence.

Tensions accompanying the setting up of school networks

O'Brein *et al*. (2006, p. 409) put forward some of the ambiguities surrounding the setting up of school networks. These focus on: network purpose; collaborative inertia; collaboration and accountability; trust and relationships; conscription and volunteerism; identity and autonomy; competition and co-operation; lateral agency; and power inequality. Despite the seemingly apparent logic of the positioning of the 'school network' as a structural model for today's schools, this presentation leaves too much unsaid. Tensions suggest that the implementation and development of high quality education networks pose more challenges than government may appreciate. While government urges structural reform to adapt to a changing world, attainment-driven

pedagogy and stringent performance monitoring remains. In government rhetoric and policy presentation relating to school networks, there is an unproblematized, near-blind belief in the ability of education networks to solve the problems being faced by schools. This narrative serves as a backdrop against which to explore the discursive tensions in which Maltese colleges were set up and which permeate the leaders' interactions within the network.

Day *et al*. (2003) warn against the possible danger of school networks becoming primarily a vehicle for government-driven school reform. This may happen when central education authorities make use of networks for the sole purpose of implementing policy issues in order to actualize the government's agenda, without embracing the wider context. In this scenario, school networks would prove to have little to do with the 'moral purpose' as pointed out by Lieberman (1999), that of raising the learning quality, value, purpose, and experience for the stakeholders involved. Hopkins (2000) argues that consequently, networks would merely be serving a structural purpose as instruments of system change, functioning as vehicles for organizational reform for whatever policy imperatives are operating at a given time.

Lima (2010) accuses the current field of educational research of having a *normative* and *instrumental* view of networks and suggests a possible solution through a *conceptual*, *pragmatic* and *political* problematization of these systems. Additionally, from a policy point of view, network interventions need to be informed by empirical research. Huxham and Vangen (2005) describe their concept of 'collaborative inertia' – the potentially frustrating gap that can exist between policymakers who may view networking as a logical panacea to the myriad challenges faced, and the reality of networks on a day-to-day basis.

Policy-makers face the challenge of overcoming the obstacles posed by the former individual accountability framework for the development of a sense of collective accountability. Elkins and Haydn (2004) detect a clear tension between collaboration and accountability. While 'collaboration' implies shared visions, agendas, and modes of practice within and between schools, consequently presupposing a commitment based on trust, the ongoing regime for external accountability does not augur well for these trust-based approaches. Chapman and Fullan (2007) claim that attempting to find a solution to the top-down bottom-up dilemma may lead the network to border dangerously on diffuseness, towards which collaboration tends to be biased. This context of 'diffusion' is undesirable due to the demand of the present-day public for transparency, accountability and performance.

Relationships in terms of human interaction are one of the main building blocks of school networks. In effect, as Skidmore (2004) says, relationships are pillars supporting collaboration, but, just as much as these relationships foster networking, they can also prove to be a hindrance. Trust is fundamental to positive relationships. Church *et al.* (2002) describe human relationships and trust as the connective tissue in networks. However, 'trust' does present itself as a problematic notion. Sundaramurthy and Lewis (2003) explain that while trust facilitates collaboration, too much trust encourages extreme cohesion. Thereby, they suggest an interplay of trust and conflict, as the latter stimulates critical feedback to counter groupthink, although it may also trigger clashes that engender distrust. Chapman and Hadfield (2010) seem to strengthen this argument by warning against the dangers of school networks devolving into 'comfortable collaboration' (p. 238), which makes reflexive critique of peers difficult to achieve. Leaders in networks operate in a collaborative fashion rather than on hierarchical issues

of command. One of the key paradoxes of networks is that people prefer to work with others they already know, which may lead to networks becoming a force for exclusion and for the engendering of parochialism (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009). There is also the danger that certain network members may not initially experience the same rapport and attraction to the idea as the initiators (Jackson, 2005). On the other hand, there is the risk of too much integration – dense, tightly-knit networks may be subject to insularity from the outside world. For Lima (2010), these dangers of 'network homophily' – the tendency for similar actors to cluster together – could lead to a convergence toward 'groupthink' (Lima, 2010) and deindividuation (Katz *et al*., 2009), as well as to an excessive dependence on 'effective leaders' (Berry, 2004), giving way to lower levels of network effectiveness. This context could also lead to what Katz *et al*. (2009) describe as a diffusion of responsibility and social loafing, with certain network participants being less likely to shoulder responsibility in the presence of others. Elkins and Haydn (2004) conclude that networks need to come to terms with the fact that not all members will offer the same level of participation.

Tensions may arise due to the constitution of school networks, more precisely involving the dilemma between what Hadfield and Chapman (2009) identify as conscription and volunteerism. Most successful networks are built on volunteerism – a weakness of this being that schools with potentially the most to gain may opt out of networking. Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010) state that some schools' involvement tends to be largely symbolic due to the heads' frustration over the mandatory nature of networks. Conscription is problematic as although network membership can be mandated, meaningful participation cannot. Both Hargreaves (1994) and Jackson (2006) are of the

opinion that fostering a sense of collaboration may prove to be a daunting task among schools and staff used to isolationism.

According to both Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010) and Jackson (2005), a major hurdle is identity maintenance – school leaders must interrogate their own preconceived notions about networking. Networking may even be regarded as a threat to the institutional success of individual schools who often implicitly strive to retain their autonomy – the reason given by Weiss *et al.* (2002) being that sharing and giving to other partners can appear high risk, creating insecurities, uncertainties, and unnecessary anxieties.

An unintended consequence of the activity of the network according to Rusch (2005) is an enhanced culture of competition among the schools comprising the network. Consequently, Lima (2010) states that school networks often have to maintain an unstable and fragile balance between competing forces – a tension between competition and co-operation, often translated into school leaders adopting an ambivalent attitude towards networking, which may ultimately lead to 'reciprocal, circular and mounting processes of relational disengagement' (ibid, p. 17). This may thus lead to the potential disengagement and foundering of networks since 'the stability of a network is in constant danger of dissolution' (p. 17).

A more specific difficulty that may crop up in school networking is what Hadfield (2007) labels as 'leadership shearing'. This occurs when groups of leaders end up in antagonistic relationships because of differential rates in the development of their lateral agency, their shifting identification with the network and its aims, as well as the impact of the various political and cultural influences shaping the leader/follower dynamic. Hadfield *et al*. (2005) suggest that 'lateral agency' which expresses the desire

and ability of individuals to work across school boundaries in order to change practices and the local education system, has the propensity of being directed at peers due to opportunity and cultural issues. Hadfield (2007) suggests that in this situation of strong lateral but weak vertical links, the interaction between school and network structures is weakened, leading to the different layers of network leadership breaking apart as they develop their own sense of what network leadership means. Hadfield (2007, p. 280) explains how this scenario can lead to the disruption of the whole network, with what Denis *et al*. (2001) term as the 'constellation of leadership' breaking apart 'as different groups spin out of each other's orbit'.

Lank (2006) hints at the potential power inequality that may exist in any partnership that can lead to one-sided relationships. Furthermore, Coleman (2011) explains that 'the issue of power is an implicit yet under-explored issue within collaborative working and fundamental to the relative success or failure of partnership working' (p. 299). Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) warn how in this context of power relations, partnership working can be viewed as a mechanism for increased surveillance, as partners act as a check and scrutinize each other's activities. Weiss *et al*. (2002) state that collaborative working may be regarded as a potential threat by those organizations striving to retain their autonomy. This power issue forms the basis for one of the main research questions underpinning this study and will subsequently be explored in depth.

Evidence reveals a difficult point within education networks – that of education being part of a national policy that notwithstanding all discourses on autonomy, tries to regulate educational practices. Bentley (2005) tries to sum up his view on this phase of educational change, 'Life in this new system may not be any calmer…but it could be more coherent' (p. 4). It is within this discursive context that I explore the leaders'

reception of network imposition through a policy mandate and how 'leading in a network' rather than just 'leading in a school' impinges on the leaders' emergent leadership identities. This first section of the literature review explored networks and networking in education through a critique of the proliferation of the network concept; the network metaphor; and networking in education. The emergence of school-based networks was investigated through their attractions, as well as the tensions accompanying their set-up.

Leadership issues and dilemmas

In this part of the literature review, I consider the leadership concept and its problematization; network leadership and its under-theorization; distributed leadership in education, its critique, and challenges to its implementation in the network. This section is intended to flag up the areas around network leadership that are as yet unexplored or under-theorized. These are: the relationship between power and distributed leadership; distributed leadership in practice; and the dynamics unfolding within the network. It contributes to the research by setting the theoretical background for the second and third research questions.

The leadership concept and its problematization

Notoriously little agreement exists about how leadership may be defined – Alvesson and Spicer (2012) describe the field as characterized by 'conceptual confusion and endemic vagueness' (p. 369). Ladkin (2010) celebrates this lack of definitional clarity, while inviting us 'to consider the very *indefinability* of leadership as significant' (p. 2), with each expression of leadership contributing to our understanding of its identity – the total determination of which remains elusive. This section presents the lack of

definitional clarity in the leadership concept, subsequently proceeding to the celebration of the heroic leader model and its deconstruction.

Alvesson and Spicer (2011) state that: 'The leader has become one of the dominant heroes of our time…Whatever the problem, leadership has become the solution' (p. 1). We now live in a 'leadership-obsessed culture', a world dominated by the idea that leadership is one of the major factors – sometimes the only determining factor – of the success or otherwise of an educational organization. It is a society that according to Alvesson and Spicer (2012) practises a 'blind faith in the curative powers of leadership', while extolling its 'celebration and naturalization' (p. 368), pushing us to deny 'ambiguities, incoherencies, and shifts in our great leaders' (ibid, 2011, p. 3). An outcome of society's love affair with leadership is what Fairhurst (2011) describes as 'leader centrism' (p. 190) – a tendency to focus primarily on leaders' actions, as well as the often unchallenged assumption of leadership as a positive thing, reflecting broader social beliefs in the power of the heroic individual, therefore manifesting a preference for the avoidance of what Festinger (1957) terms as 'cognitive dissonance'.

Wood and Case (2006) suggest that studies of leadership have been dominated by the search for a blueprint of competences, capabilities and models that can be implemented to achieve similar results. The existing frameworks of leadership construct it as something existing as an 'exceptional practice', resulting in a normalizing of leadership into models dominated by stories of heroic endeavours (Niesche, 2011, p. 2). This idealized concept of leadership is deconstructed by Christie and Lingard (2001), for whom leadership is 'a dynamic process where forces that are conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational, play out in complex social situations' (p. 138), thus doing away with any notion of heroism.

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) demolish the model of the heroic leader, by arguing that notwithstanding the portrayal of leadership discourse as something extraordinary, leadership often gets lost amidst the mundane work aspects. They thus label everyday leadership practices as the 'extra-ordinization of the mundane' (p. 1435). I therefore present an exploration of educational leaders' mundane practices, and perceptions, that enable a textured reading of educational leadership with various layers, rather than conceptualizing leadership as a range of competences and models that are common in many of the popular leadership discourses. Alvesson and Spicer (2011) maintain that 'leadership is seldom a matter of a great leader with a clear self-understanding who directs, supports, and controls followers', instead it is best understood as 'full of ambiguities, paradoxes, confusions, inconsistencies' (p. 48). This is vital for my research as this facet of leadership emerges prominently in my case study.

Leadership in school networks

It is apparent that sharing leadership with agencies outside their walls is still not a very strong point for many school leaders. Black (2008) argues that a 'moated or walled culture of schooling' (p. 44) still persists, which is an entrenched mode of thought and behaviour very difficult to overcome. Black (2008) thus advocates 'genuinely shared or distributed leadership' for new educational networks in order for this sectoral isolation to be overcome, quoting West-Burnham, Farrar and Otero (2007) who declare that 'networks are fundamental to building social capital through trust, commitment and interdependency…what is essential…is exchange and sharing…'. Therefore, besides pointing out the strong presence of sectoral isolation in schools, this section explores network leadership and its under-theorization, as well as distributed leadership and its fit to networks.

Jopling and Spender (2006) argue that there is 'no simple, single solution to leading networks' (p. 5), with Hadfield (2007) describing how '…the very nature of a network makes it difficult to define who its leaders are…' (p. 260). Katz *et al*. (2009, p. 5) claim that in these new collaborative partnerships of school networking, leadership is 'defined by activity other than formal position', encompassing the practices and activities of the various leaders across different strata both within the network and across schools. Jopling and Crandall (2006) assert that networks of schools do require some form of leadership despite their shift towards more plural, distributed and adaptive forms. They go on to explain that network leadership is qualitatively distinct from traditional notions of hierarchical school leadership as it is facilitative rather than directive, it is about leadership emerging from interactions and relationships between people, rather than charismatic individuals – it seems to work best when it is distributed, being more responsive to context.

Hadfield (2007) states that 'the increasing popularity of network-based approaches…is generating new and emergent leadership challenges, which in their turn are likely to create new leadership approaches'(p. 259). Consequently, Jopling and Crandall (2006) conclude that:

> the quest for a single, unifying theory about its essential elements based on empirical research eludes consensus. Conceptions rise to prominence from time-to-time, none ever fully displacing its predecessors but adding to the intellectual stew surrounding the subject (p. 3).

Kubiak and Bertram (2010) thus argue that while leadership is a widely researched and debated topic in the organizational sciences, network leadership remains under-theorized – few empirical accounts exist of the impact of school networks in the United Kingdom, even internationally, there is still a paucity in the area. Writings on

networked ways of working such as revealed by O'Brien *et al.* (2006) place an emphasis on non-hierarchical and fluid ways of functioning rather than rigid or highly structured means. Consequently, Anderson *et al.* (2005) argue that this marks a conceptual shift for school leaders taking on network leadership roles, a shift involving moral responsibility, egalitarian practices, connectivity, and informal learning. Kubiak and Bertram (2010) admit that despite network leadership being a 'multi-faceted and complex activity' (p. 35), aspects of network leadership do connect with the headteachers' present skill repertoire. However, having to undergo an orientation shift, Anderson *et al.* (2005) stress that it is unsurprising that leaders find it difficult to identify with such a role, the literature base around which is still emerging. It is this which I hope the findings emerging from my research will contribute to. Kubiak and Bertram (2010) lament over the fact that while network leaders are placed in a fluid and adaptable organizational form, they are expected to function in a position lacking the usual resources of positional power or formal hierarchy.

Harris (2005) describes the state of networking: 'we are witnessing a proliferation of collaborative possibilities…schools are frenetically pursuing the goal of networks and networking' (p. 5). Consequently, Harris foresees the generation of leadership challenges in terms of the necessity of more innovative and dynamic approaches resulting in lateral and vertical forms of leadership practice. Distributed leadership is thus regarded as a complementary mode of thought about leadership practice that meets the shifting demands of multi-site collaboration, due to the conception of this leadership theory being based on the metaphor of the network with its ideas of interaction, undefined boundaries, wide distributions, and power flows. This is an under-theorized aspect of network leadership in interaction that I plan to address through my study of

the leadership dynamics between Heads themselves and between the Heads and the Principal.

Distributed leadership in education: exploring reasons for its emergence and the various interpretations of the term

Lumby (2013) argues that the conception of distributed leadership has dominated educational leadership theory and practice, thus becoming 'the theory of choice for many' (p. 581), undergoing a transformation 'from a tool to facilitate the comprehension of leadership ecology to a widely stipulated praxis' (ibid, p. 581). She expands on this by adding that distributed leadership theory has moved on into practice. Bush (2013) further states that this leadership model has been given 'normative preference', with Gronn (2010) noting the 'accelerating amount of scholarly and practitioner attention' (p. 70) given to this model in an undivided manner. This section explores the reasons behind the popularity of distributed leadership; its 'conceptual confusion'; and the reasons behind distribution.

Distributed leadership already features in policy frameworks in a number of countries and is being actively advocated. This is the case in the Maltese state education system, where, similarly to England, distributed leadership underpins the new models of schooling as researched by Chapman *et al.* (2010). Similarly, literature by both Harris and Jones (2010), and Harris (2011) describes how in the Welsh case, distributed leadership is a vital part of system-wide reform, manifesting itself through a national infrastructure of professional learning communities within, between, and across schools.

Definitions of distributed leadership abound in literature. Harris (2005) describes it as 'collective leadership responsibility rather than top-down authority' (p. 1), subscribing

to Spillane's (2005) 'leader plus' perspective, moving us from a 'person solo' to a 'person plus' perspective, suggesting multiple leaders at multiple levels. This is premised on a collective approach to capacity building in schools (Harris & Lambert, 2003) through a recognition that leadership practice is constructed through shared action and interaction. In his emphasis on 'leaders, followers, and their situation', Spillane (2005) implies an interdependent influence between followers and leaders, who emerge as leadership co-producers. Harris (2005) points out the contradiction in this model – having the idea of followership within distributed leadership. However, as Spillane (2005) rationalizes, the follower dimension incorporates followers as influencers in the determination and shaping of leadership practice. Bennett *et al.* (2003) identify three characteristics of distributed leadership: as an emergent property of a network of interacting individuals; operating within undefined boundaries that can only vary along a continuum between wide and restricted; with widely distributed expertise and leadership opportunities. Zepke (2007) builds on Gronn's (2002) definition of distributed leadership as 'structurally conjoint agency' (p. 543), describing it as a 'community for action' (p. 305) where power flows from leader to leader as new leadership roles emerge and are nurtured.

Mayrowetz (2008, p. 425) argues that the term 'distributed leadership' has been widely applied to notions of school leadership and adapted in education discourses – leading to the co-existence, persistence, and prevalence of diverse conceptualizations and interpretations of the term – thus encouraging researchers to 'talk past each other'. Harris (2013) distinguishes one common misuse of the term in literature which renders it more difficult to demarcate its 'precise' meaning – using it as an umbrella term to encompass any mode of shared, collaborative, or extended leadership practice.

Confusion is further engendered by its positioning as the antithesis of top-down, hierarchical leadership – a position critiqued by Harris (2013), for whom distributed leadership is a form of co-leadership involving 'both formal and informal leaders, it is not an *either/or*' (p. 548). It is this 'loose' application of the term which may lead to some confusion – in the words of Hartley (2010),

> If distributed leadership is indeed a loose canon, open to doctrinal disputes, then it is perhaps of little surprise that its operationalization within empirical research is less than consistent (p. 281).

Various reasons have been given as to the motivation for distribution. Those which feature the most prominently are what Fullan (2005) proposes as the recognition of the limitations of the 'charismatic hero', which, according to Bush (2012, p. 649) have been 'supplemented but not supplanted' by concepts of shared leadership, mirroring the trend towards self-management, together with the pragmatic popularity of distributed leadership to ease the burden of principals and senior leaders who have become overloaded, as evidenced by Hartley (2010). Bush (2013), however, argues that distributed leadership oversteps this instrumental motive to an acknowledgement of the conjoint expertise of organization members.

Hartley (2007) explores the emergence of distributed leadership in education through political and cultural considerations – besides providing a response to recent policy shifts foci on the merging or networking of work-based activities, distributed leadership resonates with Bauman's (2000) concept of 'liquid modernity' in a contemporary culture that favours the trend 'from organized social structure to network culture' (Page, 2006, unpaginated). Dispersion of leadership within and across organizations resonates with the flexible 'liquid modern' view of time and space. Moreover, Hartley (2010)

claims that it fits in well with the contemporary trend of organizational learning within a so-called knowledge economy.

Harris (2013) offers a note of warning, however:

> Distributed leadership does not guarantee better performance; it is not a panacea for success, it does not possess any innate good or bad qualities, it is not friend or foe. Much depends on *how* leadership is distributed and the *intentions* behind it. (p. 552, emphasis added).

Jopling and Crandall (2006) suggest that distributed leadership is viewed as an important practice in school networks as it offers a new way of talking about leadership in which all the voices of relatively 'unrecognized leaders' are legitimized and the language of leadership is extended. Relatively new, emergent leadership roles are given the space to expand across the network. Distributed leadership aids leaders in challenging expectations, adding new perspectives, and making lateral and latent leadership practice more visible, as Bennett *et al.* (2003) say, it is 'an important analytical tool for thinking about leadership and re-orientating thinking about its nature' (p. 7).

Collegiality and distributed leadership

Jarvis (2012) espouses the advocacy (by researchers) of collegiality as the ideal approach to school leadership as it involves the distribution of responsibilities across an organization. However, he notices the interchangeable use of the terms 'collegiality' and 'distributed leadership' and questions it. Despite the assertion by Bush (2003) that distributed leadership 'shares many features with collegiality' (p. 64), Jarvis (2012) argues for collegiality as 'a state of mind that may or may not find expression in distributed leadership' (p. 490) – distinguishing between collegiality as an abstract quality and distributed leadership as enacted collegiality in practice. The state of the

literature on collegiality in (hierarchical) organizational structures is summed up by Lima (2008). He states that most writings on the subject, 'downplay the traditional notion of the single strong leader and emphasize the collective responsibility and collegial activity of wider groups' (p. 160). This conceptualization of leadership emerges in the literature as being the most widespread in school networks – at least, it is the one potentially aspired for in policy and consultation documents despite the lack of empirical research having been carried out about how distributed leadership unfolds in a school network. Indeed, 'distributed leadership' is the only leadership concept spelled out in the FACT policy document to be specifically adopted in Maltese networks. A distributed leadership lens moves the analysis of leadership beyond individual practices to the patterning and emergence of leadership activities within and between groups.

Problematizing distributed leadership

Lakomski (2008) however describes distributed leadership research as 'causally idle' (p. 278), with the field having weak theoretical foundations. On a similar note, Timperley (2005) argues:

> Yet, leadership has always been distributed within organizations; it is a little surprising that we have taken so long to recognize it and develop the associated conceptual frameworks…Grounding further research in empirical studies that chart the territory, as well as its inadequacies, is essential if distributed leadership does not just become another faulty conceptualization of leadership to be overtaken by the next set of ideas (p. 418).

It is within this discursive background that I problematize distributed leadership as the only form of leadership explicitly referred to in the policy document FACT. In this study, I explore the extent to which school/college leaders embrace this policy-mandated discursive leadership practice. In this section, I problematize the 'real' purpose behind the advocacy of distributed leadership; its relationship to power and

how this is yet under-researched; as well as its novelty in the education leadership discourse. I then look at the tensions revolving around distribution and democracy; relationship differentials; and the notion of the 'single leader' in a distributed leadership setting.

Hartley (2007) suggests that one of the main reasons behind the emergence of distributed leadership in schools, at least at the level of policy rhetoric, can be regarded as it being a response to policy shifts. The notion of distributed leadership might just be used as a mask by policy producers and government officials to ease in their agenda as a normalizing discourse in schools. Hartley (2010) further elaborates on this notion of distributed leadership by stating that it 'is a means to an end whose purpose is organizational…*development*…It is mainly about accomplishing the *organizational* goals which comprise the instrumental tasks and targets set by officialdom' (p. 281, original emphasis). A link can here be established with the notion of the network being used solely as a vehicle for government-driven reform (Day *et al.*, 2003). Hall *et al.* (2011) recognize distributed leadership as the 'officially sanctioned model of good practice' (p. 32) advocated by government departments, yet suggest that discussions around this notion reflect normative narratives and are just part of policy rhetoric to claim that power and autonomy are being shared with schools, whereas reality points to centralization and managerialism. Hartley (2007) regards it as 'yet another sign of an institutional isomorphism' (p. 211), whereby the public sector purports to legitimate its policies by appeals to the new organizational forms within the private sector (Alvesson & Thomson, 2005, p. 488). Gunter and Forrester (2008) detect a control imperative in the relationship between policy and practice in the professional practice of 'policy entrepreneurs' (a term coined by Kingdon[2003]), thus concluding that the primacy of

the single person (that is, the 'solo' leader) remains, with distribution coming downward and used as a form of sophisticated delegation. Youngs (2009) states that education reforms by neo-liberal policy agendas have privileged the economic purpose of education, leading to the opposition between self-management and mandated external accountability. He points to the lack of critique surrounding the policy environment and queries the extent to which distributed leadership practices will be shaped or hindered by 'official and delegated leadership practices informed by neo-liberal ideals' as opposed to the 'more educative and democratic ideals' (p. 382) informing the professionals' performative environment. It is within this narrative of policy rhetoric, self-management, and external accountability that I explore the extent of the influence of the exercise of distributed leadership as a policy mandate on the leadership practices within the individual schools and the college.

Lumby (2013) laments the fact that distributed leadership literature fails to problematize power and its relationship to distributed leadership, except for a few sporadic attempts, as revealed in studies carried out by Flessa (2009), Hartley (2010), Hatcher (2005), and Storey (2004). Hartley (2007) notes the under-theorization of the relationship between power and distribution. However, organizations are replete with structures of power, unlike the 'mirage', the 'apolitical workplace', that according to Lumby (2013, p. 582), distributed leadership has been used to create.

> Ignoring politics can be interpreted as a political act as much as overt engagement. In its avoidance of issues of power, distributed leadership is a profoundly political phenomenon, replete with the uses and abuses of power (ibid, p. 592).

Within this unproblematized theoretical framework of distributed leadership, evidence of a hierarchical framework of control lurks – residual control which is presented as a

necessity for successful distribution. Autonomy is restricted, nesting within the imperative of the official agenda, due to the potential threat to the coherence of school improvement initiatives that may come about as a result of differing agendas between the leadership distributors and those among whom it is distributed – the latter is an issue that was explored by both Harris (2008), and Timperley (2005). In his exploration of the inequality in the leadership hierarchy between the 'distributors' and the 'distributees', Youngs (2009) concludes that leadership is a vehicle of power. Youngs (2009) further questions the locus of power in educational contexts and whose interests are being safeguarded. He problematizes the assumption that 'official' distributed leadership is presented as 'a moral and educational act' of distribution, thus implying that those at the receiving end 'do not have it in the same measure in the first place' (p. 387). He shows his concern that 'distributed leadership may become a term that is synonymous with and restricted to formal leaders distributing more leadership to others' (p. 387). This produces a directed form of distributed leadership, which ends up emphasizing rather than lessening the distinct leadership hierarchies. This notion leads to the 'dysfunctional dynamics of control-collaboration tensions' as defined by Sundaramurthy and Lewis (2003, p. 399). While control curtails human limitations through discipline, collaboration leads to the empowerment of individuals. Yet, if one approach gains more prominence, the danger of groupthink or distrust comes forward. This is a paradox which Watson (2013) locates in the strong advocacy of distributed approaches to leadership in the United Kingdom for the headteachers. The twin justifications provided by appeal to organizational effectiveness and democracy highlight the inherent contradictions within distributed leadership practices.

Some critics of the distributed leadership notion inquire whether such a concept offers a genuine alternative to other forms of leadership, or whether it just serves as 'the emperor's new clothes' (Bolden, 2011, p. 254) or as a pragmatic response to society's demand for equity and purpose. Lumby (2013) accuses distributed leadership of offering 'yet another nuanced rebranding, anchoring the nebulous concept of leadership to a seemingly fresh and inclusive activity' (p. 589). She argues that in this way, distributed leadership subjects educators to the ever-increasing limitations posed by centralized curriculum control, surveillance, and marketization. This comes about as distributed leadership appears to loosen the bonds in encouraging staff to embrace it as a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 2000e, p. 177), thus leading to the successful enactment of policy discourse. Hartley (2010) suggests that it is 'little more than an emancipatory rhetoric' (p.279), building on the accusation of Hargreaves and Fink (2008) of distributed leadership being a 'more subtle and clever way to deliver standardized packages of government reforms and performance targets' (p. 238-9). On a similar note, Spillane *et al*. (2011) argue that distributed leadership has 'effortlessly entered the conversation about school leadership and management…often with simplistic and unwarranted mantras such as *everyone is a leader* or *the more leaders the better*' (p. 159).

According to Woods (2004, p. 22), as with other discourses of legitimation, such as 'empowerment' and 'ownership', the notion of distributed leadership appears to incorporate democratic procedures. Woods addresses the danger of the notions of democratic leadership becoming colonized by distributed leadership discourses, stating that the two notions cannot be regarded as synonymous. Distributed leadership incorporates a degree of control and autonomy, within which there is the scope for

dispersed initiative and the boundaries of participation. Despite being distributed, leadership does not imply the lack of a pyramid as it varies along the continuum between control and the autonomy participants are allowed to exercise. This positioning of distributed leadership across the control/autonomy continuum determines whether autonomy and empowerment are extended or if constraint and control are exercised in novel ways. Democratic leadership runs the risk of being regarded as another way of denoting distributed leadership, however, the concept of democratic leadership simultaneously draws open and goes beyond that of distributed leadership. Whereas distributed leadership may obscure the deeper questions inherent in democratic leadership through its widening of leadership boundaries, democratic leadership attempts to make visible these deeper questions. Woods (2004) thus argues that distributed leadership promises a 'hollow' democracy, further entailing a 'democratic deficit', which according to Woods and Gronn (2009, p. 430) leads to its critical interrogation. Is it the leadership of one or the leadership of many?

Hartley (2007) argues that distributed leaders do not arrive at their position as the result of an election, but an appointment, with a 'presumed harmony and consensus' about the whole affair. Hatcher (2005) and Storey (2004) think that 'distribution' tends to underestimate the micro-political aspects of leadership practice, while completely ignoring the 'distribution' of wealth beyond the school and its causal relationship to attainment. However, leadership cannot survive without difference – this seems to be echoed by Harter *et al*. (2006) who argue that leadership dynamics are 'unequal' in one way or another – power differentials exist despite the notion of distributed leadership. Woods *et al*. (2004) propagate the existence of distributed leadership and strong senior leadership which allows for strong partnerships with the simultaneous power disparities

between the partners. Watson (2013) draws on McMurry's (1958, p. 82) notion of 'benevolent autocracy' to show its particular relevance to school leadership, thus implying that distributed leadership practices are 'only' possible 'where an autocratic leader at the top ruthlessly ensures that participatory ideals are…adhered to by those lower down the hierarchy' (p. 259).

Stohl and Cheney (2001, p. 387-389) have revealed that even in situations where leadership is a matter of collective consideration, people's attachment to the concept of 'strong leaders' is sometimes still very heavily felt. Lingard *et al.* (2003) stress the necessity for leadership in schools, arguing that 'schooling discourses locate authority in principals and defend their positional power because schools, as we know them, require leadership in order to function *as* schools' (p. 144, original emphasis). How can a school move forward without a leader at the 'top' to steer its direction? The same applies to college leadership – the individual yet collaborating network nodes require someone assuming responsibility. Distributed leadership does not equate to no leadership, and does not mean that everyone has an equal say in every matter. It is this common conception (or misconception, rather) that creates a tension between the notions of distribution, democracy, and the concept of the network. Gunter *et al*. (2013) regard the single leader as central to distribution, in line with the reasoning of Harris (2007), 'The paradox is that without stable, consistent leadership in schools distributed leadership will be incredibly vulnerable and ultimately fragile' (p. 322). Harris (2005) argues that distribution of leadership does not lead to the redundancy of the Head who has the critical role of providing empowerment to the would-be leaders through asymmetrically distributing the tasks.

Can distributed leadership and hierarchical leadership co-exist? Can you have a network with a hierarchy? Does this create a tension within the notion of a network of schools? Leadership can be stretched over leaders in a school, but is not necessarily democratic – Spillane (2005) argues how a distributed leadership perspective may also give rise to autocracy. Is there a single distributor who 'distributes' leadership? One has to question *what* is being distributed, *how*, and *to whom*, as well as the way in which this distribution occurs.

Challenges to the implementation of distributed leadership

Education practitioners and policy-makers have been lured by the attractive notion of leadership distribution for various reasons. Mayrowetz (2008) explores the value of distributed leadership in a pragmatic sense, pointing out four benefits that can be generated through its practice. It may be regarded as a theoretical lens for exploring the leadership dynamics; as a means for furthering democracy (despite distributed leadership and democracy being very distinct, as outlined by Woods [2004]); as a way of improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness; and finally, as leading towards human capacity-building. The last benefit relates to Gronn's (2002, p. 3) notion of 'concertive action', which results in an outcome which is greater than the sum of individual actions, illustrating leadership as an emergent property of a network and resulting in a product of conjoint activity.

Notwithstanding the 'perceived' advantages of distributed forms of leadership, Harris (2004) states that inevitable and inherent difficulties are associated with its implementation in schools – namely structural, cultural and micro-political barriers in operation. This section thus outlines the challenges that are presented by the tensions revolving around the hierarchical structure, power, and autonomy; the notion of

distribution and boundary spanning; and the level of control and autonomy. Schools as traditional hierarchies, with the demarcations of position and pay-scale may prove to be a barrier to a more fluid and distributed approach to leadership. Moore and Kelly (2009) claim that the nature of schools as traditionally hierarchical structures with the headteacher as the leader tends to conflict with the leadership style promoted in networks (p. 397). Hopkins and Jackson (2002) suggest that the 'more hierarchical the management structure, the more the liberation of leadership capacity is likely to be stifled' (p. 11). Harris (2004) also states how distributed leadership may pose an inherent threat to the status quo, placing the head in a position of vulnerability due to a relinquishing of power to others, leading to a lack of direct control over certain activities. Issues regarding loss of leadership power and autonomy may arise as school leaders struggle with the notion of delegating responsibility and accountability to network members. Earl and Katz (2005) explain how,

> Establishing patterns of distributed leadership is a subtle dance of power and authority. Sharing leadership within schools and across the network can cause confusion, resentment and protection of position and power (p. 71).

Harris (2004) shows concern that significant impediments to distributed leadership are presented by 'top-down' approaches to leadership and the internal school structures. Another challenge is posed by '*how* to distribute' and '*who* distributes', ensuring that distributed leadership 'is not simply misguided delegation' (ibid, p. 20), involving interdependency rather than dependency, with the leadership function *stretched over* the interaction of *multiple leaders* (Spillane *et al.*, 2001, p. 24, emphasis added). Timperley (2005) writes about the potential problem of incoherence within an organization due to the different agendas circulating among those to whom leadership is distributed and the 'official' leaders, especially where no boundary spanning is involved. Boundary-

spanning leadership as defined by Miller (2007) has an important role to play in leadership distribution as it involves bridge-building with numerous points of contact, establishing collaborative environments, as well as carrying out information brokerage.

Jarvis (2012) describes how schools as organizations are 'the loci for various forms of power and compliance relationships' (p. 489) due to their high level of complexity. Distributed leadership, according to Woods *et al*. (2004) may be both constraining and enabling, depending on the degree of control and autonomy in the organization, which turns out to be a major variable in this leadership practice. This concern raises the issue of the extent and limits of individual autonomy. Furthermore, they draw attention to the fact that where distributed leadership veers towards the autonomy pole of the control/autonomy continuum, one should not assume that non-negotiable, 'top-down' goals, values, and aims are always unsuitable, despite presenting a strong, directive steer. Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 384) identify an organizational paradox emanating from the tension around 'empowerment and direction', where leaders are expected to enact their roles while following others' decisions in a 'supposedly' distributed leadership setting. Consequently, Watson (2013) draws our attention to the paradox in relation to autonomy and collectivity, which produces tensions between belonging and performing, thus giving rise to the dichotomy between 'collective' and 'individual' identities. A plausible connection between the two sets of tensions identified above seems to exist in equating 'empowerment' with autonomy, thus leading to individual identity; and 'direction' which leads to the nurturing of 'collective' identities due to enacting that which is 'given'. This is engendered by the push for distributed leadership within a scenario of networks, co-operation, and flatter hierarchies. Gronn (2009) states

that little attention has been paid as to how it may be ideologically driven and political in nature.

Moreover, according to Sugrue (2009), distributed leadership can promote an excessive reliance on group-based leadership and understate the importance of the individual leader in organizational effectiveness. Gronn (2009) argues that,

> solo leaders continue to figure prominently in accounts that purport to be distributed and that distributed leadership apologists have not adequately clarified the role and contribution of individuals as continuing sources of organizational influence within a distributed framework (p. 383).

In his view, distributed leadership fails to give an explanation of the different forms of leadership at work at any one time, from concentrated solo leaders to more dispersed forms of networks within the same organization.

Conclusion

This critical review of literature thus provides the theoretical scaffoldings that will eventually enable me to analyse my data, generate conclusions from my research, and position it within the existing gaps in literature which I identified and outlined in Chapter 1. The key issues from literature that frame my research are educational networks within the policy context, the rationale behind this organizational reform, and the subsequent counter-arguments. These issues provide the setting for the exploration of my first research question that explores the unfolding of policy-mandated collegiality, serving as a backdrop against which I can justify my findings and make conceptual conclusions. Leadership issues and dilemmas are then explored in relation to school networks, focusing on the notion of distributed leadership, its problematization, as well as challenges to its implementation. This area of literature provides the foundations on which to explore the second and third research questions dealing with

the flow of relations of power and leadership distribution within the college. This leadership narrative has particular implications for my study as it illustrates where I answer particular 'blank spots' related to issues of power in a distributed leadership setting, and how distributed leadership unfolds in practice, besides showing how my findings literally undermine leadership theory.

Chapter Four: Methodological 'moments' along my doctoral research journey

> I think it is always a little pretentious to present in a more or less prophetic way what people have to think. I prefer to let them draw their own conclusions or infer general ideas from the interrogations I try to raise …
>
> [Foucault, 2002f, p. 404]

Introduction

This chapter, which is divided into two main sections, outlines my paradigmatic and theoretical frameworks. I set out 'the' postmodern paradigm, followed by the Foucauldian theories used in my analysis, giving justifications for both choices. I briefly explain my engagement with the process of 'plugging-in' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1), which constitutes a focus on the theorist and specific concepts, rather than the theoretical framework – the process of 'reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory' (ibid, p. 4).

Conceptual Underpinnings: My Interpretive Framework

> Postmodernists, defining everything as a text, seek to 'locate' meaning rather than to 'discover' it…They offer 'readings' not 'observations', 'interpretations' not 'findings'…They look to the unique rather than to the general…to the unrepeatable rather than the re-occurring…truth gives way to tentativeness…(Rosenau, 1992, p. 8, cited in Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 75).

This is the reason why I embrace this paradigm for the perspective of my research, as it allows me to represent the ambiguities, contradictions and absurdities in the college constituting my case study, in order to trace the circulating relations of power. Moreover, it is especially fitting for my study in the light of Usher and Edwards' (1994, p. 10) description of a postmodern world 'without fixed referents and traditional

anchoring points', where 'uncertainty, the lack of a centre and the floating meaning are…phenomena to be celebrated' – phenomena embedded in my case study.

Postmodernism, as here defined, refuses totalising and essentialist systems of thought and abandons the entire epistemological basis for claims to indubitable truths (Crotty, 2003). Postmodernism's emphasis on the centrality of discourse and fragmented identities, with subjectification as a process, allows me to explore how leaders are 'subjectified' in this networked school organization, and whether they adopt the 'positions' offered by the hegemonic distributed leadership discourse. Postmodernism favours multiple voices and local politics over the power of grand narratives, allowing for the dissonant voices and 'masked' power relations to play out in my research.

Lyotard occupies a significant position in postmodern educational thinking due to his book '*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*' (first published in 1979, translated in 1984) which provided the first introduction to the links between education and the postmodern condition (Bleakley, 2004). Lyotard assaults the 'grand narratives' of modernism (Darwinism, Freudianism, Marxism), calling rather for 'local narratives' and 'small' stories, giving weight to 'difference' over 'sameness'. Usher and Edwards (1994) state that Lyotard's work is an attempt at disrupting 'the order of our own narratives and reading of narratives' (p. 171), simultaneously drawing our attention to a paradox he himself acknowledges, that 'His narrative of little narratives would seem to offer a *grand narrative* of the postmodern condition' (p. 184, emphasis added). Universal agreement about values should be discouraged because consensus only 'does violence to the heterogeneity of language games' (p. 65-6), as Lyotard says. His work encourages me as a researcher to focus on 'local', contextualized settings and interactions, while entertaining and broadcasting plural voices and identities.

MacLure (2006) regards postmodernism as 'education's Other' (p. 224), extolling it for its ability 'to unsettle the still core of habit and order in the uncertain hope of shaking things up, asking new questions, estranging the familiar' (ibid). She argues that much qualitative research is still conducted as an Enlightment practice: seeking to dispel illusion. MacLure (2006), however, extols the 'untimeliness' of postmodernism and speaks about 'working the ruins' – a notion signifying both acknowledgement and a commitment of the breaking down of the Enlightenment ideals for a different kind of research to emerge out of those ruins. The 'postmodern moment' has been defined as one of 'questioning and critique' (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 209).

Embracing postmodernism requires me, as a researcher, to question long-held beliefs and values, as well as entrenched practices – Bogdan (1990, p. 116) describes it in this way: *'ostranenie*: the process of defamiliarization, the making strange of reality in order to create it anew'. It is 'an ontological rejection of the traditional full subject…an epistemological obsession with fragments or fractures' (Hassan, in Wolin, 1992, p. 206), making it a very suitable methodology for examining networks which I consider to be made up of 'fragments', represented by each individual school (on its own) encompassing individuals, and the other network elements in my case study. These 'fragments', which are not isolated but parts of a whole, link with Foucault's notion of the 'political double-bind' (2002g, p. 336) of individualization and totalization. This notion of 'fractures' and 'fragments' allows me to explore the extent to which the identities of the network 'elements' are formed through their position and function as parts of the whole rather than their intrinsic significance as such. According to Usher and Edwards (1994), education in the postmodern is characterized by a 'decentring' and 'loosening of boundaries' (p. 212), which unfolds within educational authority, control,

and provision. This contrasts with my data where educational authority, control, and provision are still *very* 'centralized'.

Postmodernism spurs me as a researcher to critically examine my methodological assumptions and choices, producing a self-consciousness unshackling the procedures used to represent the world, encouraging representational diversity and innovation. Usher and Edwards (1994) problematize the relationship between postmodernism and representation. This leads to the argument centering around the 'non-innocence' of language in postmodernism and the consequent political implications – 'we both *constitute* and *are constituted* by language' (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 16, emphasis added). Moreover, the undecidability of meaning renders the text open to a variety of readings, thus calling the author-reader relationship into play, by encouraging a shift of emphasis to the reader and his/her creativity (Alvesson, 2002). The postmodern perspective provides 'an alternative discourse' (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 25) to be utilized in the problematization of educational theory and practice, thus generating the possibility for a 'disruption' of the 'given'. This is a vital premise in my study in which I deliberately 'disrupt' theory.

Scheurich (1997b) suggests that research in the postmodern attempts to erase the distinction between research practices and the subjectivity of the researcher, recognizing the intertwined nature of the two, as research practices construct identities of which 'researcher' is one. The methodological approach I adopt in my doctoral studies brings forth the various aspects in my shifting self, aiding me to acknowledge, although not always to come to terms with my distinct and at times, conflicting identities.

The use of Foucauldian theory in my research

Foucauldian theory facilitated my exploration of the power flow among the educational leaders within the network, as well as the positioning and performance of identities within a discourse that renders them both 'subjects' and 'objects'. Foucault's work initially drew my attention to the central issue of relations of power. Deleuze (1990) states,

> When people follow Foucault, when they are fascinated by him, it is because they are doing something with him, in their own work, in their own independent lives (p. 86)

This is the stance I follow in my adoption of a Foucauldian theoretical framework. Gillies (2013) demonstrates the value of Foucault's trident of scepticism, critique, and problematization to operate within educational discourse,

> Given the scale of the educational leadership literature and the relatively small amount of questioning voices raised against it, it seems eminently timely to bring Foucault into the lists (p. 23).

Scepticism doubts and challenges educational leadership, while critique involves questioning, probing, and analysing, in an attempt to demonstrate 'that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted' (Foucault, 2002c, p. 456). Gillies (2013) suggests the adoption of critique as 'a professional responsibility' (p. 18), in order to articulate and employ doubt to chosen values, beliefs and assumptions in both policy and practice. Problematization constitutes the 'development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response' (Foucault, 2000d, p. 118).

Conscious of the fact that Foucault was keen to avoid being seen as offering a 'general system, an overarching theoretical framework or worldview' (Foucault, 2001a, p. 240), I take a 'piecemeal approach to his work' (Allen, 2012), by viewing it as a 'tool-box' (Megill, 1987). Foucault (2002b) warns,

> What I've written is never prescriptive either for me or for others – at most it's instrumental and tentative (p. 240).

Gillies (2013) therefore concludes that Foucault's (2001a) support for his 'gadgets' to be utilized as 'thinking tools' (p. 65), combined with the current powerful status of leadership discourse within education, 'make a Foucauldian analysis eminently suitable and potentially illuminative' (p. 18), the purpose of which is 'to question, probe, and identify weaknesses, contradictions, assumptions, and problems' (p. 19).

Deleuze (2012) strongly emphasizes the difference between the visible and the sayable, the non-discursive and the discursive in Foucault's thinking. According to Deleuze (ibid), a form that haunted the whole of Foucault's work is 'the form of the visible, as opposed to the form of whatever can be articulated' (p. 28). This Foucauldian notion caught my attention after I perceived a distinction between the leaders' narratives (individually, and in private during the interview) and their performance (in interaction with each other in the CoH meeting), which eventually served as the foundation for the structure of my play.

Relations of power

One central thread running through Foucault's writings, and which aids my exploration of the modes by which educational leaders in a network are positioned by the interweaving and often battling discourses is that of relations of power. According to Foucault (1998), power is 'the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of

their inequality, constantly engender states of power…[that] are always local and unstable' (p. 93). According to Merquior (1991), Foucauldian power is 'ubiquitous, anonymous and comprehensive…making cogs in its machinery of us all, high and low, ruling and ruled' (p. 114). In Foucault's sense, power is a mechanism that works in and through institutions to produce particular kinds of subjects, knowledge and truth (Foucault, 1991a, 1980). For Foucault, power is a sinuous and insinuating mechanism that works its way in a 'capillary' fashion into the 'very grain' of individuals, inhabiting their bodies, their beliefs and their self-hood, and binding them together as institutional subjects (Foucault, 1980, p. 39). Power, in this sense, is both coercive and enabling, in that it is not imposed from 'outside' or 'above', but circulates within institutions and social bodies, producing subjects who exert a 'mutual hold' on one another. This is termed by Foucault as 'a mutual and indefinite blackmail', which binds superiors and subordinates in 'a relationship of mutual support and conditioning' (p. 159). Thus, despite institutions having a system of power with a 'pyramidal form', power does not derive from the summit which stands in a symbiotic relationship with the lower elements of the hierarchy.

Foucault(1979) is very critical of what he terms the 'repressive hypothesis': 'If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?' (p. 36). Instead, he attempts to move the conception of power away from this negative model towards a framework extolling its productive nature.

Foucault (2002g) contends that power is dependent upon relations: "The term *power* designates relationships between *partners'* (p. 337) due to the fact that 'while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally

placed in power relations that are very complex' (p. 327). No society exists without power relations that 'are rooted in the whole network of the social' (p. 345). Foucault (2002g) eventually states that the exercise of power does not simply signify a relationship, but more specifically, 'It acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions' (p. 340). He further states that 'something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action' (p. 219-220).

Freedom is another condition necessary for the exercise of power – 'at the same time its precondition…and also its permanent support' (p. 342). It is a form of power 'that subjugates and makes subject to' (p. 331), functioning in what Foucault (2002g) terms a 'political *double-bind*…the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures' (p. 336). This is a particularly interesting concept in relation to the context in which my research took place as it enables me to explore the notion of 'individual identity' and the extent to which this becomes appropriated by the FACT/college discourse of totalization.

Foucault conceives of power dynamically, by proposing a model in which power relations dissipate through all relational structures of the society. He insists that 'relations of power are not something bad in themselves…I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power' (1980, p. 96). He insists that 'power is employed through a net-like organization…individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application…The individual is an *effect* of power and the *element* of its articulation' (1980, p. 98).

This way of understanding power exhibits two key features: power as a network of relations and individuals as the locus where power and resistance to it are exerted (Mills, 2003, p. 35). Foucault's (1998, p. 93-94) concept is that 'power is exercised from innumerable points…[it] comes from below' – we get a picture of dispersed power, not present at specific locations, but always at issue, being 'produced from one moment to the next'. According to Foucault, power is not possessed by a dominant agent, nor located in that agent's relations to those dominated, but is instead distributed throughout complex social networks: 'power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere', further giving evidence to his claim of power as 'something that circulates'. Foucault shows that power is less a property than a strategy: 'it is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the *privilege*, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions'.

Fox (2009) laments the fact that in discussions of relations of power in schools, much of the literature and research focuses on relationships between staff and pupils (e.g. Allan, 2008; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998) rather than between members of staff, who in my case would be senior educational leaders. Fox (2009) articulates how,

> It would seem that the former tend to be characterized by explicit demonstrations of power, while the latter shroud more overt manifestations of power behind professional politeness and convention (p. 67).

Foucault (1998) acknowledges the veiled nature of power relations when he states that it 'is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms' (p. 86). This suggests that Foucauldian power is exercised unconsciously with its effects often being repressed.

Foucault's concept of power relations helps me understand power not simply as functioning in a straightforward manner at organizational level, or retained by the

leaders, but as operating in multiple instances within the network, between and within schools, and between individuals, repeatedly and continuously. It also allows me to explore the productive effects of power flowing within the network.

Foucault theorizes about an array of topics which I utilize as analytical tools in my exploration of relations of power within the college. These are the power-knowledge knot; techniques of discipline; governmentality; discourse; and subjectification.

The Power-Knowledge Knot

Foucault (1975b) writes about the interdependence of forms of knowledge and practices of power, and their subsequent link with 'the subject':

> I have been trying to make visible the constant articulation I think there is of power on knowledge and of knowledge on power…The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power (p. 752).

Foucault rejects the notion that 'knowledge is power' or that 'power is knowledge' – had these terms been interchangeable, there would have been little to investigate (Foucault, 2000f, p. 455). At the same time, Foucault wishes to subvert the idea that genuine knowledge or truth can only be produced in the absence of power. Foucault challenges the conventional notion of power not being allowed to corrupt the production of knowledge by building on an idea taken from Nietzsche – the suggestion that one thing can 'arise from its opposite' (Nietszche, 2002, p. 1*1). Nietszche argues that power cannot corrupt knowledge because knowledge is already the product of power. Though knowledge appears to reside somewhere above the confusions of everyday life, it is closely connected to the 'perishable, seductive, deceptive, lowly world' that produces it (ibid). Foucault (1975b, p. 189) suggests that this has contributed to the lowering of the 'threshold of describable individuality'. The portrayal

of individuals, which had remained below the threshold of description, now became 'a means of control and a method of domination' (Foucault, 1975b, p. 191), constituting the individual as 'effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge' (ibid, p. 192).

Foucault utilizes the word '*savoir*' to signify constructed knowledge about oneself – showing an interest in how it is possible for subjects to understand themselves in relation to others, and how they consequently use that knowledge constructed within relations and practices to transform themselves (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 257). Foucault (1992) insists that,

> Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. 'Cutting', in the form of resistance, criticism, struggle…performs this work through the appearance of particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything around it (p. 82).

This 'cutting', therefore, works to produce individuals as knowing subjects in particular ways, and in response to particular power/knowledge practices.

According to Foucault, different forms of knowledge are in the service of power, functioning in a disciplining way by establishing normality and deviation, thus contributing to regulating the self-consciousness and the actions of individuals. He goes on to suggest that knowledge cannot be extricated from power and made to mark neutral insights. Power and knowledge are parallel concepts, but of course not identical. Foucault, as Deetz (1992, p. 77) points out, focuses attention on 'the power *in* rather than the power *of* knowledge'.

Power-knowledge have a mutually generative relationship where each produces the other. This will help me explore how individuals are made subjects and subjectify themselves within the 'regimes of truth' brought about by the policy discourse.

Techniques of discipline

In '*Discipline and Punish*' (1991a), Foucault explores discipline as a form of self-regulation encouraged by various institutions, primarily the state, schools, hospitals, prisons, and workshops. All these correspond over several junctures of intersection, namely an attention to the body. Foucault explores the notion of 'docility': 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (p. 136), in order to illustrate how 'discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, *docile* bodies' (p. 138). These disciplinary practices result from 'a multiplicity of often minor processes', with discipline being 'a political anatomy of detail' (p. 138-9). Usher and Edwards (1994) thus argue that when discipline is effective, 'power operates *through* persons rather than *upon* them' (p. 92, emphasis added). In this manner, the exercise of power is reconstituted through discipline rather than coercion.

Foucault examines how discipline as self-regulation acts as an instrument for the individual to change both him/herself and the 'lived' reality:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'…, on the other hand, it produces reality;…domains of objects and rituals of truth (1991a, p. 194).

Balan (2010) argues that discipline leads to individuality, therefore to the subsequent creation of different identities – 'an unintended, even unwanted effect of the initial disciplinary project' (p. 5). The individual changes through the exercise of discipline.

Foucault regards discipline as a set of strategies, procedures, and behaviours acting in specific ways – these have a direct bearing on present-day education practices, besides contributing to my exploration of relational power being exercised within the educational leadership discourses and practices in the college. Discipline is exercised through the spatial distribution of individuals – 'enclosure', followed by 'partitioning', in order 'to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 141-3). Rank works on bodies by 'distribut[ing] them and circulat[ing] them in a network of relations' making the educational space function 'as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding' (p. 146-7). Further techniques are 'hierarchical observation', 'normalizing judgement' that aims at conformity as it 'compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes…it normalizes' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 183); and the 'examination'. These techniques serve to examine the extent to which leadership practices at different hierarchical levels are influenced within the current educational context of multi-school collaboratives, and how power is exercised by these novel techniques of surveillance embedded within this 'performative regime' (Ball, 2003, p. 226).

Foucault (1991a) utilizes Bentham's architectural figure of the '*Panopticon*' as a mechanism for the exercise of disciplinary power, as 'it automizes and disindividualizes power' (p. 202). Thus,

> a multiple, automatic and anonymous power [is exercised]…its functioning is that of a network of relations…[that] 'holds' the whole together and traverses it in its entirety…supervisors, perpetually supervised…This enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet…and absolutely 'discreet' (p. 176-7).

Exposure to this 'maximum visibility' becomes internalized:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (p. 202-3).

Deleuze (2012) states that Foucault's definition of panopticism affects 'visible matter' and 'articulable functions' – 'So the abstract formula of Panopticism is no longer *to see without being seen* but *to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity*' (p. 29, original emphasis). Foucault's evaluation to follow in the face of this all-encompassing web of flowing relations of power is 'not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are' (1980, p. 84). Foucault (2002g) holds a strong belief that power and resistance are inextricably linked. In drawing attention to 'the forms of resistance against different forms of power', he points to a particular kind of analysis:

To use another metaphor, it consists in using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies (p. 329).

Usher and Edwards (1994) state that if Foucauldian theory allows a 'plurality of power*s* rather than a monolithic power', this allows for a 'plurality of resistance*s*' (p. 99, original emphasis), reminding us that Foucault (1998) himself presents resistance as *the* product of power. They further argue that consequently, subjects are 'multiply positioned and multiply determined' (p. 100).

This is an interesting issue that emerges in my research in relation to discipline. Educational leaders, although themselves in a position where the exercise of power is part of their everyday repertoire, and where the power relations they are involved in are often skewed heavily in their favour, are themselves subject to discipline, either in the form of surveillance or in terms of self-management and control. Foucault's analysis of

discipline helps me in the exploration of how educational leaders are formed, and form themselves, in relation to the discourses of distributed leadership and collegiality. The interest is in how the discourses of collegiality and distributed leadership serve to 'create subjects and how subjects create themselves' (Gillies, 2013, p. 27).

Governmentality

In his analysis of the concept of *gouvernementalite*, consisting of methods of shaping others' behaviour, Foucault (2002a) stresses that institutions are fragile and have a great potential for change. Thereby, he implies that power is subject to negotiation, each individual having his/her place in the hierarchy, no matter its degree of flexibility. Foucault thereby hints at the potential for change within the retention of a pyramidal structure – an important issue that comes up in my analysis, allowing me to explore the way/s the leaders' relations are shaped by the system. Foucault understood the term 'government' as 'the conduct of conduct' (2002g, p. 341), in both a wide and narrow sense, encompassing forms of activity to affect the conduct of others, as well as the relation between self and self. Governmentality encompasses both political rationality (dealing with mentalities, conceptions, and discourse), and technologies of government (dealing with the ways in which government is exercised) (Olssen, 2003, p. 197). Foucault (2002a) reveals a preoccupation with the 'art of government' (p. 201), when he enquires 'How to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor' (p. 202).

Gillies (2013) suggests substituting 'govern' with 'lead' in order to identify the relevance of the pre-occupations of government for the world of education – the government of leadership is focused on the shaping of others' conduct. According to

Foucault, modern governmental rationality is simultaneously individualizing and totalizing, in its attempt to explore what it is for an individual, and for a number of individuals to be governed. In his essay '*Governmentality*' (2002a, p. 205), Foucault alludes to the 'multifarious' practices of government 'concern[ing] many kinds of people', further describing how the art of government involves establishing a continuity, in both an upwards and a downwards direction, learning to govern both oneself and others. Gordon (1991) draws attention to the fact that this idea of government rationality may need 'to be credible to the governed as well as to the governing' (p. 48). In a political context where there is a double movement of state centralization and dispersion, Foucault (2002a, p. 202) identifies a 'problematic of government' that emerges through 'how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods, and so on'. Gordon (2002) further suggests that the 'problematic of government' provides Foucault with a more practical way to address the power-freedom association, as power only functions in the presence of freedom. Thereby, certain discourses (that is, rationalities of government) are 'transactional realities', tools for negotiation, which may eventually lead to dissenting 'counterconducts'.

Gillies (2013) explores the utilization of a Foucauldian governmentality perspective in relation to the discourse of educational leadership – it allows one to examine the rationality of its exercise; the justification of its own activity; as well as the way it comprehends its own function (p. 66). Foucault's concept of governmentality is a very useful analytical tool in my exploration of the leadership behaviour at college level as it facilitates the study of how leadership is justified, and how its exercise is to be understood. It allows me to explore the extent to which the leaders' behaviour is shaped by FACT and the Principal's discourse. At the individual level, it allows for the study

of how leaders make sense of and rationalize their own behaviour: what they understand of distributed leadership, and how their behaviour consequently affects others. When an analysis of governmentality is applied,

> it increases our awareness of the role of construction and the constructed in governmental landscapes and institutions, and of the way in which habit leads us to accept these constructions as facts of nature or universal categories (Gordon, 2002, p. xxiv).

According to Gordon (2002), this governmentality generates critique, 'a certain decided (*decisoire*) will not to be governed' (p. xxxix).

Discourse

Foucault (2002e) describes discourses as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (p. 49). He understands discourses as bodies of knowledge, 'regimes of truth' (p. 132) and thus expressions of power/knowledge relations. The effects of the power/knowledge complex are relayed through different discourses: 'it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together' (Foucault, 1998, p. 100).

Foucault noted that:

> Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse', I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as *the general domain of all statements*, sometimes as *an individualizable group of statements*, and sometimes as *a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements* (Foucault, 2002e, p. 80, emphasis added).

In doing so, he encompasses the range of meanings that the term 'discourse' has accrued to itself within his work. It is the second and third definitions that are of primary importance within this study as they refer to the particular structures within discourse, thus allowing me to identify the various interweaving discourses at play; as well as the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts.

Within a Foucauldian approach, discourses are inextricably linked to institutions and to the disciplines that regularize and normalize the conduct of those brought within the ambit of those institutions – as Foucault (1991a, p. 217) put it, the individual is 'fabricated' into the social order –people are woven into, and woven out of, discourse. Britzman (2000) spells out how discourse works in the formation of subjects:

> Every discourse constitutes…imaginary communities, identity investments and discursive practices. Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said; they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent, and thus discursive boundaries are always being redrawn around what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable (p. 36)

Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 90) interpret discourse as a powerful 'absent presence' as it '*speaks* but is yet *silent*' [original emphasis] with the possibility of being both inclusive and exclusionary. Foucault implies that the subject is produced 'as an effect' through and within discourse, within specific discursive formations, and has no existence, as well as no transcendental continuity or identity from one subject position to another – discourses construct subject positions through their rules of formation and 'modalities of enunciation'. MacLure (2003) translates this as: 'The individual achieves agency as an active subject by being subject-ed to the disciplinary machineries of discourse' (p. 176).

Foucault also argues that 'discourse is not a place into which the subjectivity irrupts; it is a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions' (1991b, p. 58). This notion of the subject is important as Foucault is referring to the idea that subjects are not only shaped by social structures, but actively take up their own discourses through which they are shaped and by which they shape themselves (Blackmore, 1997). Notions of agency and structure are always present when looking at educational leaders, as they are expected to formulate visions and enable change while simultaneously being

constrained and normalized by bureaucratic processes and mechanisms (Niesche, 2011). It is not my aim to explore the agency/structure debate but to understand this notion of agency through the concept of discourse (Bleiker, 2003). Bleiker argues that discourses offer possibilities for human agency besides framing and subjugating our thoughts and behaviour – it is here that the possibility of resistance to discursive practices can be explored.

Foucault redefines the universe as a 'realm of discourse' (Megill, 1987, p. 239). In '*Nietzche, Genealogy, History*' (2000b), Foucault depicts discourse as something that goes out to do battle, after portraying its autonomy in his interpretations. Foucault speaks of 'a power relation, a battle *among discourses* and *through discourses*' (1975a, p. x, emphasis added) – Foucault views the world as discourse/s. Discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity, which are not fixed, but constantly being made and remade. Foucault emphasizes the productive capacity of discourse. For Foucault, 'discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (1998, p. 101).

Here, Foucault is referring to the idea of power being synonymous with resistance. Since discourses do not exist in a vacuum but are in constant conflict with other discourses, Foucault's main concern is with the mechanics by which one becomes produced as the dominant discourse. Language is the site of struggle – as Foucault states: 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing *for which* and *by which* there is struggle' (1981, p. 52-53, emphasis added).

However, Foucault himself confesses that, 'relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse' (1980, p. 93). Foucault approaches the analysis of discourse as an investigation of 'its conditions of existence' (1991b, p. 60). Foucault writes about the importance of defining the play of dependencies between the transformations of intra-discursive, inter-discursive and extra-discursive dependencies (1991b). Intra-discursivity refers to the relations between the objects, operations and concepts within one discursive formation; inter-discursivity occurs between different discursive formations; while extra-discursivity plays out between discursive and non-discursive formations, referring to the relations between a discourse and the whole play of economic, political, and social practices. Foucault uses the term 'discursive field' (1991b, p. 161) to describe the difference between what one could say correctly at one period and what is actually said at a specific moment. This discursive field

> consists of a whole group of regulated practices which do not merely involve giving a visible outward embodiment to the agile inwardness of thought, or providing the solidarity of things with a surface of manifestation capable of duplicating them (ibid, p. 63).

Foucault's (2002e) 'regimes of truth' enable an exploration of how the subject is produced 'as an effect' through and within discourse and within specific discursive formations – how the leaders in my research are positioned by the leadership policy discourse, and how they, in turn, position themselves according to their distributed leadership performance. The notion of discourse helps me explore issues of knowledge and power, determining what sort of knowledge is considered legitimate according to the *games of truth*, the discourses generating in the college and subjugating the leaders, in addition to the discourses being produced by them as a form of resistance and needed to subjugate others.

Subjectification[2]

Foucault (2002g) defines the major purpose of his writings as a pre-occupation with the formation of the subject, evolving into an interest in self-identity:

> My objective…has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. Thus, it is not power, but the subject, that is the general theme of my research (p. 326-7).

To be a subject, in Foucault's view, is to be subjected. Individuals are in the unknowing grip of an insidious power operating through invisible strategies of 'normalization', even when they are under a 'misconception' of a state of total freedom. Foucault (2002e) insisted that the self should be an ongoing process of creation rather than a fixed identity, 'Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same' (p. 19).

Foucault (2002g) outlines three modes of objectification of the subject: 'dividing practices', 'scientific classification', and 'subjectification'. This last mode of objectification, 'subjectification', which is significantly relevant to my study in helping me explore the ways in which educational leaders are 'subjectified' in a college, represents 'his most original contribution', according to Rabinow (1984, p. 11). It deals with the 'way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject' (Foucault, 2002g, p. 327). This process represents an important new direction in Foucault's work with a focus on those processes of self-formation in which the person is active. This self-formation takes place through a variety of 'operations on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct' (Foucault, 2002g, p. 341) – entailing a process of self-understanding mediated by an external authority figure. The self as a tool of power, a product of domination, rather than as an instrument of

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[2] Various terms are used to refer to this Foucauldian notion: subjectification, subjectivation, subjectivity. I utilize the term 'subjectification' as utilized by Foucault in 2002g.

personal freedom becomes Foucault's main theme after *'Discipline and Punish'* (1991a). In addition to the earlier questions, *'What do I know?'* and *'What can I do?'* the question of self-identity emerges, *'Who am I?'* (Deleuze, 2012).

Foucault's subjectification is formed through multiple 'practices of the self', as he himself remarks:

> the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or … through practices of liberation, of freedom…starting of course from a certain number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the culture (2002g, p. 331).

Foucault thus brings to our attention the contingency of self-formation practices. Foucault states that subjectification, the relation to oneself, continues to create itself, but by transforming itself and changing its nature – recuperated by power relations and relations of knowledge, the relation to oneself is continually reborn. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), 'The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis' (p. 211-2).

By exploring the construction of selves, a greater appreciation of subjectification and its insecurities can enhance an understanding of the ways that power relations are reproduced, rationalized, resisted, and perhaps, even transformed, in the Maltese educational arena. Foucault's notion of subjectification helps me examine how the leaders position themselves in relation to the discourse of distributed leadership as outlined in the policy, what is expected of them, and how they shape themselves and understand themselves within the college. A focus on those processes of self-formation in which the person is active helps me explore the ways in which educational leaders are 'subjectified' in a college, and in the changes that occur in their leadership conduct due to the creation of new roles. Through the multiple 'practices of the self', Foucault draws my attention to the contingency of self-formation processes, therefore, the

multiple subjectivities of educational leaders being shaped by both global and local forces.

Understanding educational leadership as discourse

Educational leadership is regarded as 'an effect of discourses of schooling, rather than a set of practices or dispositions adopted by individuals who occupy certain positions within schools' (Lingard *et al*., 2003, p. 143). Niesche (2011) frames educational leadership as a discourse, or rather a set of discourses. Gillies (2013) regards this as an important stage in the application of a Foucauldian analysis as it presents it as a constructed reality – undermining the concept of educational leadership and throwing it into question – it 'renders the practice mortal, reduces its aura, creates vulnerability, and inserts instability' (p. 25). Besides, it also permits further analysis of its working practices. In my thesis, I therefore apply a Foucauldian analysis, which according to Gillies (2013) 'is potentially useful in exploring the lived experience of the so-called forms of leadership' (p. 114). It is within this framework that I approach distributed leadership as one of the 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 2002h, p. 132) of educational leadership – what I consider to be one type of leadership discourse among the many generating in the college - and use it to explore how relations of power unfold in the dynamics among leaders in a networked school setting.

Researchers viewing educational leadership as discourses have explored issues of power in educational contexts – how various discourses exert power both on and through the leaders. Niesche (2011, 2013) uses Foucault's work to illuminate how power is exercised through regimes of high stakes accountabilities on the Head, through the Head, and by the Head. Savage (2013) uses Foucault's (2002a) concept of governmentality to analyze a different power issue, that of educational marketization, in

order to illustrate how educators 'are *subject to* and *subjects of* market reforms in education, just as they are *subject to* and *subjects of* the market society' (p. 104, original emphasis). Cohen (2014) examines how principals are constituted by the discursive practices of an expanding culture of performance accountability in public education through Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, revealing how they have become normalized by accountability regimes functioning as technologies of surveillance.

Conclusion: 'Plugging in'

It is with this frame of mind that I embrace a postmodern paradigmatic lens for my research. I engage in 'plugging in' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1) as a process rather than a concept, where the larger theoretical frameworks are dissolved and instead of just focusing on postmodernism, I focus more specifically on Foucault, not just on Foucault as a theorist but on his concepts of power-knowledge, discipline, governmentality, discourse, and subjectification. I engage in 'plugging in' as a process, 'a constant, continuous process of making and unmaking' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 1) which involves decentering both the data and the theory, showing how they constitute one another; showing how analytical questions emerge in the middle of plugging in; and working repeatedly with the same chunks of data for the 'assemblage in formation' (p. 2). It is a connection of three fields: that of reality (data, theory, and method), of representation (producing different knowledge while resisting stable meaning), and of subjectivity (my becoming as researcher) (ibid, p. 2-4). I extol dissonance, diffraction, and divergence, rather than sameness and convergence, thus allowing the data to express multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity. As a researcher, I acknowledge that I am not the sole author of this assemblage – the research participants and Foucault as theorist have also inserted themselves in the process. I also

acknowledge all the other sources of influence, recognizing all writing as intertextual. Kristeva (1980) defines intertextuality as 'a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another…The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity' (cited in Martin, 2011, p. 148). I seek to unsettle the 'I' of both the researcher (myself), and the researched. The 'I' of the participant is always becoming in the process of telling, while my 'I' as researcher is always becoming in the process of researching, listening, and writing. I do not stray too far from the theory or the data – I feel the need to 'show' rather than to explain the lengthy process of my production of a narrative dramatization. This process of 'plugging-in' enables me to reject coding, a process that situates the researcher as distant from the data and disallows the 'production of different knowledge' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 12). 'Plugging-in' allows a focus on the micro, rather than the macro produced by the codes, which might not permit the emergence of 'the texture, the contradictions, the tensions' (ibid, p. 12).

Chapter Five: Research Design Issues – choices, rationale, and implications

> If, for the time being, I grant a certain privileged position to the question of "how", it is not because I would wish to eliminate the questions of "what" and "why". Rather … I wish … to know if it is legitimate to imagine a power that unites in itself a what, a why, and a how …
>
> [Foucault, 2002g, p. 336]

Introduction

This chapter explores the components involved in research design, namely, my research strategy, the research sample, the data collection tools, and the ethical considerations involved. I also write about the crisis of representation in qualitative inquiry, and my response to it in terms of my engagement with issues of validity, transcription, and translation. I subsequently describe my data analysis method and mode of representation.

Research strategy: Rationale for case study methodology

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, I decided that my research was most suited to a case study design. The case study is regarded as 'more a strategy than a method' (Punch, 2009, p. 119). Stake (2000) states:

> Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied…By whatever methods, we choose to study the *case*…The focus is a qualitative concentration on the case (p. 443).

I consider this research strategy as 'a concentration on the specific rather than the general – a choice of depth over breadth' (Burton *et al*., 2008, p. 66-67).

Case studies have several claimed strengths and weaknesses. One of the challenges inherent in qualitative case study research is the identification of the case by the researcher (Creswell, 2008). A common criticism of the case study concerns its lack of

'generalizability' (Denscombe, 2003; Punch, 2009), an argument countered by Cohen *et al.* (2000) who state that: 'Significance rather than frequency is a hallmark of case studies' (p. 185) – by significance I understand specificity, contingency, and contextuality. And this is what made it my research strategy of choice – its suitability for the exploration of circulating relations of power within a particular college. Case studies are not easily open to cross-checking, leading to selectivity, bias and subjectivity, as well as being prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity (Bell, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2000). As a postmodern researcher in search of interpretations, seeking the particular rather than the general, providing open endings rather than closure, I acknowledge these perceived 'shortcomings' and address them in my reflexive writings.

My research sample

A criterion-based or purposive sampling procedure (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002) was utilized to select the sample for this study. The college under study was chosen on two main criteria: geographic characteristics (in terms of the proximity of the schools constituting the college) and the Principal at the lead. I am well aware of this being what Burgess (1984) and Honigmann (1982) call 'judgment sampling'. The members of my population sample were chosen with a 'purpose'. It was an exemplary case, chosen because it seemed to be in the vanguard of policy – having gone the furthest in developing a network.

My single-case study population was chosen from the available sample frame of ten, information about which is provided online on the national government education website (Ministry for Education & Employment, 2013) containing details about the composition of each college, its geographical location, as well as the contact

information of the Principal and Heads of individual schools. This website is complimented by the very informative websites of each of the ten colleges, with links to the individual school websites. Another criterion which led me to my college of choice was the extremely informative and updated website of both the college and the constituting schools.

Initial contact with the Principal was made via an email in which I explained my position and expressed my wish to explore her college for my doctoral research.[3] An acceptance email ensued which was followed by a phone call and an invitation to her office to discuss the matter. The meeting in person secured full participation from the Principal concerned and a rough date was established for me to meet the Heads at a CoH meeting, during which I explained what their participation involved, answered their queries and left consent forms, which were signed by all and eventually posted to me. The Principal 'paved' the way by inviting me into her college, but the terms of participation were negotiated with each individual Head.

Polyphonic College (the fictitious name given to the college under study) was set up during the last tri-partite phase of school networking. Despite the fact that since undertaking the fieldwork, both the Principal and the network composition have changed, I cannot give any more specific information about the individual schools and their leaders due to the sensitive nature of the data involved and the bounded nature of the Maltese educational community. This is done to respect the ethical issues involved, as well as not to commit a breach of confidentiality while maintaining the promise of not causing any harm to the participants.

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[3] All the participants in my research are referred to by the female gender to respect anonymity issues.

Overview of the research design

This section outlines the overall research design and includes the list of steps (although they are not uni-linear but occur simultaneously) in carrying out my research from prior to data collection through to data analysis and representation.

Data Collection Methods: The choice of research tools

Denzin (2010) states that 'anyone can use any method, for methods are merely tools, not forms of performative, interpretive practice' (p. 420). This study employs a number of different data collection methods, namely observation and documentary analysis to work with naturally occurring data and in-depth interviews for generated data.

Semi-structured Interviews

In-depth, open-ended interviews offer a 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen *et al.*, 2000, p. 270), due to being 'exploratory' (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 65) and 'loosely structured' (Mason, 2002, p. 62), thus allowing greater flexibility and freedom for both the researcher and the researched. These were chosen as the primary research tool due to the way they commensurate with postmodernism. In what has become 'the interview society' (Silverman, 1993; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), due to the influence of postmodern epistemologies, concerns previously glossed over are now being taken into consideration. The so-called detached researcher and interviewer are recast as active agents in the interview process, with attempts being made to deprivilege their agency (Denzin, 1997) – what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) label as 'the active interview'. Scheurich (1997a) thus describes the interviewer and interviewee in an interdependent symbiotic relationship, what he terms as a 'dominance-and-resistance view of the play of power' (p. 71), while simultaneously acknowledging the power asymmetries present.

Gubrium and Holstein (2003) suggest that the role of the active interviewer is to incite respondents' answers, 'virtually *activating narrative production*' (p. 75, original emphasis). Scheurich (1997a) argues that the interview interaction is fundamentally indeterminate due to the lack of stable 'reality' or 'meaning' that can be represented – it is into this 'interpretive moment' that the researcher brings 'considerable conscious and unconscious baggage' (p. 73). The possible reason for this from a postmodern perspective is that 'the *wild profusion* of the Other (the interviewee) is reduced and refashioned to fit the modernist prison of the Same (the researcher's project)' (p. 70).

I conclude that this approach to interviewing is ideally suited to my exploration of power relations among educational leaders, which I seek to arrive at through narratives, its main aim being that of openness to interviewee framing, employing active listening and encouraging free expression of their viewpoint. I took this narrative approach to interviewing in my research due to my specific interest in understanding the meanings of events and experiences from the leaders' perspectives. At the data collection stage, I was intent on narrative being the phenomenon under study and the methodological approach adopted for analysis. However, I had no idea that it would turn out to be my mode of representation. The interview was regarded as a 'site for the production of meanings' (Elliott, 2012, p. 289) – analysing the individual narratives enabled me to identify themes around which I constructed my three-act play by utilizing the leaders' actual 'narratives' and producing another narrative out of the original.

The Interview Process

The interview schedule was planned after a critical review of the literature and the subsequent reformulation of the research questions. It involved a lot of drafting and re-drafting in order to formulate open-ended questions that would lead to narrative by the

interviewees. A pilot interview was carried out with a retired Principal and a practising Head of School who was not going to be involved in my study. 'Active listening' of these interviews and eventual transcriptions of the 'pilots' were very helpful in aiding me to reformulate some of the main questions and add more subsidiary questions for the elicitation of narrative on certain issues. A list of six main questions was drawn up together with a subset of subsidiary questions which were only resorted to if the issue under examination was not 'exhausted' by the interviewee. These are the interview questions used in my research:

1) **Tell me about the experiences in your life that contributed to 'who' you are at present. What factors led you to develop into the leader you have become?** [Can you speak about the function of in/formal training? / Describe the role adaptations along your career.]

   This research question, besides serving as an interview 'ice-breaker' to 'ignite' the narrative flow, sets the stage for the three research questions revealing the factors contributing to the leaders' construction and performance of identity, which lead to the eventual positionings they take up.

2) **Can you tell me what the term 'college' means to you? What are your ideas on the way Maltese state schools have been networked?** [Back in 2005, what were your reactions to FACT and 'contrived collegiality'? / Did this networking result in adaptations to your leadership role?]

   This addresses research question 1 as it seeks to incite the leaders' perception and performance of 'contrived collegiality', as well as their eventual positioning and re-positioning.

3) **How would you describe your Principal and the nature of your relationship?**

[What channels of communication exist between you and the Principal and who initiates it and for what reasons? / How does decision-making take place in the college?]

This contributes to research question 2 as it explores the power flow between the Principal and the Heads, as well as the political technologies involved in the exercise of power.

4) **Tell me about opportunities for interaction with the other educational leaders in *Polyphonic College*.** [Describe your relationship with the other Heads in the college. / If you had to draw a sketch of yourself in relation to the others in the college, where would you position yourself and the others? / What is your preferred method of contact, reason and frequency?]

This ties in with research question 2 as it examines the power flow among the Heads, indirectly leading to the exploration of the extent of leadership distribution which is the focus of research question 3.

5) **Can you tell me about your communication with other Heads of school outside your college?** [Does networking with other colleges take place? / What opportunities for interaction with 'other' Heads exist?]

This is an indirect address to research question 1, in exploring the "effects" of policy-mandated collegiality "outside" the network.

6) **What does 'leadership' mean to you?** [Can you tell me about your leadership practices pre- and post-college? / To what extent were you influenced by the model of distributed leadership delineated in FACT? / Speak about leadership challenges and tensions in a college setup.]

This is a direct address to research question 3 that explores the distribution of leadership among the college leaders and its 'effects'.

Although the questions may seem quite mainstream and positivistic, they just served as a framework for me to ensure that I covered all the aspects, as the interview unfolded in a different manner with each unique participant. I used prompts and probes to incite narrative and the interpretation is postmodern. The interviews were digitally recorded (with field notes being taken in the process) and after being transcribed in full, were subjected to narrative analysis. (More details are provided on p.138-141).

Observation

Observation, working along a continuum between semi-structured and unstructured, was utilized as an additional research tool – it allowed me to observe the effects of power, especially through a contrast between the 'visible' and the 'sayable' (Deleuze, 2012) in Foucault's work, what is narrated in interviews in relation to what is observed in interaction.

Observation has been selected for many reasons, mainly due to the fact that it 'is unrivalled in enabling the researchers to immerse themselves in the research environment and correlatively in drawing the reader into the world of the researcher and researched' (Burton *et al*., 2008, p. 97). According to Mason (2002), interactions 'reveal data' in multidimensional ways, thus enabling me to be both an interpreter and 'knower' of data, as well as an 'experiencer, observer, or a participant observer' (p. 85). Observation enabled me to conceptualize myself as active and reflexive in the research process, writing myself into my field notes and into the analysis. As Coffey (1999) points out, 'Fieldwork is personal, emotional, and identity *work*' (p. 1).

Ethnography conducted within a postmodern paradigm explores the discontinuities, paradoxes, inconsistencies, disjunctions, mismatches, and contradictions in action, with the author 'seek[ing] to dissolve that disjuncture between the observer and the observed' (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 256).

Observing the CoH meeting

Besides being informed by the concepts from my critical literature review, reading around the methodological aspects of observation as a data collection method informed my understanding of what to do while I was in the field. Although I had planned otherwise, the fact that I had carried out all the interviews prior to the observation session due to the meeting having been postponed several times helped. It served as an unexpected advantage as a result of my familiarity with the leaders' narratives which enabled me to observe how they would play out against their performance.

The observation schedule carried out during the CoH meeting roughly followed the agenda described below. Relationships visible within the college were explored in terms of spatial dimensions via seating arrangements and positions, distance from the Principal, any particular clustering of Heads, as well as turn-taking during discussions. The behaviour of participants towards each other in terms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, led to the exploration of issues such as the dominance of discourse, the 'polyvalence of discourses', localization as opposed to mobilization of power, 'resistance' operating as part of power, as well as the 'rarefaction' of discourse in terms of any rules that delimit the 'sayable', and the amount of closure present. Foucault (1981) describes 'rarefaction' in this way:

> There is, I believe, a third group of procedures which permit the control of discourses…of determining the condition of their application, of imposing a certain number of rules on the individuals who hold them, and thus of not

permitting everyone to have access to them. There is a *rarefaction…*of the speaking subjects; none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. To be more precise: not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions (p. 62).

The notion of discourse as a 'regime of truth' was explored in terms of the balance between knowledge-sharing and secret-keeping among the various educational leaders, as well as the process of decision-making. The concept of 'distributed leadership' was investigated as a potential 'technique of power', while the 'microphysical' workings of power were scrutinized via the perception of 'hidden' rules governing the organization of the meetings, leading to the veiled mechanism of power that works its way through relations.

The meeting was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed and translated. This data was further enhanced by fieldnotes that were taken before, during, and after the observation session, these fieldnotes a representation of 'the research *process* and *product'* (Corwin & Clemens, 2012, p. 489, emphasis added). Recording the meeting rather than just taking fieldnotes allowed me to 'actively' observe the interactions going on at both a macro- and a micro-level – the exchanges (verbal and silent) among the Principal and the Heads and between the Heads themselves.

Documentary Analysis

Documents offer a lens to interpret events in order to gain insights into the relationship between the written and unwritten, spoken and virtual, public and private, and past and present (Fitzgerald, 2007). The policy document FACT is both 'contextual' and 'evidential', offering a productive starting place by providing a strong indication of what 'should be' happening at both school and college level (Burton *et al*., 2008).

Analysis of the policy FACT falls within the continuum of 'analysis *for* policy' and 'analysis *of* policy' as identified by Gordon *et al*. (1997). Besides this research being aimed at providing policy makers with information about policy implementation at school and college level with a deliberate aim of influencing future policy development, emphasis is put on policy process in order to develop an understanding of its origin, intentions, and operation. The framework adopted in my analysis follows Ball's (1994) two-dimensional approach emphasizing policy as both product and process: 'policy as text' – its presentation and interpretation, and 'policy as discourse' – its framing and discourse development, the latter giving rise as to 'who can speak, when, where, and with what authority' (p. 21).

Ball's (1994) view of policy as 'text' raises the issue of power relations. He argues that policies posit a 'restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations', as with power being 'multiplicitous, overlain, interactive, and complex, policy texts *enter* rather than simply change power relations' (p. 20).

Analyzing the FACT policy document

Scott (2000) proposes a critical reading of a policy text to be aligned along a number of continua, to be understood as constructed by these devices and located within the policy process itself. The document was analyzed to explore discourse, content, and text revolving around the following issues: stated intentions of the writers and linguistic devices used as tools of persuasion towards acceptance of their version of the truth; ideological underpinnings and negotiation of competing interests; positioning of the reader vis-à-vis the policy agenda; dominant discourses; actors who generate and shape policy; as well as the 'structure/agency dichotomy' (Ball, 1994, p. 15). Paradoxes, inconsistencies, or contradictions were explored, in addition to the extent of 'policy

importation' and forces leading to its creation; how the enactment of this policy may inhibit, contradict, or influence others already in circulation (Bowe & Ball with Gold, 1992); factors impacting on policy implementation at institutional level, how it is 'acted on' (Beilharz, 1987, p. 394) and the amount of 'policy refraction' that occurs. This analysis is presented in Chapter 2.

Ethical considerations

Securing 'official' permission to the research setting is only the start of the negotiation process leading to data collection. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that harbouring the assumption that gaining written informed consent (which also implies 'informed refusal' [Cohen *et al*., 2000]) at the start covers the whole study is insufficient, with anonymity being a concern throughout the inquiry. I understand that ethical commitments are not time-limited and will not fade naturally into the background once I emerge from the research setting and terminate contact with the participants. The leaders in *Polyphonic College* work in a bounded context and have tight working relationships through regular meetings, therefore, I do not publish any data which may put this 'collegial atmosphere' into jeopardy.

I am well aware of the fact that my case study constitutes what Damianakis and Woodford (2012) have identified as a 'small connected community', where 'unintentional identity disclosure' of both the participants and others involved in their narratives is at risk, especially if 'raw data' (in the form of participants' words) is included in the report (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Creswell, 2008; Etherington, 2007; Kaiser, 2009; Morse, 1998; Tolich, 2010). Participants' names or any other personal means of identification such as gender do not appear in any part of the study. The 'responses' presented in my analysis have been transcribed and translated to ensure

non-traceability. I struggled with ways to address this ethical dilemma in my unfolding research, with the resulting narrative dramatization partially dealing with this 'crisis'. I do not use any identifying participant (McGrath, 2006) or community information (Quigley, 2006). Despite Waldorf's (2005) argument that a relationship of trust is best maintained when no promises of anonymity are made, I make my participants aware of its limits and the possible risks involved.

Engaging with relational ethics in the awareness of my responsibility towards my participants, I attend to 'the ethics of what to tell' (Ellis, 2007, p. 24) as I selectively leave out data which having been transcribed and translated would still fail to protect the anonymity of particular participants. Attempts at avoiding betrayal have been made (although it cannot be guaranteed), with assurance being given to the participants that the data will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be disclosed to third parties.

Relationships in the field may also present problems due to reciprocity, mutuality, and (in)equality. In this case, with the participants being at a much higher hierarchical level in the education system, it is a somewhat inverted power relationship. According to Walford (2012), all interviews are about power and politics, not just those researching the powerful, as power resides both in the researcher and the researched. I at times control the interview direction through main questions and the particular discourses used, while participants demonstrate their power through 'silence' or 'non-response' responses. This can also be done through their selection of what to say when they 'unmask themselves' (Butt *et al*., 1992, p. 21, cited in MacLure, 2003, p. 132), as 'what is revealed when the masks are lowered will always be another fabrication' (MacLure, 2003, p. 132). MacLure (2003) further argues that qualitative methodology claiming

postmodern allegiance to notions of multiple selves are in denial that interviewees may be 'putting on masks, staging little research dramas in which they pretend, or believe, that they are *unveiling* themselves, only to reveal (and conceal) further simulations' (p. 157). Scheurich (1997a) regards this interview space as 'chaos/freedom enacted by both the interviewer and the interviewee' (p. 72) through a dominance and resistance contingency. Policy research may be ethically problematic due to its value-laden and politically-sensitive nature, in addition to my personal views about the policy being studied, and my relationship to the processes being researched, especially underlying power inequalities.

As a Deputy Head, I encompass 'multiple identities' (Mercer, 2007), thus defying the 'inside/outside binary' (Thomson & Gunter, 2011, p. 18) in my simultaneous positioning as insider/outsider (Adler, 2004; Bridges, 2002) in the research context. I wear the 'insider' mask as a deputy Head, being in the same educational sphere as my participants, while being an 'outsider' due to belonging to a different organizational setting in that the post-secondary school where I work does not belong to a college, additionally to being at a lower leadership hierarchy than my research subjects.

I am aware of the fact that there is no solution to these ethical dilemmas, with fully ethical research being impossible to achieve (Busher & Clarke, 1990) – whatever stance I adopt, there will always be 'unknown, unforeseen problems and difficulties lying in wait' (Kimmel, 1988). I acknowledge that while I have attempted to cover all bases, I am aware of the fact that there will always be risks, despite the promises made and kept.

Validity issues in my research

Validity has become 'a standardized discourse that is often represented as one grand narrative' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 603), being presented as a 'cover of universality, its disingenuous naturalness, the ideological mask that convinces us of its own essential truth' (Watson, 2009, p. 527) – turning into 'a signifier for *good* and *valuable* qualitative research' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 603, emphasis added) – and utilized to produce 'truthful' representations of reality.

In my research, I attempt to adopt the position where 'Space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive' (ibid, p. 706). I simultaneously acknowledge my struggle to reject, or at least to problematize my 'Western Enlightenment' assumptions. In my struggle against essentialism, I regard the text I produce as one way of venturing into the unknown –

> We can never be sure what meanings our texts might produce (Bridges-Rhoads & Van Cleave, 2014, p. 650).
>
> I believe that validity is in doing, as well as its (un)making…Validity can become possible in doing the impossible, allowing possibilities to develop (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 609).

As an ethically responsible researcher, I deal with dilemmas, uncertainties, and indecision by facing what Koro-Ljungberg (2010) regards as 'the ultimate responsibility: the unknown' (p. 605). When I start data analysis, I am not sure of the end 'product' or of what the 'process' that takes me there entails. Ultimately, for whom is the research valid? In whose interests are the 'truth claims' being made?

Lather (1993) reformulates and positions validity as 'an incitement to discourse…a space of constructed visibility of the practices of methodology' (p. 674). She dismisses the 'masks of methodology' (Nelson *et al.*, 1987, p. 3, cited in Lather, 1993, p. 674) as

she argues for a 'validity of transgression' through a reflexive exploration of representation practices. Scheurich (1997c) regards constructions of validity as '*different masks* that conceal an underlying sameness, a singularity of purpose or function, which transgresses the supposedly incommensurable differences or boundaries dividing various research methodologies' (p. 80, emphasis added), voicing his apprehension about 'the resourcefulness of the Same to reappear with new masks that only seem to be Other' (p. 90). Lather (2006) declares her rejection of 'methodolatry' where methodological issues direct the research process, with the 'what' and 'why' questions preceding the 'how' (Kvale, 1996), advocating researchers to function within a setting of tensions, competing discourses, and paradigmatic proliferation. She further states that validity 'has been the problem, not the solution', especially where approaches are always 'partial, situated, temporary' (p. 51), thus raising the issue of what Kvale (1996) labels as 'the validity of the validity question'. Watson (2009) depicts Lather's typology as being 'deliberately provocative, performative, and unsettling, opening a space for thinking heretically about what validity in a research text might mean' (p. 528).

It is within this reconceptualization that I reject 'methodolatry' (Janesick, 2000). I demonstrate how I engage with 'crystallization' as a methodological framework (Ellingson, 2009), what Richardson and St.Pierre (2005) think of as

> a postmodernist deconstruction of triangulation…propos[ing] that the central image for 'validity' for postmodern texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object…[but]…the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach…What we see depends on our angle of repose (p. 963).

Richardson and St.Pierre (2005) denounce traditional, positivist notions of methodological triangulation that assume 'a *fixed point* or an *object*', asserting that 'there are far more than 'three sides' by which to approach the world' (p. 963). I highlight my vulnerabilities and positionality, embracing Richardson and St.Pierre's (2005) claim that, 'There is no such thing as *getting it right*, only *getting it* differently contoured and nuanced' (p. 962).

I am particularly taken up by this notion of crystallization due to its deconstruction of traditionalist validity by which

> we feel how there is no single truth, and we see how texts validate themselves…Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know (p. 963).

Polkinghorne (2007) discusses validity issues in narrative research, thus concluding that, 'Narrative researchers need to argue for the acceptance of the validity of the collected evidence and the validity of the offered interpretation' (p. 478). However, I feel no such need, as an 'imperfect researcher', I 'make modest claims concerning [my] efforts to grapple with the Too Big' (McGettigan, 1997, p. 379). Through my research, I do not assume to have arrived at any 'final truths', but interpretations that are multiple, partial, contingent, relative, and relational.

Data analysis choices

Transcription matters

As a researcher, I cannot neglect addressing theoretical or methodological transcription issues, in order to problematize the assumption that transcriptions are transparent, directly reflecting in text the 'hard reality' (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 65) of the actual interaction as captured on audio tape. I regard transcription as a fluctuating decision-making process revolving around the issues of purpose, theoretical stance, and

analytic intent, which consequently influence analysis, interpretations, and implications for theory and practice. Procedural and methodological decisions have implications for how the discourse is understood (Mishler, 1991).

I consider transcripts as a theoretical construction of reality *not* as a neutral representation (Mishler, 1991) – they are 'a constructed interpretation of a constructed event' (Lapadat, 2000, p. 214). Through my use of transcripts as a tool for the capturing and re-presenting of voices, I tend to agree with Denzin's (1995) claim of transcripts being textual constructions, not merely representations, regarding each new retelling as both 'less' and 'more' than the original, for 'Behind the text as agent is the author of the text doing the interpreting. *The other becomes an extension of the author's voice*' (p. 15, emphasis added).

I approach the transcription process as a 'discovery procedure' (Rampton, 1995), involving a lot of careful and thoughtful listening and notating, going back again and again to the original data, transcribing speech as well as non-verbal aspects, and writing down my thoughts and interpretations in the process. I chose to carry out a 'verbatim' transcription (being 'faithful' to the recorded speech without making any changes) of the interviews and observation sessions which are audio-taped, while acknowledging the problematic nature of 'verbatim', and 'full', and 'complete' transcription. I include non-word elements, such as the tone of voice, pace, emphasis, relevant gestures and fine movement, silences, pauses, overlapping voices, and all the contextual information taken down as field notes both during the leaders' narrative and their performance. I took these transcription decisions given that what emerges in the end is a semi-fictionalized narrative, due to the fact that these 'verbatim' quotes aided my interpretation of the meaning of what was said, besides informing the construction of

the play. The three-act play is a semi-fictionalization in that I use the actual quotes with their non-word elements to make up the three acts of the play – they serve as building blocks. Doing complete transcriptions of my digital data enables me to develop an intimacy with the subjects' voices and employ transcription as an 'analytical act' (Antoesp's Blog, 2013).

Translation concerns

Collecting data in one language (Maltese), and presenting the findings in another (English), involves me as researcher making translation-related decisions. 'Do the *signifiers* I choose change the *signifieds* for my readers?' This is a question I pose to myself as translator – my problematization of my own translation process.

Translation added yet another layer of complexity. After shelving my initial idea of a simultaneous transcription and translation, due to the sheer impossibility of the task, I decided on translating only those extracts from my digitally-recorded data to be used as 'verbatim' quotes of the actors in the narrative dramatization I craft. Despite being a bilingual researcher, with the interviewees resorting to code-switching (that is, while speaking in Maltese, certain terms for which no Maltese equivalent exists, are uttered in English), word and concept choice turned out to be very difficult. Mine is a case where I am both the researcher and translator and I will subsequently write about the factors that influence the quality of translation – my autobiography; my knowledge of the Maltese language and culture; in addition to my fluency in the write-up language, that is, English.

I operate within a context of bilingualism, where both Maltese and English are the recognized official languages. Despite being 'fully and fluently bilingual' (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 161), my thought processes occur in English, I pose the interview

questions in English, and openly express a preference for it due to English having been the first language I was exposed to. It is my preferred language of spoken interaction and the only language I utilize for written communication. It is from this stance that I adopt the translator role in my research story.

I decide to go for a 'literal' translation of the participants' text – a 'word-for-word' translation (what I constantly refer to as 'verbatim quotes' – or should I correct myself and say 'transcribed and translated' verbatim quotes?) This seems to do more justice to what participants have said as I want to convey their 'direct voices' to the reader.

A translation-related problem I encountered was gaining conceptual equivalence (Temple, 1997). Phillips (1960) sees this 'in absolute terms an unsolvable problem' which results from the fact that 'almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but that the field worker, as an outsider, usually is not' (p. 291). In my case, the process of gaining comparability of meanings was facilitated by not only having 'a proficient understanding' of the Maltese language, but an 'intimate' knowledge of the culture (Frey, 1970). Despite this fact, I still acknowledge the source language as problematic, especially due to the value-laden nature of the Maltese language. Working across languages in research intensifies 'already existing issues of *representation*, *voice*, and *authority*' (Hole, 2007, p. 707, emphasis added). At times, it was a struggle to find the correct equivalent of phrases in terms of meaning. This second layer of translation from Maltese to English, (an admittedly arduous task), turned out to be beneficial for my research and me in terms of ethical concerns – it helped me address the ethical dilemma of preserving anonymity in the bounded nature of the Maltese educational community

while still presenting the very sensitive data obtained about relations of power among top educational leaders.

As simultaneous researcher/translator/interpreter, I assume positionality, the only power dynamics I have to negotiate are between my participants, my data, and my selves. After reaching a decision on which extracts from the transcript are to be translated, I not only re-read them until I think I have managed to convey the same meaning, but re-listen to the original voice on the digital recording for further nuances. I also adopt a pluralistic stance in admitting that another translator may give different words (signifiers) – but I occupy a position of unique advantage in having been the direct recipient of the interviewees' statements – I try to impart the effects that their words had on me on the reader, by choosing the signifiers I think will convey the signified as I perceived it. Another thing in my favour is our bilingual setting, and the fact that the interviewees resorted to code-switching throughout due to there being no equivalent to certain leadership concepts in the source language.

Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis of the empirical data generated during the interview process and the observation of the meeting allows me to unravel the often 'masked' power flow circulating among educational leaders through the construction and performance of their identities that emerge through their accounts and interaction. The 'positioning of self in relation to the other' (Watson, 2012, p. 460) emerges in narratives as 'we narratively construct the other and through this construction we establish claims for our own identities' (ibid, 2012, p. 471).

My approach to narrative analysis does not assume objectivity, but rather, embraces and admits to positionality and subjectivity. The perspectives of 'both narrator and analyst'

(Riessman, 2001) come into view as I attempt to switch from the role of researcher actively involved in the collection of empirical data through in-depth interviews and observation, and adopt the stance of what Smith and Sparkes (2008, p. 20, cited in Watson, 2012, p. 400) label as the 'storyteller', where the analysis is the story or the story is the analysis. I do not consider myself just as a 'story analyst' (ibid, 2008, p. 20), where 'analytical procedures' are employed to examine features of the data. I *do not find* narratives – instead, I participate in their creation through 'active interviews' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Narrative analysis provides the site for the production of 'another narrative' (Watson, 2012, p. 463) which unfolds as I craft the narrative from interview and observation data. I show how 'identity is constructed through narrative' (Watson, 2012, p. 460), paying special attention to how leaders *construct* and *perform* their identities. Bamberg (2003) conceives of positioning in two distinct ways: the 'being positioned' orientation in which the subject has little determination of agency, and the 'positioning oneself' orientation where discursive repertoires are constructed rather than already given. These constitute two very different 'agent-world relationships' (p. 135). Utilizing the above theory of positioning analysis, I explore how the leaders position themselves in relation to discourses by which they are positioned. Davies and Harre (1990) argue that the power of discursive practices lies in the endowment of subject positions. Accordingly, 'who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our and others' lives' (p. 46). According to Hendry (2007), 'Our narratives…are the tales through which we constitute our identities. We are our narratives…Who we are is embedded in our stories.' (p. 495). Therefore, narrative is

both the phenomenon being studied and the methodological approach adopted, in addition to being the mode of data representation.

My approach to narrative analysis roughly follows Mishler's framework for understanding the different approaches to narrative analysis (Mishler, 1995), based on meaning, structure, and interactional context. Focus is based on the content of the narrative, on its structure, and on its performance, for a disclosure of the interactional and institutional contexts in which narratives are produced, recounted, and consumed. This is done keeping in mind the claim of Frosh (2007) that human subjects experience both fragmentation and integration through narratives, further outlining the tension between the human subject 'understood as positioned in and through competing discourses' and the integrity of the subject inferred as 'both a starting- and end-point of analysis' (ibid, p. 639).

As a researcher, I am aware of a particular challenge in the narrative approach as pointed out by Elliott (2012). Because the narrative approach to interviewing differs from individuals' usual expectations that researchers ask a lot of closed questions, it can take time to build up a respondent's confidence that telling stories about their experiences is valid within the interview context (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 44). This emerged in the pilot interview where the interviewee's own words, *'I don't want to waste your time telling you my stories',* when this is what I definitely want to 'listen to', increased my awareness regarding the role of questions and my behaviour in the success of narrative generation and production. As I actively constitute the 'stories' that I interpret and subsequently analyze, I attempt to facilitate the production of narratives in my interviews by establishing a climate that allows for storytelling. I allow longer turns at talk, paying attention to details such as specific incidents and turning points,

picking up on these for further probing. Additionally, when shifts occur, associations and meanings that might connect to other stories are explored with the participant. According to Riessman (2008), creating possibilities for extended narration involves investigators relinquishing their control – I follow participants down *their* trails as I acknowledge the asymmetrical power relationships within the interview process and the benefits derived from power-sharing.

Tensions encountered in the conduct of qualitative research

A tension between language and representation, debated by post-qualitative inquiry[4] has been an issue in the field for well over three decades, with the *crisis of representation* (1986-1990) being the fourth 'moment' in qualitative research, as identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) – a 'moment' whereby researchers struggled with their location and that of their subjects in textual representations of ethnographic studies. This 'crisis of representation' which is explored at length by Denzin (1997) problematizes '(a) the 'real' and its representation in the text, (b) the text and the author, (c) lived experience and its textual representations, and (d) the subject and his or her intentional meanings' (p. 4). One must therefore question the relationship between reality and its representation (Pettinger, 2005), since research always unfolds in the domain of the politics of representation. The process of research writing, of creating the narrative representation, is regarded as 'a contested and loaded arena' (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 299), especially when the 'representational vulnerability' (ibid) of the Other is taken into consideration.

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[4] There has been the emergence of a discourse around post-qualitative research (Greene, 2013; Lather & St.Pierre, 2013; MacLure, 2013; St.Pierre, 2013) that rejects the hierarchical logic of representation and language, proposing instead "non- or post-representational research practices" (MacLure, 2013, p. 658) that engage the materiality of language itself.

This 'crisis of representation' eventually led to further crises in legitimation and praxis, constituting a 'triple crisis' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19) confronting qualitative researchers. Thus, long-held assumptions and notions such as validity, reliability, and generalizability as well as the ability of the research to change the world through its textual representation were seriously re-thought and re-theorized. A response to these crises led to a renewed focus on qualitative research and creating texts, with qualitative work carrying its meaning in its entire text (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005). This established the need for texts that make a difference, with the researcher being considered as the 'instrument' (ibid, p. 960) in the research process due to his/her writing voice/s. The textual staging of the research 'story' is never innocent, being influenced by views of reality and the Self.

The fictional representation of narrative in my thesis

In my attempt at dealing with this 'crisis of representation', I fictionalize a dramatic representation of the 'voices' of the leaders in the drama *Polyphonic College*, where the three main themes of school networking, relationships of power, and leadership distribution, materializing from my data, are presented in a play of three acts. The case study presented *is* the analysis, with further interpretation drawing on concepts discussed in the literature review and Foucauldian theory. I acknowledge my presence as narrator, observer, producer, interpreter, and playwright within the play itself. Nonetheless, as Richardson (1992) states, 'no matter how we stage the text, we…the authors (researchers)…are doing the staging' (p. 131) – I do assume responsibility for this 'staging'.

Through the use of fictionalizing devices (in my case, the selection of quotes from interview and observation data and their subsequent crafting into a narrative

dramatization), I move away from a conventional form of analysis and representation, thus releasing myself and my readers from what Barone (2007) refers to as 'a methodological straightjacket' (p. 460). As a narrative researcher, I reject the 'grander narrative', in favour of 'narrative truths' (Spence, 1982) produced in interaction, embracing an unconventional understanding of storied texts,

> we do not take narratives at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality…stories…allow a wide periphery for freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of… (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 8).

Barone (2007) argues that

> our aim as researcher-storytellers is not to seek certainty about correct perspectives on educational phenomena but to raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice that enrich an ongoing conversation (p. 466)

− this is what I attempt to do through my dramatized narrative.

I choose to 'do representation differently' by creating a representation through the use of creative analytic practices (CAP). These practices utilize genres as fiction, poetry, narrative, and performance, thus rendering data representations more 'effective' at portraying the research study (Richardson, 2000). *Writing as a method of inquiry* [WAMOI] (Richardson, 1994) thus emerged in which the researcher pays attention to both the product and process of writing, learning both about him/herself and the research topic. In this sense, writing becomes a 'field of play' (Richardson, 1997), thus troubling the concept *method*. St.Pierre (1997a, c) calls her writing 'nomadic inquiry', in which 'writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery' (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 967). Writing is both a method of data collection *and* data analysis. This writing involves a mixture of 'headwork, textwork, and fieldwork' (St.Pierre, 1997a, p. 411), working in

unconventional spaces, 'mental spaces, textual spaces, and theoretical spaces' (ibid, p. 412), with the researcher being regarded as the subject of his/her fieldwork.

Exposure to this writing as a method of inquiry enables me to trouble the commonsense understanding of data in order to 'create' research 'that aims to *produce different knowledge* and to *produce knowledge differently'* (St.Pierre, 1997b, p. 176, emphasis added). Clough (1999) presents this challenge of 'producing knowledge differently', of writing social science as art as a dilemma, however, without feeling the need to carry a methodological apologia but for 'two credos that provide some implicit justification for this experiment' (p. 442). He presents the first credo as a claim that,

> To seek new epistemological and methodological avenues demands that we chart new paths rather than constantly return to well-worn roads and point out that they will not take us where we want to go (Tierney, 1998, p. 68, cited in Clough, 1999, p. 442).

The second "credo" is Sandelowski's (1994) request that,

> when you talk with me about my research, do not ask me what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data...I am not confessing to telling any lies about the people or events in my studies/stories. I have told the truth. The proof is in the things I have made (Sandelowski, 1994, p. 61, cited in Clough, 1999, p. 442).

I therefore make sense of my 'data', by trying to 'chart new paths' that will enable me to 'produce knowledge differently', by inventing the play *Polyphonic College* 'from and out of my data'. I acknowledge that my

> writing will never be 'the Truth' as it will always represent something that has ...been...re-created...[and that]...with each reading something new is interpreted, leaving the work always as a work in process (Berbary, 2011, p. 188).

The positive and negative aspects of fictional narrative

Well-crafted narratives have the capacity 'to illuminate *the universal* by focusing on *the particular'* (Spindler, 2008, p. 29). Barone (2001) argues for 'an epistemology of uncertainty' (p. 152) and for educational enquiry that strives for meaning enhancement rather than the reduction of uncertainty, with the inherent ambiguity inviting 'polyvocal, conspiratorial conversations' (p. 178). This is an approach I take up in the representation of my data. These narrative constructions possess

> the power to lift the veil of conventionality from my eyes as they subtly raise disturbing questions about the necessity and desirability of comfortable, familiar educational discourses and practices…the products of an educational research that refuses closure (Barone, 2007, p. 465).

A case is also made for the promise of alternative forms of data representation that serve to enlarge understanding by 'illuminating' the message; providing a sense of particularity, in addition to 'productive ambiguity', as well as allowing for the exploitation of individual aptitudes (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). This creative mode of data representation

> rather than disconnect and reduce experiences, it encourages involvement, inspires curiosity, creates inclusivity, and constructs depictions that remain in the thoughts of readers in ways that traditional representations sometimes do not (Berbary, 2011, p. 195).

I am aware of the dangers of declaring my work simultaneously fiction (or semi-fiction) *and* social science – as voiced by Watson (2011), 'the researcher runs the risk…of not having their work read as social science…and therefore dismissed' (p. 396). Besides the virtues of alternative forms of data representation, there are also the 'perils' that encompass loss of precision and a potential backlash from their use due to covering 'new terrain' (Eisner, 1997, p. 8-9).

I follow what Hendry (2007) advocates as an 'epistemology of listening', viewing participants as 'meaning makers and central to our own meaning making' (p. 494), with storytelling resembling

> a spider's web – with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing each other. As with the web, the structure of the story emerges as it is made and you must simply listen and trust that meaning will be made (Silko, 1991, p. 83).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss my position as researcher within my research story of *Polyphonic College* by explaining the rationale behind my research design 'choices'. I 'trouble' issues related to the conduct of qualitative inquiry, namely the crisis of representation, validity, transcription, translation, and ethical considerations. I finally outline my method of data analysis and mode of representation, the latter process turning out to be a struggle due to my resolve to adopt an innovative approach.

Chapter Six: Raising the curtain on *Polyphonic College*

> The work of an intellectual is not to mould the political will of others; it is, through the analyses that he does in his own field, to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions and to participate in the formation of a political will …
>
> (Foucault, 1988b, p. 265)

Introduction

I present an analysis of the data in my case study exploring the ways that the leaders experience 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1994) through a policy mandate; how relations of power play out among the different leaders; their perceptions of distributed leadership, and how it unfolds at college level. These are the three main themes that emerged after I carried out an 'analysis of narratives' (Polkinghorne, 1995) of the transcribed interview and observation data by paying particular attention both to the content of the narrative and the form of its construction. It is from the identification of themes in these individual analyses of narratives that I moved from 'story analyst' to 'storyteller' (Smith & Sparkes, 2008) stance and carried out a 'narrative analysis' (Polkinghorne, 1995) by configuring the analyzed data into a fictionalized narrative dramatization.

I 'craft' a narrative dramatization from my data, using my play as a medium to present my research findings as I want to *show* rather than just *tell* how writing can become 'a field of play' (Richardson, 1997) in social science. In the very initial stages of analysis, when I first started looking at the data, it became clear to me that 'reality disjunctures' (Pollner, 1975, p. 411) were evident – the mismatches between what the leaders narrated in the interviews and how they behaved in interaction with the other college members literally jumped off the pages of my transcriptions. It was these inherent

contradictions between the participants' private narratives and their public performance which sparked off my idea for a play, moreover, when set against what 'should be' happening, presented by the documentary analysis of FACT. This was a 'dramatic moment' in my thesis in which I came to the realization that a narrative dramatization was the way I wanted to actually *show* and *represent* what was going on. I consider this to be a 'momentous decision' in my doctoral trip as it shaped the whole structure of my thesis and my reasoning from that moment forward – it was a 'moment of epiphany'. I go beyond what Pollner (1974) terms as 'mundane reasoning', as I fully acknowledge and attempt to show that 'what is but a solipsistically contrived dream world of appearances' (p. 35) through my 'dramatic decision'. The play *is* the analysis, my personal response of coming to terms with my struggle regarding data representation. I use this play in order to draw out the absurdities, inconsistencies, and inherent contradictions in communications within the network, the way people seek to position themselves and are positioned within the network, and the dysfunctionalities around the network where leadership is not unfolding as discursively set out in the policy FACT.

Methodological concerns of how I craft my data as narrative

The actors in my play are 'polyvocal', that is, different voices emerge from the same leader – 'dissonant' voices are detected both 'within' and 'among' interviews, and between what I 'hear' and what I 'observe'. This is in line with Deleuze's (2012) emphasis on the difference between the visible and the sayable in Foucault's writing. The voices of the Heads are numbered as 'P1', 'S1', etcetera, in order to retain anonymity but also to be able to distinguish between the primary and secondary sectors for the purpose of my research questions. It is only the Principal's voice that is identified throughout as CP or when she is addressed directly as 'Miss Perfection'.

These choices are taken to justify my exploration of the relationship among leaders at the same and different hierarchical levels. I also make use of thought bubbles in the narrative dramatization. I do not, however, claim to have access to their innermost thoughts in real time, I use these as a device to juxtapose what the leaders narrate to me in the interviews in private, but do not voice in the meeting. These 'thoughts' that emerge in the narrative of the interviews clash with their performance in the meeting, thus bringing out the absurdities, inconsistencies, discrepancies, and dysfuntionalities in the network. These extracts from the interviews are presented as asides, indicated by square brackets and a bold typeface. In the interviews, the Heads were asked to sketch a pictorial representation of how they position themselves in their own individual schools and in the college. In the play, these sketches are presented as doodles, interspersed throughout the three acts in order to contradict or reinforce what that particular leader is saying at the moment. All the interviewees are referred to by the female pronoun in order to avoid distinction. This respects issues of anonymity and non-traceability. Distinction of gender is not my concern, since I do not seek to explore gender differences in leadership. The Principal is referred to as SHE or HER (as a pronoun) in capital letters, this typographical choice reflecting the leadership hierarchy.

It is from these verbatim quotes transcribed, and then translated from Maltese to English, that I then craft a narrative dramatization, using both the insights obtained from the 'narrative' and 'performance' revealed to me in the interviews and observed meeting, and my own imagination, to think up the 'acts' according to their characteristics and particularities, with the play as analysis taking shape while I am writing. I introduce the policy document FACT as a character, by inserting quotes from the document, in order to bring out the tensions between what 'should' be happening

and what actually unfolds in the leadership dynamics within the college. This technique of collating data from multiple sources (interviews, observation, documentary analysis) provides me with more inventiveness to yarn the narrative and to show competing perspectives. The analysis of the leaders' narratives that I present in the play is itself a narrative where I add my own interpretations to present 'moments' from the observation of the meeting which illustrate themes, rather than trying to tell the whole story. This play is not a transcript of the observed CoH – it is a product of my imagination that I crafted from the 'collected' data which I then 'collated'. The dialogue draws on what the interviewees actually say – I remain 'as faithful' as possible to the original 'voice', which has already undergone a double layer of translation – from speech to written text, and from Maltese to English, which in a way helps to retain anonymity, as well as to respect ethical issues due to the very sensitive nature of the data revealed to me. I insert narrator's comments throughout the scenes, with each scene being followed by a discussion between Denise and Foucault, in order to incorporate researcher interpretation without breaking the flow of the various scenes. This approach does not aim at the transparent presentation of data, which is itself a 'narrated' fiction, but at its representation. I thus seek to draw attention to what my position in the research is and how I represent that research – in my attempt at dealing with my crisis of representation, and recognizing that crisis, I acknowledge that my play is not a transparent mediation between what actually happened and how I have deliberately chosen to represent it.

Polyphonic College: a preamble

I proceed to give an outline of the structure of the play that I choose to name *Polyphonic College*, which is also the fictitious name given to the college under study –

a name that embodies the incongruities emanating from the individual leaders in interaction – a fluid and fluctuating assemblage of dissonance, instability, heterogeneity, cacophony, and polyvocality.

A fictional account set up as a Council of Heads meeting takes place over the course of one day. Act 1 covers the initial part of the meeting until coffee break, Act 2 encompasses the middle part of the meeting from after the coffee break till lunch time, while Act 3 reports on the final part of the meeting after lunch break. An outline of each act which is further divided into scenes is explained in the table below.

(Chapter 6) PROLOGUE	The 'making' of the play, and the presentation of the cast of characters who constitute *Polyphonic College*, as well as the setting where networking unfolds		
(Chapter 7) ACT 1: Policy-mandated collegiality as experienced by the leaders	Scene 1: Demands for a collective statement of the *Early School Leavers' Report*	Scene 2: Reactions to FACT and its effects	Scene 3: Exam paper setting: Isolation or collaboration?
(Chapter 8) ACT 2: Relationships as perceived and performed by the leaders within the network	Scene 1: The Principal, the Heads and human relationships	Scene 2: 'The Audit' and the Principal's emails and HER school visits: their effect on the Heads	Scene 3: The *Creativity Scheme* and discrimination practices
(Chapter 9) ACT 3: Distributed leadership as narrated, performed, and experienced by the leaders in *Polyphonic College*	Scene 1: FACT, distributed leadership, and the leaders of *Polyphonic College*	Scene 2: 'The Centre', the *Alternative Programme* and autonomy	
(Chapter 10) EPILOGUE	Closing down and opening up: the main points of discussion and the provision of questions for problematization		

Table 2: Outline of the play

Play conventions

The conventions used in the play are as follows:

- **normal typeface** indicates either the participants' quotes emanating from the observed meeting or my comments as narrator;

- **bold typeface within square brackets** indicates the participants' quotes derived from the interviews;

- **italicized writing within square brackets** is the running commentary throughout the play;

- **capitals** show emphasis made by the actual speaker;

- **underlining** indicates my added emphasis;

- **continuation dots …** show a pause in the text, with each group of three dots indicating a short pause in the conversation, while two groups of three dots indicate a longer pause;

- **continuation dots within square brackets […]** represent omissions from the transcript;

- **SHE/HER** refer to the Principal;

- the **page numbers** following each intervention by the character FACT indicate the pages in the policy document from where the actual quotes have been taken. The quotes derived from the policy FACT are all enclosed within a border due to the official nature of the source.

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Raising the curtain on *POLYPHONIC COLLEGE*

PROLOGUE

The cast of the characters who constitute Polyphonic College

MISS PERFECTION, the Principal of *Polyphonic College*, has been occupying this leadership position since the college was established. In the play, the acronym CP (which stands for 'College Principal') is used.

S1 is a secondary school Head.

P1 is a primary school Head.

P2 is a primary school Head.

P3 is a primary school Head.

P4 is a primary school Head.

S2 is a secondary school Head.

S3 is a secondary school Head.

FACT is the acronym for '*For All Children to Succeed'* (Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005), the policy mandating the college reform, the child of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, born in 2005. In the play, it is her voice that is heard – the policy document stands on a bookshelf in the boardroom.

The DGs are the two Directors General who are referred to indistinctly by the Principal and the Heads[5]. Although they do not appear on stage as flesh and blood characters, their presence is felt throughout the play through reference made to them by the other characters – their 'absent' presence is very strong.

MATILDA is the personal secretary of Miss Perfection, whose voice is barely heard throughout the production. However, she plays a vital role in taking down the minutes of the meeting and receiving orders from the Principal.

FOUCAULT, the French postmodernist/post-structuralist philosopher, who has been dead and buried since 1984 (the thirtieth anniversary of his death fell on the 25th of June 2014) is very much a living presence in this play, involved in a discussion with the

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[5] When they mention the DGs both in the plural and the singular form, none of the leaders distinguish between the DG for Educational Services and the DG for Quality and Standards in Education.

Interpreter at the end of the drama over the unfolding actions through his theories of power, governmentality, subjectification, discipline, and discourse. HE is a constant presence throughout the play-writing process: during its conceptualization, drafting, and interpretation. During its production, HE pays very careful attention to the characters/actors, at times nodding, at other times mumbling something intelligible in French, or just observing in silence. Foucault is the only male figure in the play.

DENISE, doctoral researcher, plays several roles in this play. She is the researcher, author, playwright, producer, narrator, and interpreter, whose pervading presence is constant throughout. She only appears under her nomenclature in the Interpretation following each scene. Throughout the rest of the play, she distinguishes among the roles as she undertakes different guises, at times even simultaneously, at any given time. The play *Polyphonic College* is her brainchild, a product of endless months of struggling with data representation.

Stage setting

The meeting takes place within the boardroom of Miss Perfection's Office[6] overlooking the 'Garden of Eden', the central courtyard of *Polyphonic College*. The Principal's office has a huge window overlooking the courtyard, therefore giving HER a 360-degree view of all the activities being carried out in the surrounding offices, their comings and goings, and all the 'visitors' about to 'descend on' HER Office.

Foucault: A very panoptical layout indeed – a technology to retain HER absolute power through constant surveillance? Or else, is HER Office strategically placed in such a way for Miss Perfection to make HER PRESENCE felt, in order to empower

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[6] 'Office' starts with a capital letter as this is how SHE refers to the entire building housing the Secretariat of 'Polyphonic College'.

school leaders who visit HER Office with the reassurance that SHE (or 'HER OFFICE') is easily accessible and always available to provide unending help and support?

Producer: But now we must focus on the boardroom, which is the 'microcosm' of the college, the nucleus of the Secretariat, where the major part of the 'networking' takes place as the leadership dynamics unfold. *Polyphonic College* is represented on stage by a sign indicating its name on the left hand side of the stage, just at the top of the flight of stairs leading to the auditorium – as a constant reminder to the audience, lest they forget, throughout the three acts as the drama unfolds.

The stage is dominated by a large oval conference table in the centre, which is placed lengthwise, with a big, comfortable-looking black leather swivel chair at the head, and eight chairs, which are also black, but smaller in size, are stationary (not swivel) and look less comfortable. There is an empty chair in the corner, which will remain vacant during the play – this symbolizes my presence as researcher when I observed a particular Council of Heads meeting unfolding among all the leaders of *Polyphonic College*. A substantial bookcase stands to one side, with a glossy A4 hardbound document, particularly noticeable in the centre of the top shelf, which is otherwise empty. The cover of this policy document is displayed at such an angle for its title to be visible – *'For All Children to Succeed'*. This is the oracle from which the voice of the character FACT emerges. There is a smaller table at the back, on top of which is a coffee machine with a selection of teas, coffee, hot chocolate; cups and saucers, as well as an assortment of mouth-watering biscuits …

The stage setting remains the same for the three acts. The curtain closes as Denise finds her way to the back of the stage to check on the characters and raises after a few

moments. As the drama unfolds, both Foucault and Denise occupy a chair on the right-hand side landing of the flight of stairs leading to the auditorium, as they have to confer after each scene. The left-hand side is occupied by an empty chair which is a symbol of the invitation I, as Denise, extend to members of the audience or potential readers of my play to join me and Foucault in our discussions, in order to offer different interpretations of my production. The curtain closes after each act, in order to give the characters the needed privacy to have their coffee break and lunch in a collegial atmosphere without the 'disciplinary gaze' of either Denise or her French philosopher mentor. Those very short breaks are the 'quality time' of the privileged *Polyphonic College* members only.

Chapter Seven: The performance of collegiality

> I try to carry out the most precise and discriminative analyses I can in order to show in what ways things change, are transformed, are displaced. When I study the mechanisms of power, I try to study their specificity … I admit neither the notion of a master nor the universality of his law.
>
> (Foucault, 2001b, p. 911-912)

Act 1: Policy-mandated collegiality as experienced by the leaders

Narrator: The meeting takes place in the boardroom of the Principal's office, with all the leaders seated around a very long table. The Principal (CP) is standing at the head of the table, walking around and making small talk until it is time for the meeting to start. All the Heads are seated – they are talking about the various reforms to be incorporated in the Maltese education system as from the next scholastic year.

Scene 1: Demands for a 'collective' statement of the 'Early School Leavers' Report'

Narrator: The Principal introduces the first item on the agenda, which is a statement on the '*Early School Leavers' Report*' to be drawn up on behalf of all the Heads in the college.

CP: [*Trying to speak above the background noise and the laughter…Standing still near HER swivel chair to address the school Heads present*]

The plan for today is…

[*The voices have almost died down…SHE makes HER second attempt to start the meeting…*]

Today we must be more disciplined than usual since we can only stay till three o'clock as I have been summoned for an urgent meeting with the DGs. And I cannot arrive late for that.

Narrator: The Principal simultaneously signals HER subjection and HER subjectifying others – how SHE positions herself and others while simultaneously being positioned HERSELF.

CP: [I have a good relationship with the Directorates. I can't think of a time when we ever had a problem. But you have to understand that THEY ARE THE AUTHORITIES.]

S1: [I feel that the Directorates are very distant from the classrooms and the schools. This hurts me a lot […] I think that they should make their presence felt […] Them being up there while we are down here – that does not augur well […] The DGs communicate with us only when there is something coming – either an impending reform or a problem.]

Narrator: Despite the physical absence of the Directors General, they maintain a ghostly presence throughout.

CP: Okay…Naturally, I'm assuming that maybe you've gone through the minutes and the agenda that Matilda emailed you…that maybe you've given them a look…If not, we can go through them very briefly.

Narrator: Is SHE being sarcastic?

S1: They were all very clear, nothing needs to be amended…

CP: [*Starts reading from the paper, turning the pages over without taking heed of her words*]

The first item on the agenda…the proposed strategic framework to deal with the problem of early school leavers to be adopted as a system across all the secondary schools in the colleges. I assume that you've all read the '*Early School Leavers' Report*' that was sent to your offices. The Ministry, the Directorate even, have requested feedback on it, that is, read it. Some changes to the original document have been made, therefore, YOU HAVE to read it.

> **FACT:** The Principal will communicate the national policies to the Council of Heads and <u>ensure that these are carried out</u> across the college. (p. 45)

S1: I'm very busy working on classification right now.

P1: It's far too long…

S2: [No-one is going to tell me what to do! When SHE starts taking notice of me, I'll follow HER orders, not before. As if they care about what I have to say […] If only the Principal would listen to me […] I feel so invisible.]

CP: They want to read about your thoughts, your fears, and your misgivings regarding this reform. It is only seventy pages long.

> **FACT:** We need to develop a <u>new</u>, <u>more focused</u> and <u>purposeful relationship</u> between the Ministry responsible for education, the new national education Directorates, the colleges, the new school networks, and the schools themselves. (p. 62)

S3: [Who does SHE think SHE is, a teacher coming here as a PRINCIPAL?]

CP: I am requesting feedback, therefore please do it. I gave you a deadline until the 25th of May…you have almost one month left.

P3: That's impossible!

S3: [*in an aside to her neighbour*] I'm not going to do it…not in that time frame at least.

FACT: It is not the intention to take a <u>big bang approach</u> in implementing the proposed reforms. Precautions will be taken to <u>phase-in the reforms</u> and <u>the widest possible consensus</u> will be sought. (p. xii)

CP: Please bear with me…I have to present the feedback about this report as a college.

Narrator: This report has to be a collective endeavour incorporating the 'voices' of all the networked leaders.

CP: Please bear with me. I know that perhaps I am demanding a lot but you must understand that right now, it's a time of upheaval…We have a new Ministry, there are new people and we are trying to understand each other. It's not easy, but we are trying to understand them, they are trying to understand us, and we're trying to meet somewhere mid-way…Understood?

Narrator: Is SHE trying to justify the demands being made on the Heads from ABOVE or perhaps attempting to appear conciliatory?

FACT: I know that <u>change will not be easy</u>. (p. xiii) The task ahead is a mammoth one. It will involve <u>collective commitment</u>, <u>discipline</u> and <u>effective network leadership</u>. (p. xxi)

Narrator: FACT seems to echo the Principal in admitting that this reform is "not easy" – a matter of the policy speaking the Principal or them speaking the same discourse? It could also be a matter of the Principal echoing FACT – is SHE perhaps speaking the policy in HER attempt at implementation?

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Denise: [*addressing the audience*] The adoption of a governmentality perspective enables me to explore ways in which 'government' is practised in relation to those in leadership positions in the college, namely the Directors General, the Principal and the Heads. [*directing her gaze back at Foucault*] Examples of YOUR concept of *gouvernementalite*[7] are found throughout the meeting, where the Principal's 'performance' or 'discourse', which is subjectified by the Directors General who are themselves 'subjects' of the State (through the Minister), subsequently affects the conduct of the school Heads in the college.

Foucault: Through various instances unfolding in this scene, I try to identify examples of how to *govern oneself*, how to *be governed*, and how to *govern others*, without much evidence, however, as to how to become the *best possible governor.*[8]

Denise: Being "more disciplined than usual" in order to be able to fit in all the items on the Principal's agenda during the day-long meeting is presented to the Heads as a 'discursive discipline', due to the Principal HERSELF being disciplined by the Directors General, *whose* orders SHE has to comply with.

Foucault: Power thus emerges as the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power.[9]

Denise: This is the start of the infantilized relationship that seems to exist between the Principal and the Heads which emerges in many instances in the play.

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[7] (2002a)

[8] (2002a, p. 202)

[9] (1998, p. 93)

[*Foucault has a faraway look in HIS eyes. Is HE perhaps reminiscing about 'Discipline and Punish'[10] where HE spoke so convincingly of the disciplinary practices pervading various institutions, prominent among which are schools? Denise continues*]

The Heads are disciplined through the Principal's control of how long to spend on each agenda item, HER various demands and very inflexible deadlines. The Principal has expectations regarding their behaviour both outside the CoH and throughout the interaction.

Foucault: *[nodding in agreement]* This leads to the Heads adopting these expectations as 'technologies of the self'[11], practices by which they shape themselves through acts of compliance or resistance in relation to the educational leadership discourse being practised and fostered by the Principal.

Denise: In fact, all the Heads except for P2 offer resistance to the Principal's demand for a report, by presenting various political rationalities ranging from curricular duties to undermining HER authority as Principal. This resistance is countered by resistance on the part of the Principal to extend the deadline. Can we assume this resistance from the Heads at the very beginning of the meeting as a critique of the Principal's leadership?

Foucault: *[seems to be pleased by my question]* This governmentality generates critique…a certain decided, as the French would say, *decisoire*, will, not to be governed […] the art of voluntary nonservitude, of considered nondocility.[12]

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[10] (1991a)

[11] (2000e, p. 177)

[12] (2000g)

Denise: This request for an urgent meeting at the beginning of the scene is an example of 'top-down' power exercised by the Directors General over the Principal, to which no overt resistance is offered by the Principal in order to respect the leadership hierarchy outlined in the discursive framework of the college setting.

Foucault: Power in *Polyphonic College* plays out as a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise [it] just as much as those over whom it is exercised.[13] SHE is subjectified by the Directors General as a consequence of which SHE subjectifies the Heads.

Denise: I totally agree but HER position is ambiguous as HER reference to the Directors General also signals HER importance to the other Heads through being <u>in direct contact with</u> THOSE ABOVE.

Foucault: They subjectify leaders at different hierarchical levels through their 'art of government'[14], revealing the power of the State to shape and lead individuals, and the simultaneous power of the individual leaders to shape and conduct themselves and others. Their absence from schools and distance from both the school Heads and other stakeholders is their mode of subjection.

Denise: The Principal avoids speaking about the Directors General, masking the truth by HER vague 'non-response response'. **[p. 150]**

The Principal is openly admitting to subjectifying the Heads and to rendering them as bodies of docility, but SHE positions their 'small story narrative' (the reality of their everyday college life) within the 'grander narrative' of global discourse (the political

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[13] (1998, p. 39)

[14] (2002g, p. 341)

upheaval following a reshuffle in Parliament and the demands being made by the newly-appointed Minister of Education).

Foucault: [*nods*] The Principal tries to justify HER exercise of leadership, through HER provision of 'political rationalities'[15], forms of reasoned discourse. Following my work, Miller and Rose (2008) use the term 'governmentality ethos'[16] to describe this.

Denise: Throughout the scene, SHE changes her political technologies from the use of a very demanding tone, imperative verbs and assumptions, to a pleading tone in which SHE asks for their opinions, making use of 'collegiality' – using empowerment in order to mask the governmentality coming from ABOVE and to self-subjectify the Heads into compliance. This pleading could perhaps imply conciliation to a certain extent.

FACT, besides governing the Principal, positions the Heads within a demanding discursive framework, through its enactment of 'collegiality' as a "mammoth task", presenting change as difficult. SHE attempts to do all this while positioning them within the discourse of "collective commitment", "discipline", and "effective network leadership", simultaneously promising "the widest possible consensus".

Foucault: This foreshadows the transformation of the leaders' subjectivities and professional lives in the rest of the play, calling upon us as audience to problematize their degree of agency in their 'promised' discursive positioning by FACT.

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[15] (2002f, p. 416-7)

[16] p. 13

Scene 2: Reactions to FACT and its effects

Narrator: This scene, which takes off from the last one in which the Heads were 'asked' to draw up a report regarding the proposed strategic framework for measures to be adopted to prevent early school leavers, which is to be presented to the Minister, starts off with the Heads' reactions to this imposition, revealing their perceived degree of agency in their leadership practices. A discussion arises around their reaction to the FACT policy.

P3: Is the Minister really going to read our report and take our views into consideration or will it just be an imposition like the college setup and the implementation of the FACT policy in 2006? Why should we waste our precious time giving our opinions when everything has already been decided and we are just given orders? Nowadays, everybody has authority, so everybody orders. YOU order, the DG orders, the other Director orders, the Minister orders…And everybody is just giving us, giving us, giving us! And we just receive, receive, receive…all this is putting undue pressure on us! Why would they bother about our opinions now if they didn't take any notice back then?

Narrator: P3 is standing now and making gestures with her arms to make a point while the others are looking thoughtful. She gets so red in the face while arguing…SHE just listens without intervening. There is a slight pause…None of those present say anything in response to this.

> **FACT:** In fact, one of the most important things to acknowledge as schools begin their journey together as a network, is that <u>schools, staff and children will be their guides</u>. Their context, their histories, their strengths and needs, their aspirations and the ways of working in their schools, will all influence the design of their network and its activities. (p. 37)

Narrator: P3 openly contradicts FACT's statement above – about schools guiding the network, its design, and activities. The schools do not guide the network, but are in fact guided by the network (and in a much "directed" manner, indeed!).

P4: [Even though we have our reference point in the Principal, we still have to refer to the Department on certain issues.]

P1: [One has to accept that it is something that is COMING FROM ABOVE…]

Narrator: Do all the Heads accept this? Including those who attempt to exercise resistance?

> **FACT:** We believe that networks are the new essential units of organisation to replace the questionable dichotomy of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to educational change. (p. xi)

P1: [Perhaps this imposition did have its benefits. I'm speaking for myself now. I feel lucky enough to have been appointed Head when colleges were in existence, so not having any other choice helped.]

Narrator: But P1 could have never been in a position to make choices, could she?

S2: [When there is a policy, you are either part of a club or you're out. You cannot make choices yourself. In life, certain things have to be imposed in order to be initiated. I think that they did the right thing to impose them – if you leave it up to the people to choose, you will never get anywhere.]

S3: [I very much agree with imposition from the top to the bottom in this case […] So, yes, I believe that DEMOCRACY IS IN DICTATORSHIP!]

Narrator: So, democracy and dictatorship are exercised simultaneously within the college!

P3: [As an Assistant Head involved in the setting up of a college, I was a bit sceptical as not everybody was giving the same input – practically nobody wanted to share her work. We have our college, yet there isn't that freedom of give and take. That needs time to develop and be nurtured, in order not to remain tied to your school.]

> **FACT:** In the twenty-first century, Nation-States and many other entities survive better through securing <u>partnerships based on shared responsibilities</u>. Schools are amongst such entities and can only prosper and flourish if they form and gain strengths through <u>new alliances</u>. (p. xii) The college will ensure the <u>emergence</u> and the <u>sharing of good practices</u>. (p. 71)

CP: Let me tell you this…I had the privilege of setting up *Polyphonic College* from scratch. I feel very close to the schools, so close that sometimes I feel that they are MY schools. Even though they are not mine, I almost feel that the schools are MINE…

Narrator: Is this the same Principal who very passionately spoke about the retention of school autonomy, about giving Heads their own space, who argued against isolationism in favour of collegiality? SHE has a very clever and subtle way of trying to weave the Heads into this discourse of 'collegiality'.

S2: [What does SHE know about "MY" school if SHE has never set foot inside? The students don't know who the Principal is as they've never seen HER. The teachers feel offended, forgotten, and left out. The school is not HERS, the school

is MINE – I am the one who knows the school inside out […] HER impositions or interferences are unhealthy, unwelcome, and unwanted!]

Narrator: My goodness! This has touched someone's nerve…Knowledge of certain facts imparted to me as researcher by S2 make me feel rather uncomfortable as narrator.

P1: We can consider ourselves lucky since we are just a stone's throw away from each other, within walking distance almost. However, what I see is that geographically, the way they were clustered, I don't know what the idea behind this is. Why and how did they decide on this geographical clustering?

P2: [I feel comfortable within our college as it is balanced – all the schools are on the same level. But I cannot say the same for the colleges composed of schools in depressed areas. What benefits are they reaping?]

P3: I still have a bit of a question mark about how healthy it is for our students to spend their primary years together and then move on to secondary school.

Narrator: These three Heads unanimously problematize 'geographical clustering' despite *Polyphonic College* having benefited from this setup – with the students in the Maltese state system being their main concern.

CP: [I did not like the fact that someone decided how the colleges were going to be composed, that things were just presented as given, that there was no option. I would have preferred clustering by specialization rather than geographically – it makes more sense academically although it would be very difficult to carry out logistically.]

> **FACT:** A school network would ideally be built around a secondary school that serves as a receiver from primary 'feeder' schools. The existing stock of secondary school buildings in Malta makes the application of this ideal school network logistically difficult to implement on a national level. (p. 44)

Narrator: FACT itself does acknowledge the <u>problems</u> surrounding the implementation of 'geographical clustering', yet it <u>was</u> put into practice.

CP: [*sitting down in HER swivel chair, turning round and looking directly into the eyes of all the Heads…at least of those who were not sending text messages on their mobile phone…In a very calm manner, SHE says*]

Are you telling me that you would have been better off on your own, not belonging to *Polyphonic College*, not having me as your Principal? I regard you as the college in this way – it is as if WE bought a house with seven rooms. Each room is different from the other. You all know that at the beginning, I worked a lot on maintaining respect for autonomy, ethos, school culture…those are still going to be kept…you still have them. The fact that we have become a college does not mean that you have to divest yourself and become how someone else wants you to be. Every school had to remain autonomous and that's how I believe you all are.

 [*Turning round on HER chair again to look directly into their eyes and pause, if albeit very briefly, in front of each one*.]

P1: [Autonomy? I still have to see it being born! I cannot even organize Prize Day the way I like – it has to conform to the Principal's standards and be similar to that of the other college schools.]

> **FACT:** Whilst <u>retaining their individual identities</u>, the schools within the network would be co-ordinated by a leading facilitator. In this way, ideal school networking should lead to the development of <u>autonomous</u> educational institutions, working within an agreed framework of performance, accountability and outcomes. (p. 41)

P3: [The schools are not autonomous; I would not want to say that they are NEVER AUTONOMOUS! When it comes to the SDP[17], I'm supposed to cater for the individual needs of my school. But if the Principal imposes the inclusion of healthy eating, of eco-school, of literacy, of AfL[18]…how many items can be included? I then end up not catering for my school's basic needs!]

Narrator: The issue of autonomy remains a bone of contention at both school and college level.

> **FACT:** This is a system where the <u>autonomy</u> of schools and the <u>decentralization</u> of services are expected to assume an increasing profile. (p. 25)

P2: For me, the college is a shoulder as I am no longer alone in leading a school, but I am part of a wider circle as all the seven schools, in their own different way, are led by one direction.

S3: [I don't feel collegial at all…Maybe it's because I'm the eldest and I think in a different way, but I don't feel part of the college.]

S2: [I don't feel part of this college at all. I feel that there is a lack of attention to my school by the Principal. Every school should be given the same attention, the

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[17] The 'School Development Plan' is drawn up by the Head of each individual school together with the other SMT (School Management Team) members, according to the needs of their school.

[18] 'Assessment for Learning' is an issue that is further developed in Act 3, Scene 2.

same service, the same priority. It's not fair for schools, or their Heads, to be given the cold shoulder.]

Narrator: The 'shoulder' metaphor is used in a contradictory way by these two Heads whose adaptation to *Polyphonic College* and its reception is very diverse – the 'shoulder' metaphor 'includes' P2, while 'excluding' S2.

P1: For me, a college means networking, working together, you are not alone as a Head of school – it means an identity.

P2: I don't believe that the idea of the college has lost school identity.

P3: [I liked it better when my students had their pink and grey uniform rather than the blue one which is standard for all the schools in the college. I also liked our name 'Lily-of-the-valley Primary School' much better than the anonymous 'Primary A, Polyphonic College']

Narrator: Gaining the identity of *Polyphonic College* or losing one's individual school identity? Do Heads have to make a choice?

CP: This is how I see it…There is the atmosphere of a family, almost. WE have managed to build this really well.

Narrator: Do all the Heads experience this "familial" atmosphere?

P4: I feel that there is so much energy among us and we really look forward to meeting in the CoH.

P3: [There needs to be a strong sense of belonging, which is entirely lacking on my part! To feel that I belong, I feel the need to be involved in ideas, that one listens to what I have to say, even if things are decided in a different manner then.]

Narrator: P3 doodles as she thinks about collegiality, or its absence, rather. Her sketch resembles a bomb ready for ignition. It makes me wonder at her positioning in *Polyphonic College*.
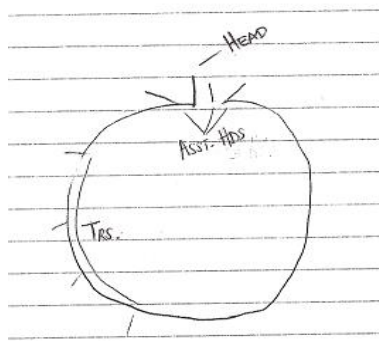
P3: [I draw my staff as a circle, with all the members at par, occupying positions along the circumference, I am at the 'top' of the circumference with my Assistant Heads very close and the teachers more dispersed. In the college, I am positioned in the same way, with the Principal at the top of the circumference and the other school leaders around – but with a difference - 'I AM ME' in my school as I can deliver what I believe in…whereas in the college I sometimes (doesn't mean 'never') don't feel that free to speak about my vision.]

P1: Upon being networked, I realized that I could benefit from shared problem-solving and decision-making in good relationships with other Heads. WE found strength in unity!

S2: [Maybe it was not the right moment for colleges to be introduced. We were not mature enough for this reform, and still are not perhaps. We should have been given more information about it.]

Denise: The college is regarded by the Heads as a form of imposition, although there is an element of ambivalence in their response to it. At the beginning of this scene, P3 narrates herself as Head as the locus of power at the receiving end – the point of application of power exercised by higher leadership hierarchies.

Foucault: This Head narrates herself as the 'vehicle of power'[19]– a channel for the asymmetrical and uni-directional flow of power from the Principal, the Directors General and the Minister to the various stakeholders below. Networking has created a 'discursive field'[20], limiting, or rather, delineating what the Heads can do and say. Heads are subjects of the policy discourse, and therefore, have to carry out the reform as set out within the policy's discursive framework and boundaries.

Denise: On the other hand, 'contrived collegiality'[21], experienced as a beneficial 'imposition' by P1, is regarded as a positive effect of power, thus bringing YOUR reversal of the repressive hypothesis of power[22] in operation. *[while turning her head to look directly at HIM]*

Foucault: 'Intradiscursive dependencies'[23] emerge in this scene. Through these the discourse of networking as practised by 'their leaders' is utilized as an instrument of power to subjectify the Heads.

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[19] (1980, p. 98)

[20] (1991b, p. 63)

[21] (Hargreaves, 1994)

[22] (1979)

[23] (1991b, p. 53-72)

Denise: The college lacks the autonomy it was 'promised', still being directed by the 'Higher Authorities' who have raised expectations, becoming more demanding.

It seems that the Principal contradicts HER own discourse – "MY school" (the leader's isolated perception of her school in the pre-college setup) has now implicitly been converted into "MY college", or better still, "MY" schools in "MY" college – SHE is possessive of HER "college" and the constituent schools just as Heads were (or *still* are) of THEIR schools. The Principal presents HERSELF as the founder of *Polyphonic College*, the sense of pride and ownership in being the pioneer. This affinity with "MY schools" within "MY college" comes out in the use of personal pronouns, adopting an almost maternal role in their regards. This 'act of giving birth' is presented as a challenge due to having had to foster a sense of collegiality to replace the entrenched sense of isolationism in schools.

Foucault: *[who seems to agree with her reasoning]* Contradictions abound within HER own 'regime of truth'[24]. The voices of isolationism of the Heads are now being articulated by the Principal – leading to a battle within the discursive truth of the Principal. The autonomy of the schools (or worse, the leaders) is being appropriated by the Principal, not only in the way SHE practises leadership behaviour, but also in the way SHE talks, HER philosophy, HER discourse – it becomes the 'regime of truth' by which SHE identifies with the network and the school leaders. This discursive framework can be interpreted as both coercive and enabling for the schools and the leaders: Heads have to 'share' their leadership and school autonomy with the Principal, while simultaneously benefitting from her direct attention and distributed leadership

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[24] (2002h, p. 132)

within the college. Power thus emerges as an insinuating mechanism, as being both coercive and enabling.

Denise: *[this IS getting interesting]* Use of the personal pronoun "my" may be regarded as a political technology, a mechanism by which SHE tries to weave the Heads into this discourse of 'collegiality'. **[p. 160]** "My" signifies that SHE is not just their leader but feels a sense of belonging as in "your" schools are "my" schools – SHE gave birth to *Polyphonic College*, after all. However, this discourse offers the potential for resistance. Through narrating her school as being discriminated against, S2 constructs her own identity as an outcast within the college. Her discursive narrative thus reveals an entrenched sense of school ownership and a simultaneous resistance to the performance of the Principal according to the policy discourse.

As you yourself have said, the Heads emerge as 'divided selv[es]'[25] as they position themselves in favour of the reform but against the way it was enacted. Having been subjectified by the global discourse of networking, decentralization, and collaboration, pervasive in the realm of educational leadership, they exercise scepticism and problematization.

Foucault: *[listens attentively and nods]* The narratives of S2 and S3 **[p. 159]** reveal subjectivity as the product of a 'power game'. Their opinions are subjectified by global discourse which they are in favour of, while rejecting the local discursive framework of the network setup.

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[25] (1992)

Denise: The Principal HERSELF disagrees with the college setup being a system of 'contrived collegiality'[26] which is a form of subtle coercion, of what you call 'masked power'[27] exercised by the policy discourse over school leaders, revealing HER partial acceptance of the policy discourse. The Principal is subjectified by the global discourse of networking even while rejecting the local framework of the network setup.

Foucault: The leaders experience the college through MY notion of the 'political double-bind'[28], retaining individualism within collegiality. The discursive narrative of the Heads reveals an embraced collegiality as opposed to an entrenched sense of school ownership, in turn bringing out the asymmetrical power flowing within relationships.

Denise: It seems that the Principal has a different understanding of *"degrees of autonomy"* than what is understood by the Heads. There is a clash between how educational leadership discourse is 'performed' in schools, and how the schools are 'positioned' by the educational leadership discourse in the FACT policy. An example in point is that the agenda of the School Development Plan is dictated by the Principal. Collegiality is experienced in different ways as revealed in the use of the metonymy of the 'shoulder' by the two Heads. **[p. 163-4]**

FACT has not maintained its promise of decentralization, as although school leaders respect the different levels of leadership present, there is an expressed wish for more school autonomy. Due to the interference by the Principal, belonging to the college may be regarded as 'a mechanism for increased surveillance'[29]. The FACT policy made false

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[26] (Hargreaves, 1994)

[27] (1998)

[28] (2002g, p. 336)

[29] (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002)

promises as rather than giving more autonomy gradually, the Heads complain about having none at all! The Principal embraces the discourse of autonomy. HER exercise of leadership as narrated by the Heads (P1 and P3), however, is an open contradiction of the FACT discursive framework which is the Principal's 'regime of truth' as you yourself describe.[30]

Foucault: The Heads are subject to HER 'normalizing judgement'[31] which aims at conformity, thus generating more homogeneity within the college.

Denise: Through HER use of the plural pronoun 'WE', the Principal narrates network leadership as a collective effort.

Foucault: Indeed, SHE does try to have power relations which dissipate through all relational structures of this 'networked' college. The power SHE divulges to the Heads is both coercive and enabling, constructing the Heads' identities as powerful within the network – powerful to the extent that SHE allows.

Denise: Therefore, SHE can be regarded as both the 'keeper' and 'distributor' of power!

Denise: School identity seems to be a bone of contention among the Heads. P2 states that contrary to losing school identity, power can be generated positively by the networked stakeholders in fostering a positive reputation. But this is not the same for P3 who speaks about a loss of school identity. The 'discursive boundaries'[32] as imposed on the schools through the college uniform and loss of the pre-college school name serve

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[30] (2002h, p. 132)

[31] (1991a, p. 177)

[32] (Britzman, 2000, p. 36)

as a 'strategy' for homogeneity, disciplining the Heads to lead within the discursive boundaries of FACT.

Foucault: Not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable, some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions **[…]** None shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not **[…]** qualified to do so.[33]

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[33] (1981, p. 62)

Scene 3: Exam paper setting: Isolation or collaboration?

Narrator: This scene depicts collaboration on exam paper setting as a controversial issue among the Principal, S1, and S3. While the annual exam papers for state primary and secondary schools are issued by the Examinations Department on a national level (prepared by the E.O's[34] and H.O.D's[35] of the subjects concerned), those for the half-yearly exams are college-based. This means that they are the same for all the schools within the college, and are prepared by the subject H.O.D's or jointly by the teachers.

CP: We have to speak very urgently about the Half-Yearly exams for the next scholastic year and the papers from Form 1 to Form 5 for secondary schools, and from Year 3 to Year 6 for primary schools. It is important for the H.O.D's to start meeting immediately, that is, you have to start preparations this term.

[*Addressing Matilda and being very abrupt and demanding*] Send them an email. Where there are no H.O.D's, communicate with the Heads. *[reverting HER gaze back to the Heads]* Be aware that papers have to be finalized and the teachers need to be informed about what to cover in their schemes of work by the end of this term.

Narrator: Isn't SHE being overly demanding with the already over-burdened Heads?

S1: That means that we have to make arrangements for exams now?

S3: By the end of this year?

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[34] E.O. stands for 'Education Officer' whose role is that of inspecting and auditing the quality of education in state, church and independent schools under the direction of the Director General. The E.O. also mentors H.O.Ds.

[35] H.O.D. stands for 'Head of Department' who has half the teaching load and is responsible for a subject, being expected to collaborate with the college and school educational leadership to ensure high standards of teaching and learning, under the guidance of the Education Officers.

CP: Of course. This year we need to know about the topics to be covered. That is, NOW! Let's start with the H.O.D's. [*Addressing S1*] Start with the H.O.D's, with those subjects that have H.O.D's.

S1: So I will speak to the H.O.D's.

S3: Don't you realize that what you are proposing is way too much? It involves too many papers to be 'shared' in such a short time!

S1: The problem is not that they are set in collaboration…the problem is the time needed to meet up. How can the H.O.D's run around from one school to another? They wouldn't have enough time to meet and talk.

[More discussion goes on about the time involved and all the problems that crop up…]

CP: You have to intervene as Heads. The system is complicated…that's how it is and that's how it will remain [*in a matter-of-fact tone*] However, we have to take a stand. Go directly to the H.O.D of the subject involved and assign him/her the paper.

CP: [When it comes to leading a school, I believe that the current political situation will exert its influence on us as schools – the issue being how long it will take. When the Prime Minister says that we have to be the best in Europe, it means that even the schools have to be the best in Europe. It means that as a leader, you have to be the best in Europe. Therefore, in that way, HE has already provided you with a direction. There are higher expectations from me as a leader by the Minister of Education.]

Narrator: The Principal rationalizes 'HER' demanding nature through the demands coming from the State (in the figure of the Prime Minister), evidence of the heavy

influence of political discourse and the situation in the macro-sphere at the time of the study.

S1: But the problem is…I understand your point and I agree very much with the fact of having common papers. The problem is that the expectations of X may differ from the expectations of Y…

CP: The problem only exists where there are no H.O.D's! We have to see not where YOU don't have H.O.Ds, but where they are lacking as a college. You have to start thinking on a college level…

S3: Can we give teachers the possibility of setting papers themselves?

S1: All my teachers would opt to do it themselves rather than work with your teachers! [*addressing S3 without looking directly at her*] Because they do not want to work with those of School A! *[shouting now…]*

S1: [For me, 'college' means networking, working together, not simply sharing ideas, even organizing things together […] an exchange of knowledge […] you are not alone as a Head of School]

Narrator: S1 speaks very highly of practising collegiality in the aside, but her attitude towards networking during the Council of Heads does not emerge as such… …

CP: As far as I am concerned, you can do what you like. However, listen, you are speaking about collaboration. This shows that the schools are not yet prepared to collaborate… *[above the loud voices of S1 and S3]* Do not revert to the old system!!

FACT: The college will network the schools forming the college by <u>fostering a team culture</u> amongst the Heads of School and by facilitating the effective co-ordination of the said schools. (p. 71)

CP: So now we can start the system where we cover the window panes with brown paper so that no-one gets to know what's happening in the classroom [*in a mocking tone, with a smirk on HER face*]. Beware! I think that it is inevitable that *we* work together, collaborating is inevitable.

Narrator: This was literally the common practice in pre-college days, so everything was kept in secret. I experienced it myself as a child attending a state primary school.

FACT: One thing is clear – <u>individual schools cannot achieve this alone</u> […] Networks of schools offer more hope […] No single school can hope to provide <u>diversity</u>, <u>flexibility</u> or an <u>economy of service</u> this entails. Networks can. (p. 62)

S1: I don't have any objection to collaborating.

Narrator: How can S1 contradict herself in such an overt manner?

S3: Neither do I.

S1: [There are disadvantages of working in a team as not everybody gives the same input or takes things with the same degree of seriousness. For example, if we are setting exam papers, my standards are not the standards of S3. We have a very good working relationship, but I have a different leadership style. I have two Assistant Heads in charge of exam papers who have my full trust – I just make sure that the work is being done, but I'm not going to check each and every exam paper! That's what S3 expects me to do! I don't have expertise in every subject,

and besides that, I don't have the time! She has a smaller school population of three hundred students while I have around nine hundred!]

Narrator: Is she trying to justify her tenacious resistance to collaborate? Attempts at collaboration between secondary school Heads do exist, but are encountered by a lot of resistance… …

S3: [I try to collaborate with S1, but it's a nuisance and a lot of obstacles are involved. We have different standards, S1 and I – I am a perfectionist so I check that all the papers are set out exactly according to the given specifications. So when I checked the papers sent over by her school, I found discrepancies, and phoned S1 to ask her about it, she took it as an offence and started screaming on the phone. It is a matter of 'mismatch' of standards – I am a perfectionist and want the papers to be all standardized.]

Narrator: S3 mumbles to herself as she doodles, while drawing a flat and a three-dimensional representation of her positionings. Very circular…These cones, which resemble tepees, do look a bit confusing. She must be one of those cones, if I understood well, supporting the Principal at the top!
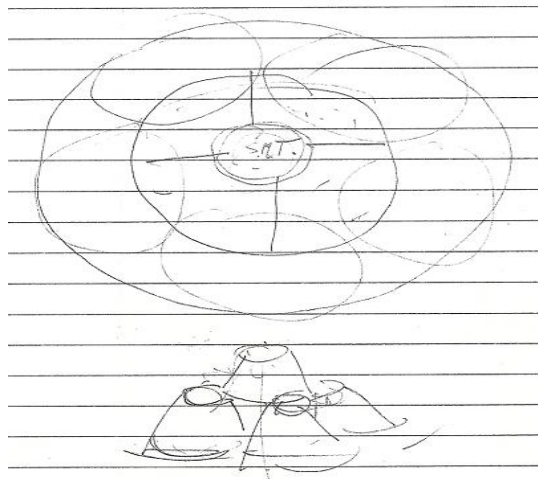
S3: [In my school, I am in the centre, but reaching out to all the teachers – the SMT are the cones keeping me in place, but there is no isolation – the circle intersects and I have boulders for support. At college level, it is basically the same, but

flatter, with the Principal at the centre, intersecting schools, closer to us but with the distance growing as it moves further away from the centre to the periphery. As an Assistant Head, I didn't have any contact with the Principal, now as a Head, I feel closer – the gap has diminished.]

CP: That is, even for the most basic things, *we* cannot have, I'm going to speak as a Principal now, *I* cannot have two students in two different schools in the college who follow a completely different programme. There may be differences, okay, but I can only have one benchmark…I only have one yardstick, I have one college, with a lot of rooms – each room is a school. The students attend different schools but they are in the same college. Therefore, we have to ensure their equal entitlement, so as not to create injustices. That leads to more synchronization among you Heads in the College.

FACT: The Principal will support the schools within the college to grow together as effective providers of quality education. (p. 73)

S1: Because individuals are individuals and the expectations are different.

CP: But the standards are the same. Variations will always be present.

CP: [I believe that the Ministry should be strong. That is to say, the direction taken by the Ministry should be crystal-clear and very strong, otherwise it would be difficult for the nation state to obtain the desired results.]

Narrator: The Principal's obsession with results leads HER to go against HER convictions – SHE very adamantly insists on more decentralization for the college and HER schools while proposing a powerful central direction.

S1: I agree with you one hundred per cent and I re-declare that I am in favour of having common papers. The problem is to meet up…things become more difficult and complicated.

P1: Yes, that's the problem! [*in a loud voice*]

S1: That's the problem! [*in a high-pitched voice*] Not the idea or the logic behind it.

[S1, P1, S3 and P3 continue to argue. The voices become high-pitched. P1 and S1 can be easily distinguished above the others.]

CP: Everything is difficult in life, nothing comes easy...Listen to me, listen to me, don't speak about the schools, speak about the college! The Heads of Department belong to the college, not to the school! The H.O.D's do not belong to XXXX secondary school, they belong here, to the college – that is, what she has, what she has, what she has [*indicating different Heads*] – *we* amalgamate them…

S3: My H.O.D's can come to the Principal's office for the meetings.

S2: Even those at my school. I don't have any problems with that. They will be released when the Principal tells us.

S1: My H.O.D's will remain at my school. Yours can meet them there!

Narrator: S1 still refuses to practise collegiality. She looks rather cross, subdued, and offended as she doodles. Her sketch resembles a halo. I wonder what she wants to imply by this? A victim of this paper setting exercise, perhaps?
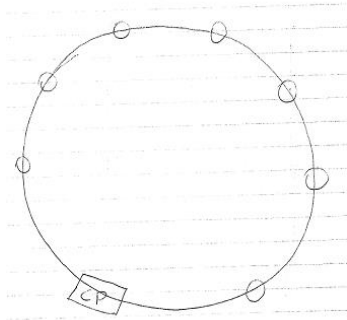
S1: **[I am one of them. I feel part of them. These are the Heads…obviously headed…but in the circle with us, by the Principal.]**

Narrator: Being one of THEM, feeling part of THEM… through isolation and non-collaboration?

CP: No! The H.O.D's of XXXX secondary school will meet in MY boardroom. Those H.O.D's belong to the college not to your school! If they are left at your school, they will continue thinking about the needs of one school only – your school – not about the needs of *Polyphonic College*. They have to think about the college.

S1: [*in a very offended voice*] Let me make this clear – the H.O.D's in my school are all aware of the fact that they belong to *Polyphonic College* and they all work for the benefit of the college, as far as I know...

CP: The most important thing is that we cater for the needs of the schools. Schools are the most important, not 'The Centre'. 'The Centre' does have its importance but that's all. It's not the one and all, it's not everything. Have you all understood? That's settled now. Shall we move on? Let's move on.

Narrator: I'm getting puzzled here. Hasn't SHE just stated that the Ministry should provide a direction that is "very strong and crystal-clear"?

FACT: A new network educational organization, however <u>light and flexible</u> in structure, needs to have a <u>firm and solid</u> hub to hold together and prosper […] The State has to ensure that the system of individual educational institutions operate within the parameters of a <u>coherent national educational strategy</u>, and to assure the quality of the

educational provision that these <u>increasingly autonomous institutions</u> <u>claim</u> to be providing. (p. 30)

P1: [*trying to ease the tension by introducing an entirely different topic*] By the way, did you watch the news feature about *Isolation College* and their award for best practice of 'green measures'? If only we had joined forces, we wouldn't have been the runners-up…*[sounding defeated and somewhat disappointed]*

CP: That would have led to disqualification as it was open on an individual college basis.

CP: [I am not happy with the present situation, I want more...the college still falls back upon itself...There were attempts, I did try to build bridges with other schools in other colleges...But they didn't get rolling...that's all. It is easier to work on a college level. Just as in the past, a Head of school used to feel more comfortable, and found it easier and more natural to work in her own school, and now she had the challenge to work not just within her school but within a college context, that challenge is upon us as well because we have to work outside the college, with other people.]

P1: We have to pay attention not to get cocooned as a college and be unaware of what is taking place in other colleges…which practically, is happening at the moment.

S1: *[she, who must always say something]* Not really. We don't need to worry. I meet other Heads when we have a national meeting and we talk before, during, and after the break. In this system, we are working together as a college in our own college, rather than networking with the outside…a good practice, in my opinion…which makes me feel very comfortable!!

Narrator: Working within one's "comfort zone" may lead to college isolation - what is actually happening at the moment.

CP: **[A lot of energy was channelled into establishing clear standards and clear practices in our own college […] All the Heads know that VERY WELL!]**

P2: [We already have enough on our plate…within OUR COLLEGE. Besides, we have to inform the Principal before embarking on a new initiative […] HER permission and approval need to be sought…]

S2: [It is a known fact that some of the Principals compete with each other…as to who is the better and the best … which does not engender the right climate [for inter-college networking]**]**

CP: [I have a good relationship with the other Principals. I do not feel that I am in some sort of competition with anyone. Personally, I do not feel as if I am competing […] I respect them as colleagues.]

Narrator: Competition rather than collaboration among colleges seems to be the norm – but not according to the Principal!

CP: [*who seems to be getting a bit uncomfortable with the topic under discussion*] Let's adjourn for a break, a short break. You can help yourselves to coffee, tea, hot chocolate, biscuits...whatever Matilda has prepared.

[*They eagerly get out of their chairs and follow the aroma of the brewing coffee. The discussion continues during the break, but it IS NOT for OUR ears…or eyes…]*

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Denise: This novel policy discourse of collegiality has created a dichotomy between the pre-college discourse of isolationism and the present one of collaboration which the Principal is striving to generate − there is what YOU defined as a RAGING BATTLE between these educational leadership discourses[36]. The scene opens with the Principal subjectifying those beneath HER through HER demanding tone, attitude, manner, deadlines, and imperative language. [*Foucault nods in agreement*]

The Heads attempt to resist collegiality which is presented as a normative truth, they offer transgression which is curbed by the Principal. Although there is initial compliance by S1 **[p. 173]**, this develops into a very powerful, rather passionate resistance throughout the scene. SHE tries to make the discourse of collegiality and collaboration drown out that of isolationism and individualism. Influenced by the global discourse of local politics, the Principal attempts to generate a discourse of efficiency and achievement, thus keeping in line with the highly demanding FACT policy discourse. It proves to be a discursive struggle for the Principal to promote collegiality and collaboration. S1 tries to reject 'collegiality' through the discourse of achievement, thus bringing about the play of interdiscursive dependencies by stating that achievement requires isolationism (through the different expectations of the Heads).

Foucault: *[whose excitement visibly seems to mount every time Denise utters the word 'discourse']* This rather heated argument over paper setting unfolding among S1, S3, and the CP can be regarded as a strange contest, a confrontation, a power relations, a

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[36] (2000b)

battle among discourses and through discourses[37]. The entire battle is taking place within discourse itself – the discourse of educational leadership and collegiality!

Denise: While the Principal takes up the discursive positioning of FACT in trying to promote the discourse of collegiality, by "fostering a team culture", the Heads refuse to take up this positioning, they refuse FACT's fact that "individual schools cannot achieve this alone"[38].

Foucault: This shows the 'systems of formation',[39] the discursive formations within the college as contingent, provisional, and fallible.

Denise: The Principal strives to foster collegiality – power emanates from HER as SHE tries to circulate it among the Heads. SHE subjectifies the Heads to the discursive framework of the FACT policy, while at the same time resisting the policy discourse by attempting to garner more autonomy for the schools within the college away from 'The Centre', narrating this in terms of a discourse of progressive reform, efficiency, and achievement. SHE wants totalization for the schools within the college, simultaneously with individualism of the college from 'The Centre' – embracing collegiality and individualism at the same time at different levels. **[p. 177-9]** However, when asked about opportunities for inter-networking with other colleges, the Principal narrates HERSELF in a very ambivalent position. **[p. 180-1]**

Foucault: There is an intradiscursive battle within HER discourse – SHE wants HER schools to collaborate, while SHE does not collaborate with other colleges. The luxury

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[37] (1975a, p. x)

[38] p. 180

[39] (2002e, p. 121)

of working within HER college has been internalized as a technology of the self, to which SHE fails to offer resistance.

Denise: The same problem that the networking system worked so hard to eradicate – school isolation – is now unfolding at college level – with colleges working in isolation with no opportunities for inter-networking, with intra-networking taking place among the schools in the same college. Is it for power to remain within the college? [*Foucault merely shrugs …*]

Both the Principal and the Heads explore the rationalities of the exercise behind college isolationism. There is also the element of inter-college competition, which is subtly endorsed by FACT.

Foucault: This denotes the unequal power flow among the different networks, due to the repressive hypothesis of power (that I worked so hard against to overturn), that certain Principals still cling on to. If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?[40]

Denise: Oh, you are always saying that!

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[40] (1979, p. 36)

Chapter Eight: The fluidity in the emerging relations of power

> On the contrary, I set out to grasp the mechanisms of the effective exercise of power; and I do this because those who are inserted in these relations of power, who are implicated therein, may, through their actions, their resistance, and their rebellion, escape them, transform them – in short, no longer submit to them.
>
> (Foucault, 2001b, p. 911-912)

Act 2: Relationships as perceived and performed by the leaders within the network

Narrator: The coffee break is over, well, it supposedly ended ten minutes ago, when SHE declared that it was time to resume the meeting, but HER mobile phone rang and SHE crossed to the other side of the boardroom, for some privacy, apparently engaged in a heated argument with the person at the other end. The Heads take advantage of this un/expected interruption, loitering by the coffee table and sipping the last dregs from their coffee cups, some still in earnest conversation, while others are listening in. SHE seems perturbed, frustrated almost, ending the conversation in a somewhat subdued, *"I will come, you can take my word for it […] Right now, I'm in the midst of a CoH meeting, so I can't just pack up and come and leave THEM all stranded. I'll come to the Directorate as soon as WE finish".*

Scene 1: The Principal, the Heads, and human relationships

Narrator: This scene, which starts off the middle part of the meeting, depicts the relationships between the Heads and the Principal and among Heads as they emerge within the dynamics of leadership interaction in the networked setting.

CP: That was a rather prolonged coffee break! You MUST be ready for the next item on the agenda now. I just hope we don't have any more <u>outside</u> interruptions to be able to <u>fit in</u> the whole agenda by four o'clock, at the latest. [*Barely having finished HER sentence, SHE is interrupted from the <u>inside</u>, as P1 makes a query which SHE is reluctant to answer, or at least SHE seems to want to avoid at the moment.*]

P1: [*in her characteristic loud voice and uninhibited manner*] Can you kindly give us more information about the new directives by which the Directorates intend to carry out a 'reshuffle' in some of the colleges? Are we on the black list? An ex-colleague of mine, now Head of Primary Z forming part of *Active College* has just been moved to *Utopian College* at the other end of the island…And I really would not like the same thing to happen to me! [*P1's voice becomes louder, her pace quicker, and her tone more demanding*]. So, what is going to happen to OUR college, to *Polyphonic College*? [*This seems to draw the attention of all those present, as all the murmuring stops suddenly and eight pairs of eyes – the seven Heads and Matilda included – are all riveted on HER.*]

CP: [*SHE takes some time to answer, before breaking out in a smile.*] Be assured that the composition of *Polyphonic College* is not going to change. You are going to remain as you are.

[*Five of the Heads – P4, P3, P2, P1, S1 – including Matilda don't even give HER time to finish off HER sentence as they break out in a round of applause. Only S3 and S2 do not react to this 'good' news.*]

FACT: The Council of Heads will nurture <u>a spirit of collegiality</u> in the running of the college, while developing <u>a common ethos</u>. (p. 79).

Narrator: It does not seem to have nurtured a spirit of collegiality among <u>all</u> the college Heads, however.

S3: [The other Heads view things from a different perspective, perhaps I am still a bit old-fashioned, that's why I don't think in that way. I'm the eldest. I just feel like an outsider. I don't feel part of the college.]

Narrator: This Head does seem to be short-changed by the college – feelings of unacceptance due to age, failed attempts at collaboration on paper setting as we saw in I,iii…

P1: I can openly declare that I have a very good relationship with you all. We have a very good communication network among us. We consult each other, we take initiatives, we work a lot and seriously…WHILE STILL RESPECTING THE TRADITIONS OF EACH INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL.

Narrator: As researcher, I realize that P1 comes across as occupying two contradictory positionings in relation to autonomy. In the CoH, she celebrates collegiality <u>and</u> the retention of individuality. In the interview, she positions the CP as an 'oppressor' to that autonomy as we saw in I,ii where she complained that she can't even organize Prize Day as she wanted. **[p. 186]** There, she positioned herself as a 'resistor' who is then repositioned as a compliant Head by the CP who resists P1's resistance and by the other Heads who easily comply on this issue![41]

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[41] Prize Day is accorded a lot of importance in the Maltese education system and is a highly significant event for each individual school during which the successful students are acknowledged for their efforts. After the introduction of colleges, it started being called 'Celebration Day' and all the students were given a certificate, instead of book prizes to the first three places in each subject. It was the Principal who made the decisions regarding organization of the event to ensure homogeneity across the college.

> **FACT:** State schools will acquire <u>greater autonomy</u> and will be in a position to <u>nurture their own identities</u>. In this way, each school will adapt the national curriculum to its own needs. (p. v)

Narrator: FACT emphasizes autonomy <u>and</u> individual identity. There seems to be a contradiction between this and the previous scene where the CP adamantly insisted on standardization among college schools.

CP: As Principal, I have worked closely with you all and I have come to understand that as Heads of School, you are all very different…with your individual leadership style. But you all know that YOU HAVE YOUR OWN SPACE and that whenever you seek help from MY OFFICE, it is always given. You all know that you can work in your own way without any interference.

Narrator: But this comes out blatantly as not true! You could have fooled me!

> **FACT:** A college is a network of schools and *not a merger*. The proposed structure <u>will still allow enough internal diversity</u> to enable the stretching of all abilities to the *highest excellence* possible. It will safeguard against a debilitating levelling down of all provision. (p. xvi)

Narrator: I am overwhelmed by all these contradictory discourses coming from the Principal, from FACT - space, non-interference, diversity - while the Heads speak of impositions, authority…

CP: [They all know that we are in a somewhat demanding context where one expects certain results, certain practices, a certain way of doing things.]

P3: [In the college we feel free to talk, one even feels free to criticize, but there are still certain things that are imposed. We have to do THIS, we have to find space for THAT…]

Narrator: The Heads' 'own space and working pace' as narrated by the Principal does come at a price. It is a conditional type of 'internal diversity' – one which does not permit them to be diverse!

P1: [SHE respects our territory a lot, but then unconsciously you get used to the fact that unknowingly, there are certain things that the Principal's office has to be made aware of. It's not fair on HER to get to know of the matter from another source. One has to respect THE AUTHORITIES.]

[S1 looks directly at the CP, as if about to say something, when P1 puts the Principal in a rather awkward position and takes HER by surprise by asking]

P1: Do you know who is going to replace you, coming September?

Narrator: The Principal was going to lead *Polyphonic College* till the end of the scholastic year due to having been promoted to higher echelons. The Heads are worried about their 'new' Principal.

CP: [*Looking a bit hesitant, indecisive about the answer*] I haven't got a clue as to who will be coming…it's still too early on in the year. I presume they'll issue a call of application for the selection process to take place. Don't you worry, I'll provide mentoring to whoever will be taking MY PLACE.

Narrator: The Principal is not involved in the recruitment and selection process of HER successor – this is the domain of the Directorate for Educational Services.

P1: [*raising her voice…her tension now very evident*] Of course, I'm worried and will remain so until I meet HIM or HER. We could have a new Principal who destroys what we have managed to build. She would have to change because we ARE NOT USED TO BEING SILENT [*almost shouting now*]. We are used to talking, this is our release – the CoH – where we discuss issues. [*lowering her tone to show the seriousness of the situation…sounding very worried*] The Directorates have a great responsibility when they choose the Principal […] The Principal is the DETERMINING FACTOR of the college.

S3: It's true, it's true as within our college, within our CoH, one feels comfortable to talk, to argue on disagreements as at the end we do reach a conclusion. There is so much energy among us Heads and the Principal and we really look forward to meeting.

[*S1 nods in agreement*]

Narrator: However, I also get confused by S3 who narrated herself as an *outsider* in *Polyphonic College* in I,ii.

P3: [I AM ME in my school as I can deliver what I believe in…whereas in the college I sometimes (doesn't mean 'never') don't feel that free to speak about my vision. Moving from one college to another is not easy…I do have some nostalgia for my first college] [*sounding very wistful*]

Narrator: In speaking about the other college P3 perhaps reveals more than she realizes about *Polyphonic College*.

P1: We're not going to be quiet…We're used to having a lot of NOISE…We'll just drive the new Principal crazy until SHE or HE changes HER or HIS behaviour.

[The 'loudest' Heads start shouting and clapping, with the Principal now laughing heartily]

Narrator: I must admit that a lot of noise is generated in the CoH. But do some Voices <u>choose</u> to remain silent?

S2: [I do not speak up in the CoH, in the presence of the other Heads. I have come to realize that the inferiority complex I suffered from when I was young, at times comes out during a CoH meeting.]

[The Principal has stopped laughing and SHE is evidently very pleased with the 'collegial' atmosphere SHE has managed to foster among HER Heads. A smile pasted on HER face, SHE tries to make HER voice heard above the noise…]

CP: I have a VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP, GOOD…VERY…VERY…VERY GOOD. We work well together, we have built A VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP, and we have A VERY GOOD WORKING ENTENDRE. Nowadays, naturally, every day is an investment in the relationship and I invest a lot, a lot, a lot in relationships. We get along very well, talk a lot…

Narrator: No conflicts with the Heads are ever mentioned by the 'overly positive' Principal while the Heads narrate and perform otherwise! Does SHE retain HER privileged position of power through HER quasi-perfect construction of 'Polyphonic College'?

CP: [Heads are no longer afraid of making decisions as they know that THE COLLEGE will offer support, will intervene, will help. And you start building, piece by piece, you slowly start gaining more trust. Certain fears are dissipated…I listen a lot, I listen and act. Every day is an investment in relationships.]

P4: *[looking somewhat embarrassed…Her face turns red but she speaks in a very calm manner, an undertone almost]* Look, I'm going to be honest. When I was summoned to the Department and I asked which school and which college, I was very, very hesitant as I had heard so much negativity. And I found something totally different. I don't think I can complain…No words can explain the support that I found…*[still blushing]*

Narrator: P4 finally opens her mouth! The Principal does not offer a reply – SHE just looks very pleased.

P1: [I have a good relationship with THIS Principal, a very, very good relationship. We have built a relationship of deep friendship…of friends. I cannot say that it was like that from the beginning. I used to ask myself, 'Who is SHE? Why did SHE come here if SHE was never even a Head?' But it resulted that SHE DID WELL…One of the best things was that SHE always allowed us our own space.]

Narrator: P1 doodles as she reflects. This is a strangely phallic portrayal of *Polyphonic College*, what relationship is she implying between the Principal and the Heads?

P1: [We are one big group (me and the other Heads) SHE is everywhere […] SHE is one of us. One of us, but we do look up to HER…we look up to HER because when we needed HER help, we found it […] There are Principals
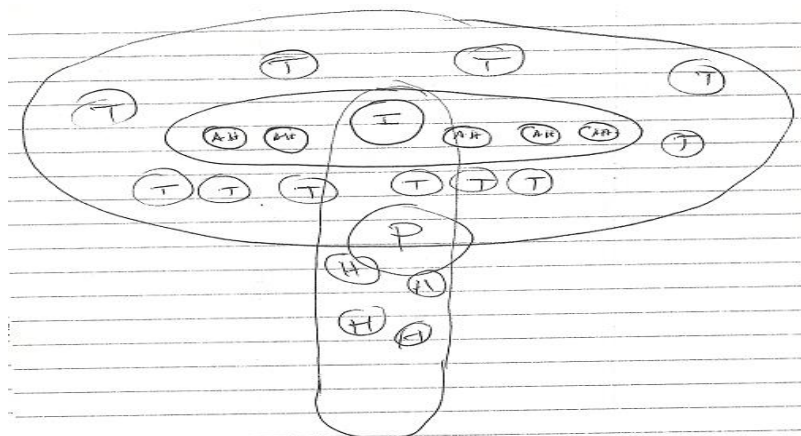
who want to get involved in everything […] SHE is here. SHE is with us, as well, but with a capital 'P'.]

Narrator: Is the Principal's centrality in the conceptual map consistent with an 'allowance of space' as earlier asserted?

S3: [I had several arguments with HER when I had to move schools. SHE told me not to interfere – a lot of emails were exchanged – every email I sent HER was forwarded to the DG, so the matter just escalated…I had to give in. SHE had the final word.]

Narrator: S3 contradicts the "very, very good relationship" the Principal narrates having with HER Heads! Why does SHE remain silent about these 'moments of resistance'?

CP: I work very hard with you all as I want *Polyphonic College* to be one of the best, if not <u>the</u> best college in Malta. That is why I'm always after good results, in today's world, one has to give results.

[Looking around expectantly at all the Heads who nod in agreement, except for S2 who seems to remain indifferent]

S1: [SHE is a very energetic person, very fast, very demanding and hardworking, with very clear views, harping on results – that is something none of us as Heads of School under HER principalship can ignore or deny. I understand HER drive… because if you don't have someone pushing…]

Narrator: The best college in Malta, the best schools in Europe…a very competitive Principal indeed…who earlier on claimed not to be in any sort of competition with the other Principals…

CP: Shall we move on now? Let's move on, let's move on. This term we have to… *[While turning over the pages of the agenda, SHE is suddenly interrupted by the ringing of HER mobile phone. SHE lets it ring, flips it open to check who the caller is, winces, and answers it. SHE walks out of the boardroom to carry out the ensuing conversation which is not meant for the Heads' ears.]*

[As soon as SHE walks out of the door, already 'lost' in conversation with the Other, the silence is replaced by gossip as to the identity of the mysterious caller…]

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Denise: This scene depicts how despite power residing in structure, in terms of the college itself and its leadership positions, power exists very strongly within relationships, bringing into play relations between individuals.

Foucault: [*addressing the audience*] It also enables us to observe the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject, with this human subject, in our case, the Principal or the Head, being equally placed in power relations that are very complex.[42]

Denise: The concern expressed by P1 about the identity of the new Principal **[p. 189-90]** and the subsequent reaction of the majority of the other Heads at the Principal's response, show that despite their attempts at resistance in Act 1, these Heads have been normalized into 'collegiality'.

Foucault: They have adopted this collegiality as a 'technology of the self',[43] as acceptable and legitimate.

Denise: However, the CoH has failed to 'nurture a spirit of collegiality' among all the Heads as laid out in FACT. FACT positions the CoH as the 'binding force' of the networking narrative, however, the CoH of *Polyphonic College* does not always take up this positioning. The CoH is repositioned by the Heads due to their strong attachment to the discourse of individualism whose presence from the pre-college system is still very powerful.

Foucault: [*rather hesitantly*] These can be considered as 'discursive differences',[44] manifesting themselves in various ways.

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[42] (2002g, p. 326-7)

[43] (2000e, p. 177-8)

Denise: Both S2 and S3 remain indifferent to the news of the continuity of *Polyphonic College*, with S3 further repositioning herself as 'outsider' in the college. In contrast to this, P1 describes the power in relationships, generated within this net-like organization.

Foucault: Perhaps S2 and S3 have not been subjectified by this discursive formation of collegiality to the same extent as the other Heads. They manifest overt resistance and indifference but they are coerced to be collegial in attending the CoH and working with 'the others'. As for P1, I have always argued how power exists only within relationships, it brings into play relations between individuals.[45] This, in turn, leads to what turns out to be a very sensitive issue in *Polyphonic College* and also emerges as an inherent tension – the interplay between autonomy and individual school identities, both of which are 'assured' by the Principal and FACT. Promising autonomy while demanding conformity signifies individualization and totalization brought about by modern governmental rationality and the 'multifarious' politics of government.[46] The Heads are thus positioned in a subservient role.

Denise: *[who is eager to develop this argument]* This tension revolving around autonomy and individual identity carries over from the previous scene (I,iii) but emerges more intensely here. It seems that being part of the college, rather, does not permit them to take up the positionings set out in FACT – being allowed "enough internal diversity" - as they are repositioned by the Principal's impositions and insistence on standardization (I,iii) as 'docile, conforming subjects', despite HER reassurance of 'spatial autonomy' and 'individual leadership style'.

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[44] (2000a)

[45] (2002g, p. 337)

[46] (2002a)

Foucault: Power is exercised from innumerable points as the Heads are subjectified by the prevailing global educational discourse of effectiveness, the discursive framework of the FACT policy, and by the Principal's discursive reality of collegiality and relational empowerment. By adopting a results-driven approach, they identify with the positions to which they are summoned by both the policy discourse and the Principal, and perform these positions.

Denise: The Principal narrates herself on very good terms with all the Heads, due to the heavy investment in human relationships which developed over time, all within the supporting help of the Principal's Office. However, not all the Heads reciprocate the Principal's version of a "very, very good relationship".

Foucault: Both P1, in a very 'mild' manner, and S3, can be seen as agents of resistance and transgression, perhaps S3 to a stronger degree as she took longer to be subjectified and the matter was taken to a higher level of power – the Director General who was made aware of the Principal's and S3's 'divergence' of opinions, and intervened on behalf of the Principal. This can be regarded as a form of what I call 'counter-conduct' by the Principal as a response to S3's transgression.

Denise: The Principal is influenced by the market discourse of efficiency, performance, and accountability which SHE has managed to circulate among the Heads through HER insistence on high expectations and results, by which the Heads are in turn disciplined through its adoption as a 'technology of the self'.

Foucault: *[looking thoughtful, adds]* Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak[47] – the CP being 'formed' by market discourse, subsequently 'forming' the Heads who 'form' themselves.

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[47] (2002e, p. 49)

Scene 2: 'The Audit', the Principal's emails and HER school visits: their effects on the Heads

Narrator: The discussion moves to the upcoming audit[48] that is to be held in the schools of P1 and P2 respectively. These two Heads are engaged in a heated discussion, without realizing that SHE is waiting for them…

CP: Are you ready? Can we please continue now? What is the matter with you two? You seem to be lost in your own private world! You can direct your attention to the next item on the agenda which is…[*suddenly interrupted by P2*]

P2: Let me tell you, Miss Perfection, we were talking about our school audit which is to take place in less than a month's time. That's why we were "lost in our own private world" [*sounding offended*] We're just worried about what's actually going to take place, that's all. *[looking directly into HER eyes, with P1 nodding in confirmation*]

CP: [*Breaking into a smile, SHE speaks in a reassuring tone in an attempt to allay their anxieties while looking directly at both of them]* You have to be yourselves as much as you can. You have to be natural…The school is YOURS and you know it very well – YOU are the school! You should just think in this way: 'As Head of school, I know what is important, I know what my problems are'. I, who know your schools well, can assure you that you do not have anything to worry about. You have a lot of positive aspects, a lot of strengths and it is important that they all emerge…

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[48] The audit is a monitoring exercise that is carried out in each state school every five years. The Director for Quality and Assurance, together with his or her Assistant Directors and other related staff spend a week in a particular school checking the infrastructure, teaching, teachers' resources and plans, the school's development plan, at the end of which they prepare a report which is sent to the Head of School.

Narrator: This is what I consider to be an 'excellent' example of the positive effects of power. By celebrating the positive aspects of their schools, SHE is constructing them as effective leaders, encouraging them to take up that positioning with the auditors.

P2: I am not sure exactly what they are going to observe.

P1: There is that list, that checklist in that blue file…

P2: No-one has come to speak to me about the matter.

P1: Did they give you the questionnaires?

S1: They are supposed to hold a meeting with you beforehand.

CP: It is important for you to start preparing for the audit. Why? If you have any shortcomings, it is vital that you prepare yourselves as they will surely ask you about them. That's why I advised you not to take anything for granted in the email.

P2: In the email, you mentioned something regarding maintenance if I remember well.

Narrator: SHE is doing everything in HER power to prepare the Heads in HER college for the audits in *their* schools.

P1: [At the beginning of HER appointment, SHE used to invade our inbox with HER emails. Whenever I saw HER name in the inbox, I used to think 'Oh, my God! Another request! What has happened now? But, eventually, SHE must have realized that SHE was overdoing it as the emails dwindled.]

P4: [When you get all the emails, you say, 'Oh, God! So many emails!!', and then, when they're not there…I used to worry about having done something wrong […] I can request individual meetings via an email, without HER even knowing of the

issues beforehand. SHE is always at our disposition. There are certain periods when SHE is not that readily available, but when I needed HER, I found HER.]

Narrator: Complaining about emails and then expressing anxiety at their absence?

CP: Check what needs to be fixed and I'll send the College Precincts Officer.

Narrator: The College Precincts Officer is in charge of the infrastructural maintenance of all the schools within the college.

P1: Do they look over those things as well? [*sounding slightly worried*]

P3: Of course. They check security issues, health and safety issues…

Narrator: This unfolding discussion can be regarded as an example of collegiality at its best! It's hard to believe that the heated argument over the practice of isolationism surrounding the issue of paper setting in I,iii took place in the same boardroom a short while ago… …

CP: Exactly. *[Addressing P3]* You've already undergone the audit, so you know what I'm speaking about, you can tell them all about it. *[P3 nods and is about to say something when SHE resumes with HER advice.]* But you have to speak about all the work that has been carried out. If we can provide help in any way from the Office, just ask for it. Just let us know and we will help. You have the advantage of being two schools to undergo the audit at the same time, so you can communicate a lot amongst yourselves. This is not a matter for competition, of one trying to be better than the other. Good things do not compete…It would be best if you communicate a lot with each other. Utilize this time to talk as much as you can, to share concerns, to help each other out.

Narrator: Why does SHE raise the issue of competition? The very fact of the audit being held in individual schools is a contradiction to the college system itself. Why not hold an audit of <u>the</u> college?

P1: I don't know about the rest of you, but I feel very comfortable to form part of a group of Heads who can support each other. This concept of networking became more realistic as we started working together – not just our monthly meeting, which I consider to be sacred, but especially when we primary school Heads started working more closely together, consulting each other about decisions and problems. WE PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADS work together a lot and very seriously. *[Her usually jovial tone becoming very serious now.]*

Narrator: P1 narrates herself as 'working a lot and seriously' twice: with all the Heads in II,i, and now with the primary school Heads. Does her confession of a good working relationship in II,i emerge as a non-acknowledgement of the chasm which will soon emerge between primary and secondary school Heads?

P2: [We all meet regularly for the CoH meeting – which is THE ONLY OCCASION when we really, really meet, that is, WE DO HAVE TO ATTEND. With the primary school Heads we are in constant contact via phone and email and even meet up outside the CoH, always, naturally, informing HER as Principal. With the secondary schools, there HAS to be a link over transition.]

[*P4 solemnly nods in agreement to this*]

FACT: They will <u>work in partnership</u> with one another, share resources, will <u>jointly</u> solve problems and create new practices within the <u>specific</u> and <u>particular</u> context of a

group of schools forming one whole unit. Networks will ensure a <u>smoother flow</u> from one level of education to another. (p. xix)

S3: [With the four primary school Heads, there is just networking on student transition. Apart from that, we don't have anything else in common, SO WE CANNOT WORK TOGETHER!]

S1: [I think that the primary schools network with each other more than us three secondary school Heads. We don't have much to collaborate on, but we do collaborate with the primary school Heads. Therefore, it's not a question that we DON'T WANT to work together.]

Narrator: Is this partnership between primary and secondary school Heads a "forced" one they HAVE to endure?

FACT: Networking will <u>facilitate horizontal and vertical linkages</u> between schools from early childhood on to primary and then through to secondary education, in this way lessening one of the challenging problems of the existing system – that of a difficult transition from primary to secondary schooling. (p. 42)

Narrator: Networking has been successful in fostering horizontal linkages within the same level (primary), but not vertical ones across levels (primary and secondary). Unfortunately, these linkages just function at the students' transition period and stop there. Collaboration is limited to that very narrow aspect of transition which involves a visit to the prospective school and the handing over of the pupils' documents.

P2: Only four weeks remain! [*starting to fret and panic again*]

CP: That's why I wanted to put some pressure on you. Well, anything you need, just let the Office know. By the way, please bear in mind that during that week of the audit, the Principal cannot set foot in the schools due to an agreement that had been signed. Not that right now I'm setting much foot in your schools.

P1: It was just on the tip of my tongue *[laughing]*, but you said it yourself!

CP: *[Breaks out in a smile which then develops into laughter]* It's true, it's true, at the moment I'm not visiting schools. Basically, MY PRESENCE in your schools is there, and you all know that I will always give you support, at any time, always, not just occasionally. *[with a faraway look in HER eyes]* At the very beginning, when appointed Principal, I had this vision of a mobile office, of working from different schools on different days of the week in order to be closer to you all. Unfortunately, this never materialized. [*HER tone becoming regretful, all of a sudden*] I do not visit to oversee or criticize, but to learn and have fun. AND YOU ALL KNOW THAT *[making a circular movement with HER eyes to get everybody's attention AND agreement]*

Narrator: Do THEY view HER visits in this manner?

P4: [At the beginning, I used to feel rather uncomfortable. When you have your senior person coming by unannounced, my first thought would be, 'Oh, my goodness! What has happened?']

P3: [HER day-long school visits gave me the opportunity to talk as that is the only space where I feel free to tell HER what I have in mind.]

Narrator: HER 'physical' presence has a diverse significance for the various Heads.

P4: [SHE does not visit my school as much as I think HER presence is felt in other schools. But I think that stems from the fact that we're sort of a bit further out […] The staff feel – I have expressed this to HER at times – that they are on their own because they don't feel that they're really part of the college, being so far away.]

Narrator: Indirectly criticizing the Principal's physical absence while simultaneously attempting to excuse HER exhibits P4's subjectification by the Principal <u>and</u> her critique.

S1: [HER daily visits, even just to greet me or to check how I was doing, were a boost for my morale.]

S2: [I am sometimes offended as SHE is supposed to spend a day per term in each school. SHE has never come here!! That is, I have never seen HER here! Without telling me, you are telling me, 'Listen, you are NOBODY! Your school is NOTHING!' And this disturbs me a lot. The students don't know who the Principal is. I think that SHE's got to make HER presence felt here.]

Narrator: A notable discrepancy in the frequency of the Principal's visits to the schools of S1 and S2 exists. How does this translate in terms of relations of power – daily visits as compared to a complete absence?

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Denise: [*turning to the audience*] This scene contributes to the development of the theme of relationships as it is explored in Act II in three main ways: the Principal empowers P1 and P2 in order to prepare them for the upcoming audit; this, in turn, leads to exposing the very strong bond among primary school Heads and their detachment from the secondary schools. It also reveals the Principal's 'unconscious' or 'masked' exercise of power. [*looking back at Foucault*]

This scene opens with a discussion around the upcoming audit, the Heads' worries indirectly revealing how they have been subjectified by the prevailing market discourse of effectiveness, efficiency, outcomes, and results, and how they position themselves in terms of the issue of accountability which, as YOU say, is a 'regime of truth'[49] in FACT. **[p. 199]** The Principal invests a lot in relationships, relationships where power can be exercised dynamically.

Foucault: I have always insisted that power is employed through a net-like organization, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. [50]

Denise: The leaders narrate how forging strong relationships with others is a form of empowerment, with all hierarchies depending on each other for the circulatory exercise of power which passes through both the dominated and the dominating.

Foucault: [*who never tires of speaking about this subject, adds*] This dispersed power is exercised from innumerable points […] comes from below […] being produced from one moment to the next.[51] The Principal exercises several political rationalities and

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[49] (2002h, p. 132)

[50] (1998)

[51] (1998, p. 93-4)

technologies to empower the Heads **[p. 200-204]**: using words of praise; appealing to their sense of school ownership while simultaneously contradicting HER discourse in I,iii; using a reassuring tone <u>and</u> the imperative when necessary. The discourse of efficiency and accountability comes out very strongly in HER speech.

Denise: Power is also exercised by the Principal in a subtle manner through the strategic use of emails. Heads are subjectified both by the 'strong presence' of emails in their inbox, simultaneously so by their absence. Emails can be both 'disempowering' and 'empowering'. The Principal's silence through lack of emails generates 'powerlessness' while the ability to request a meeting electronically makes P4 'powerful'.

Foucault: Power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself.[52]

Denise: All this makes me wonder whether the emails are what YOU label 'political technologies'[53] used by the Principal in HER conduct of governmentality. Besides being exercised through emails, power is also exercised by the Principal through HER physical absence/presence in schools which has an impact on the construction of the Heads' identities, as well as those of other stakeholders at various levels, with constant physical presence leading to empowerment and constant absence leading to powerlessness.

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[52] (1998, p. 86)

[53] (2002a; 2002f)

Foucault: Power relations are multiple, they have different forms, they can be in play […] within an institution.[54]

Denise: This constant presence and support is negated by S2 and P4, to a lesser extent, a fact which shows disagreement with what the Principal says SHE is doing and what SHE actually does. HER wish for a 'mobile office' can be interpreted in two ways: the circulation of power on the part of the Principal in order to empower the Heads *or* more control by the Principal, resulting in more 'surveillance' for the Heads.

Foucault: *[always ready to quote HIS theories about 'le pouvoir']* The success of power is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.[55]

Denise: Through empowering the Heads for the audit, by encouraging collaboration and communication, rather than competition, SHE is fostering networking among the primary school Heads, strengthening the bond of the already strong presence of a network of primary schools within the weaker network of *Polyphonic College* as depicted by the Heads. When it comes to the power from 'below', that is, the leadership hierarchy at a lower level than the Principal, it is the primary school Heads who exercise the power in *Polyphonic College* due to their very strong bond. The discursive framework of FACT is being enacted only partially – the aim of "working in partnership" and "jointly solving problems" is not being reached, neither is the facilitation of "horizontal and vertical linkages" being actualized. S1 rationalizes how this lack of collaboration is not a matter of resistance to the policy, but a form of 'normalization', of how they are constructed by FACT, as a result of which this primary school networking seems to have become a 'norm'.

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[54] (1988c, p. 38)

[55] (1998, p. 86)

Foucault: These can be considered as the 'dividing practices' by which the strong network of primary schools excludes secondary schools.

Scene 3: The Creativity Scheme and discrimination practices

Narrator: This scene involves a discussion between the Principal and the secondary school Heads over the attendance at a meeting and the application for an EU-funded project.

S3: Are we going to break up for lunch now? [*Some of the other Heads giggle.*]

CP: *[in a firm tone]* No. We have another matter to discuss before lunch break. Did you receive that email regarding the national meeting to be held on the 8th of May about the reform in the choice of subjects for Form 3 students?

S1: [*looking straight into HER eyes*] Of course I have. But it's not very clear about the type of information to be disseminated at the meeting.

S3: *[mumbling to herself, almost intelligibly]* So, it's going to be next week. *[Addressing S1]* Are they proposing any changes? New subjects on the syllabus?

Narrator: Are these the same Heads who clashed with such resonance about paper setting in I,iii?

CP: *[in an urgent tone]* It is very important that you attend.

S1: I'll definitely be going and will take my Assistant Head, as well.

CP: *[Disregarding her voice and directing HER gaze at S2 who has been listening to the unfolding discussion without saying a word, sending text messages on her mobile phone.]* Did you receive it?

S2: [*in a resigned tone*] Yes, I have. But I do not have Form 3.

CP: It would perhaps be a good idea if maybe you attend…you SHOULD go nevertheless.

S2: *[After a slight pause, without lifting her eyes off the ground]* Well, okay. I will go.

Narrator: Does S2 have any other choice?

S2: [Wherever I am, I want to be the first one, so that the others follow, it's an inner urge. I want to lead people, I need to talk, I cannot keep back, that is, I love the microphone. I am a people's person – I am not a person to be on my own – I want that we are always a group.]

Narrator: Is it the same Voice who spoke in the interview, being so silent here in the meeting, in the Others' presence? A 'docile body' indeed, in the presence of the other Heads and the Principal. I thus conclude that S2 takes up her positionings according to the setting and the audience present for her narrative and performance.

CP: Shall we move on to the next matter? *[Turning over the pages of the agenda, going back and forth, SHE can't seem to find the right page. Still looking down at the paper…thinking out loud rather]* The matter of EU funds…*[Suddenly looking up from the agenda to address the Heads, a note of enthusiasm in HER voice]* The 'Creativity Scheme' has been re-opened…The 'Creativity Scheme'…I think that WE should consider submitting an application. I think that it is important…I might need to apply for a project through one of your schools, but the project and the funds will be for the Department of Research and Development, not for your school.

S2: *[Breaking her 'silence', in consternation]* Just like you did for last year's 'Creativity Scheme' – the project was carried out in MY SCHOOL and you took all the funds! I didn't receive a single penny! [*In a very disapproving and reprimanding tone*]

Narrator: S2 finally reacts! School matters touched on a nerve. The 'loud' character revealed to me in the interview is starting to surface…finally…

CP: [*calmly*] That's it. *[All the other Heads except for P4 burst out laughing.]*

> **FACT:** A network can provide a <u>better environment</u>, can encourage and foster more <u>initiative and innovation</u>, more <u>team spirit</u>, an increased <u>shared sense of purpose and direction</u>. (p. 41)

Narrator: I observe very little of the above unfolding in this particular scene!

S2: [*adamantly*] It's true, it's true! I didn't even know what the project involved!

CP: [*still calm*] It involved making a film with the students.

S2: St.Lucy School managed to generate twelve thousand euro out of the five thousand euro fund they had been allocated.

S1: [*in a tone of incredulity*] How is that possible?

CP: [*obviously poking fun at S2*] When we produce the film, we'll sell it, to generate profit! *[laughing]*

> **FACT:** The Principal will <u>offer opportunities</u> to the Heads of School to <u>help to pool and share ideas, experiences and good practice</u> and to <u>work together</u> on common educational programmes, projects, activities and other initiatives. (p. 73)

Narrator: Are the Heads offered opportunities to participate or is this 'Creativity Scheme' a coercion for the Principal's benefit?

S2: When you make the film, copy it on CDs and the students can sell them, but I want a share of the profits, a commission at least, not nothing at all.

Narrator: The Principal is making fun as they <u>are</u> producing a film which is not for sale, but S2 is taking it up as literally…

S2: [My students don't even have a proper playground, while S3 has a playground with turf and S1 has a garden with reading alcoves! The school backyard, a miniscule patch of uneven, potholed asphalt is our "temporary" ground and I'm always having students with injuries lined up behind my office door after the break. When I spoke to the Principal about it, SHE answered that SHE had no funds to spare – FOR MY SCHOOL, obviously! If only I would manage to get the funds from somewhere! But I was mostly offended when the other six schools were given the money to buy books for basic skills and my school was the only one left out. At the time, I WAS SO OFFENDED. I was offended [*starts hitting the desk with her fist*] **because every school should be given the same service, the same priority.]**

Narrator: It is blatantly obvious that what was promised by FACT in terms of the provision for a better environment, initiative, innovation, and team spirit <u>is not</u> being done! This was confirmed when I visited her school as researcher to conduct the interview – all she says about her school building in relation to the other secondary schools turns out to be true.

FACT: Heads are expected to work <u>under the leadership of the Principal</u> and according to the <u>direction and guidelines established by their competent authorities</u>. (p. 74)

Narrator: FACT positions the Heads at the lowest rung of the leadership hierarchy, thereby giving authority to the Principal to exercise HER leadership practices in HER own way, without embracing the Heads' suggestions.

CP: *[sarcastically]* You can take everything…Whatever there is, you can take it yourself…Would that be fine?

Narrator: Is this an 'investment in relationships' by the Principal or blatant discrimination? Or an exploitation of HER position as Principal?

S2: [I don't know who SHE is…SHE's a person of many facets…HER way of approaching Heads is not the ideal approach as there is no warmth, everything is frivolous. I want some appreciation.]

Narrator: The Principal does not seem to have, as SHE says, a VERY, VERY, VERY GOOD RELATIONSHIP with ALL the Heads in *Polyphonic College*!

S2: [The secondary schools are problematic due to the presence of a very strong secondary school *[that of S1]* with a good intake of high achievers, as a result of which, attention is focused there, it is a showcase for the college. The Principal has reached HER aim in the primary sector, but not in the secondary – resulting in a vacuum in the latter sector – we three *[referring to the secondary schools]* we are all separated. The Principal should call us and tell us that certain issues have to be tackled together because we are in a college. Is it just a college in writing only? On paper? A college means collegiality – we work together for the common good of the students. We have to work together. If the Principal gives prominence to a certain school, that is not good.]

Narrator: S2 thus problematizes the unfolding of 'collegiality' within *Polyphonic College*. She doodles as she reflects further on this issue, putting it on paper to make it more concrete.
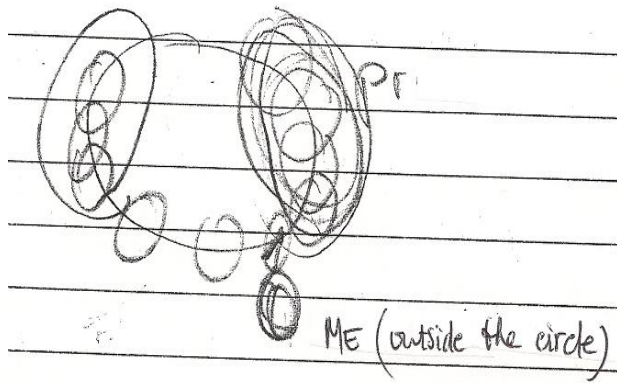
S2: [I draw primary and secondary schools as two separate entities without any interconnecting link as there are differences among them. Me, I am outside the circle as I don't feel part of the college.]

Narrator: This is exactly how their relationship unfolds during the meeting!

CP: We can now break up for lunch. You must all be ravenous after the intense session we've just had…

[*All the Heads pass their own comments on this remark in a mumbling voice, seemingly reluctant to generate another discussion which keeps them in the boardroom any longer…*]

I've ordered outside catering – you can all help yourselves from the buffet table laid out in the reception area…

S1: *[interrupting the Principal]* Can we have our lunch outside today?

CP: You can eat wherever it pleases you…It would be a good idea to take advantage of the sun!

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Denise: This scene depicts the differential treatment given to certain schools and their Heads, thus translating into subtle discriminatory power at play within *Polyphonic College*, as exercised by the Principal. This scene brings out the subjectification of the Heads by the Principal, thus pointing to the fluidity of their relations of power due to their constant shifting. The action in this scene, which centers around a particular Head, S2, brings out the division among secondary school Heads, inequality in resource allocation and in the treatment of Heads.

Foucault: Power is, therefore, mobile, reversible and unstable[56], opening up the potential for resistance and agency.

Denise: It is not only the Heads in general who are subjectified without distinction, but the Principal exercises discriminatory power against S2, thus subjectifying her and making her subjectify herself. The Principal attempts to weave her into the discourse of collegiality which S2 attempts so hard to weave herself out of through both voiced and silent resistance, at times even through compliance. The discursive narrative of S2 as revealed to me in the interview - where she constructs and performs herself as a strong leader - clashes with her performance in this scene **[p. 211]**, when she complies with the Principal's order to attend the meeting. However, she offers voiced resistance when it comes to an issue which concerns the financial situation of her school.

Foucault: The Principal subjectifies S2, thus, she is produced 'as an effect' through and within discourse[57]– the discourse of collegiality and educational leadership – within the specific discursive formations of *Polyphonic College*.

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[56] (2000d)

[57] (1981)

Denise: *[still discussing the plight of S2]* No power flows to her school due to the discriminatory treatment by the Principal, who goes against FACT in not offering equal opportunities to all the Heads. S2 takes up the discourse of the marketplace when she demands a share of the profits for her school, thus positioning herself in line with the Principal's discourse of the marketplace, but not with the way it is being enacted. There is an unequal power flow among the schools which ultimately reflects the relationship between the Principal and the Heads. Thus, not only are the secondary school Heads detached from the primary school Heads, but they are also detached among themselves, in that they have not managed to network. S2 feels excluded from the network due to being an outsider to the primary schools and even more so to the secondary sector. Networking is not being enacted according to the FACT discursive framework, showing how Heads are both the subjects of policy and active agents in mediating policy practices. Heads across both levels acknowledge this 'lack of networking' among them but perform themselves in diverse ways: primary school Heads strengthen 'their own' bond, while secondary school Heads construct and take up a distant positioning both within and across sectors.

Foucault: *['re-positioning' his spectacles]* It becomes a 'regime of truth' for them. In her narrative of the reality of secondary schools in the college, S2 constructs and performs her isolated identity which develops due to her positioning by the Principal's discriminatory behaviour in her regards. *[getting up to address the audience]*

To conclude this Act which explores the perception and performance of the relationships between the Principal and the Heads, and among the Heads themselves, I will just add this: The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners

[…] it is a way in which certain actions modify others […] This also means that power is not a function of consent.[58]

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[58] (2002g, p. 340-1)

Chapter Nine: The unfolding of leadership distribution

> And if I do not say what ought to be done, it is not because I believe there is
> nothing to be done. Quite on the contrary, I think there are a thousand things
> to be done, to be invented, to be forged, by those who, recognizing the
> relations of power in which they are implicated, have decided to resist or
> escape them.
>
> (Foucault, 2001b, p. 911-912)

Act 3: Distributed leadership as 'narrated', 'performed', and 'experienced' by the leaders in *Polyphonic College*

Narrator: The Heads arrive from their lunch which they took in the garden, taking advantage of the good weather, occupying the various tables shaded by the olive trees in the 'Garden of Eden', the central courtyard of the Secretariat of *Polyphonic College*.

The Principal, who is already seated in HER place at the head of the table, appears pleased to look up from the agenda SHE has been 'revisiting' and see all the Heads in their seats, ready to start.

Scene 1: FACT, distributed leadership, and the leaders of Polyphonic College

Narrator: This scene starts off the final part of the day-long meeting after lunch which depicts the discussion that ensues when the Principal informs the Heads about the decision of the Ministry for an imminent revision of the FACT policy document and subsequently passes on the request to submit suggestions in writing to the same Ministry.

CP: Are you ready to start the final session? *[looking round and being met by nods, smiles, or vacant expressions…]* I want to update you with the latest development from the Ministry which is still under discussion. Proposals have been put forward for a

revision of the policy FACT. This is still insider information, so I beg you to keep it under wraps for the time being.

> **FACT:** The start up of school networks is an exciting opportunity for our schools to develop <u>local solutions</u>. It will provide us with <u>the capacity to re-invent structures and practices</u>. (p. 62)

Narrator: Why this sudden decision by the Ministry for a policy revision? Is it *not* working rather than *networking*?

P1: [*tries to make fun of the situation*] I read it from cover to cover when it was first published in 2005. [*changing to sound serious, or trying hard to sound so*] But over eight years have passed so I need to refresh my memory…Ha! Ha! Ha! Very long documents just put me off!

P3: Why are you sharing this 'secret' information with us? [*her pace of talking quickening and her voice raising*] What do THEY want now? Another 'report' from *Polyphonic College* with OUR views…OUR suggestions? [*the tempo catches up*] What did FACT do to us really, except network us into colleges and emphasize the exercise of distributed leadership?

> **FACT:** This document addresses the issue of <u>the governance of the education system</u> and of the <u>autonomy and decentralization of State Schools</u>. (p. xix)

P1: I didn't have to be told to practise distributed leadership because it is my style.

P2: There are certain things in life which do not have to be dictated by anyone, they don't have to be issued by the Directorate. They're almost natural. The policy document just put in writing all my practices!

> **FACT:** the <u>significance of shared or co-leadership arrangements</u> […] it <u>distributes the leadership function across more than one school location</u> within a given network. Shared leadership creates a capacity for <u>healthy dialogue and debate</u> that will foster <u>a satisfying and fruitful team spirit</u> […] Those networks which report the best progress […] will have <u>planned for distributed leadership</u> from the earliest stages. (p. 39)

CP: Distributed leadership is a very positive aspect as no leader can work on her own. *[getting more passionate now…speaking with conviction]* We have just gone through an experience in politics. The general election results have undoubtedly highlighted the importance of distributed leadership and how important it is for leadership to reflect that distribution. This is a model that we should reflect about more in schools, that we should try to understand much better. *[in a pensive mood, with a faraway look in HER eyes]* Unfortunately, this is not a practice that is being performed so widely in many of our schools.

Narrator: The Principal is here referring to the results of the March 2013 general elections in which the Labour party had a landslide victory after fifteen years in opposition. It was widely felt that the Nationalist party which had been in government for three consecutive terms lost the election due to it becoming a party of the elite, led by a handful of autocrats who sent it to ruins…Of course, SHE is not referring to the schools of *Polyphonic College* but to *other* schools in the Maltese state education system. In presenting the 'others' as non-practitioners of distributed leadership is SHE perhaps implying that the schools in HER college do practise distributed leadership? It still remains to be seen…

[HER statement is followed by a short pause. Both the Principal and the Heads look thoughtful, perhaps reflecting on HER proposed model of distributed leadership imported from politics]

P1: [We do take initiatives together. For example, my school organizes a day trip to Rome for Year 6 pupils. Before, we used to take our pupils only, now it is open to all the Year 6 students of the college. We even give them a t-shirt with the logo *Polyphonic College*, in order for them to be identified. Another example of sharing is 'Merit Day'. P2 prepares the certificates which are identical across the college. So everybody has her own task in *Polyphonic College*.]

> **FACT:** Systems within the network must <u>encourage everybody to contribute</u> and to feel that their contributions are valued. (p. 39)

Narrator: But are ALL the Heads encouraged to contribute? If so, are all individual contributions then valued? Moreover, what is the nature of this contribution – t-shirts and certificates?

P3: The Assistant Heads have to understand that distributed leadership is not equal to 'free rein'. If I have delegated something to you, I expect you to give me feedback.

CP: [School Heads are gradually learning how to distribute leadership. I've come to enjoy observing Heads working a lot more closely with their Assistant Heads and not simply delegating tasks to be carried out. Distributed leadership is the leadership of EVERYBODY…of EVERYBODY…leadership that is felt by EVERYBODY…Leadership is not the prerogative of a particular position, but it is the prerogative of EVERYBODY *[clapping HER hands in the air]*. **Even the Government reflected this, and spoke at length about it in reality…which is very**

interesting…very interesting indeed…Leadership is co-ordinated by the Head who ENSURES THAT IT WILL LEAD TO RESULTS. The Heads will surely tell you about it.]

Narrator: The "leadership of EVERYBODY…felt by EVERYBODY" – this has been imported directly from the Labour party electoral manifesto that managed to sway the majority of votes in its favour. Is this a political technology adopted by the CP to serve the same purpose with the Heads? The leadership is distributed but owned by all… Indeed the Heads did reveal to the researcher their understanding of distributed leadership and a very ambiguous understanding this turned out to be!

P2: One of the things that I insist on is that I have to be informed about every single thing [*almost screaming*]. I need to know about everything! It is a distributed type of leadership but the 'knot' is in my hands.

Narrator: P2 doodles, saying to herself
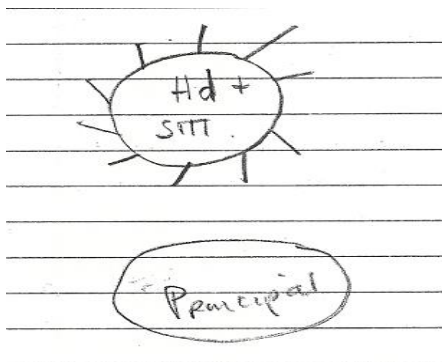
P2: [I draw myself in a flat structure, positioning myself in the centre of the circle immediately surrounded by my SMT members, reaching out to everybody while leading the school in a transparent manner…I do not believe in hierarchical leadership. In the college I think I occupy the same position. In the sense that the Principal is in the centre and we all surround HER.]

CP: [Distributed leadership is leadership which includes EVERYBODY, that invites you to CONTRIBUTE and to be a PROTAGONIST. Our schools need

leaders who distribute leadership. I believe that the current political situation will influence schools – the issue is how long it will take to influence us.]

Narrator: As I explained a short while ago, the defeat of the Nationalist party can constitute a lesson for all the leaders in *Polyphonic College* in order for them to avoid the same situation.

P3: [Distributed leadership has its pros and cons – it can lead to isolation with the lack of a common vision as all the Heads lead in isolation without communication.]

S2: [*finally contributes to the discussion*] I agree with the fact that you distribute and you delegate, but you have problems. Not every Assistant Head carries her own weight. If you are a perfectionist and others are not, then you've had it!

Narrator: Therefore, S2 distributes to the very bare minimum due to lack of responsibility on the part of the Assistant Heads…Well, at least, this is what she revealed to me as researcher in the interview.

P2: How distributed is it going to be? Who is going to shoulder the responsibility? How are the tasks going to be divided? The FACT policy does not mention any of this.

FACT: This does not mean that no role exists for senior leaders in networks […] Distributed leadership only thrives where there is effective senior leadership. (p. 39)

P1: [*looking rather pensive*] **[We have to accept certain 'mistakes' of others. That goes against my beliefs, but I CANNOT BE PERFECT! In some way or another, I have to accept certain 'imperfections' in others.]**

S3: [I am very reluctant to delegate as I would like to do certain things my own way.]

Narrator: Distributed leadership, as narrated to the researcher by P1 and S3, seems to have to satisfy a set of criteria set by *them*.

CP: These are very good ideas about your direct experiences of distributed leadership in practice. Therefore, your excellent feedback HAS TO REACH the Directorates, the Ministry even, as it is invaluable to be incorporated in the revised policy document. I want a report from every school. Email it to Matilda by the end of this week.

Narrator: Is this an example of distributed leadership in practice by the Principal?

P1: Can't you just pass on our feedback verbally in your meeting with the DGs this afternoon?

CP: *[getting annoyed and struggling not to reveal this]* NO. DEFINITELY NOT. *[firmly, if not sternly]* I want your feedback in writing by Friday. Thanks for your understanding and co-operation.

Narrator: A rather abrupt conclusion to the matter…

CP: [I think that I distribute a lot. I work very closely with the Heads – I have my own space and they have their own space – spaces that come together. But I do not invade their space, and they do not impinge on mine – the spaces are very close to each other but they are not the same.]

Narrator: The Principal's comment regarding distribution in 'spatial dimensions' is recurrent in HER discourse.

FACT: The intensification of networking based on communication is the way learning communities can free themselves from unnecessary stifling central control and

bureaucracy without, however, suffering from weak direction, lack of accountability and an absence of quality assurance. (p. xii)

Narrator: Is it possible to 'distribute' leadership among the Minister, Directors General, Principal and Heads of School?

FACT: Each school still requires its <u>individual strong leadership</u> to achieve. The direction of a strong central authority to monitor development plans and to audit progress cannot however be underestimated. (p. xvii)

Narrator: Strong individual leadership, strong central direction, monitoring, auditing – is it the only way to achieve distributed leadership?

S3: I have an idea. Why don't we meet next week at my school, always with YOUR permission *[directing her gaze at the Principal]* and write up the report together? YOU would just have to add YOUR comments *[to the Principal, who thinks that it's a good idea as SHE nods]*. It would be a practice of distributed leadership while writing about distributed leadership! *[laughing]*

CP: [An effective leader never works on her own. I don't think that being a leader means being superior to anyone else. It doesn't mean that if you are a leader, you are at the top and someone else is at the bottom. As Principal, I am not of the opinion that a good idea doesn't materialize if it doesn't emanate from me – the last word on the matter shouldn't always be mine. I think that I do not only preach this reality, but I live it, as well.]

S1: I'm busy the whole of next week

S2: Meeting up and discussing issues would be much better than individual thinking

P4: I can't make it either…

P1: I have to prepare for the audit!

P2: *[in her high-pitched voice]* Me too!

Narrator: S3's proposal is instantly rejected by the majority! The Principal realizes that it would be better to change the subject quickly.

CP: OKAY. CASE CLOSED.

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Denise: This scene explores the notion of distributed leadership as perceived and performed by the Heads and the Principal both in *Polyphonic College* and in their individual schools.

Foucault: The discourse of distributed leadership thus emerges as both the *object* and the *site* for struggle, as the thing *for which* and *by which* there is struggle.[59]

Denise: The Principal constructs HERSELF as a democratic leader practising distributed leadership and placing a lot of emphasis on relations, but does not 'perform' this self as frequently as SHE narrates. Despite FACT stating that communication within networking will lead to freedom from "unnecessary stifling central control", this scene reveals the presence of a strong central direction. FACT's emphasis on individual strong leadership and strong central authority to "monitor" and "audit" **[p.226]** shows modern governmental rationality as simultaneously individualizing and totalizing.

Foucault: The 'political double-bind' is at play in *Polyphonic College* as a modern power structure.[60] What degree of agency do Heads have within this discursive framework?

Denise: The Principal empowers the Heads with insider knowledge from the Ministry, giving them "the power *in* rather than the power *of* knowledge".[61] Well, but another interpretation is possible. SHE performs HER power in relation to the others as SHE knows – SHE indicates HER closeness to the Ministry and the seat of power by whom SHE is subjected and eventually subjectifies the Heads. This 'empowerment' – a power

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[59] (1981, p. 52-3)

[60] (2002g, p. 336)

[61] (Deetz, 1992, p. 77)

tactic SHE uses to position the Heads at par and subsequently below HER, is one of HER techniques to 'convince', or rather, 'coerce' them to contribute to the forthcoming policy revision of FACT, as demanded by the Ministry through the Directors General. [*Foucault just listens but does not contribute*] Does this simultaneous 'empowerment' and 'subjectification' give the Heads space to enact their own discourse/s?

The aim of FACT is clearly set out: "autonomy and decentralization of State schools". Is the discourse of distributed leadership intended to be used as a technology to generate more autonomy and decentralization - defined by FACT as "a greater say by schools in determining their own management"? Despite the construction of distributed leadership as the dominant discourse, it fails to be enacted as such and is instead overshadowed by the 'hidden discourse' of centralization. This emerges both in the leadership practices of the individual schools, where P2, P3, S2 and S3 speak about a distributed leadership that positions them at the centre, and more so, of *Polyphonic College*, where a 'centralized' model of distribution seems to be enacted as it comes from the top. Indeed, centralized control is still heavily present in *Polyphonic College*. This is a fact which is even acknowledged by the Principal who expresses and practises resistance to 'The Centre' in the following scene - III,ii.

[*Denise pauses to catch her breath, simultaneously giving space to Foucault, who however, remains in silence. She therefore continues*]

Denise: Some Heads (S2, P1 and S3) practise distributed leadership as 'informed delegation', with S3 even using the verb 'delegate' rather than 'distribute', as they must have knowledge of everything for the retention of leadership power in their schools.

Foucault: Practice of distributed leadership therefore leads to the lowering of the 'threshold of describable individuality', using these practices as a means of control and a method of domination […] it is a new modality of power.[62] I consider this mode of distributed leadership as a 'disciplinary technology' - at par with the examination - that aims at both objectification and subjectification of the individual, implying more leadership transparency and accountability for the various leadership levels in the college hierarchy as a result of networking. Distributed leadership may be interpreted as a form of panopticism – to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity[63] – the conduct of accountability.

Denise: *[nodding in agreement]* There is a certain degree of control present in the distributed leadership narratives presented in this scene. How is this leadership distributed? It turns out to be an ambiguous concept, as the term itself contains a directional element of power – distributed leadership is done to the others. Do the 'distributees' always accept the 'distribution/s' of the 'distributor'? One can detect a battle within leadership discourse in the narratives of some Heads who narrate themselves as distributors who retain control – distributed leadership for some but not for those at the lower levels.

Foucault: A paradoxical leadership identity emerges through their exercise of MY concept of *gouvernmentalite*[64] – where their discourse acts as a form of masked power, albeit unconsciously. These Heads' voices undermine what the Principal says about "Heads working closely with Assistant Heads and not simply delegating tasks".

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[62] (1975b, p. 189)

[63] (1991a)

[64] (2002a)

Denise: The subsequent discussion the Heads (P3, S2, P2, P1, and S3) have regarding problems in the enactment of distributed leadership **[p. 224]** reveals an 'intradiscursive battle' within distributed leadership practice. This 'intradiscursive battle' indirectly reveals how the Heads have been subjectified by the discourse of efficiency, accountability, and marketization – they want "perfection", "my intentions", and "my standards". However, in this way they are taking up the positioning as "effective senior leaders" laid out by FACT **[p. 226]**. But is this senior leadership practised to such an extent as to be detrimental to the practice of distributed leadership? [*looking round at the audience*]

The Principal's narrative about distributed leadership is dominated by political discourse as SHE parallels this style of leadership with the political situation in Malta at the time of the interview – the period of the post-2013 general elections. Is distributed leadership within *Polyphonic College* unfolding as the "leadership for all" and "of everybody" as narrated by the Principal?

This scene reveals leadership distribution unfolding in *Polyphonic College*, and not unfolding at all! P1 gives examples of 'effective' leadership distribution within the college **[p. 222]**, positioning her colleagues as leadership distributors. These same Heads reposition themselves within the distributed leadership discourse through their instant rejection and resistance to S3's suggestion to draw up a collective report **[p. 226-7]**. The Principal's silence following the Heads' reaction by changing the subject in question can be interpreted as a subtle rejection of this practice. One is made aware of a contradiction in these leaders' own discourses of distributed leadership – narrating one thing and performing the opposite. Intense resistance to leadership distribution is exhibited by the very leaders who narrate themselves as leadership distributors …

[Foucault does not have anything to add as HE just looks on, shaking HIS head…perhaps exhibiting HIS disappointment with the situation as it unfolds within Polyphonic College]

Scene 2: 'The Centre', the Alternative Programme, and autonomy

Narrator: In this scene, the Principal discusses the possible implementation of AfL[65] in the college schools, as well as informing them of the possibility of having an alternative programme for 'low-achievers' in their schools. This scene reveals the degree of autonomy present in *Polyphonic College*, as a means of exploring distributed leadership within the unfolding tension between centralization and decentralization/autonomy.

CP: *[turning over the pages of the agenda and looking at HER watch]* Last time, we discussed the issue of AfL training for your teachers, offered to us by the E.O.[66] of Curriculum and Assessment. This assessment for learning is not something for training purposes only; assessment is something that should be incorporated in everyday teaching.

Narrator: SHE needs to get to the DGs' meeting after the CoH, that is why SHE is in a hurry.

P1: [*seriously*] I organized a professional development session about the topic.

Narrator: P1 signals her own knowledge about the matter, taking the initiative prior to the Principal's directive.

CP: It is an issue which is very important in scholastic development. It would perhaps be a good idea for you to consider how to incorporate AfL into your school development plan.

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[65] Assessment for Learning

[66] Education Officer

Narrator: The Principal is 'suggesting' topics to be included in each school's SDP, or giving <u>directives</u>, rather. But this is not the "autonomy" implied in FACT, is it?

FACT: The Head of School will <u>facilitate</u> a <u>participatory team</u> and <u>collegial process</u> leading to the formulation and constant review of the School Development Plan. (p. 74)

Narrator: But who formulates the School Development Plan in *Polyphonic College* – the Head or the Principal?

P2: I held one session on AfL which the teachers did not consider to be enough, so I asked the E.O. for another one.

Narrator: Heads do have a certain degree of <u>autonomy</u> as they can ask for services without consultation with the Principal – a practice endorsed by the Principal HERSELF – SHE encourages this 'autonomous' practice.

CP: Well, well…that's very good, very good…*[nodding while turning over the pages, agreeing with her without really seeming to listen. SHE re-checks HER watch. A very brief moment of silence elapses]* Perhaps…I don't know…you can ask the E.O. to visit individual classrooms and carry out demonstrations.

Narrator: SHE really must get to the DGs' meeting on time but SHE <u>has</u> to cover <u>all</u> the items on the agenda first!

FACT: The Principal will <u>empower</u> schools towards <u>school improvement</u>, <u>effectiveness</u> and <u>growth</u>. (p. 73)

Narrator: SHE does try to do so, to 'empower schools' as directed by FACT – despite being carried out according to HER rationalities and technologies – SHE <u>does</u> try to

make suggestions for empowerment through HER encouragement to request services from the E.O.

P2: As I see it, either we adopt it as a system introduced 'across the board' or else…as I don't think that we can rely upon isolated cases of introduction.

CP: Of course. At the moment, it would be a good idea for each school to make its own arrangements [*seemingly undermining P2*] […] We're going to detach ourselves gradually from the approach that everything…that you would have the Centre offering a service and the whole country…they are still going to continue…but I don't think that the trend will still be for the Centre to continue directing you on certain issues…you have to decide what you really need…

Narrator: Does the Principal allow them to do this, to decide on what they really need THEMSELVES? SHE seems to imply that schools will become self-sufficient, when at present, the colleges themselves are not autonomous, being directed as they are by 'The Centre'.

CP: [I have always regarded the CoH as ABOVE ME, not ME above everything. I think that it is very important for the Principal to keep this in mind as it is very easy to make decisions yourself, to intervene, to go into schools and tell them what should be done. I don't think that this is a model to be followed, it doesn't do any good to anyone concerned […] Sometimes, I cannot do otherwise. There would be some decisions which come directly from 'The Centre', which, very reluctantly, I would just have to communicate to them – one of my least favourite leadership tasks, I must confess.]

Narrator: Yet, this is the model SHE follows with HER own schools in many cases! Of making decisions HERSELF for HER schools, despite HER insistence on "the CoH ABOVE ME"! *[A short pause ensues…a moment of reflection?]*

Now P4 takes up her pencil and starts to doodle…depicting a 'perfect' vision of *Polyphonic College* with a symmetrical power flow among all the members.
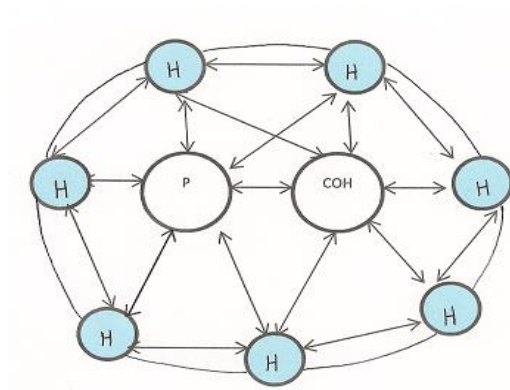
P4: [The relationship is the same amongst us Heads… It's not the Principal is up here, and we're down there and SHE's just throwing things down at us...We're with HER, decisions are taken together. There may be decisions which come from higher up, which are passed on to HER, which SHE then passes on to us [...] obviously, if we don't agree, we're definitely going to air our views, and normally, these are passed on...I mean, it's always a two-way street.]

CP: Up to now, the practice has been that 'The Centre' gives most of the direction from the Directorates. Now it MAY change. I anticipate that it WILL change. *[getting passionate now, speaking with conviction without revealing any specific information]* I anticipate that the direction will be issued from the Ministry and that 'The Centre' will take on a role of support rather than dictating what schools should do and how they should get there. The scenery might change under this new legislature – that's all I can say at this point.

Narrator: 'The Centre' as 'supporter'? One has to consider the 'level' of support to be given.

FACT: <u>Autonomy</u> is not to be confused with <u>complete deregulation</u>. On the contrary, autonomy and decentralization predicate a <u>grasp</u> by the Education Ministry and the central education entities. Autonomy and, therefore <u>a greater say by schools in determining their own management</u>, can only be effective in delivering the relative results and outcomes if there is in place <u>a strong central guiding and monitoring authority</u>. (p. 25)

Narrator: Isn't this what has been happening in the lifespan of *Polyphonic College*, according to the narrative of both the Heads and the Principal – a strong grasp 'FROM ABOVE', with very little autonomy, if any, for schools 'BELOW'?

CP: [We don't really need 'The Centre' – as a college, WE know what our needs are and we are committed to addressing those needs in our schools. As Heads, they can think, they can decide, they can analyse the internal situation, they can understand it, and can plan accordingly. Before, they were much more restricted and centralized, due to the bureaucracy involved. If a Head needed something for her school, she had to inform the Assistant Director, then it had to be passed on to the Director, whose decision needed the approval of the DG. The process was simply too bureaucratic! Nowadays, things have become more simplified and a lot of decisions are taken by ME, as Principal. NOT ALL the decisions. I really wish that more decisions are taken by the Principal and do not have to go to 'The Centre'.]

Narrator: Can Heads really think, decide, analyse, understand, and plan things autonomously? Perhaps they do have more autonomy from 'The Centre' in some cases, but not from the Principal. SHE still makes the majority of the decisions for HER schools in HER college!

> **FACT:** Is it wise to devolve all educational services and operations that are currently being handled, at the Centre, by the Education Division? Common sense suggests that <u>decentralising all current services</u> to <u>each and every school</u>, or <u>groups of schools</u>, may prove wasteful both from a financial and human resources point of view. (p. 25)

Narrator: Complete devolution and decentralization may not be the wisest and the most efficient decision although FACT does not distinguish between decentralizing services to individual schools or to colleges, which is very distinct indeed. Decentralizing services to schools in terms that they can request services themselves rather than just being directed from ABOVE signifies autonomy from both 'The Centre' and the college, while devolving to colleges would still allow the latter centralization over schools. It would just be a matter of 'devolving' centralization to a lower hierarchical level above the schools.

S1: What changes are being projected for our schools?

CP: I cannot divulge any information at the moment. But things are going to change … for the better. *[turning over the pages of HER agenda and looking at HER watch]* Let's move to the next item. Soon, you're going to start hearing about '*The Alternative Programme*', that is, alternative programmes in your schools for those students who are falling behind academically.

S1: We have a meeting about that next Friday. Is it to be implemented at secondary level?

CP: Yes, even though the matter is still not very clear. Okay? If the school feels ready to come up with an alternative programme, well and good, but it is important for the proposal to be drawn up in a certain manner and not in a way to lower the education

level in our schools. That means the idea of just involving the students in crafts because that is what they want, because they are not good for academic subjects, is not good. That is, it has to be…

S2: *[interrupting the CP as it is a matter which concerns her school and her students who are low-achievers]* It has to be a substantial idea, an alternative programme which is well-planned…

S1: *[interrupting S2]* But let me ask you this, who is going to cover us on this matter if it's going to be a school-based decision? Because I don't want to be faced by the irate parent of a Form 5 student who accuses me of not having allowed her daughter to follow all the subject options on offer!

Narrator: Are the Heads who have been complaining so insistently about their lack of autonomy in the college system now afraid of making school-based decisions due to perceived 'consequences'?

CP: That's it, that's it. In fact, that's how things are at the moment. Things started when some Heads who seem to have had a very good proposal contacted the Minister after permission to put this alternative programme in practice was denied by the Directorates. The Minister said, 'No. Schools have the right to progress and move forward, so if there are Heads who are prepared for this move, they can come forward with their proposals'. The Directorate will come up with some sort of framework which will offer guidelines as to what is acceptable or not. Okay? So if any one of you thinks that she is prepared, you can forward your proposal to the Directorate. Naturally, this will be discussed; you have to convince the Directorate that it is a structure to be put in place to help students ameliorate, to at least acquire the basic skills…

Narrator: The Minister, being more powerful, had the final word over the matter but it is the two Directorates who will then decide on whether the school will implement the alternative programme.

S3: But can we ask for extra human resources, for example? Because this…

S1: *[interrupting]* But is there a deadline? Do we have to draw up a proposal by the end of this scholastic year?

CP: No, no. This is something that we have to discuss at length. That is, if there are schools that are that prepared…I don't think that there's anyone among you who is that prepared, in fact.

Narrator: The Principal 'knows' HER schools well enough to advise that none of the Heads is prepared for this.

S1: [*sounding very concerned*] But is there any legal backing? Can the Education Directorates provide legal advice on the matter before we start putting it into practice? Because that's the problem!

Narrator: Are these the same Heads who earlier on expressed their wish for autonomy? On being offered autonomy, they now seem wary of taking it up!

CP: *[very calmly]* As far as I'm concerned, the Curriculum Department is going to start working on this issue as well. That is, things are still at the very beginning. [*re-checking the items on the agenda in order to make sure that everything has been covered*] Shall we move on now? Is there anything else you would like to discuss or any issues that need clarification?

Voices: *[All the Heads seem to be eager for the CoH to draw to an end, in their nearly-unanimous]* No! No! Everything has been understood!

CP: We can draw the meeting to a close. I want to thank you all for your participation and for the lively, but healthy, arguments that evolved around certain issues. Please, do not forget the tasks I assigned to you today and it would be much appreciated if you keep within the given timeframe. I have to leave immediately as I'm already running late for my meeting with the DGs. The date for our next CoH meeting and the agenda for the day will be confirmed by Matilda in due course. In the meantime, do not hesitate to contact 'THE OFFICE' should you need anything – WE ARE ALWAYS THERE to help. You can help yourself to another coffee before you leave. I can't join you as I really have to go.

Narrator: SHE gathers HER belongings and goes out of the room in a hurry. The Heads follow suit. No-one stops for a coffee.

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Denise: *[looking directly at the audience]* This scene depicts autonomy in relation to the Heads and the Principal in *Polyphonic College*, a somewhat controversial issue that has been introduced in I,ii where the Heads complain about the absence of autonomy as a direct result of FACT. The first part of the scene presents the Principal discussing the implementation of AfL with the Heads, simultaneously impinging on their 'choice' of SDP topics as well as encouraging them to request specific services from 'The Centre', thus giving them more autonomy to a certain extent. The Principal then tries to garner more autonomy for *Polyphonic College* - and for HERSELF - by proposing more decision-making power at college level away from 'The Centre'. The final part of the scene depicts the reluctance of the Heads at taking up the autonomy being offered by the Ministry. *[turning her gaze back to Foucault]*

A discussion about the AfL strategy being proposed by Education Officers reveals the Principal trying to promote a certain discourse, the discourse of school autonomy – after having been disciplined and subjectified through the FACT policy discourse of 'contrived collegiality'.[67]

Foucault: *[looking askance…HE knots HIS eyebrows while scratching the right hand side of HIS head to mirror HIS incomprehension]* You keep using the term 'autonomy', but what do you mean by this?...I must apologize, but I'm somewhat confused.

Denise: *[raising both her hands and then bringing them together in front of her face while turning to give her full attention to Foucault]* Oh! I must apologize for this. I sometimes tend to forget your lack of familiarity with *Polyphonic College*, moreover with the Maltese education system. There are distinct understandings of the term

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[67] (Hargreaves, 1994)

'autonomy'. In I,ii the Heads explain autonomy as decision-making power, something they enjoyed more pre-FACT, while the Principal defines it as individual school identity. FACT equates it with more participation in school self-management. In this scene, the Principal initially seems to be moving towards the definition of autonomy as understood by the Heads.

Foucault: *[after a slight pause says] Merci beaucoup*, Denise. That has clarified things for me. So perhaps, this discourse of autonomy as here being propagated by the CP can be a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse renders power fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.[68]

Denise: SHE is envisaging a scenario where Heads have the power to decide what THEY need for THEIR school. This move is not endorsed by FACT which exhibits a tension between centralization and decentralization, autonomy and accountability, as demonstrated in III,i, **[p. 225-6]** with this tension running over in this scene in a more powerful manner. This future scenario of more decision-making power is reflected in HER use of pronouns: we/you, we/they. In this scene, **[p. 235]** SHE first starts off with the plural 'we' implying the collective schools, then moves on to the single 'you', addressing them as individual schools. SHE wants more autonomy for the college from 'The Centre', therefore, when addressing them individually, SHE positions 'The Centre' as the one issuing directives, not HERSELF – in turn positioning HERSELF simultaneously *apart from* 'The Centre' and *with* the schools - HER schools. SHE seems eager to dissociate HERSELF from 'The Centre' – is this a form of self-denial of HER subjectification from that very 'Centre' whose directives SHE HAS to pass on to the Heads?

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[68] (1998, p. 100-101)

[Foucault doesn't utter a word. Denise wonders what this silence means…is HE perhaps reflecting on the various tactics of power utilized by the Principal? Thus, Denise continues…]

The Principal narrates HERSELF through changes that SHE knows will occur in the educational system (due to HER 'privileged' leadership position, SHE is aware of imminent reforms that have not yet been disclosed to the public).

Foucault: *[HIS eyes light up as soon as HE has the opportunity to tell us something about HIS 'pouvoir-savoir' reasoning]* This knowledge gives HER power, knowledge that can be used for 'cutting'[69] in the form of resistance, criticism, and struggle against this centralization from 'The Centre', through the appearance of particular, local, regional knowledge[70]. SHE is produced as a knowing subject, in response to particular power-knowledge practices – the present 'power' of 'The Centre' in presenting directives and ready-made decisions.

Denise: SHE simultaneously draws HER authority from 'The Centre' and subtly tries to undermine that same authority by attempting to allocate a minimal degree of authority to the Heads of HER college schools, authority that FACT makes no provision for. However, a certain degree of ambiguity revolves around this. HER repeated use of the pronoun 'ME' signals HER importance as the channel through which decentralization unfolds. But SHE is practising decentralization in the college, not in the individual schools. SHE is the decision-maker for the schools – the layer in-between the schools and the Directorates. SHE constructs HERSELF as the Heads' saviour, positioning

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[69] (2000b)

[70] (1991a, p. 82)

them as 'freedom thinkers' and 'decision-makers' when this process indeed does not involve them to the extent that SHE makes us believe. Schools are weakly 'decentralized' from 'The Centre', but strongly 'centralized' by the college through the figure of the Principal.

Foucault: [*calling on the 'pouvoir-savoir' argument once more*] Keeping the Heads in the dark about certain issues is another form of subtle power exercised by the Principal, calling into question the power-knowledge knot. When the Heads asked about potential changes being proposed for schools, SHE is very vague about the matter. SHE positions HERSELF close to the seat of power and performs HERSELF as such by positioning the Heads closer through revealing enough information and simultaneously distancing them by not disclosing enough information for them to adopt a very close positioning to that seat of power.

Denise: The wish expressed by the Principal about the eventual self-sufficiency of the college can be regarded as a form of resistance, in HER refusal to be subjected by the Directorates.

Foucault: [*who leans forward in HIS chair as soon as HE hears the word 'resistance'*] Every power relationship implies, at least in potential, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed…Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit…At every moment, the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries.[71]

Denise: FACT, however, problematizes this decentralization, presenting itself against total devolution in this scene. **[p. 237]** This tension within the de/centralization

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[71] (2002g, p. 346-7)

discourse is a running thread throughout the play. It features more prominently in Act 3, where the exercise of distributed leadership seems possible solely within strong central control and accountability in Scene 1 and is further highlighted in this scene. This intradiscursive tension is prevalent within the FACT policy framework and has even influenced the Principal's discourse who has been subjectified by it, though SHE adopts an active stance in demanding more autonomy for *Polyphonic College* and for HERSELF as Principal. *[Foucault nods]*

In response to their constant pleas for autonomy in I, ii, the Heads are offered autonomy under the guise of *'The Alternative Programme'* in which they have the freedom to propose a diverse curriculum for low-ability students. This suggestion brings about different reactions among the secondary school Heads. Having been subjectified by ready-made decisions from ABOVE and constant impositions, S1 feels wary to take up autonomy.

Foucault: This has been internalized as a 'technology of the self', a 'normalization', a discursive practice which S1 finds very difficult to weave herself out of, despite the Principal's reassurances.

Denise: Perhaps, the Heads are not yet ready for total decentralization! S1 may feel 'empowered' within an 'imposed' setting and 'powerless' when she has the autonomy to make decisions regarding her students in her school. *[As producer, Denise is pleased by the way their discussions have developed...She looks at Foucault and HE too seems to be pleased that they are using HIS 'toolbox']*

Other aspects also come to the fore in this issue of *'The Alternative Programme'*. The tensions between the Minister and the Directors General are instantly identifiable, but

the word of the Minister is MORE powerful than that of the Directors General. Schools, however, do try to exercise autonomy from the Directorates, bypassing them and going straight to the Minister, thus undermining their authority. Another issue is the fact that the Principal thinks that SHE possesses a sound knowledge of HER schools to have the power to advise the Heads that none is *yet* ready to introduce these 'measures of autonomy'. When SHE claims that schools are not well-prepared, SHE is positioning HERSELF above the Heads and undermining their authority, implying that SHE knows THEIR schools (which SHE earlier on referred to as being HERS) better than they do. A contradiction lies in the fact that they are being offered more curricular autonomy, but are not allowed the autonomy to decide on their school's readiness for the programme, which is appropriated by the Principal, besides having to apply to the Directorates for their 'alternative programme' to get approved for implementation. *[The scene is almost drawing to a close but there is a further comment Denise must make]*

A certain degree of ambivalence emerges in the Principal's performance of identity. The way SHE ends the meeting rather abruptly and just abandons the Heads to attend HER urgent meeting with the Directors General signals HER importance, distance, detachment and hierarchy from the Heads – contradicting HER earlier stance about the 'CoH being ABOVE ME'.

Foucault: *[who would like to make the concluding note to this scene with HIS own view on autonomy]* Liberty is a *practice* […] The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws intended to guarantee them […] 'liberty' is what must be exercised […] The guarantee of freedom is freedom.[72]

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[72] (2002d, p. 354-5)

[The curtain closes and the audience waits with anticipation as to what will unfold…next]

Chapter Ten: Bringing down the curtain on *Polyphonic College*

> I have absolutely no desire to play the role of a prescriber of solutions. I think that the role of the intellectual today is not to ordain, to recommend solutions, to prophesy, because in that function he can only contribute to the functioning of a particular power situation that, in my opinion, must be criticized … My role is to raise questions in an effective, genuine way
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> (Foucault, 2002b, p. 288)

Introduction

This Epilogue draws together the main issues emerging from the three acts of the play that has just been performed on stage. I do not purport to present these as the conclusions of the play; rather, they are points which struck me for various reasons. They contradict what has been reported in literature, or else overturn my deeply-held assumptions about collegiality, relations of power, and distributed leadership. Besides presenting closure to the play, this Epilogue is also meant to open up my research through rhetorical questions and points of debate with Foucault, with the intent to problematize.

EPILOGUE

Denise: In this final part of the play, [*which she would like to keep short*] before bringing down the curtain on *Polyphonic College*, I want to share with you all [*Denise first looks sideways at Foucault, then directs her gaze to the audience*] the key issues that arose from the performance on stage that 'disturbed' me to some extent due to having perturbed my deeply-held assumptions about network leadership dynamics. These 'striking' issues relate to my theoretical research questions, namely, the performance of collegiality; relations of power; and leadership distribution. As Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 207) write in their book on postmodernism and education, 'far from offering certain reassuring closures as conclusions', I offer 'certain observations

and resonances'. I simultaneously raise questions for you, as audience, me included, for I consider myself as the spectator of my own work. [*The actors, who are also the characters in the play, descend from the stage and find a place among the audience, in order to attend to this final part of the play which they enacted, and reflect on their own performance*.] My play is meant to raise questions for education practitioners, especially those who occupy leadership positions; policy makers; and researchers; thereby aiding reflexive thought about one's practices and their effects. Research usually attempts to provide closure, but I refuse this, consequently attempting to open it up with questions, or trying to provoke them, rather than just presenting conclusions. This is done in order to aid the initiation and generation of this reflexive process, which is meant to provoke scepticism, critique, and problematization.

[*Denise pauses and turns her gaze back at Foucault, who is sitting on the edge of HIS chair, but stands up as soon as she finishes her rather long introduction to the Epilogue. HE is unable to keep quiet and interjects at the mention of HIS 'trident'. Denise takes her seat and lets HIM take the lead. It is 'her' play, but she is utilizing concepts from HIS 'toolbox', after all*]

Foucault: In the finale to this play, I would like you to think by using my tools of scepticism, critique, and problematization – a very powerful trident within which to manoeuvre in educational discourse. Relate your mundane practices to what you have just witnessed, or performed, [*looking directly at the actors*] in the three acts in order to apply and express doubt; as well as to challenge and question the assumptions expressed by scepticism. This enables you to raise questions and difficulties inherent in your praxis in such a way to reconsider them for improvement and change.

Denise: [*smiling*] Thank you, Monsieur Foucault. I am interested in problematizing the system through my work. Let me start with the first point. I cannot understand what the 'real' purpose behind networking is…FACT says one thing while the Heads say another. Who are the beneficiaries, ultimately? Is it a bi-directional relationship or a parasite-host relationship where the network takes from the schools rather than the other way round, as stated by Katz *et al.*[73]?

Foucault: [*Denise turns sideways to look at HIM, eager to hear what HE has to say*] What, after all, is an education system, other than a ritualization of speech, a qualification and a fixing of the roles for speaking subjects?[74]

Denise: Another point related to this bi-directionality, or lack of it, rather. How much 'active participation'[75] is encouraged and consequently permitted to evolve within the network? More importantly, who participates, and what is the nature and extent of their contribution? The Heads fail to contest this 'non-participation' and accept the college as 'given'.

Foucault: Why do you find this fact so difficult to accept?…He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it […] he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[76]

Denise: Another thing that irks me is this whole mystery surrounding the college setup and composition, in addition to the resulting problems that defy the very idea behind

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[73] (2009)

[74] (1981, p. 64)

[75] (Church *et al.*, 2002)

[76] (1991a, p. 202-3)

networking. Is this school reform thus generating equitable improvement through the reduction of the polarization inherent in the pre-college education system of streaming?[77]

[*A slight pause ensues. Foucault does not seem to have anything to add at this stage so Denise moves on to her next point*]

Denise: I am extremely staggered by the strong sense of individualism which the leaders cling on to, both at school and college level. Their performance turns out to be an open contradiction of their own words! [*the rising pitch of her voice seeming to mirror her disbelief*]

Foucault: [*does not interject immediately, as if giving Denise enough time to calm down*] Why are you so surprised by this? Any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry.[78]

Denise: [*who still cannot let go of this*] But how can you not question this lack of inter-networking, this isolation, even at college level?

Foucault: [*polishing HIS glasses with a handkerchief HE takes out of HIS blazer pocket while smiling…HE has by now realized that Denise does not let go of things that easily*] Relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor

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[77] according to research carried out by both Ainscow and West (2006) and Chapman and Fullan (2007) about the reasons behind school networks.

[78] (1981, p. 64)

implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.[79]

[*Denise looks at Foucault in awe and respect while HE elaborates on HIS concept of 'les relations de pouvoir'. She raises a related issue, wishing to discuss this theory further*]

Denise: It is a network…a network of school leaders under the leadership of the Principal. Did you realize the prominence given to the CoH in the college, especially as the building-block of human relations?

Foucault: [*nodding, and breaking into a smile at the same time*] But of course! My *pouvoir* theories would be in a vacuum without human relations! Power in the substantive sense, *'le' pouvoir*, does not exist […] In reality, power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinating cluster of relations.[80]

Denise: Networking is not unfolding as set out in FACT. I am simply overwhelmed by the presence of a very strong bond…a very detached bond…the unequal power flow both within and across different levels [*She puts up both her hands in a gesture of incomprehension, and looks at the audience, in the possible hope that someone might provide an answer…but no-one volunteers…She thus resumes*] Isn't *Polyphonic College* fostering the 'appropriate' climate to engender 'team culture'?

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[79] (1980, p. 93)

[80] (1980, p. 198)

Foucault: This signifies the omnipresence of power […] because it produces itself at every moment, at every point, or rather in every relation of one point to another. Power is everywhere.[81]

Denise: The notion of distributed leadership as described by FACT is NOT unfolding among the Heads. There is a deeply-felt sense of 'direction' and 'delegation' instead. I am disturbed by the distinct difference of the presentation of distributed leadership in FACT and its unfolding in the network. Control, collaboration, accountability, centralization, deregulation, decentralization…the heavily felt 'absent' presence of the Directors General, in other words the State…

[*Denise takes a brief pause to regain her breath. Foucault is giving her HIS full attention, as well as the rest of the audience whose eyes are riveted on her*]

Foucault: [*shaking HIS head as if slightly disappointed by the fact that Denise has failed to get a full grasp of HIS notion of 'masked' power*] But don't you understand that it is all part of the process of the encompassing web of power? The success of power is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanism.[82]

Denise: [*running her right hand through her hair which looks dishevelled now*] Ehm…I think I understand now. But there is something else that had never ever crossed my mind. [*taking a deep breath*] I had never thought of the mere possibility of infantilisation being present in *Polyphonic College* within the behaviour and leadership practices of 'mature' adult school leaders.

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[81] (1998, p. 122-3)

[82] (1998, p. 86)

[*There is some murmuring in the audience and people shift in their seats. Is it a way of expressing discomfort at the mention of their 'infantile' behaviour? Or a denial of its presence, perhaps?*]

Foucault: Nothing should surprise you at this stage. It all has to do with the conditions of the exercise of power. Keep this in mind: power is exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are 'free' […] freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power […] its precondition […] and its permanent support.[83]

Denise: Distribution. Autocracy. Democracy. Direction…This is the *melange* [*she tries to throw in some French words, as well]* flowing within *Polyphonic College*. [*looking at the audience in earnest*] Do the Heads question the role of the Principal as LEADERSHIP DISTRIBUTOR, HOW SHE distributes, and the INTENTIONS behind the distribution? [*placing a particular emphasis on the capitalized words*]

Foucault: I do not think that this problematization is happening in the Maltese education arena in a widespread manner, but I tend to disagree with you on this issue. We did witness some sparks of critique in *Polyphonic College*, they are still very weak, almost invisible, but they are there…It is problematization that responds to these difficulties […] This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problematization and the specific work of thought.[84]

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[83] (2002g, p. 342)

[84] (2000d, p. 118)

Denise: Well, our opinions beg to differ on this issue…I don't know about you, Monsieur Foucault, but the issue of autonomy is, for me, one of the most bewildering notions in *Polyphonic College*. The Heads desire autonomy, then refuse to take it up…Utterly incomprehensible to me! [*she rolls over her eyes and throws up her hands in disbelief*] Has non-autonomy been internalized as what YOU term a 'normalization', or better still, a 'regime of truth'?

Foucault: [*scratching HIS forehead*] Well, not really…perhaps it has more to do with power…and freedom…Given the present conditions of subjection, what are the possibilities of freedom available to them? [...] The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?) […] but the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. [85]

[*Up to now, the audience has participated through murmurs and other non-verbal responses, such as awe, disbelief, interest, inattention…Denise, however, yearns for more direct interventions from both the spectators and the actors…She wants people other than Foucault to raise questions and points of discussion and debate on her production. Feedback on her debut would be much welcome…*]

Denise: Are there any issues you would like to discuss further before I lower the curtain on our stage?

[*She looks round at the audience who are still seated – no-one has yet left his/her seat – which is a good sign perhaps. Some awkward moments of silence transpire. Is the play going to end at this – without any further intervention from the educational leaders themselves? Denise is about to thank the spectators, and actors, for their attention, and*

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[85] (2002g, p. 342)

participation, when someone at the back stands up. Everybody's eyes are riveted on HER. It's the Principal. SHE starts talking…]

CP: I would like to thank you for crafting this play about MY college, OUR college really. [*looking round at the other actors*] I had never realized…

[*The curtain goes down while another discussion starts and we now return to the normal world of academia, perhaps wondering how the debate is going to ensue… …*]

Chapter Eleven: The quasi-final stage: presenting the conclusions of my research

> …all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don't construct my analyses in order to say, "This is the way things are, you are trapped." I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them. Everything I do is done with the conviction that it may be of use.
>
> (Foucault, 2002b, p. 295)

Introduction

This chapter draws together the conclusions emanating from my research. It is divided into two main sections – theoretical and methodological, according to my two main research questions – to which I attempt to provide responses respectively. Research usually attempts to provide closure, but I refuse this, consequently seeking to overturn this 'convention' by opening it up through provoking questions, rather than just presenting conclusions. The final section considers the implications and limitations of my research.

Providing possible answers to theory

'How does networking unfold in school governance in a Maltese college?'

I now present the conclusions to my theoretical research question according to the main thematic areas that emerge from my research, namely, the performance of collegiality; relations of power; and leadership distribution.

I will first speak about the conclusions related to the unfolding of collegiality in 'Polyphonic College' as they materialize in the play.

The introduction of collegiality in the Maltese state school system

Riles (2001) makes claim to the 'institutionalized utopianism' of the network – and this is how it is presented in FACT. There is an unproblematized, almost-blind belief in the

ability of education networks to solve the problems being faced by schools. Nevertheless, there is a simultaneous recognition, acknowledgement, and problematization by the State of that same 'blind belief' that led to the generation of FACT in 2005 and the 'birth' of colleges in 2006. The Maltese college is, at other times, utilized as a 'vehicle for government-driven school reform' (Day *et al*., 2003; O'Brien *et al*., 2006) as neither the Principal nor the Heads have any say over State-issued directives. In the Maltese education scenario, it is the 'structural' purpose (Hopkins, 2000) that outshines the 'moral' goal (Lieberman, 1999), with the network serving more as a 'cross-over structure' (Hopkins, 2005) rather than a means of collaboration to enhance educational delivery.

The Maltese college thus exhibits 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham & Vangen, 2005) as an evident gap exists between the policymakers' view of networking and how it unfolds on a day-to-day basis. Networks were 'imposed' on the Maltese state school educational landscape, rather than having been 'incentivised' (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009). They can thus be regarded as 'a mechanism for increased surveillance' (Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002) by both the Principal and the Heads due to higher levels of accountability and monitoring measures. However, the leaders accept the college as incontestable despite voicing their disagreement.

Collegiality is regarded as a 'straitjacket' (Jarvis, 2012) by some of the leaders, as an imposition by the State through a policy mandate. However, when it comes to the issue of conscription and volunteerism (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009), all the leaders in my study unanimously agree that conscription was the only way forward for the Maltese state schools. A lot of ambiguity revolves around the 'support' provided by the college. 'Support' and 'empowerment', which vary in degree, are translated by the Heads as the

frequency of the Principal's physical presence in their schools, as well as the space given to their voice/s in the CoH.

The concomitants of 'networking'

Various issues were generated as an effect of this school networking. College setup is problematized by the leaders on two main issues: geographical clustering and college streaming. The reasons behind geographical clustering as the setup of choice for Maltese colleges as to *how*, *why*, and *who* decided remain mysterious and anonymous. School networking by district leads to the isolation of students who are 'entrenched' in the same geographical area – this accords with the concerns of Bezzina and Grima (2003) over the 'stagnation of ideas and limited exposure to educational experiences', leading to a 'lack of cross-fertilization' which somehow contradicts the concept of networking. This also results in 'college streaming' as schools from deprived areas are networked together, while those from 'affluent' areas are clustered together, resulting in social injustice and educational inequality. Despite the imposition, Maltese leaders do problematize colleges which is in direct contradiction to O'Brien *et al.*'s (2006) suggestion of an 'unquestioned consensus', as the debate in *Polyphonic College* has not been closed off with the implementers.

Joining a college also brings forward the issue of identity maintenance (as explored by Evans & Stone-Johnson, 2010; Jackson, 2005) which emerges in two contradictory ways in this play. Joining *Polyphonic College* is regarded as a loss of individual school identity, leading to homogeneity and loss of autonomy. However, empowerment is generated through the acquisition of a new college identity which enhances one's individuality. This highlights the paradox in relation to autonomy and collectivity as

explored by Watson (2013), which gives rise to the dichotomy between 'collective' and 'individual' identities.

The centrality of the Principal's role

Traces of the 'romance of leadership' (Meindl, 1993) emerge, both in the FACT policy discourse, and in the narrative of the Heads. The Principal is regarded by the majority of the Heads as the determining factor of the college, showing evidence of 'leader centrism' (Fairhurst, 2011, p. 190), with a primary focus on HER actions and the often unchallenged assumption of leadership as a positive thing. In addition to being positioned in the midst of this 'leader centrism' scenario by FACT, the Minister, the Directors General, and the Heads, the Principal positions HERSELF within this rising ideology of 'leaderism' (O'Reilly & Reed, 2010) at the centre of the leadership dynamics in *Polyphonic College*, which emerges in the way SHE constructs and performs HERSELF.

College discourses

Notwithstanding the Heads' narrative of embracing collegiality, a "moated or walled culture of schooling" (Black, 2008, p. 44) still persists, despite the college having been in operation for six years. The majority of the Heads extol the benefits of networking; however, sharing leadership 'outside' their school walls and 'letting go' of their schools is still a weak point.

One can detect an interdiscursive battle between collegiality and isolationism. A tension thus emerges, with school leaders adopting an ambivalent attitude towards networking which could perhaps be considered as the first step towards the dissolution of the network. Furthermore, an intradiscursive struggle emerges within the Principal's

discourse of collegiality and co-operation which SHE promotes so strongly among the Heads, but fails to practise with Principals in other colleges, while simultaneously trying to break away gradually from 'The Centre'.

The very strong sense of isolationism still prevalent within the college is mirrored at macro-level, with the network system itself failing to promote inter-networking – becoming a case of 'college isolationism' due to the lack of collegiality among colleges – FACT creates a discursive reality of college insularity. The same problem that the networking system worked so hard to eradicate – school isolation – is now unfolding at college level. The college runs the risk of insularity from the outside world (Jackson, 2005), in addition to becoming a force for exclusion and for the engendering of parochialism (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009) as school leaders prefer to work with others they know, that is, within their college. This snail-paced, or rather, 'effectively' inexistent traffic flow among colleges may lead to 'network homophily' and 'groupthink' (Lima, 2010), with colleges and Principals reverting to the old system of isolationism.

The discourse of efficiency, accountability, and the marketplace which is prevalent within the FACT policy is reflected in the Principal's discourse, who, therefore, does take up the positioning as set out by its discursive framework, thus acting out HER role for the development of 'a quality education' as deemed in FACT. This highlights an ambivalent tension that emerges in the policy document between the former entrenched cultural attitude and current 'global' discourses.

<u>Networking as it unfolds in leadership dynamics</u>

The CoH emerges as a major constituent contributing to the success or otherwise of networking in *Polyphonic College*. Besides being laid out as such in the discursive framework of the FACT policy document, this is corroborated by both the performance and the narrative of the Principal and the Heads, who both construct and enact the CoH as the core of *Polyphonic College*, where the networking unfolds. The role of the CoH to "nurture a spirit of collegiality" is not materializing among all the network members, confirming the notion of Church *et al.*(2002) of human relationships and trust as the connective tissue in networks. Human relations emerge as both a pillar and a hindrance to collaboration. The Heads construct the CoH as a vehicle that is both empowering and disempowering, thus contributing to the construction and performance of their leadership identity in interaction within the network. All participants have their own individualistic notion of a network (Berry, 2004) which is further enhanced by their particular college philosophy.

Networking does not unfold as laid out in FACT, neither the Principal nor the Heads are acting out their roles according to the policy discourse, perhaps the Principal to a greater extent as evident in HER very contradictory performance. The policy mandates the Principal to foster collaboration or the sharing of good practices among the Heads of the college schools which does not always unfold. The 'power to decide' about network purpose and plan, role definitions, the allocation of resources, and the determination of success, as described by Jopling and Crandall (2006) is not being distributed by the Principal to the Heads. The Maltese college does not turn out to be the network described by Thompson *et al.*(1991) – 'a collection of essentially equal agents', with its emphasis on egalitarianism and democracy. Therefore, the Maltese college in practice

transpires as anti-thetical to Castells'(1996) notion of the network with its emphasis on decentralization, fluidity, and lack of boundaries. It *is* aspired as such in FACT and discursively constructed in such a manner. The process *is* 'network-like', but only in a directed, top-down manner. Bi-directionality (as defined by Eriksson, 2005), is practised only to a limited and selective extent, depending on the leadership level – the higher the level, the more stringent the totality.

The second subsidiary research question explores the flow of relations of power within the college which led me to construe the conceptualizations about several related issues.

<u>Relations of power flowing within and across the different levels</u>

The Heads' narratives and performance reveal what might be described as a very *detached bond* among primary and secondary school Heads. One can detect the presence of a 'network within a network' constituted by the four primary school Heads which emerges as a 'strong' network within the 'weaker' network that is *Polyphonic College*. There is the possibility of this 'network of primary schools' devolving into 'comfortable collaboration' (Chapman & Hadfield, 2010). Consequently, too much integration within the same sector would in turn lead to insularity not only from the outside world as stated by Jackson (2005), but from the other network members – the leaders of the secondary schools. Seemingly, it is only the primary schools that have been enabled to partially 'overcome their isolationism' (Katz *et al.*, 2009, p. 16) through networking. However, this also shows the agentic action (Adams, 2012) of these primary school Heads within policy discourse as they manage to articulate positions for themselves within the constraints of FACT. This confirms Lima's (2010) claim about the constantly shifting nature of the network. The Heads rationalize this

lack of bonding between primary and secondary sectors due to having nothing in common curriculum-wise. They thus position themselves as 'victims' of the State that in turn positioned the 'school network' as *the* structural model for Maltese schools.

However, not only are the secondary schools detached from the primary schools, there is a strong detachment among the three secondary school Heads. This is mainly attributable to 'leadership shearing' (Hadfield, 2007) – the Heads have ended up in quasi-antagonistic relationships because of differential rates in the development of their 'lateral agency' (Hadfield *et al.*, 2005), as well as their shifting identification with the network and its aims. This leads to a power inequality. According to Lank (2006), this power inequality can lead to one-sided relationships – and traces of these *can* be detected in *Polyphonic College*, to a certain extent – with the potential danger of the disruption of the whole network, with the constellation of leadership (Denis *et al.*, 2001) breaking apart 'as different groups spin out of each other's orbit' (Hadfield, 2007, p. 280).

Struggles between tiers of leaders are a reality (Hadfield, 2007). Tensions emerge among Heads, between Heads and the Principal, the Principal and the Directors General, and ultimately, even between the Directors General and the Minister.

The fluctuating positioning and re-positioning of the Principal

The Principal performs HER selves in a very contradictory manner in *Polyphonic College* and adopts various positions in relation to both the Directors General and the Heads, through HER various positionings and re-positionings by those above HER and those below HER in addition to HER selves. Despite drawing HER authority from 'The Centre', SHE performs herself as a resistor of 'The Centre', wanting to garner more

power for Polyphonic College and for HERSELF eventually. SHE is also close to the seat of power, which is the Minister and the State, concurrently drawing the Heads closer and keeping them far to retain the distance and role boundaries as outlined in FACT. SHE does align with the Heads, however, when SHE attempts to distance HERSELF from the Directors General. SHE performs HER selves in a very ambiguous way as if SHE wants to be simultaneously close to and distant from the distinct hierarchical levels. The leadership practices exercised by the Principal emerge as 'full of ambiguities, paradoxes, confusions, [and] inconsistencies', corresponding with the findings of Alvesson and Spicer (2011, p. 48).

The third subsidiary research question deals with leadership in the network, more specifically leadership distribution and the way it unfolds.

Distributed leadership: its perceptions, ambiguities, and dilemmas

My study reveals the appeal of the 'chameleon-like quality' (Harris, 2007, p. 315) of distributed leadership to Maltese policymakers and leaders, each with their own 'variabilities and dualities' (Woods *et al*., 2004, p. 439) of the term. One can detect its various adaptations to describe an infinite variety of leadership approaches with a specific focus on highly structured forms of limited, or 'directed', rather, delegation, especially at school level.

Another dilemma of distributed leadership that emerges in the Heads' discourse is the selective nature of this co-leadership practice – distributed leadership for some, but not for all, in this case, the Assistant Heads who are positioned lower in the leadership hierarchy. This dilemma points to the inequality in leadership dynamics (Harter *et al*., 2006), throwing into question Katz *et al*.'s (2009, p. 5) claim of leadership being

'defined by activity other than formal position', while simultaneously contradicting Simkins (2005) on the claim of informal influence being more relevant than formal power.

<u>Distributed leadership in FACT and the resulting power flow</u>

Distributed leadership is specifically set out in FACT as *the* leadership style to be practised by all the leaders in the college. Leadership practices in *Polyphonic College* transpire otherwise. Despite the leaders' claims, distributed leadership does not unfold as such a prominent praxis.

The discursive framework of FACT itself has inherent contradictions when it comes to the involvement of the Heads as policy implementers in the enactment of networking; implying the assumption that they will just fit within the pre-set discursive positionings and roles, with further expectations encompassing involvement. The policy discourse, however, does not unfold in this participatory democratic manner in practice as not all the Heads are allowed to make their voice/s heard, thus contradicting Jopling and Crandall's (2006) view of distributed leadership which legitimizes all the leaders' voices. This underlines the tension between 'empowerment and direction' as identified by Smith and Lewis (2011, p. 384), resulting in an organizational paradox where leadership enactment in a Maltese college is 'directed' rather than 'distributed' from above.

FACT, mandating the setting up of colleges across the state educational system, maintained the existing power relations between the Directors General in their Head Office and Heads of School, with a multi-layered bureaucracy in-between, thus confirming Ball's declaration that policy texts '*enter* rather than simply change power

relations' (1994, p. 20). Hierarchical forms of accountability are still inherent within the system, as what is to be 'distributed' remains within the strategic parameters set by the government (Hartley, 2007), thus creating a tension between collaboration and accountability (Elkins & Haydn, 2004). A control imperative in the relationship between policy and practice (as explored by Gunter & Forrester, 2008) can be detected in *Polyphonic College*, with distribution coming downward and used as a form of sophisticated delegation. This points to the 'constraining' nature of distributed leadership (Woods *et al*., 2004), which leads to the 'dysfunctional dynamics of control-collaboration tensions' (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003, p. 399). Despite the hegemony of distributed leadership discourse as constructed and positioned in FACT, the primacy of the 'solo leader' remains in the figure of the Principal, the Directors General, or the State - represented by the Minister. The narrative of distributed leadership in *Polyphonic College* unfolds as part of the policy rhetoric to claim that power and autonomy are shared with schools and within and across schools, whereas the mundane leadership practices point to centralization and managerialism (when analysed against research in distributed leadership carried out by Hall *et al*., 2011).

The Maltese network thus becomes a 'totalizing structure which imposes its will without much, if any, consideration of agency, local politics or resistance' (Angus, 2004, p. 24), with leadership being utilized as a vehicle of power (Youngs, 2009). The college may give the appearance of deregulation and decentralization, while 'The Centre' retains control through decision-making (Ozga, 2009). Despite their non-appearance in flesh and blood on stage, the leaders in the higher echelons, that is, the Directors General and the State, still manage to make their 'absent' presence felt, thus impinging on the network dynamics. However, power *is* exercised from various points

and does follow a bi-directional traffic flow. Although most of the power comes from above, power does flow upwards in the form of resistance which is exercised by the leaders at all hierarchical levels.

The 'performance' of distributed leadership

The quest to redistribute leadership away from its current heroic mode might be impossible to achieve (Grint, 2010) – it turns out to be a quasi-impossible task in *Polyphonic College*. This manifests itself in the infantile relationship that is portrayed between the Principal and the Heads. This recurrent theme of infantilisation is constructed in two complimentary ways – through the positioning of the Heads by the Principal and through the Heads' acceptance and performance of this positioning – what I consider as a concurrent double positioning and performance. The second type of positioning is more frequent, showing the Heads subjecting themselves to this adult-child relationship. The college thus becomes the locus for various forms of 'power and compliance relationships' (Jarvis, 2012, p. 489) with the Heads investing all the power in the Principal. The Principal positions and performs HERSELF as 'superior' to the Heads in this power relationship, who in turn position HER as such while positioning themselves as 'infantile subordinates' – a 'self-inflicted' subordination. This confirms the possibility of distributed leadership practices within the notion of 'benevolent autocracy' (Watson, 2013), as well as the claim made by Lingard *et al.*(2003) that schools do need the leadership of the Principal and his/her positional power.

Both the Principal and the Heads make claims to leadership distribution according to a set of very specific criteria, which is tantamount to 'imposed' distribution. At times, distributed leadership also serves as 'a smokescreen for the more authoritarian practices' of the leaders (Crawford, 2012), in which case, the notion of distributed

leadership only 'appears' to incorporate democratic procedures (Woods, 2004, p. 22). The Heads in *Polyphonic College* do resist the practice of distributed leadership, despite their complaints about the impositions 'from ABOVE', revealing their very confounding relationship with distributed leadership. A distributed leadership perspective may also give rise to autocracy (Spillane, 2005) as leadership can be stretched over leaders without being democratic – evident in the college under study. The discourse of the Principal exposes the ambiguous nature of the term 'distributed leadership' – this contains a directional element of power, implying that distributed leadership is done to others. This confirms Youngs' (2009) findings about the inequality in the leadership hierarchy between the 'distributors' and the 'distributees', and the subsequent positioning of the locus of power in educational contexts.

Autonomy and decentralization

There is a tension between autonomy and centralization, which emerges in the FACT policy discourse, the discourse of the Principal, and that of the Heads. Autonomy is constructed by FACT as 'a greater say by schools in determining their own management' (p. 29) and distinguished as apart from 'complete deregulation' (ibid). The Heads, on the other hand, equate autonomy with decision-making power at school level, while the Principal identifies autonomy with individual identity, two aspects which although not anti-thetical, emerge as contradictory in the college. Distributed leadership, thus incorporates a degree of control and autonomy, consequently restricting the boundaries of participation from the Heads. This tension among autonomy, centralization and decentralization runs across both school and college level.

The FACT policy promotes more autonomy and decentralization for the schools within a framework of strong central control. The Principal is in a constant struggle to

decentralize both the college and the schools, manifested in HER desire for *Polyphonic College* to loosen its ties from 'The Centre' and HER expressed wish for more decision-making power at college level. The Heads, on the other hand, have been 'normalized' into centralization. Decentralization still has a long way to go in the Maltese state educational system. The policy only promises a conditional form of autonomy, which is not 'true' decentralization by precluding a grasp by the Education Minister - representing the highest level of the State - and the central education entities. It seems that the only way to achieve distributed leadership in *Polyphonic College* is through monitoring, auditing, and strong central control. It can therefore be argued that centralization has been re-introduced through colleges.

Addressing method

'How does a researcher negotiate the methodological tensions and contradictions in qualitative inquiry in order to construct knowledge differently?'

In this part of the chapter, I attempt to provide answers to my methodological research question from the viewpoint of an emerging researcher who has had to struggle with the crisis of representation in my deliberate choice of constructing knowledge differently.

I 'show' and 'tell' that one cannot set the boundaries of academic discourse, despite the problematic link between lived experience, its textual representation, the subjects, and the author, with my play emerging as a response to my struggle with the 'crisis of representation'. 'Lived experience', or my understanding of it as the subjects' narrative and performance, is represented in their 'verbatim quotes', of which I show the origins, thereby placing the subjects centre-stage. This is a strategy I employ to retain the 'voice' of the 'other' (Venuti, 1998) – as long as the reader accepts 'my' version of 'verbatim' (transcribed and translated signifiers).

I refuse homogenization and the suppression of the 'I', of my voice. Instead, I acknowledge my presence in my research story and write myself - my *selves*, rather - into my own text by exposing my voice (as Denise) in the play and using the first person, rather than the passive, throughout the thesis. As researcher and translator, I acknowledge myself as an 'active producer of research' (Temple, 2002, p. 845), rather than simply being a 'gatherer of facts'. According to Hermans (1996), 'we expect the agent, and hence the voice…to remain so discreet as to vanish altogether' (p. 5). However, in the absence of my 'voice', the play would not have been the same. In my dual role of researcher and transcriber, I am conscious of my effect on the unfolding transcript. I profess that transcription is an act of negotiation, not a search for perfection (Ross, 2009, p. 12), producing a text that at times is 'more like a script than a transcript' (Tedlock, 1990, p. 137), in which I am as central as the other participants.

In the steps of Richardson (1997), I experiment with textual form, writing educational research as drama. I experiment with voice, turning the leaders' voices into drama and positioning my 'voices' as narrator, researcher, interpreter, author, and producer into the text - which ultimately turns me into a performer of my own work. I also experiment with frame by inviting Foucault, and subsequently the spectators, into my text.

I reject the traditional notion of validity that is presented as *the* grand narrative, as *the* normative discourse (Koro-Ljundberg, 2010), and do not feel the need to make a 'methodological apologia' (Clough, 1999) for my work. I lay claim for the validity of my research. I give a lot of importance to writing, to the writing process rather, using writing as 'a process of discovery' (Richardson, 1997, p. 2) and am startled by *what* and *who* I discover. The process of play writing has transformed my identity, bestowing me

with new ones in the process – those of writer, experimenter, playwright – identities that were inexistent, or perhaps buried, in my pre-doctoral existence have now been unveiled. My writing has both affected who I have become and demarcated who I no longer am. In the words of Richardson (ibid, emphasis added), I am now 'more aware of myself as both *product* and *producer*, *object* and *subject*'. As producer of this play, I consider myself to be its 'product' because of what and who it has turned me in. I am also the 'subject' of my own research process, but also the 'object' in that I problematize my own writing and the various positions I occupy within it.

I now present a 'writing-story' (Richardson, 1997, p. 1) about my production – the 'story of my story' of *Polyphonic College* by giving an outline of the various stages in my attempts at play writing that led to the version of the play that has been performed on stage:

1. All the interviews and the CoH observation were transcribed, followed by a narrative analysis of each individual transcript, simultaneously identifying the themes and selecting 'verbatim quotes' which were subsequently translated from Maltese to English.

2. This led to the creation of three tableaux made up of a number of scenes where I juxtaposed interview 'narratives' versus their 'performance' in the meeting, which I labelled 'a play of voices'.

3. This was then transformed into three Acts that were ironically constructed, in terms of ironic asides and comments on my part where I used the actual verbatim quotes, inventing the various situations, however. Foucauldian interpretations were interspersed within the Acts in grey textboxes.

4. The Acts were then broken down into shorter scenes, with the interpretation moving to the end of each scene, however including quotes which were not in the play but which developed themes exposed in the scenes.

5. Verbatim quotes could not be included apart from the scenes, so a re-structuring involved presenting the three themes that emerged in relation to the research questions in three Acts, further subdivided into scenes, according to the topics I wanted to portray, with my Narrator's comments running throughout. It was at this stage that I introduced FACT as a character by inserting direct quotes from the policy document highlighting the main issues that emerged. These were identified through a policy analysis conducted while carrying out the interviews and observation. An interpretation in prose form followed each scene.

6. Another version ensued in which I added more Narrator's comments and more verbatim quotes to illustrate certain points better.

7. After carrying out these 'amendments', the play was well beyond the 'ideal' word limit. This constituted a crisis for me as I was in a dilemma as to whether to pull out two complete scenes or shorten all the others. I kept all the scenes, removing material which was 'unnecessary'.

8. The latest version has been 'visibly' changed in terms of both my presence and that of Foucault on stage. I insert myself as Denise throughout the play and the interpretation following each scene has been developed into a lively discussion between Denise - me, in my various roles - and Foucault, who honours us with HIS actual presence on stage in human form. HIS role in my play underwent a gradual transformation from 'invisibility' to 'visibility'. In one of the earliest versions, HE spoke through me as Narrator in my comments interspersed throughout the text. Then, I gave interpretations through HIS theories after the

scenes. However, despite HIS presence in both the crafting of the play and the interpretations, HE was physically absent until I decided to put HIM on stage and take on a more active role.

9. The decision over whether to give the characters names in order to retain their anonymity was another dilemma. I tried out several approaches before settling on referring to them as 'S' or 'P', according to their sector – this level of identification was needed for the purposes of my research. I tried several versions: I gave them names according to how their 'roles' in the play emerged; named them after Foucauldian concepts; gave them ironic titles; and even considered giving them common names starting with 'S' or 'P' but ruled out all these possibilities as they amounted to labelling or ridicule.

10. The composition of the Epilogue remained a battle till the very end. I tried out different versions: showing how the characters developed throughout the play; tracing the absent presence of the Directors General; presenting the conclusions of the play; elaborating on the conclusions with questions, implications and limitations; until I arrived at this final version where the main points of the play are presented as a form of debate to open up the research.

I will now tell you about the dramatic influences, affinities, and confluences on my recently-discovered creative identity as playwright. I show my play in the making by identifying the source of the verbatim quotes through font type and by revealing how I juxtaposed these two sources 'on stage' to construct each scene which brings out the contradictions both within the individual leaders and among them in a networked context. My intention is not to create a narrative dramatization for production, so my play does not always follow the specific 'rules' or expectations of a 'true' drama.

My play is crafted from the everyday mundane leadership practices of *Polyphonic College*. I present different levels of reality to my audience: that of the Heads in their individual schools; the Heads in relation to the Principal, on both an individual and a network level; the Heads in relation to each other on a one-to-one basis and in interaction within the network; the Heads and the FACT policy; the Principal in relation to the DGs; the DGs and the Minister; together with any other layers of reality identified by the reader/spectator. My drama allows me to depict the 'unstable reality', or 'unreality', rather, of *Polyphonic College* – the apparent divide between what leaders 'say' they do and what they 'actually' do.

During the lengthy process of play-writing, I came across the 'Theatre of the Absurd' and my interest in it grew as I discovered that it highlights aspects of my play. 'The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images' (Esslin, 2004, p. 402). I consider my play to be 'unconventional work', as I both create and apply a different convention of drama to present the many absurdities inherent in the college and its actors, both individually and in interaction. I do not make claims for my play under the genre of the 'Theatre of the Absurd', therefore; I do not present a fully-fledged critique of the conventions of this category but delineate those elements that are relevant to the issues emerging in my play. In the plays of the Absurd, man is depicted as a puppet controlled by invisible, outside forces, trapped in an enclosed space, often in crisis due to the incomprehension of the surrounding world. There is a menacing outside force which also exists inside, with the theme of absence being one of the central features. The characters express a sense of wonder and incredulity at the lack

of cohesion and meaning in the world. It is a chaotic environment where previously-held certainties have dissolved.

The limitations of my research

Having spoken about the conceptual conclusions I managed to generate from my research, I will now consider the limitations of my research, followed by its implications for theory, policy, and practice.

As a reflexive practitioner and researcher, I assume responsibility for limitations arising from decisions concerning my research methods and methodology. I also acknowledge the scope of what was possible within the scale of the collected data for my empirical study, thus recognizing an issue all research should address – the bounded nature of data. It can always be argued that more data can be collected. However, within the scope of my thesis, especially with regards to the research purpose, case study methodology, and innovation in data analysis and representation, the data collected met the requirements of the project, thus enabling me to explore the flow of power within network dynamics in a particular college, though more data would have given more substantiation to my claims.

It could possibly be contended that a relatively small empirical study is being asked to support a large theoretical structure and thus be regarded as overly ambitious. I acknowledge the fundamental limitations of my study in terms of research design - one in-depth interview with each of the eight participants and the observation of the meeting, in addition to the documentary analysis of the FACT policy. The single, in-depth interview provided me with sufficient narrative to depict the power flow within the network dynamics. It could be argued that observation of more than one meeting would have strengthened the claims made, and though perhaps desirable, this proved

impossible due to constraints imposed on the research. However, since the aim of the research was to follow a series of unique events in order to map the unfolding of particularities, further observation would have yielded different events but would not necessarily have led to different conclusions. The research was not about 'characters' or 'traits' but about networks (hence the research was not concerned about gender). The participants declined any further engagement with the data after collection stage, therefore preventing me from sharing the observations and evaluations, and discussing them with them. Thus, I do not claim to make universal generalisations or claims to 'truth' on the basis of a single case study. Through the narrative stance adopted, I offer 'readings' and 'interpretations' by looking to 'the unique' rather than to 'the re-occurring' (Rosenau, 1992). I do not present any totalising conclusions on leadership, neither do I attempt to put forward a 'grand narrative' of power relations within school networks. My single case study and the methodological approach adopted do allow me to present a 'small story' of the dynamics of leadership within the college in contrast to the aspirations for distributed leadership and collegiality as set out in the FACT policy, which from a postmodern perspective may be considered as a problematization of educational theory and practice, with the possibility of disrupting the 'given'. (The 'given' hereby understood as the policy discourse and leadership theory).

I am well aware of the critiques levelled against postmodernism due to its extremely subjectivist and destabilizing nature, mainly what Gubrium and Holstein (1997) describe as 'excessive scepticism', 'paralyzing relativism', and 'unfettered reflexivity' – the very reasons which drew me to this paradigm. I therefore work within the risks and potential provided by these paradigmatic 'shortcomings'. My attention has been drawn to the emergence of post-postmodernism, where 'You are the text, there is no-

one else, no author; there is nowhere else, no other time or place. You are free: you are the text: the text is superseded' (Kirby, 2006, p. 5) – due to the emergence of new technologies re-structuring the nature of the author, the reader, the text, and their inter-relationship. However, I believe that since postmodernism is about finding new ways of describing the world, it can be regarded 'as unfinished […] as an ongoing project to find new ways of looking at new times' (Ward, 2010, p. 261). I agree with Ward (ibid) who confesses that,

> 'Postmodernism' may no longer be the most fashionable label for our times, but nothing has yet replaced it […] claims to have reached the 'end' of postmodernism are not only premature, but distract attention from some of the important challenges it lays down (p. 262)

I declare that the choice of research methods is 'a compromise between the ideal and the achievable, whilst maintaining a keen focus on the purposes of the research and its practicability' (Burton *et al*., 2008, p. 72). Although interviews have various strengths, especially in their emphasis on depth, nuance, complexity, and roundedness in data, they also possess certain problematic features. Alvesson (2011, p. 29) regards the interviewer and the interviewee as the source of 'problems', mainly due to interviewee motives, in addition to the tricky relationship between 'knowing' and 'telling'. Interviewees may be 'politically aware and politically motivated actors', they may find it difficult to translate their version of the world into the interview context, or else unwilling to 'share', and may just 'provide answers' to fill in the role and expectations of the interview situation. This also highlights the role of the macro forces operating behind the interview as a micro situation. I do not assume that the interviewee is primarily 'a competent and moral truth teller' (ibid, p. 4), thus acknowledging the problematic nature of mutual trust, social distance and interviewer/interviewee control. Berger and Ellis (2001) state that the boundaries between, and respective roles of

interviewer and interviewee have become blurred due to the influence of postmodern epistemologies, and it is in this regard and the narrative stance adopted that I focus on the interview situation, the interviewee, and the accounts produced, rather than just on the interviewer as a 'gatherer of data'. As a post-modern informed researcher, I do not view the interview as the straightforward result of asking questions and receiving answers, but consider myself as an 'engaged conversationalist' (Murchison, 2010, p. 200).

Throughout my study, I make references to the interview data as 'narrative' and to the observation data as 'performance'. This does not imply that the interview data is unproblematic whereas the observed meeting involves 'performance'. I utilize this binary as a methodological tool to identify the data source for the crafting of my narrative dramatization in order to bring out the incongruities present within what they say in private and how they behave in interaction, therefore enabling me to present the dysfunctionalities present within the college in order to raise the curtain on relations of power flowing within the network leadership dynamics. The interview is also a 'performance' and neither has claims to more 'authenticity' than the other.

Observation as a research tool poses its own problems. Murchison (2010) draws attention to the apparent paradox between participation and observation, explaining how the common understandings of 'objective stance' and 'detached observer' no longer count, making observation a very challenging method due to the subject position adopted by the researcher. I attempt to counter the problem of subjectivity in interpretation by presenting the 'verbatim quotes' from the observed meeting and acknowledge that what I'm representing through drama may be a 'partial' representation of the truth filtered through my researcher lens. Mason (2002, p. 87)

voices her concern over the challenge posed by settings, situations, and interaction which may be 'notoriously messy and complicated'. But it is this 'messiness' and 'complication' in this particular college that I extol in my research that allows me to display a sketch of the different levels of reality (and unreality) unfolding both within and across the leadership hierarchies.

Documentary analysis which allows me to 'locate, interpret, analyze, and draw conclusions' (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 279) in relation to the data obtained from interviewing and observing also has its limitations. Scott (1990) cautions researchers to adopt the position that documents cannot be regarded as objective accounts, besides having been written for purposes unconnected with the research. I acknowledge that the policy FACT was written as a prescription for organizational reform to be implemented in Maltese state schools and offer a critical analysis regarding it both as 'text' and as 'discourse' (Ball, 1994). I utilize this 'subjectivity' and 'prescription' present in FACT in order to draw out the juxtapositions between what 'should' be happening and what 'is' actually happening in the network.

However, at times, the macro-level steered my micro-level existence. Juggling a full-time job while doing a PhD limited the choice of methodology and research tools. The fact that I worked within the same sphere being explored did not allow me to carry out an ethnographic study of *Polyphonic College* due to my working hours. Other research tools such as diary entries and job shadowing would have perhaps yielded a different perspective, thus giving a different research project. These were not resorted to due to being more time-consuming and engaging for the participants, as well as being more 'intrusive' in their professional lives. After careful consideration, it was mutually decided that within our local context, in-depth interviews and participant observation

would be best suited for them and for the research purpose. The exclusion of other stakeholders such as the Directors General and Senior Management Team members and teachers could have provided more voices to speak about the leaders' interaction within the college. However, the Directors General merely extend the network, which could have been extended indefinitely. The main intention of my research was to explore relations of power as they unfold within college governance, more specifically, the Principal and the Heads. Nevertheless, I do acknowledge that these gaps have major implications for what can be expressed about decentralization, autonomy, collegiality, networking and distributed leadership. Another researcher may have chosen to explore issues of gender. However, I do not seek to explore gender differentials present in leadership, nor am I interested in researching the individual aspects of the leaders as distinguished by gender. It would have been interesting to have studied gender but this would have been a different research project. Perhaps these limitations can be regarded as potential issues to be addressed in post-doctoral research.

I am also fully aware of the 'costs' of my deliberately chosen data representation method of narrative dramatization, of what it has enabled me to do, but also of what has been forfeited, in the process. This technique of combining data from three different sources allowed me 'more freedom to tell the story that needed to be told and show competing perspectives' (Berbary, 2011, p. 194), as I want to *show* rather than simply *tell* readers about the relations of power flowing among governance in a Maltese college through the dysfunctionalities and contradictions that emerge in *Polyphonic College*. I want the readers to experience the same disjunctions I experienced first-hand, in-situ – this mode of representation provided what I consider to be the 'best' means of doing so as it illuminated the case being researched, making for more compelling

reading and engagement by the reader, while simultaneously adding to our social scientific understanding of leadership. I understand that I have presented a 'partial' picture – 'partial' in the sense of being 'partly' in presenting only part of the picture that is *Polyphonic College*, and 'partial' in the sense of there being a potential for bias. I fully acknowledge that partiality while simultaneously recognizing that it is a feature of all research, as it is an absolute fiction to suggest that research can be impartial. What I have presented, paradoxically, is perhaps a more truthful version as I have acknowledged that it is a partial version, without any pretence of it being a definitive or objective study – I do admit to being bound up in the research itself as a researcher.

As a narrativist, fictional representation demonstrates 'an overdue release from a methodological straightjacket' (Barone, 2007, p. 460) – I adopt the stance of

> The postmodern artist or writer [who] is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules […] working without rules in order to formulate rules of what will have been done (Lyotard, 1984, p. 81)

Narrative research also gives 'the long overdue recognition of the sound of silence' (Barone, 2007, p. 463) – it helps me make the voices of educational leaders in a distributed leadership setting heard. Meanwhile, I also recognize the important role of the reader in meaning-making (Spindler, 2008), drawing on Barthes (1975) who suggests that it is the reader who brings unity to a text. Likewise, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1993) also advocate the ambiguity of 'writerly texts' (Barthes, 1975) that leave spaces, demanding the active participation of readers. Readers are thus given the possibility of multiple interpretations, 'fram[ing] meaning possibilities rather than clos[ing] them' (Lather, 1991, p. 113), where readers may choose to follow a particular voice, actively constructing meaning.

The fictionalization of research data may raise serious concerns around the notion of validity – Polkinghorne (2007) outlines validity threats in narrative research, both in the assembled narrative texts and in their interpretation. Validity threats may arise due to the disjunction between a person's actual experienced meaning and the storied description, and due to researchers' interpretations of the narrative, where provided. However, I use fiction to animate the multiple voices that constitute the college – I do not presume to *represent* their voices as if my words could present a reality that pre-exists the act of writing – rather it is through the act of writing that their 'voices' are given space to emerge.

> The play cannot be a realist tale that might capture one authoritative truth…but an exploration with emergent voices and with movement toward the unknown (Davies, 2009, p. 198)

In my writing of the play, I let myself go towards what is described as

> the best known unknown thing, where knowing and not knowing touch, where we hope we will know what is unknown. Where we hope we will not be afraid of understanding the incomprehensible, facing the invisible, hearing the inaudible, thinking the unthinkable (Cixous, 1993, p. 38)

The implications of my research

I will now consider the implications of my research for theory, policy, and practice. Before setting out the implications, I would like to clarify to the reader that the 'readings' and 'interpretations' I hereby offer emanate solely from the specific case study of a particular Maltese college, *Polyphonic College*, where I try to 'locate' meaning about power relations as they unfold within the network leadership dynamics. I fully acknowledge that the adaptation of a different research design, methodology, and theoretical framework would have produced alternative 'interpretations' with diverse

implications. What I present below emanates from the case study of a single college using a narrative dramatization as a method of analysis and representation, which has been crafted using data collected from a single, in-depth interview with all the participants, the observation of a day-long meeting, and the documentary analysis of the FACT policy which mandated this collegiality.

I do not present any 'totalising explanations', subsequently no 'totalising conclusions' – my case study in no way claims to be representative of the Maltese education system in terms of the translation of the FACT policy at practitioner level. At its most basic level, my work may be considered as a unique academic study of the Maltese college system, therefore adding to that administration's research literature. I do acknowledge that in the case of networks, collegiality and distributed leadership, the thesis does set up the FACT policy document against the research findings. My exploration of its reception by the leaders and its implementation in a particular college allows me to focus on the particular aspects of networking, relationships, and distributed leadership. The particular findings of my research do make a modest contribution to the critical literature around leadership theory which is outlined below. My work addresses gaps in educational leadership literature, thereby adding to knowledge in the areas of collegiality; relations of power; and leadership distribution practices. I now address my research questions very briefly, explaining the tentative humble contribution of my study in relation to the three above-mentioned topics, in full acknowledgement of the limitations outlined in the previous section.

Lima (2010) highlights three areas of inadequacy in education networks research, which revolve around leadership processes; network dynamics (a shortcoming which is also noted by Fineman[2003] and Crawford[2011] as relationships within the organization); and network dysfunctions. A lot of ambiguity revolves around the reception to

networking which is simultaneously accepted and eventually problematized by both the State and the leaders on issues of accountability, support, college setup, and identity. Isolationism is very strongly present at both school and college level, leading to intra-networking, rather than inter-networking. Networking does not always unfold in leadership dynamics due to issues revolving around trust, power inequalities, and bi-directionality. Network dysfunctions thus emerge through an exploration of the leadership processes and network dynamics, which are anti-thetical to network theory as propagated by Castells (1996). My findings therefore contest the notions of egalitarianism, democracy, social justice, decentralization, fluidity, lack of boundaries, and collegiality associated with multi-school collaboratives in leadership theory.

 The current policy discourse favours distributed leadership, which necessitates democratic relationships, and yet there is little discussion in literature (as evidenced in the literature review) and among educational practitioners (at least, in the local scene and according to international research documented in literature), about what this means in terms of relations of power. Attention has thus been drawn to the absence of in-depth critiques of power relations surrounding distributed leadership in school settings in the educational leadership literature (Storey, 2004; Youngs, 2009; Crawford, 2012). Power inequalities emerge through the strong 'network within a network' of primary schools which threatens to founder the assumed power of the school network. The latter turns out to be very weak due to competing inside forces presented by the 'bonded' primary schools, in addition to internal problems arising from the weak bond among primary and secondary schools and the sense of detachment evidently palpable within the secondary school level. The Maltese college thus defies the idea behind networking, creating more barriers and divisions rather than 'strong' bonds. This highlights the

disparity in leadership dynamics both within the same hierarchy, and across hierarchies. Power is not exercised equally among the members, but only by the privileged few at the top and those who have bonded at a lower hierarchy.

In my thesis, I address the 'conceptual confusion and empirical reticence' indicated by Harris (2007, p. 315) and other researchers (Storey, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Spillane, 2011) in the field of distributed leadership. The Maltese college undermines the very idea of 'distribution', due to its leadership practices revealing themselves, instead, as 'direction', 'delegation', 'centralization', 'control', 'constraint', and 'accountability'. Network leadership is not more horizontal and distributed – it is vertically directed, rather – replete with ambiguities, paradoxes, and incoherencies. My study does provide new knowledge to network leadership, in reply to the claim by Harris and Beatty (2004, p. 244) about 'so little [being] known about leadership across multiple sites'. The Maltese college provides an 'excellent' example of a collaborative that is *not* working, rather than *net*working.

Niesche (2011, p. 139) commends researchers to cast a wider net 'in terms of approaching, researching, theorizing, and analysing educational leadership' – my study does attempt to take a different approach to leadership analysis and the representation of this research story. Gunter (2010) argues that while theory does not immediately solve the dilemmas of what decisions can be made and implemented in a school leader's work practices, it does allow possibilities for the generation of novel perspectives on this phenomenon we call leadership. My research, besides addressing a gap in the educational leadership literature, may demonstrate the importance of the relationship between theory and practice which is sorely lacking in leadership studies.

I also aim to demonstrate the usefulness of Foucault's work in educational leadership. His themes are still relevant today, in fact, May (2005) argues that if we need to question the relevance of Foucault's work for today, then we must become *more* Foucauldian rather than less. Through the use of Foucauldian theory (mainly, HIS notions centering around power, discourse, subjectification, discipline, and governmentality), the aim of my research has been to critique and problematize traditional understandings of educational leadership – Foucault's notions of webs of power, discipline, governmentality, discourse, and subjectification provide a more nuanced understanding of power that moves beyond hierarchy and position.

It is possible that a move towards distributed leadership will simply involve more complex 'masks' being utilized. Foucault's work helps me examine how leadership discourses operate to produce particular leader subjectivities and how these, in turn, offer resistance to produce particular discursive positions – they are both *subjects to* and the *subjects of* particular leadership discourses. As the processes inherent within colleges involve a distribution of leadership, Foucault's construction of power as relational is used to try to identify and understand the 'nature' of power relations which appear to be present. I would contend that paying attention to the micro-functioning of relations of power among educational leaders within the college structure allows a fresh look at the complexities of professional identities and development and enables an exploration of the 'masks' which are utilized and the forms of resistance against different forms of power (Foucault, 2002g) which are apparent amongst professionals.

My research can also serve as an inspiration for practising leaders in present-day educational institutions in order for them to reflect on the multiple influences on their leadership experience and identity, on how they are 'subjected' by both local and global

forces, and how they in turn subjectify others, all the while moving down the leadership hierarchy. They can come to an understanding of the forces by which they are 'subjectified' from above, in turn leading them to 'subjectify' those beneath them, who in turn offer 'resistance' in response to this subjectification. These forms of 'subjectification' and 'resistance' which are internalized by the various leaders as a 'normalization', 'a regime of truth', thus becoming a 'technology of the self', may therefore be viewed with scepticism and critiqued, rather than being accepted in an essentialist unproblematic way. My research demonstrates that the leaders' subjectivities are a constantly shifting and flexible phenomenon rather than fixed as is constructed through FACT – they are created through a range of particular discourses, power relations and interactions. The explanations and insights presented in this thesis might help senior educational leaders to delineate and re-write their positions within the school network system. It can also lead educational leaders at different levels within the hierarchy to challenge and question the power relations presented by the current educational leadership discourse, consequently adopting a productive role by opening up the discourse for the construction of novel responses and positions. They can take up Foucault's (2000d) notion of critique as a 'permanent' ethos in which they explore the nature of their existence but at the same time query the limits imposed upon them, while probing opportunities for increasing freedom (p. 118).

I provide a diverse reading of leadership – a reading through relations of power as simultaneously exercised through and experienced by the educational leaders in *Polyphonic College* through their own voices that does not necessarily conform to the prescribed models and theories so prevalent in much of the leadership literature. It is through this dramatization of the voices that I believe these findings become of interest

to school leaders themselves. It is certainly clear - according to Niesche (2011), (and I can safely speak from experience) that few school leaders trawl through formal research reports and academic articles, which they feel do not relate to their circumstances. It is my hope that many school leaders can relate to the experiences of the characters in *Polyphonic College* and this can aid their understanding of their competing subjectivities, thus enabling them to be reflexive about their leadership practices for the benefit of their students, schools, college, and themselves as leaders – for their 'becoming' into their leadership role.

Moreover, this diverse reading of leadership, with its equally innovative mode of data representation through the use of narrative dramatization, adds something to the nature of publication, of the writing of research more specifically. I demonstrate that one cannot set the boundaries of academic discourse, acknowledging my constant presence in my research story alongside my participants, experimenting with textual form, voice and frame, all the while giving a lot of importance to the writing process rather than just the product.

My research has highlighted the very weak link among secondary schools and the lack of inter-networking with other colleges, as well as the (non-)performance of distributed leadership within the college. These 'observations' depict a network that is defying its very purpose both according to the FACT policy directives and to the presentation of networks in literature – a network that is fostering isolation; unequal power relationships; and 'top-down' leadership – thus exposing the complexity of their workings, in addition to the contested nature of their claimed value. My case study displays the inadequacies of simplistic notions of 'networks' which have come to be seen as a universal panacea fostering symmetry and equality, when what is required is

to acknowledge the complexities of leadership. The network attempts to foster homogeneity, while suppressing the heterogeneous structures within, when in practice, it is the circumstantial milieu that generates the system's dynamic personae. It is a network that has yet to acknowledge the oscillations between the top-down, hierarchical dynamics and the contingent leadership practices emerging from interactions, as well as recognition of the complexity leadership dynamics unfolding through mechanisms that are 'nonlinearly changeable, unpredictable…, temporally based, and interactively and causally complex' (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007, p. 314). This has serious implications not just for schools but for all organizations. Consequently, my findings could aid policy makers in future revisions of the FACT policy.

Furthermore, the nine remaining colleges can be explored in terms of my research questions in order for a picture to emerge at national level. My thesis could even serve as a starting point for other studies exploring secondary issues that may branch out from my main 'observations'. A study could be carried out to explore the micro-relations between the Principal and the Directors General, with an emphasis on how the latter impinge on the interactions unfolding in the network. Another study may explore issues of gender in terms of how gender differentials influence the dynamics within the leadership group. A further study could focus on participants in lower hierarchical levels, such as Deputy Heads and teachers, who would give their own version of the power relations among the Principal and the Heads.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusions I generated from my research while simultaneously provoking questions for the audience. I present my struggle with the 'crisis of representation' and the various identities that emerged in the process. I also

acknowledge the implications and limitations of my study – these considerations

contribute to my maturity and development as a researcher along my doctoral journey.

The function of this chapter can be best encapsulated in a quote by Usher and Edwards

(1994):

> This final chapter is therefore not so much a finality, a bringing down of the curtain, an ending, but instead an opening, a raising of the curtain. A refusal of totalising explanations must necessarily involve a refusal of totalising conclusions (p. 207).

Chapter Twelve: Reflexivity Revisited

> There are times in life where the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all … what is philosophy today … if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?… The 'essay' … is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an 'ascesis', *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.
>
> [Foucault, 1992, p. 8-9]

Introduction

On beginning my doctoral journey, I had many unexamined, unquestioned and unclear assumptions and beliefs about what would be involved, which I now revisit through reflexivity. As Fox and Allan (2013) declare (after being 'wiser' reflexively),

> The last thing on my mind in these early stages was my own place in the eventual outcome which I saw simply as the production of a thesis (p. 5).

I had not even considered my place within the process beyond the extensive reading of literature, carrying out the research, and writing the thesis, nor did I envisage how it would take me to a point of no return. This chapter is an attempt to give an account of my personal journey towards self-awareness in the research process, of my various 'becomings', 'unbecomings', and 'epiphanies', which I do through a revisiting of the main stages of my research story and its aftermath.

This research story does not seek to be judged by the standards, myths, or 'masks' of validity valorized and distributed in the discourses of the human sciences and social sciences. My assumption in this account is that knowledge is subjective, that is, positional, partial, provisional, and always subject to review and revision.

On reflection and reflexivity: my 'becoming' … and 'unbecoming'

I openly acknowledge that 'I cannot avoid being the same person wearing both (or several) hats' (Bell & Nutt, 2002, p. 75) – it has become increasingly clear to me that it is impossible to separate the roles of practitioner and researcher, as a former teacher and practising deputy head of school I have experienced this 'college' reform at grass roots level. This, in turn, has led me to develop a reflexive disposition, which according to Kamler and Thomson (2006) 'is profoundly about the being and doing of scholarship…the personal and the person of the researcher…[using] both the personal and the discursive 'I' (p. 66). And I have indeed donned the 'reflexive robe', involving a continual evaluation and problematization of subjective responses, intersubjective dynamics, and the research process itself – applying the same critical stance to my work as to my research data. I am aware of experiencing a world and moving back and forth in a kind of dialectic between experience and awareness. As Hertz (1997) puts it, 'To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment' (p. viii). I attempted to transform the subjectivity in my research from a problem to an opportunity through the use of reflexivity.

Though written from a very personal stance, I make no attempt for my reflexive methodology to spill out in a 'confessional tale' (Van Maanen, 1989) to ease my 'troubled' conscience. On the other hand, I *interrupt* reflexivity, adopting what Pillow (2003) refers to as 'reflexivities of discomfort' (p. 187), an 'uncomfortable reflexivity – a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous' (p. 188). I get suspicious of a reflexivity that provides an easy and close lead to the familiar. Adopting reflexivity problematically leads to 'practices of confounding disruptions' (Pillow, 2003, p. 192), for as St.Pierre (1997b) states, 'neither a deliberate

obfuscation nor the desire for clarity and accessibility is innocent' (p. 186). As a qualitative researcher, I subjectively conceive reflexivity as 'a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself' (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). I make use of rhetorical questions in italics throughout this chapter as a way of problematizing my own reflexive self – a 'reflexivity of self-reflexivity'.

Reconsidering the pre-research stage

I set out to explore my 'insider/outsider' position – as a doctoral researcher, I am immersed in a 'college' as an interviewer, participant observer, policy analyst, once-teacher...but I am an 'outsider' in that my school does not belong to a 'college', enabling me to adopt what I assumed would be a potentially 'detached' position which has turned out to be impossible so far. As far as I could, I wanted to look at 'my self' in ways which would help me see how my intrinsic interests were affecting my judgement. However, I would have to acknowledge that the same self is the one looking at the self and therefore detachment and ultimate separation is never going to be possible.

I want to carve my own space in the unfolding and ever-growing niche of educational leadership, rather than replicating other studies in terms of theory or methodology. An extensive and critical review of relevant literature led to the identification of 'blind spots' (Wagner, 1993) in both local and international research around educational leadership: leadership dynamics across multi-school collaboratives; the relationships among the top educational leaders; and leadership distribution practices in a networked education system. I also examined my 'lived world' as a means of clarifying the research questions, as well as putting under scrutiny my motivations, assumptions, and interests in my particular research as a precursor to identifying forces that might skew

the research in particular directions. I approached my research setting with firmly-set assumptions about power in the 'college', the 'dark' side of school networks, as well as the relative importance of FACT. These were fully or partially dissipated directly in the field, during interviews and the observation session of the Council of Heads meeting, more so at the later stage of transcription and eventual re-/analysis and representation – after being 'filtered' through my reflexive framework.

Well aware of the fact that my research questions were going to provide a novel contribution to the field of educational leadership due to the Foucauldian theory of power not having been utilized to explore relations among leaders at different hierarchies, but rather exchanges between teachers and pupils, I was extremely anxious about not being granted access to the research milieu. How would powerful leaders feel about being interviewed and observed by someone below them in the leadership rung? Would they be reluctant to 'share' sensitive information with me, in the fear that it would be disclosed (by me, the 'other' – the 'unknown' researcher) and jeopardize their role and position with the Directors General ('their' leaders)? Would they allow me a glimpse into the 'lifestyle' of 'their' college or would I just be dismissed as an 'outsider'/'intruder'? Would the window they open onto 'their' world just be a form of impression management?

I had pre-set notions about the topic under study – I had assumed that the Heads had not taken too kindly to the deployment of the College Principal – to having a new leader 'overseeing' them, whom they must now be accountable to, and being 'forced' to join a college...But what I found surprised me greatly...There was some negativity, some dissonance which was however outweighed by the positive power flowing within this quasi-familial network...

Revisiting the research purpose

The initial aims of this research were to examine the power flow between the Principal and the Heads of school in light of the new organizational setup of school networking, mandated by the policy FACT. I had initially set out to explore the Heads' reception of the Principal, a leadership role at a higher hierarchical level created as a result of this reform. I wanted to explore whether these Heads adopted the discursive positions and positionings laid out for them by the policy. In the early stages of data collection, I became aware of power flowing in a bi-directional way between the two hierarchical leadership levels. However, what disturbed me, and simultaneously widened the scope of my case study, was the existence of an asymmetrical flow of power within the same leadership hierarchy, emerging in conflicts among the Heads and also evident in the positive or negative discriminatory treatment by the Principal. The Directors General, who are hierarchically above the Principal in the leadership ladder, were frequently alluded to in the 'narratives' and 'performance' of the participants in my research – leading to the realization that although they were 'absent' contributors, their absence or presence impinged on the leadership dynamics of the network. My ingrained and perhaps taken-for-granted, unproblematized assumptions regarding uni-directional, top-down network traffic flow and the practice of distributed leadership were inverted and disturbed by what I witnessed and was 'narrated' in *Polyphonic College*. The focus of the research moved to an exploration of the power flow among the leaders (both at different and equal hierarchical positions) within the network, vis-à-vis the policy discourse. I had never thought that such a distinction between the leaders' narratives and performance would be so prominent. Considerable clashes emerged between what they told me in private during the interviews, and how they behaved in the company of the Other Heads. This seems to find its resonance in what Deleuze (2012) presented as a

form that haunted Foucault's work: 'the form of the visible, as opposed to the form of whatever can be articulated' (p. 28). This mismatch between narrative and performance turned out to be an 'epiphanic moment' at the initial stages of analysis which sparked off my decisions regarding data representation and steered the subsequent format of my thesis.

I now reflect on the theoretical and methodological frameworks adopted in my research story, while revisiting some of the decisions I made along the way.

Revisiting theory

In the first nine months of my 'doctoral pilgrimage', I read literature extensively and widely, first and foremost to explore possibilities for my epistemological framework (of which I knew nothing at the time) as well as to build a sound theoretical base in order to find a space for my work in the area of educational leadership. My theoretical framework, however, was still unexplored terrain and the first time I gave a presentation of my then-projected research at the Doctoral Conference in May 2012, my supervisors suggested Foucault, and I have never looked back. I had my first Foucauldian 'baptism of fire' in the summer of 2012. I consider myself honoured to have gained an insight into Foucauldian concepts through his original works (some of which I even attempted to go through in French, which turned out to be incomprehensible on my first attempt both due to the language and the concepts involved) rather than through interpretations of his works, second-hand. Our first encounter occurred thanks to his biography by Didier Eribon, after which I explored his philosophy in his major works, which I then tried to make sense of through critiques of his work.

> Embracing Foucault was not without pain and suffering as I took on the enormity of the impact of his thinking on my own thinking…The challenges to my points of view and the ways that I made sense of the world were considerable…Embracing the theories of Foucault undoubtedly involved loss of certainty for me -…but it also opened a doorway into a space where I could make sense in different ways (Fox, 2009, p. 185).

This is what I went through on encountering Foucault and deciding to take him up as the theoretical framework for my research. Trying to grapple with his concepts involved readings and re-readings of the original texts, with each re-reading providing me with a novel and deeper understanding of his work. I can describe it as an immersion in his world, or in 'our' world, as HE became one of the central figures in my life which was focused on my PhD research at the time (even more so at the moment).

His analytical methodologies are centered on a critique that is useful for stimulating 'a wider process of reflection and action leading to other and more tolerable ways of thinking and acting' (Gordon, 2002, p. xvii). Foucault's notion of critique helped me see what type of assumptions, familiar notions, established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based on – in the words of Foucault (2002c), 'To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy' (p. 456). At this stage of my development as a neophyte academic, I make no claims to have a familiarity with all the topics covered by Foucault. For the purposes of my research, I focus on the concepts of power-knowledge, discipline, discourse, governmentality, and subjectification, which had an impact on my understanding of the data.

Revisiting methods

I did confront dilemmas during the interviews and observation sessions – I am cognizant of the impact that my presence as a young, female researcher may have had on the 'unveiling' of relations of power. Some participants were wary of the digital

recorder – I wanted to use it in order to maintain the flow of the conversation, have direct eye contact, as well as constant and unlimited access to the 'voices', rather than trying to scribble down every word in the process. I did write field notes before, during, and after the interaction which I constantly referred back to in my attempt to 'piece' my research together. *Whom did they consider as their 'audience' – me, the digital recorder, or some 'other'? Would the outcome have been different in its absence? What if I had used a video camera instead, and had access to gestures and body language I may have overlooked? Was their behaviour in the CoH meeting 'natural' or 'contrived', were all the 'voices' heard, or were they silenced because of my presence?*

I am also aware of the developing researcher-participant relationship and the forging of a bond with some of the interviewees, with whom emails continued being exchanged well after the data collection stage. *Will this cloud my judgement and affect my writing about 'them', my representation of 'them'?* This communication made me realize that my research had managed to foster reflexivity within the leaders, 'I would like to thank you as well because, as I told you, your interview was an opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation' [Email from P3]. *She thanked me for giving her the opportunity to reflect about her job, for 'listening' to her, when it should have been the other way round – I should have been the one thanking her. This developed into a sort of inverted power relationship that exceeded my expectations – I had empowered them through the articulation of their otherwise 'silent' or 'silenced' voices – in turn, they had empowered me as researcher through a revelation of their 'entrenched and embedded silence'.*

The fact that I am exploring power flow in a school network heightened my awareness of the power relationships in the research process – of the constant fluctuation of power

between me and my participants, me and my topic, me and my epistemology. I wield the power in controlling the direction of the interview, deciding what to ex/include in the transcripts and final write-up, whose quotes to choose for the crafting of my play... The interviewees have absolute power over what to impart to me, some try to control the interview at the start by reading out questions from the pre-sent interview guide, or by trying to veer the interview direction according to their own agenda, while others make it difficult for me to gain access...I am at a hierarchically lower rung professionally (being a Deputy Head) – perhaps that makes it more difficult for them to impart their honest views...*How do they regard me as a researcher: as an 'intruder', an 'equal', an 'inferior', a Deputy Head, or a student? Whose 'version' of narratives is to be believed? This makes it impossible to maintain a neutral stance...It is impossible for me to sit on the fence...*

As Finlay (1998) confesses,

> my reflections (about my own assumptions, society's ideas and my informant's inconsistent presentation) became part of the research data I needed to take note of and analyze (p. 454).

Interviewing involved a lot of 'active' listening, gaze coupling, a few prompts, gaps of silence, nods and smiles...THEIR voice was to be heard...MINE was barely voiced and barely audible...Gaps of silence rather than voice serve as prompts for the interviewee to elaborate on his/her narrative...Even direct eye contact serves a purpose...

I felt so much part of the college – was that to my advantage or something to be wary of? Were there things that I was not 'seeing' due to this developing sense of familiarity? How was this going to reflect on my eventual analysis? Coffey's (1999) words ring true: 'Fieldwork is personal, emotional, and identity work' (p. 1).

Would I have gained 'richer' data had I been able to use other research tools and methods, such as a full-blown ethnography instead of just the observation of meetings, and reflective journal writing, or better still, self-recording by the leaders to enhance the narratives generated in the interviews?

Issues of analysis and representation

I am very much aware of the burgeoning 'layers' of interpretation present in my study, which I choose to represent in this way:

'THEIRS' --- 'MINE' ---- transcription - translation -- 'YOU'

| **('their' version)** | **('my' perception and interpretation)** | **('my' representation in writing)** | **(the reader)** |

As a researcher, I cannot neglect addressing theoretical or methodological transcription issues. Engagement with the 'process' of listening rather than just the 'product', that is, listening to the tapes rather than just reading the transcripts, a method employed by various researchers, among whom are Mazzei (2007) and Watson (2012), allowed me to pick out things I had missed out on during the interactions themselves due to my attention being focused on following their line of reasoning and providing prompts which in turn steered them towards the production of narrative. Even after full transcription of the recordings, re-listening helped generate different interpretations and fostered a certain familiarity, a closeness I can say, with the 'voices' that enabled me to craft a dramatized narrativization by just focusing on their nuances, incongruities, and visualizing the 'voices' (playing them back in my mind).

Translation added yet another layer of complexity. *How much of 'ME' is present in the transcribed/translated data and how much of 'THEM' remains? Is the transcription an actual 'enactment' of the interaction taking place (between me and the leaders, and among the leaders themselves) or is it just a 'representation' of the actual event? Is my discursive presence as translator discreet for a 'neutral' rendering of the text? Whose narrative actually comes across to the audience?*

Choosing the analytical method for my data turned out to be no easy task, well aware of the fact that my choice would determine the outcome of my thesis: the way I eventually presented the data to the reader, the findings that emerged, and the resulting implications. I was therefore wary of having to make the 'right' choice, trawling around literature in my exploration of various methods of analysis, and rejecting them on the basis of being too positivistic as they seemed to augur for a detachment between me as researcher and the data, instead of my self as researcher, interpreter, analyst intertwined with the data, with no clear demarcations of where the presence of 'my self' ended and the analytic interpretation commenced.

The report of my Progress Review in January 2013 drew attention to the fact that I now had to focus on the methodological framework of my research which was still very vague and weak at the time. My supervisor suggested looking into narrative analysis with which I found an affinity as it resonated with *what* I wanted to explore in my research, and *how* I wanted to go about it. I can never thank her enough for introducing me to narrative analysis, as this steered not only my data analysis, but also its collection and representation – opening up endless opportunities for me as well as aiding me to locate my positioning as a neophyte researcher – narrative being a genre, a mode of writing, of research which allows me to express myself.

My 'I' as researcher is constantly in a state of becoming – do I manage to unsettle the 'I' of the participant and the 'I' of the reader, eventually?

As a 'storyteller' (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p. 20), I use the 'verbatim' quotes of the leaders throughout the narrative dramatization that I craft...*Different 'layers' of interpretation...polyphony...multivocality...Have I contaminated the voices slightly through my 'double translation' – from 'spoken word' to 'written speech' and from one language to another? Whose voice is the most audible – that of the 'subject', 'mine', or Foucault making himself heard through me?*

Despite my deep engagement with literature on narrative analysis, I was hesitant to embark on the actual process. Notwithstanding the fact that the process of data analysis had long commenced at the data collection stage, where I had already started identifying themes, disparities, incongruities, even more so at the transcription stage, where my initial nuances were strengthened and widened by more insights, I was actually afraid of tackling each individual transcript and subjecting it to narrative analysis as I was unsure of the outcome. Looking back, I must confess that it was the start of the most exciting stage in my doctoral journey. After receiving what I consider to be very positive feedback from my supervisor about my first attempt at narrative analysis of one of the interviews, it has just been a narrative engagement with the data ever since – with me as storyteller, interpreter, analyst, narrator, dramatist…intertwined with the data, that is, the leaders' multiple voices in their narratives and performance, the 'facts' outlined in the policy document, the ever-present voice of Foucault in the concepts I utilize to 'read' my data, his physical presence on stage and the theories I perused in the literature regarding leadership, distributed leadership, school networks, and relations of power. They are all enmeshed in a 'network', all affecting and being

affected by each other, translating each other in the process in a circular motion with no identifiable beginning or end, but continuities and discontinuities.

My initial attempts at data analysis, the heart-of-the-matter of *my* research story which is sparked off by THEIR stories (the stories of OTHERS − my participants) resonate strongly with Scheurich's (1997b) story of his writing:

> I have wavered and mis-stepped; I have gone backward after I have gone forward: I have drifted sideways along a new imaginary, forgetting from where I once thought I had started…I have sometimes thought I knew something of which I have written. However, caveat emptor, all that follows is never that which it is constructed to appear, an apt description, in my opinion, of all writing (p. 1).

Even prior to data collection, I had had this attraction, which became a quasi-obsession with the notion of 'voices', which was strengthened after carrying out the interviews and observation session of the meeting, where I 'discovered' the multiple voices emanating from the same leader, the disparate voices emerging in the narrative and performance of each individual leader, and the clashing voices of the different leaders as they networked in interaction. I wanted to create a space for the participants' voices although I did not yet know how. The quotes which were carefully selected to illustrate the themes emerging from my research were translated from Maltese to English, which turned out to be a very problematic and challenging task in terms of word choice for retention of the original and intended meaning. I wanted to do something original with my data, even though I am well aware of the fact that it would be risky to try out in my PhD thesis, but I was prepared to take calculated risks upon my decision of narrative fictionalization of my data.

I perceived a very visible disparity between the leaders' narrative and performance, even within their own narrative, and I wanted to utilize this as a structural device for my

narrative dramatization. My first attempt at 'fictionalization', what I mistakenly labelled as a 'play of voices', produced a text which contained large chunks of 'undigested' qualitative data in the form of quotations. Supervisor feedback advised that this was not a dramatization but a series of quotes that could be aptly used to illustrate themes and gently suggested that I was in 'neither here nor there' (these are my words, not those actually used by my supervisor) from where I could choose the conventional route or else opt to go for narrative dramatization. Re-reading that text, I was aware that leaving data to 'speak for itself' was another refusal by me, a refusal of analysis. I had to put on my 'interpretive stamp' (my supervisor's words) which was yet lacking. In what I now consider to be a moment of weakness, of uncertainty, of being lost in-between, I had decided on taking the conventional route for safety reasons, for fear of not making it. I was torn as I knew that I was going against my innermost convictions and desires, I was trying to submerge the adventurous and risky me who usually went against the tide, rather than with the crowd and I actually had no clue how to break this news to my supervisor as I was apprehensive of her reaction, of letting her down (I was really letting down myself but I could not admit it at the time). I was just torn as I wanted to be unconventional but simultaneously safe. During a Skype meeting with my supervisor (in which I had yet to think of a way to break this news), a comment she made just sparked my imagination on how to write a dramatized narrative and I went back to my 'old' unconventional, somewhat eccentric, and risky self. Her reassurance that 'You're not there yet, but I'm sure you'll be able to do it' was another reason for the reversal of my faltering decision. 'Writing' this play was a very lengthy process. I have thus been in an endless vortex of writing and re-writing scenes, listening to the data, reading transcripts, thus getting new ideas on how to present particular issues in the same scene

in order for the juxtapositions and incongruities to emerge. And I can humbly say that I am pleased with what I managed to produce after so many trials and tribulations.

Revisiting the writing process

Foucault characterizes intellectual writing as a transgressive practice with the potential to enable the individual to think in other ways. Simons (1995) and Barker (1998) argue that for Foucault, writing is the specific practice, more so even than reflection, that enables us to explicate the assumptions which underpin our practices and thoughts and to re-think them. Foucault (in Kritzman, 1988b) suggests that it is the kind of change and self-transformation which is brought about by writing which changes and alters the things he thinks and articulates his intellectual positions, over time. This is how I felt in the writing process, which did not only involve the expression of my research, but also the discovery of my newly-acquired academic voice in the process. It is through the act of writing itself that the polyphony in the college emerges, as well as my own multivocality. I engaged in the writing process without any pre-set definitions of how, or what, the outcome would be – just trying to give a more 'writerly', rather than a 'readerly' turn (Barthes, 1975) where readers would have more freedom of interpretation. It was a writing process that involved a lot of going back and forth among theory, voices, my fluctuating identities, my paradigmatic framework, my own subjective experiences of school networks and educational leadership and all the other elements of structure and agency, as well as global forces impinging on the whole process of my research story.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry (WAMOI) (Richardson, 1994) aided me to approach the research process reflexively for it is 'a method that resists closure, encourages different readings, understands that it is the reader who brings meaning to a text' (Watson, 2008,

p. 13). Using writing to think involved me keeping a reflective journal where I jotted down all my thoughts, feelings, observations, insights that occurred to me about my research. This turned the notion of writing into a 'field of play' (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 969). I actually looked forward to 'playing around' with my data, to crafting a drama, to using irony to bring out the incongruities in the network. At times, I even felt that this was not PhD work at all, but creative writing in process.

As a doctoral researcher on a quest for a way of presenting my research findings and analysis, in addition to the conclusions I have managed to draw out, I make no claims to being a playwright. This is the first play I have written in my life – despite my passion for literature, drama was never something I pursued – Shakespeare being the only dramatist I was familiar with, both in my student days and in my teaching career.

Impact on my self (or should I rather say 'selves'?)

My 'doctoral pilgrimage', which is nearing its end, but which I hope will be the catalyst for further research in academia, a community in which I reside as both an insider and an outsider, in that I am on the doorstep, knocking at the door, but just allowed a peep inside – has been life-changing. Though I am still at the very threshold of the academic world, I will never go back to who, or what, I was before. I cannot even reckon, or start to acknowledge, how limited my world had been in terms of intellectual experience and knowledge and encounters. Looking back, my pre-doctoral existence all seems so dull and stifling, the portrait so monochrome.

My life has been entirely overtaken by my PhD, although most of the experience has been largely positive. I embarked on my PhD as it seemed the next step in my academic journey. At that stage I had no idea what the process would entail – looking back, I have no regrets – it has just enriched my entire existence. I cannot say that it was

without struggles and risks, it did have its highs and lows, but overall, the rewards gained far outweigh the sufferings to reach the end.

Foucault had a deep influence on my thinking, leading to a reconsideration of my unquestioned assumptions and beliefs. His writings on the subject also helped me reflect on the impact of this doctoral undertaking on different spheres in my life. Foucault explained:

> People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187).

I was overwhelmed by my 'own' subject's 'actual destruction, its decomposition, its explosion, its conversion into something else' (Foucault, 2002b, p. 247). In Foucauldian terms, I recognized my self as a shifting, uncontained subject whose 'boundaries of identity are not seamless and smooth but disjointed and fragmented' due to 'shifting, interconnected relations of power/knowledge in which the subject is involved and through which the subject is made and makes itself' (Jackson, 2013, p. 840). I regard myself as trapped within the 'power/knowledge' practice of my doctoral pilgrimage – fluctuating between bouts of empowerment due to the knowledge gained through understanding; powerlessness when I suffer from incomprehension, anxiety, and uncertainty when 'plugging in' with my data; and an even greater loss of power when I feel that it has complete command over my entire existence, after being normalized as a 'practice of the self'.

I can no longer recognize myself, as the doctoral researcher in Fox and Allan (2013) confesses:

> I was also feeling homeless in relation to my self. I no longer knew who 'I' was, what I stood for, what I believed, what I knew. I felt separate from the person I had been and from those who knew me (p. 7).

I felt detached from the sphere in which I existed and no longer felt a sense of belonging anywhere. I was just comfortable within my newly-acquired world of intellectual engagement with Foucault, my own data, my writing process…experiencing extreme feelings of discomfort and isolation in my own world. Being a doctoral researcher was a very lonely existence, but a loneliness I became comfortable with.

Conclusion

In this piece of writing, I attempt to disclose my own 'subjectivity', but I cannot demarcate where my 'self' ends and another begins. I do not know whether my 'messy' attempt at reflexivity is successful – I do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but admit the uncomfortable reality of being engaged in qualitative research – an 'uncomfortable reality' I seem to be finding comfort in. In the words of Finlay (2002), 'Any reflexive analysis can only ever be a partial, tentative, provisional account' (p. 542) – I regard it as a productive opportunity, an epistemic window, and a possibility for methodological innovation. Everything is laid bare to the reader, to the world at large, for a potential 'reflexive' interpretation. I do not just 'apply' reflexivity, I 'make it happen in the instance' (Stronach *et al*., 2007, p. 196), attempting to expose how it is reflexivity's impossibility that makes it function, due to this 'impossibility' being part of the creative process (ibid, p. 186).

The writing about my research story has come to an end – but the effects of what I have acquired and who I have been transformed into will remain. Influenced by Foucault, I will try to figure out how to create more becoming-spaces within which I can transform my multiple selves:

So many things can be changed, being as fragile as they are, tied more to contingencies than to necessities…My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 231-2).

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