School change and leadership: an insider perspective of how school change can be achieved within a centralised education system

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Abstract

The University of Manchester
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PhD

School change and leadership: an insider perspective of how school change can be achieved within a centralised education system

How schools manage the challenge of bringing about positive improvements can provide valuable insights in understanding the processes of educational change and the role of leadership. The study reported in this thesis considers this issue within a highly centralised education system, using the example of Cyprus. The Cypriot context provides an interesting site to investigate the issue of school-based change management, not least because policies and changes are directed by the state, leaving limited space for locally determined school improvement initiatives. Moreover, the way national policies on staff mobility are implemented seems to constrain sustained improvement and the development of more engaging relationships at the school level. All of this can create the conditions for passivity and disengagement.

Drawing on more engaging change models and the transformative ideal of radical collegiality, the study set out to throw light on whether, within such a highly centralised education system, space can be created for productive participation. The specific focus was on understanding how school change can be achieved with a view to drawing out implications for leadership practices that can be promising in overcoming barriers to participation and progress.

The study examined how one primary school in Cyprus managed change and development over a period of three and a half years. It involved school-based teacher research in order to both understand and improve school life, making use of the perspectives and views of different stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, students). In so doing, it utilised an unusual mix of methodological approaches, as the research progressed from ethnography to collaborative inquiry. The teacher researcher was in a dialectical relationship with the context of investigation in order to facilitate participants in moving from respondents to data inquirers and change initiators. The benefit of this approach is that it offered privileged insights in relation to the potential of radical collegiality and its transformative aim.

Data were analysed using key themes generated from critical perspectives on school change and leadership. The thesis draws conclusions about the ways in which school change can be achieved within the Cypriot education system. A critical exploration of the barriers faced by individuals shows that a school-driven approach to change, based on forms of collaboration and inquiry, can encourage possibilities for active agency and positive change. All of this has implications for the roles of formal leaders in facilitating such constructive engagements within their school contexts.

The study offers a detailed illustration of what a more engaging change process might entail. This provides a means of considering its connection to broader change agendas and policy through which productive research exchange and dialogue can be enabled and enhanced. Therefore, the findings will be of interest to those involved in the improvement of schools and education systems, and who also wish to work towards radical collegiality and the development of more democratic agendas.
Declaration

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PART 1

Chapter 1

Introduction

The study reported in this thesis investigates how change was managed within one school with a view to drawing out implications for the relationship between school improvement and leadership. Significantly, it examines the challenge of bringing about school improvement in a highly centralised education system.

Specifically, I report the findings of a collaborative inquiry that took place over three and a half years in a primary school in Cyprus, where I worked as a full-time teacher. This involved school-based teacher research, and utilised a mix of ethnographic and action research approaches, in order to both understand and improve school life. Within this project, I was deeply embedded as both a professional and a researcher, and so I engaged in a reflexive process regarding not only the unfolding project, but also my role within it.

The research questions that guide the inquiry are:

- How can school change be achieved within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus?
- What are the barriers that need to be overcome?
- What are the implications for leadership practice in schools?

The significance of this agenda is that it focuses attention on how school change takes place within a highly centralised education system, which involves a form of control that offers limited space for productive engagement amongst those at the school level.

Rationale for the study

With this agenda in mind I wanted to deepen my understandings of how processes of change were managed within my school, not least because policies and reforms are worked and reworked at many levels (Ball, 2008; Evans et al., 2008; Fulcher, 1989). This suggests that,
even in a centralised system, there are likely to be variations in what takes place on the
ground over time. Therefore, I was keen to engage into dialogue with the localised
complexity of voices (i.e. teachers, parents, students) in the belief that such an approach to
research can offer privileged insights and deepen any understandings gained. I will show in
later chapters how this can shed light on the barriers facing individuals while assuming more
active roles and attempting to bring about positive change. Furthermore, I will argue that
such an analysis can reveal possible ways forward, particularly in relation to leadership
practices that can be promising in changing educational realities.

These research interests arose from my experience as a primary school teacher in Cyprus. As
I have indicated, the Cypriot education system presents interesting particularities, since
central government dominates decision-making. In my experience, this leaves limited space
for scrutiny and local agency, since participation requires an acceptance of prescribed policy
frameworks, where school improvement initiatives serve to achieve standardised outcomes of
the national policy agenda. All of this can create the conditions for withdrawal and passivity,
as those within schools are rendered invisible within decision-making processes and are left
with limited space to act. Therefore, assuming leadership roles can be particularly
challenging.

What seems to create further barriers to productive participation is that national policies on
staff mobility force schools to go through massive periods of turbulence every year. As a
result, this creates the impression that schools are simply buildings, rather than social
institutions located in particular communities, with their own issues and historic legacies. In
this context, schools are expected to improve, despite the fact that the working force is in
constant flux.

What is more problematic in this respect is that, even though major national reforms are
underway targeted towards the idea of democratic schools, these paradoxically seem to leave
unquestioned hierarchy and policy imposition. It seems, therefore, that in this context the
official model of school improvement assumes top-down resolutions, where the Ministry
leads and the profession implements, whilst other stakeholders are viewed in most respects as
passive recipients of schooling.
It is reasonable, then, to ask how this highly centralised education system can be transformed in ways that can facilitate what is also aspired to in the proposals for reform, the furtherance of democracy. There is growing evidence internationally that highlights how school life can be improved in such ways through, for instance, school-based initiatives with an emphasis on collaboration, teacher-led inquiries and networking. For example, work by Mel Ainscow and colleagues shows how individual schools within the English education system - where the policy framework is also highly directive but with greater school autonomy - can be improved by making use of available expertise through school-based inquiries and processes of collaboration and networking, suggesting the creation of an improvement system led by schools (e.g. Ainscow, 2012; Ainscow et al., 2006a; Ainscow et al., 2012). This thesis shows the potential of such an approach to school change within the Cypriot education system in order to determine ways of improving school life productively and constructively.

*Changing perspectives*

At the outset of the research, my intention had been to focus on the impact of the way head teachers in Cyprus are frequently moved from school to school. I planned to do this using a traditional ethnographic approach. However, the early stages of fieldwork, alongside my reading of relevant literature, led me to think about leadership practices in a much broader sense, where the active agency not only of head teachers, but also of all those affected by education (i.e. teachers, students, parents) is considered essential to school improvement and progress, suggesting also the development of radical collegial relationships. This, in turn, led me to refine my research agenda, rethink my stance as a teacher researcher and refine my methodological position towards the transformative ideal of radical collegiality. At the same time, by adopting a more critical view, I aimed to contribute to knowledge that invites critical and reflective thinking, since so much of the international leadership literature, focuses on head teachers and their capacity to bring about changes from the top that are driven by the national policy agenda, while neglecting to bring into question the interplay of structure and agency that prevents those at the school level from leading change.

Through my reading, I also became conscious that there is limited empirical evidence to suggest how schools develop over time and, more importantly, how insiders can manage the challenge of bringing about meaningful improvements within their schools, especially within a centralised education system. Although such longitudinal insider research that involves a
teacher-led collaborative inquiry is rather unusual, I set out to demonstrate that it is necessary, since it can provide greater insights of the processes involved, particularly in relation to the potential of radical collegiality to move forward thinking and practice.

Whilst the arguments presented in this thesis will have particular resonance in the context of Cyprus, I believe that they will also be useful for those who face similar concerns, want to learn from difference, or wish to work with the development of more democratic agendas, in other national contexts.

**Outline of the study**

The thesis is in three parts. Part 1 consists of four chapters, and serves to outline the context and agenda of the research. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 describes how educational change takes place in the Cypriot education system. It demonstrates that bringing about positive change and sustained improvement in this context can be particularly challenging, as the policy context seems to act as a great barrier to the development of more engaging relationships. This led me to consider alternative ways of thinking about school change in order to suggest how possible barriers to participation and progress can be overcome. In particular, I argue that a model of change based on school-driven inquiries can create spaces for greater participation and positive improvement, implying also the development of more participatory and collegial forms of leadership. This analysis led me to reconsider my role as a teacher researcher, studying my school and processes of change.

The next two chapters explain my perspective, where Chapter 3 theorises my research inquiry as being about the development of collaborative inquiry, in finding a voice, while engaging with others (i.e. teachers, parents, students) to find their own. It explains that such an approach is closer to the conceptualisation of radical collegiality, not least because the agency of those at the school level is recognised and enabled in changing educational realities and, therefore, can offer valuable insights in regards to how school change can be achieved and the implications this has for school leadership. Chapter 4 explains in more detail how the research was carried out, as it moved from ethnography to collaborative inquiry, and describes the methods and techniques adopted in order to establish the research’s trustworthiness.
Part 2, which focuses on the analysis of findings and takes the form of a case study, has three chapters. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 draw on the evidence from the first and second year of the study respectively, whereas Chapter 7 draws on the evidence from the third and a half year and reflects on the outcomes. These chapters describe and analyse participation and decision-making during change processes and destabilisation in order to demonstrate how the particular school managed change over three and a half years.

Part 3 consists of three chapters, and draws out the implications of the findings in order to provide insights into how school change can be achieved in the Cypriot education system. Chapter 8 considers the barriers faced by diverse individuals (i.e. teachers, parents, students) in their effort to bring about changes from within that owned and shared. It shows that bringing about productive school change in the educational context of Cyprus requires politics of voice and active representation, suggesting the development of more participatory and collegial forms of leadership. All of this points to the potential of radical collegiality within education as a means of enabling active agency and meaningful change. Chapter 9 addresses in more detail these issues, and provides explanations of how barriers to participation and progress might be overcome. In so doing, it suggests a model of change that is based on the development of more democratic agendas and the possibility of radical collegial alternatives to leadership. This has implications for the roles of formal leaders, especially heads who, as key authority figures in their school contexts, can enable and authorise such active involvement. This also has implications for the wider policy-making and policy-makers, given that active participation from different levels is unlikely to occur without the structures that can support such developments. Finally, Chapter 10 looks at the wider implications of the study in order to offer insights for those who wish to work towards radical collegiality and the development of more democratic projects.
CHAPTER 2

School change and development in a centralised education system: the case of Cyprus

Introduction

This chapter sets out to frame the study by explaining how school change takes place within a centralised education, using the example of Cyprus. In so doing, I draw on policy documents, and the work of researchers who show an interest in the Cyprus case. At the same time, as I come from this system, I engage reflectively with the development of this account, drawing also on the views of other critical researchers. This analysis suggests that bringing about change and sustaining improvement in the educational context of Cyprus can be particularly challenging, as the policy context seems to constrain the development of more engaging relationships amongst those involved at the level of schools.

This leads me to explore alternatives ways of thinking about educational change in order to suggest possible ways forward. In explaining all of this, I draw on international literature about school-based change processes, and then relate this analysis to the current policy educational agenda in Cyprus. I argue that moving this system forward requires the development of more democratic agendas, suggesting also the development of more participatory and collegial forms of leadership. This discussion provides a theoretical foundation for the approaches I explored within my own school.

Locating the issue: school change in the Cypriot education system

The challenge of responding to student diversity, substantiated by the demands of an increasingly changing world (e.g. globalisation, competitive economy, population movements), has led many educational systems all over the world to go through major educational reforms and changes. The Cypriot education system is one such case, since a major reform effort was initiated by the Government of Cyprus¹ in 2005 as a means of...
restructuring and modernising education and curricula, aimed to create the democratic school (Committee on Educational Reform, 2004). This is a major policy challenge to address, as Cyprus is among the few members of the European Union where decision-making is highly centralised (European Commission, 2005). In fact, as Karagiorgi and Nicolaidou (2010, p.64) state, there is a concern whether educational reform in Cyprus is “an example of money, time and resources unwisely spent”, given that much of it has remained in an abstract level, and still there is a lot of debate and resistance towards its implementation.

It is possible, therefore, that, despite the effort for reform and improvement, hierarchy and the policy agenda might dominate thinking and practice, while suppressing the development of other more democratic alternatives. This draws attention to the challenges and difficulties of how school change takes place in this context. Certainly, the Cypriot education system provides an interesting example to consider the challenge of bringing about school improvement and development, as overall responsibility for education rests with the Ministry of Education and Culture. As I will show, the dominance of hierarchy and the pressure to deliver the national policy framework seem to leave limited space for those at the school level to assume more active roles and bring about positive change. In what follows, I strengthen these arguments by revealing the tenets of the public primary sector, which provides the context for this study.

Primary Education

In understanding the setting where school change is managed, I present what it means to be educated in the Cypriot educational context. The information used is based on material retrieved from the official website of the Ministry of Education and Culture (http://www.moec.gov.cy), and its annual reports from 2006 until 2010. The information in the annual reports has remained in most respects the same, mainly because the educational reform, which started in 2005, is still underway.

Public primary education is financed by the Cyprus Government, either directly or through allocations to local authorities and school boards. This means that schools in Cyprus have limited financial autonomy which itself can suggest a narrowly defined agenda. In 1972, education became free for all students, whereas compulsory education was introduced in
1962 for students under the age of fifteen. In practice, though, primary education has been universal since 1945. The department of Primary Education includes:

- Pre-primary Education (Nursery Schools: Public, Communal, Private)
- Primary Education (Primary Schools: Public and Private)
- Education for Children with Special Needs (Special Schools for children with special needs and Special Needs Units placed in primary schools)
- Cyprus Educational Mission in the United Kingdom
- Adult Education Centres
- Educational and Summer Camping
- Education of the Greeks of Diaspora.

According to the Ministry of Education (Annual Report, 2010, p.297), “the fundamental principle of defining the aims of Primary Education has always been the harmonious development of the personality of children”, whereas according to the 10-year schooling educational programme, primary education aims to enable children to:

- develop harmoniously in the cognitive, emotional and psychomotor domains, using to the maximum the means that contemporary technology offers
- deal successfully with various problems they may come across, including difficulties, in being familiarised with the school and the wider environment
- promote socialization
- acquire positive attitudes towards learning
- develop social understanding, belief in human values, respect for our cultural heritage and human rights, appreciation of beauty
- develop disposition to creativity and love for life and nature in order to become sensitive in preserving and improving the environment.


Primary education in Cyprus aims to cover the following subjects: Modern Greek Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, Religious Studies, History, Geography, Civic Education, English, Domestic Science, Music, Physical Education, Science, Art, Design and Technology, and Health Education. Textbooks are provided by the Greek
Government or the Cyprus Curriculum Unit. According to Koutselini and Persianis (2000), this is an indication of how educational policy in Cyprus is shaped in most respects by an ambition of following the Greek curriculum as a way of transmitting the traditional values of the Greek culture and Orthodox Church, and also establishing the Greek identity of Greek-Cypriots. As they go on to argue, this seems to lead to conservative practices, since teachers in Cyprus are particularly loyal to the prescribed textbooks and teaching according to traditional values.

Moreover, as Koutselini (2000) explains, the unresolved Cyprus problem managed to contextualise a pervasiveness of a national consciousness which has dominated even the educational culture and curricula of Cypriot schools. Consequently, any discourse in the Cypriot education needs to be based on an awareness of its curriculum as a political text, since it reflects the struggles of opposing groups (e.g. Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, opposing political parties) to have their interests, values, histories and politics dominate the school curriculum during different historical periods of time (Koutselini, 1997a; 1997b).

What also suggests that educational policy in Cyprus is highly political is the fulfillment of the permanent aim “I get to know, I do not forget and I struggle” (general no. 7.11.09/6, p.26 available at http://www.moec.gov.cy), the purpose of which is to keep the memory alive of the other half of the country. Although there is an emphasis on the political aspect of the curriculum and policies, Koutselini and Papanastasiou (1997) show how difficult it is for teachers and textbook writers to address properly the Cyprus problem in Civic Education, considering the guidelines of the Ministry which assume passivity, rather than active citizenship and criticality (Koutselini, 2000; 2004).

In other words, how the curriculum is developed and implemented is defined by the Ministry, and this assumes a homogenised and passive approach to teaching and learning, as each school is expected to achieve similar outcomes. In particular, the curriculum has been prescribed by the Ministry since 1992, and all subjects are compulsory. A new curriculum, which is considered more flexible, was introduced in the school year 2011-2012. This, though, leaves unquestioned the fact that the Ministry still controls its shape and content, which also makes it more difficult for those at the school level to address productively their own issues.
Yet, although policy changes are introduced and controlled by the state, it is ambiguous whether these serve more legitimate interests. For example, the division of some primary schools into two cycles, serving different age groups (6 to 8 years and 9 to 12), was criticised by a Unesco report (1997), an appraisal study on the educational system of Cyprus, since this was seen as a way of creating more headship positions. Despite these inconsistencies, the community seems to value public education, since there are a small number of private schools (24), which mostly attract international students. The total number of public primary schools during the years of the study varied from 342 to 349.

How schools operate on a daily basis is also defined by the Ministry. In particular, the school year begins on 1st of September and ends on 31st of August. In reality, primary schools open the first Monday of September and close for summer vacations the penultimate Friday of June. In addition, they close for two weeks during Christmas and Easter. Schools run on a five-day week basis with seven teaching periods of 40’ and three intervals. The school day begins at 7:45 a.m. and ends at 1:05 p.m.

Children who have completed the age of five and eight months are eligible to enrol at first grade, and must finish sixth grade by the age of twelve, since repeating the same class is confined to very special cases, and parents’ approval is needed. Primary students have no written examinations at any level, or entrance examinations to secondary education, since assessment is supposed to be continuous and internal. All students proceed to secondary education, implying that transfer procedures are simple and functional.

Students are sent to schools according to their permanent address, and this means that parental choice is limited. Every school has a Parent Association which is expected to support school’s work without interfering. According to Georgiou (1996), this has led to a tradition of low parental involvement and, as Theodorou (2008) argues, the fact that parental involvement in Cyprus is defined by the school seems to lead to exclusionary practices. As research shows, it can be particularly difficult for parents to overcome the power imbalances and structural inequalities that inevitably exist within schools, and get actively involved in the processes of schooling, without the active effort from professionals (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Ranson et al., 2003; Tveit, 2009).
Most of the changes introduced as part of the current educational reform seem to be functional rather than radically engaging, since the emphasis is on regulating and prescribing participation and outcomes. For example, although classroom size has decreased gradually to twenty-five, this was not related to opportunities for active participation. Similarly, since 1999, the Ministry is promoting the implementation of the All-day School, as part of its measures for social cohesion and support. All-day Schools work on into the afternoon until 4:00 p.m., and most of them work on a voluntary basis, but without actually engaging students and their communities in dialogues about possible outcomes. Equally, the Ministry is promoting the engagement with different European projects (e.g. Eco-Schools, Socrates), the implementation of different local educational programmes (e.g. Museum Education) and the introduction of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), which also assume to some extent passivity, as these need to be in accordance with the guidelines of the Ministry.

Meanwhile, much interest has been placed on the identification of particular groups, particularly immigrant students and students with special needs, in response to immediate social concern. The Ministry, in 2001, adopted the policy of inclusion for students identified as having special needs into mainstream schools. The mainstream programme is also used for bilingual and foreign students (9% in 2009) who attend lessons along with the Greek speaking students and, within the ordinary timetable, are moved out of the classroom for some hours in order to learn the Greek language. In other words, these particular groups are expected to be integrated into existing structures, whereas Ainscow’s work (1999; 2005) shows that the inclusion of vulnerable groups of learners into existing arrangements can be particularly fragile. Nevertheless, some new measures are to be introduced (e.g. in-service seminars for teachers, pedagogical material for fast acquisition of the language) which also seem to integrate students and teachers into the system, rather than to enable their active participation.

More worryingly, as Angelides and Leigh (2004) argue, the Cyprus educational system seems to lag behind other educational systems in terms of academic achievement, despite the effort and introduction of innovations. For example, in the international studies PIRLS 2001 and TIMSS 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007 (available at: http://timss.bc.edu), Cyprus scored below
the international average. It seems, therefore, that the effort to make the system work, despite its inconsistencies, can lead to further ambiguities and hollow reforms.

What this analysis suggests is that primary aged students and their parents are expected to participate as passive recipients of schooling in achieving homogenised outcomes. This seems to constrain a view of educational change where the agency of those at the school level is recognised and enabled in changing educational realities. This impression is further strengthened by the fact that those who hold formal positions within schools seem to also have limited space to become active agents and enable others to do so. The ensuing discussion portrays the status of primary school teachers, deputy heads and head teachers in the Cypriot educational context in order to provide an understanding of what enables or not professionals from becoming active agents in their school contexts.

*Primary heads, deputy heads and teachers*

The Unesco report (1997), referred to earlier, concluded that most of the anomalies of the Cypriot educational system stem from the fact that the issue of the educational personnel management is strongly related to structural conditions or practices having to do with staff selection, appointment, training and appraisal. Although similar concerns are raised in the report for educational reform (Committee on Educational Reform, 2004), the proposals suggested seem to maintain a view of educational change as a top-down initiative, considering that hierarchy and policy constraints remain strong. As I will show, these seem to discourage agency and participation.

In order to get appointed in public primary education, teachers need to have a university degree, either from The University of Cyprus or a Greek university. They can also have a recognised university degree by the National Academy Recognition Centre, along with proof of good knowledge of the Greek language. Then, they get on a list where the principle “first comes, first served” is applied. This assumes that all can get appointed, as long as they fulfil state criteria, regardless of what they are capable of doing, or what the school community views as important of doing. Likewise, the Committee on Educational Reform (2004) suggests the adoption of state criteria.
What seems to add further barriers to productive participation is that state control and hierarchy are particularly dominant in this context. Interestingly, these seem to remain unquestioned in the proposals for reform. The administrative structure of primary education is and, I assume, will stay as follows:

- The Director of primary education who is the head of the department of primary education and is responsible for the management and supervision of teachers and schools of pre-primary, primary, special education and also adult education centres.
- The General Inspector of primary education who is responsible for the general inspection of schools and staff.
- The Chief Education Officer who is responsible for the supervision and co-ordination of inspectors’ work in a district education office.
- The inspectors of primary education who are responsible for the direct supervision and co-ordination of schools and teachers.
- The head teachers and teachers who are responsible for the delivery of the national curriculum and policy.

More specifically, appointments, promotions, secondments, transfers, and discipline of staff are managed centrally by the Educational Service Committee. This seems to leave limited space for local decision-making. In addition, the District Education Offices, which are staffed by inspectors, are liable for the administration of all schools under their supervision. So, for example, each year, after the announcement of promotions and transfers, inspectors assign staff to particular schools. Transfer procedures begin in January and are finalised by September. Basically, they become effective the following school year. These processes, though, might serve particular interests, given the closed society of Cyprus, and the fact that all inspectors were previously head teachers.

Moreover, the national policies on staff mobility seem to close down further the spaces for productive engagement, given that they assume workforce fluidity. In particular, teachers, deputy heads and head teachers are assigned to schools depending on the needs of the system, where attention is given to their accumulated points, their personal preferences and
special reasons (e.g. pregnancy, health problems). According to Georgiou (1994), teachers acquire points based on:

a. their years of teaching experience (1 point for every year of experience, and 1.5 for every year after their 25\textsuperscript{th} year in the profession)

b. their marital status (3 points if they are married/divorced/widowed, and 2 points for every student child under 25 years old. These points, though, are deducted when their children reach the age of 25)

c. the distance between their school and their “base”, that is the city or village of their permanent address (1 point for every 10 km, but if it is over 60 km there is a different ratio with lower proportion)

d. if they work away from their base, they get an extra point for every year

e. the type of their school (depending on the number of teachers who work at the school, they get 0-6 points, where one-teacher schools get the highest)

f. the status of their school (schools are divided into four categories and get 0-6 points depending on their location)

g. their political status (if they became refugees in 1974, while working as teachers, they get extra 12 points, and also if they were political prisoners/fighters during 1955-1959 or prisoners in 1974, they get 6 more points)

h. their university qualifications (they get 1 point for a second university degree, 4 for Masters and 5 for Doctorates).

Georgiou (1994) explains that the rationale behind this system of points is the fair distribution of qualified staff in order to provide equal opportunities for all students and not through individual schools. Despite this argument, it appears that this system of points seems to create a lot of unproductive divisions, where, for example, seniority is favoured, or those with more points are in a better position when selecting a school. Moreover, it seems that, through this system, teachers’ professionalism is levelled, whereas marital status and family issues are rather objectified.

In addition, although teachers are assigned to schools centrally, the way this system of points works seems to create further ambiguities. For example, staff who have completed their
minimum time of two years, or their maximum time of six years, can ask for a transfer to a particular school, based on their accumulated points. Moreover, newly appointed staff need to serve at least two years away from their “base” -that is, the city or village of their permanent address- and, therefore, must be relocated to schools according to their points. However, teachers who do not have a permanent contract are sent to schools according to position availability, regardless of their points. As a result, schools seem to experience changes in staff quite often.

It is possible, therefore, that this routinisation of staff turnover and workplace turbulence might be seen as limiting engagement with continuous improvement and productive agency. For example, the international experience shows that, although headship rotation might be related to head teacher rejuvenation and development (Aquila, 1989; Boesse, 1991), or even school improvement (Hart, 1993), it is ambiguous whether such a strategy has significant effects on school development, since initiatives usually need time to become institutionalised (Fullan, 1993), and heads need to have sufficient time to succeed in their new schools (e.g. Fink and Brayman, 2006; Hargreaves, 2005; Macmillan, 2000). There is also research which shows how difficult it is for heads to introduce changes and sustain improvements in their new school contexts (Barker, 2005; Fink, 2000), particularly when the teaching force is in constant flux (Thomson and Sanders, 2010; Useem et al., 1997). Equally, other research shows that, in school contexts where there are frequent headship changes, teachers can become largely resistant towards their heads’ efforts to introduce changes (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004; Macmillan, 2000).

In addition, the leadership succession literature presents a different picture of ambiguity associated with difficulties in the recruitment and retention of aspirant and practicing heads (e.g. Bolivar and Moreno, 2006; Brooking et al., 2003; Castagnoli and Cook, 2004; Cooley and Shen, 2000; Dorman and D’Arbon, 2003; Draper and McMichael, 1996; 2003; Elmore and Burney, 2000; Fink, 2010; Fink and Brayman, 2006; Gronn and Lacey, 2004; Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003; Hargreaves et al., 2007; Hartle and Thomas, 2003; NCSL, 2010; Pounder and Merrill, 2001; Pounder et al., 2003; Rhodes, and Brundrett, 2005; 2006; Young and McLeod, 2001). This is mainly because the increasing pressures placed on heads’ leadership roles to deliver reforms and improve performance consistent with the national
agenda managed to turn headship into a “greedy work” (Gronn, 2003b, p.5), an intensified and, possibly, an unpleasant practice. All of this, as Gronn (2003b) argues, has contributed to a situation where there is a growing disengagement or absenteeism in formal leadership positions. Although in Cyprus there may be no discernible shortage of head teachers, delivering the national policy framework and reforms is also central to heads’ leadership and management roles (Nicolaidou and Georgiou, 2009), and this can suggest a form of disengagement, as agency is confined to policy delivery and implementation.

However, in the context of Cyprus, heads’ capacity in implementing policies and reforms is also questioned (Angelides, 2004; Karagiorgi and Nicolaidou, 2010). As Pashiardis (1995; 1998) explains, the way that the system works in Cyprus, heads may not need to have further qualifications, considering that promotions are mostly based on years of experience, and this often coincides with burn out and retirement.

Meanwhile, a further issue that seems to create ambiguities is that getting promoted is a hierarchical ladder and not a career choice or democratically derived, since the state directs appointments. In particular, promotion requirements entail high scores from inspectors, good reports from previous head teachers, further qualifications, teaching experience and the total number of accumulated points. Until 2010, all evaluation reports were confidential, and only the scores were known to the teachers and heads. However, the Education Service Commission holds the right to give to potential candidates 0-5 points. This can be seen as an indication of how democratic processes need to be strengthened in this context, not least because decision-making is concentrated at the top.

Nevertheless, the fact that all teachers get a permanent contract, and also the informal reality that most teachers get promoted to be deputy heads and head teachers, might imply passivity and disengagement. In reality, the current evaluation system has not been changed since 1976, and has no theoretical background, as it is the result of establishment and past practice (Georgiou, 1994). Pashiardis (1998) also explains that, as a result of the national evaluation system, the fact that most teachers are marked as excellent, then, the most important factor for promotion is experience. Therefore, it seems to be a system based on seniority, since the phenomenon of aging is observed at the top of hierarchy (Educational Service Committee,
and, according to Angelides (2004), this can act as a great barrier to innovation and the proper functioning of schools.

What also needs closer attention is that the way that teachers are evaluated throughout their careers can be seen as constraining the development of more engaging professional relationships amongst colleagues, since staff appraisal is based mostly on their individual practices. More specifically, at the end of the school year, head teachers complete a report regarding the individual performance of their staff. Teachers’ first formal evaluation is performed by the inspector of the school on their 12th year, then, on the 13th, and, afterwards, every two years. Head teachers are evaluated every three years by a team of inspectors, which visits the school for a day and observes one classroom lesson. This might mean that those heads or teachers who do not have an evaluation during the school year are of limited importance, and this can have great repercussions on school improvement.

Moreover, in order to be allowed to apply for promotion, teachers need to have at least three scores from their local inspector. Inspectors make their evaluations based on four criteria, while observing classroom lessons: a) professional knowledge, b) work efficiency, c) organisation-management-human relationships and d) general behaviour and action. In other words, teachers’ appraisal is based on criteria and frameworks that seem to cultivate, in most respects, individualism and self-interest, rather than questioning or collaboration. For example, teachers might become strategic and follow the formula of what the inspector prefers, or select a school according to who is the inspector or the head teacher. All of this can suggest further barriers to positive relationships and sustained school improvement.

Recently, a new evaluation system was proposed, though this was resisted by the Teachers’ Union. In this respect, the Union seems to play an important role in shaping educational policy, since the introduction of innovations and changes need to be endorsed by the Union. However, it is questionable whose interests the Union represents, given that most of its members are clustered around political parties and the government, which might press for compliance with their own political agendas.
In addition, teachers’ formal in-service training can be seen as being limited in scope, considering that it is provided centrally by the Pedagogical Institute, which has a national developmental mission. However, much of staff development is more of a personal option, and this might imply that it can be pulled in different directions (e.g. attend training only when having an evaluation). Kyriakides (1999) raises the issue that teachers’ initial or in-service training in Cyprus needs to be more closely linked to curriculum policy, disregarding that this might mean knowledge for policy implementation, rather than how to develop policies (Gunter, 2001; Ozga, 2000).

Only newly appointed head teachers attend compulsory in-service training. Nicolaidou and Georgiou (2009) argue that heads’ training in Cyprus is inadequate to prepare them for the challenges of their position in a climate of educational reform, and propose training as the acquisition of a headship qualification. All of this, though, requires closer attention, as it might imply knowledge acquisition in delivering policies, rather than professional learning in questioning and changing policies (Gunter, 2001; Lumby, 2006).

Internationally, some writers have argued that formal training of aspirant and practicing heads, although central to heads’ development activities, can be irrelevant to real practice and context (e.g. Bradbury and Gunter, 2007; Gunter, 1999; 2001; Hallinger, 2006; Murphy, 2006; Reeves et al., 2003). For example, Southworth (2002) states that head teachers learn most of their job by actually doing it. It is also argued that what school leaders do is shaped or constrained by their school contexts (e.g. Chapman et al., 2008; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Hart, 1991; Macmillan, 2000; Southworth, 2004), where, for example, school leaders might be faced with the “maintenance/development dilemma” (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991) according to which they are expected to resolve any possible tensions arising from school’s past practice and future developments, suggesting also a need to understand micropolitics in order to manage successfully their schools and bring about change (Hoyle, 1999; West, 1999). Therefore, what becomes important is how heads deal with the challenges of their position in their school contexts (Lindle, 1999; Normore, 2007).

As I have indicated, this can be particularly challenging in the educational context of Cyprus, considering that schools seem to frequently experience periods of what has been described as
“destabilisation or internal turbulence” (Hopkins et al., 1994, p.197), not least because the workforce seems to be in constant flux, and also changes and policies are imposed rather than questioned or developed. In this way, school leaders are expected to deliver the national policy framework efficiently and effectively, regardless of its worth and local conditions.

In summary, then, the way Cypriot policies are determined and implemented involves a model of change that does not set out to productively engage stakeholders, since change is driven from the top, and there is limited space or autonomy for those at the school level to get actively involved with processes of change. Furthermore, this seems to create barriers to the core aims for educational reform, and also the challenge faced across educational systems for greater participation and positive improvement.

However, Ball (e.g. 1981; 1994; 1997; 2006; 2008) does explain that policies driven from the top might not be the only constraint in bringing about change in schools, not least because, like Bourdieu (1990), he recognises the complex interplay of structure and agency, as individuals enact upon policies which itself assumes diversity and difference when approaching or even resisting change. This suggests a sense of local interpretation that allows considering both policies and reforms as worked and reworked at many levels (Fulcher, 1989). Work by Ainscow and colleagues (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2006a; Ainscow et al., 2012) captures this complexity, and shows how their effort to support schools to address aspects of equity within the decentralised but still fragmented English policy context resulted in a change process which implicitly had to do with enhancing the potential that exists within schools to overcome barriers to progress and participation.

Whilst it may well be that centralisation, in the way outlined above, can be seen as limiting educational change, it seems that the complex interplay of voices can determine in most respects processes of change through which important possibilities for agency and radical transformation can be created. Before looking at these issues in greater detail through my own school-based research, however, it is instructive to consider how educational change is managed elsewhere as a means of drawing together ideas of how school change can be achieved in particular sites.
Alternative perspectives on school change

There is a growing and rich body of literature, mainly from the English speaking world, that analyses the processes and complexities of educational change where the emphasis is on creating systems and schools that are both equitable and excellent (Ainscow et al., 2012; Fullan, 2010; Levin, 2008). Such work suggests an approach to school change that is more about enhancing and democratising the potential that exists within schools through school-based initiatives and supportive policy frameworks.

One important source of ideas to consider how schools manage change emerges from within the school effectiveness and school improvement research literatures. The school effectiveness literature views change as outcome orientated, a set of characteristics that schools need to exemplify in order to become effective (e.g. Mortimore, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Sammons et al., 1995). On the other hand, the school improvement paradigm seeks to close this gap between effective and less effective schools, and offers a rationale of how schools can be improved by focusing on their internal processes of change, rather than concentrating on achieving better outcomes (e.g. Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2001). Of course, there are studies which reflect both these two paradigms (e.g. Creemers, 2002; Stoll and Fink, 1996), and there is work which places an emphasis on the values and purposes of improving and changing schools, having to do with inclusion, equity and social justice (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2006a; Fullan, 2005; 2009; Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll, 1999; Stoll and Fink, 1996). This knowledge base suggests a school-focused approach to change, as it assumes that schools can become effective and improving by learning how to transform themselves and develop into professional learning communities.

This relates to another important body of work which emphasises that schools can enhance their capacity to become more effective and improving through school-based inquiries, with an emphasis on practitioner inquiry (e.g. Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Somekh, 2006), collaboration (e.g. Ainscow and West, 2006; Street and Temperley, 2005) and networking (e.g. Katz and Earl, 2010; Muijs et al., 2010). Such work views school-based research as a powerful lever for school improvement and development. This is based on the assumption that practitioners alone, or in partnership, can research their own practices to an agreed focus.
in order to improve them through repeated cycles of action and reflection (Elliott, 1991; 1993; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1986; Stenhouse, 1983).

The significance of this approach is that it recognises teachers as active agents in the use and production of knowledge, who not just engage with investigation, but also challenge existing knowledge and research in order to develop better alternatives to inform their practices. In this way, the learning developed is context specific and, thus, it is argued, more relevant to real practice which can be increasingly enhanced, as it is shared and enacted upon within the school or a network of schools. On this view, school-based inquiry draws strength from collective commitment and shared purposes, where professional learning is ongoing, shared and linked to school improvement and development. Such processes of inquiry can build both individual and organisational capacity, and also increase a system’s ability to improve itself, since the responsibility for improvement is not isolated within individual schools but shared across schools (Ainscow et al., 2012; Street and Temperley, 2005).

A key implication of this approach is that it also includes the possibility of enhancing the democratising potential that exists within schools, as it enthuses the participation of students and other stakeholders to engage with notions of inquiry. In this way, a wider inquiry stance can be created, and learning can be enhanced at all levels of participation. Fielding’s (1999) idea of radical collegiality moves this agenda forward, as he views teaching as an inclusive professional practice, where professionals can engage not only with each other, but also with others in mutual learning processes within a context of shared ideals. In this way, according to Fielding and Moss (2011, p.109) the school can be imagined:

not only as a public space but also as a public or collective workshop or laboratory, an invaluable potential for collective deliberation, choice and action, involving children and adults, pupils, educators, parents and other interested citizens… a place for public research and experimentation, and therefore a place that can bring about new thinking, new practice and change.

Such empowering notions of school improvement and development suggest a more engaging model of change, not least because educational change can be reinvented through democratic
participation and critical partnerships of learning. As Fielding (1999) explains, radical collegiality is a more powerful, communal relationship based on values of mutual trust, respect, care and autonomy, where dialogic encounters are central to developing radical alternatives. Thinking and working in this way, according to Fielding, is about enhancing democracy.

As Skidmore and Bound (2008, p.9) argue, democracy needs to be more of an “everyday democracy”, “rooted in a culture in which democratic values and practices shape not just the formal sphere of politics, but the informal spheres of everyday life: families, communities, workplaces, and schools and other public services”. Similarly, for Dewey (1919), democracy is a way of life, a mode of living together and a faith in human capacity for intelligent thinking and action that is not only about expressing difference, but also about enriching one’s own experiences through constructive interaction. This suggests an alternative model to change based on the development of more democratic agendas. This relates to research that emphasises for alternative approaches to schooling based upon public dialogue and democratic participation that can eventually lead to radical change and holistic reforms (e.g. Gandin and Apple, 2002; Lipman, 2004).

Promoting more democratic educational alternatives requires also fostering greater social justice so that possible barriers to democratic participation can be overcome (Fraser, 2005; 2007; Young, 2000). Using Cribb and Gewirtz’ (2003) framework, social justice can be related to issues of distributive, cultural and associational justice. Distributive justice is where equal distribution of economic resources and goods is secured in order to enable people to claim the status of life they want, without suffering from exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation (Fraser, 1997; 2005; 2007). This builds on the premise that cultural justice is in place according to which the cultural capital of others is respected and recognised, and not dominated, disrespected or unrecognised. In this way, associational justice can be enabled which assumes that people are recognised and given opportunities and resources to become active agents in decision-making and, hence, authentic bearers of their fortunes.
This opportunity for representation, where diverse individuals can make present their interests and take decisions is, for Fraser (2005), essentially political, as it links social justice with public policy. Such an inquiry can enable people to make decisions that can also restore economic and cultural injustices. In this way, injustices can be resolved through democratic participation, dialogue and reflexivity (Fraser, 2007). Therefore, a more democratic approach to change aims to improve the capacity of people to claim more sustainable ways of living and knowing. This is related to social and global movements that seek to link education change with social change (e.g. the global movement “The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014”, Unesco, 2005; 2010; see also United Nations, 2002; 2007).

The implication of all of this is that those involved and affected by education need to be included and enabled to participate in the processes of schooling in more productive ways, and, as Chomsky (2004) points out, education should provide the critical tools which can enable the practice of democracy. In this respect, as this analysis shows, a model of change that is based on school-based inquiry processes can facilitate the development of more democratic agendas, not least because within such processes those at the school level can be included and enabled to become active agents of change, and hence the human capacities that exist within a school community or a system can be integrated and enhanced in a productive way.

However, building capacity within schools implies the presence of hierarchy and policies pressures. As a result, issues of goal and control may jeopardise such aspirations, and shape practice into what Hargreaves (1994) refers to as “contrived collegiality”, where for example head teachers might retain control over decision-making and participation, and can contrive collaboration into a compulsory, supervised and, possibly, an unappealing discourse. In addition, Fielding (2001; 2006) warns about tokenistic participation and manipulating discourse in exploiting student voice over maximising organisational performance. Consequently, there is a concern whether collaboration involves authentic work integration and positive improvement, or whether it is contrived and enforced in increasing organisational outcomes.
Moreover, in-depth ethnographic studies reveal that schools are complex places of social interaction that cannot be easily transformed, since reaching agreements regarding priorities for change can be difficult (e.g. Ball, 1981; Hargreaves, 1967; Woods, 1979), and also teachers maybe isolated (Hargreaves, 1994), or may not have the time to collaborate (Sarason, 1996). Similarly, other research shows how difficult it is for those within schools to contest and transform policies, given that schools are policy dominated institutions. Work by Anyon (1997), Evans (2006) and Lipman (2004) brings to the fore the cacophonies of educational policies, and shows how those at the school level had limited opportunities in challenging policies or going against them.

This, however, should not imply hopelessness, as there is critical work which shows how resisting conformity and compliance to the orthodoxy of well-intended outcomes of policies is inherent within constructivist relationships and intellectual thinking and action (e.g. Griffiths, 1998; 2003; Gunter, 2005a; Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006). For example, Taysum and Gunter (2008) explain how school leaders, through their active engagement and critical awareness, managed to enable social justice within their schools. Other work builds on this, and shows how both external and internal effort and support can help schools to improve, particularly when the policy framework is unsupportive to school-driven change. A useful example to consider this, as I have already mentioned, comes from the English education system, where academics supported individual schools to improve, using notions of collaboration and networking within a policy agenda of standards and school competition (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2006a; Ainscow et al., 2012).

All of this shows that schools are complex places of social interaction that tend to be hierarchical and policy dominated institutions. Therefore, how schools manage change might not always lead to the development of socially critical agendas. This has important implications for leadership, not least because how leadership is exercised within particular school contexts can play an important role in shaping processes of change. As Levin (2008, p.5) explains, “in practice, leadership is always a matter of balancing competing demands, interests, ideas and approaches”.

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It seems, therefore, that a model of change that is school-driven and based on notions of inquiry, and also the development of more democratic agendas, encourages a more distributed and enabling form of leadership. At the same time, this rejects models of leadership that focus on hierarchical leaders and their capacity to bring changes from the top and consistent with the national agenda (e.g. Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006; Sammons et al., 1995). The conceptualisation by Lambert et al. (2002) of constructivist leadership offers useful leads in this respect, since it locates leadership in the patterns of relationships where the learning developed is reciprocal and purposeful among the members of a school community. The importance of this approach is that it establishes diversity and equity in the processes of inquiry and reflection as the basis for school improvement and development. In this way, leadership is distributed and shared in order to create a wider inquiry stance within the school community, where the formal leaders of the school can engage with others and support reciprocal processes of learning. Copland (2003) takes a similar stance when he argues that leadership of inquiry is increasingly distributed and essentially important to building school improvement capacity.

However, sharing and distributing leadership might mean enhancing leadership capacity for implementing centrally driven policies more effectively, rather than for questioning policies and enabling democracy. Bates (2006, p.282) explains that educational leadership can resolve injustices of maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation, since it has the potential to develop a “democratised learning society” in which individuals learn how to participate in more productive ways (Ranson, 1995). As Gunter (2004) argues, educational leadership as knowledge production can challenge what prevents agency and democratic development. Consequently, this educative view of leadership assumes an inquiry process that is radically engaging and socially critical. In other words, this can be about realising the potential of radical collegiality within education. On that view, leadership is more participatory and “emancipatory” (Fielding, 2006).

The implication of all of this is that, within formal hierarchies, school leaders should not act as policy implementers and managers in raising performance, but as educational leaders in making decisions that support and enable those within schools to participate as full members and engage more fully with education (Foster, 1986; Gunter, 2001). Therefore, how
decision-making is made within particular school contexts can facilitate the development of more engaging relationships and the furtherance of democracy. In other words, are politics pluralist and participatory or authoritarian and technocratic?

What this analysis suggests is that a model of change based on the possibility of developing more democratic agendas through more participatory and radical collegial forms of leadership can overcome barriers to participation and progress. In what follows, I consider the implications of this analysis in order to suggest possible ways forward within the Cypriot education system.

**Bridging the gap**

In the light of the analysis I have developed so far, it seems that in the centralised Cypriot education system there is an official model of change that is not supportive of school-driven change, since change is centrally directed and a “one-size-fits-all” approach is adopted.

As I have demonstrated, all schools are expected to achieve similar outcomes, regardless of local conditions and human capacities. In this context, school autonomy is constrained, and local decision-making is narrowed down to policy implementation. Consequently, opportunities for professional learning are limited, since staff development is managed centrally, and usually aligned to policy requirements and directions. In this sense, participation is regulated and prescribed in order to achieve standardised outcomes of the national policy agenda. This seems to confine agency into particular organisational roles and job descriptions. As a result, accountability is based upon state criteria and frameworks, rather than located in forms of public scrutiny. I have also explained that further ambiguities arise from the way national policies on staff mobility are implemented, since this seems to disrupt continuity and hinder staff commitment.

As I have argued, all of this seems to create a view of the school as a building, rather than as a social institution, not least because centrally determined policies need to be implemented regardless of their worth and local conditions. It seems, therefore, that in this context the official model of change discourages active agency and the development of local agendas.
On the other hand, experiences elsewhere point to the possibility of an alternative approach to school change, a more engaging model based upon a belief that schools can manage responsively and responsibly their improvement and development. This suggests that those at the school level are recognised and enabled to become active agents in order to address local needs and priorities, not just organisational goals. On this view, schools can develop their own agendas through processes of inquiry and democratic participation, where dialogue, negotiation and resolution, rather than imposed frameworks and criteria, are central to shaping decision-making processes within and beyond the school.

While a school-driven approach to change might seem utopian within a centralised education system, Fielding’s (1999) conceptualisation of radical collegiality can bridge this gap, not least because it entails the possibility of creating a learning situation based on reciprocity, mutuality and radical inclusiveness mobilised by teachers. In this respect, school-based research can create space for such positive developments, as within inquiry processes, teachers can engage with their colleagues, students, parents and the community in reciprocal processes of learning in order to address aspects of schooling and transform themselves. In this way, professionals can become active agents in their school contexts, while, also, enabling others to assume similar roles through processes of inquiry. This perspective of micropolitics locates decision-making in a communal framework that can provide a diverse basis from which narrowly defined agendas of a centralised education system can be critiqued and transformed. Moving towards this mutually educative potential of radical collegiality points to implications for the educational context of Cyprus.

It can be argued, therefore, that the way forward is to examine whether there is space for radical collegiality within the Cypriot education system so that possible barriers can be revealed and a better alternative can be developed. Kurt Lewin’s (1951) dictum that you cannot understand an organisation unless you try to change it captures this idea, where change is not the end task but rather the means for understanding a situation in order to transform it through critical questioning. This relates to my earlier argument that centralisation might not be the only problem in bringing about change. Rather, there is a need to consider the complex interplay of structure and agency in order to understand what might involve moving forward thinking and practice. In the next chapter, I address further
this issue in order to explain my role as a teacher conducting research in my school with an essentially transformative aspiration.

Summary

This chapter has described how school change is introduced within the Cypriot education system and, in particular, in the primary sector which provides the setting for the study. It showed that the centrality in decision-making seems to act as a great barrier to the development of more engaging relationships and productive change, since it assumes unified participation for the delivery of standardised outcomes. In this context, parents and students seem to be positioned as passive recipients of schooling, and professionals as policy implementers. Of particular importance is the fact that the national policies on staff mobility assume rapid changes in membership, and this raises questions about productive agency and sustained improvement. It can be argued, therefore, that the official model of change in the Cypriot education system creates the conditions for passivity and disengagement, despite the effort for reform and innovation.

This analysis led me to consider alternative perspectives about educational change, based on accounts from other countries, in order to suggest possible ways forward. In drawing out the implications, I have argued that school-driven change, with a focus on school-based inquiries and democratic participation, can create the conditions for positive school improvement. All of this was conceptualised in relation to the idea of radical collegiality.

In the next two chapters, I explain how as a teacher I sought to explore the potential of radical collegiality within my school as a means of gaining deeper insights of the barriers that need to be overcome so that school change can be achieved in the centralised education system of Cyprus. I argue that such an approach can also facilitate an understanding of the leadership practices that need to be developed as a means of facilitating positive change in such a centralised education system.
CHAPTER 3

Researching within my own school: Theorising the inquiry

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained how policy changes are introduced within the Cypriot education system. In so doing, I showed that there is limited space for productive engagement with the politics of schooling, as the policy context seems to constrain the spaces for active agency and scrutiny both at the national policy and school level. I argued that this can be problematic, since participation is not encouraged. Rather, the emphasis is on the development of standardised ways of working in order to achieve common outcomes. This led me to consider alternative approaches to school change. In this respect, radical collegiality, with its emphasis on school-based inquiries, was seen as a possible way forward.

In this chapter, I theorise my position as a teacher who researches how change is managed in her own school, with the aim of exploring also the potential of radical collegiality, as a means of making explicit the adoption of particular politics when making methodological decisions. In so doing, I theorise my inquiry within the dominant research discourse and, then, within the field of investigation in order to explain the methodological principles underpinning my inquiry as my theoretical perspectives changed, and I refined my methodological stance towards the transformative ideal of radical collegiality. In explaining all of this, I argue that establishing a research identity closely related to that of collaborative inquiry can provide greater insights in relation to the potential of radical collegiality, while, at the same time, offering a more pluralistic and critical approach to knowledge and action. My understanding in this area builds on the work of critical researchers who theorise teacher research and voice research, since as a teacher I was aiming to find a voice within the dominant research discourse, while also enabling others to be heard.

The research agenda

As I have explained, my research interests in change management and its implications for school leadership arose from my experience as a primary school teacher in Cyprus. In this context, the centrality of decision-making within the system and the pressure to ‘deliver’ the
national policy framework seem to prevent a diverse and constructive engagement with the politics of schooling, as participation is unified to achieve similar outcomes. What seems to add further barriers is that schools are forced to experience frequent and massive periods of destabilisation and turbulence, since staff changes are enforced annually. In this way, staff turnover appears quite serendipitous. What is even more problematic is that both the centrality of the system and the policies on staff mobility are normalised to the extent that reforms or changes build on or go along with them. So, for example, the current reform in Cyprus aims to create the democratic school, whereas the official model of change assumes centrally directed change.

Similarly, critical studies argue that educational reforms and change efforts in other countries often serve to make the system work as it is, without actually changing it (Furman and Gruenewald, 2004; Gunter, 2008; Gunter and Forrester, 2008). As a result, school leaders are positioned as reform and policy deliverers and those at the school level as passive recipients of schooling, denying participation in public debates about better education. On the other hand, a more engaging model suggests that change is school-driven and based upon inquiries and democratic participation.

This study set out to add to the development of this critical thinking by problematising and offering more engaging alternatives. In particular, it sought to explore how school change can be achieved within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus, despite the unpromising context I have described. These considerations guided me to approach my new school as a particular site for investigation, since, in this way, I could have a unique access to the everyday reality of how those at the school level manage or can be enabled to manage change in more productive ways. Consequently, I could gain privileged insights in relation to unique school-based change management processes. Here, I draw on the research project that I carried out there over a period of three and a half school years (September 2005-December 2008), while, at the same time, working as a full-time primary school teacher. Such longitudinal insider research is important, since there is limited empirical evidence to suggest how schools manage change over time.
Whilst carrying out the study, though, my growing critical understandings about school-based change management and its implications for leadership led me to modify my research approach from ethnography to collaborative inquiry. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2006, p.17) explain, “there is a sense in which all social research takes the form of participant observation: it involves participating in the social world, in whatever role, and reflecting on the products of that participation”, not least because research practice can entail, according to Thomson and Gunter (2011, p.18), “messy continuously, shifting relationships” within which the researcher can experience multiple and shifting identities. Thus, in adopting a more critical view of leadership, where the agency of others is recognised and enabled within school improvement processes, I saw the development of “collaborative inquiry” (Ainscow and West, 2006; Kemmis, 2001) as a promising research strategy in enriching my understandings on how those within schools can manage the challenge of bringing about positive improvements, given that such an approach assumes the inclusion and development of others in more productive ways. In this way, I was aiming to explore the potential of radical collegiality by creating space to include and enable the localised complexity of voices within the research processes.

In a nutshell, then, the research was based on ethnographic approaches, and the development of collaborative inquiry, where I positioned my self as a teacher researcher/facilitator who researches the issue of school-based change management in her own school and, in so doing, engages with teachers, parents and students in order to understand and, if possible, improve school life. Such an orientation suggests radical collegial relationships, “leaving only room for an educational facilitator” (Elliott, 1988, p.165). The importance of this approach, as I will show, is that not only it can offer a more pluralistic and critical approach to knowledge and action, but also it can provide a deeper understanding of the barriers that need to be overcome in relation to the potential of leadership practices that can be promising in moving forward thinking and practice.

It can be argued, therefore, that this research was a methodological journey in finding a voice through the development of self and others, framed within a politicised framework that seeks to leverage power into productive research inquiry. In so doing, I learnt that a socially constructed inquiry entails ongoing processes of research and development, and requires the
researcher to deal with ethical dilemmas and research refinements. For example, I found that issues of power and different meanings needed to be resolved in ways that can lead to a more sophisticated repertoire of understanding and action. Moreover, I discovered that having a change agenda might mean for some having a hidden agenda, serving more personal interests or seeking distinction.

That is to argue that a study “with, for and by participants” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) recognises not only the potential, but also the limitation of human agency, since contrasting interests and views may undermine or enhance its purposes (Braithwaite et al., 2007; Griffiths, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2006). All of this necessitates an awareness of the values that are at work when taking methodological decisions that might have a change effect.

Bearing all of this in mind, in what follows, I theorise the self in research in order to make explicit my methodological orientation and choices in finding a voice within the dominant research discourse, as a teacher who researches the issue of school-based change management and its implications to leadership practices in her own school while, at the same time, seeking to explore the potential of radical collegiality. Doing research from inside entails its own challenges and, as Smith and Gallagher (2008) stress, educational research is not apolitical, and researchers are not neutral brokers in their research contexts. Therefore, claims to truth need to be scrutinised within and outside these borders.

This also suggests an agency in finding a voice within the field of investigation, since the researcher enters the field as a social agent and needs to deal with power relations. Considering this, I also theorise my position in the field of investigation as a teacher researcher who seeks to work within the aspirations of radical collegiality and, in so doing, enables other voices within the school community, which had been missing from the dominant research and policy discourse, to participate in dialogues for social change. All of this requires its own theorisation, so that alternatives can be revealed and explained.

**Finding a voice within the dominant research discourse**

My view of finding a voice within the dominant research discourse is more about voice authentication, where I make explicit research relationships and methods in order to offer an
alternative and not an absolute in the dominant discourse of researching and knowledge. That is to emphasise that finding a voice should not be confused with the voices of other people with a similar status. Rather, this is about making choices, learning and unsettlement to the common sense. As Ranson (2000, p.268) argues “to find a voice is to find an identity and the possibility of agency in the world”.

My position of adopting a socially critical perspective on knowledge and action, while being part of the context, can be conceptualised as a struggle to restore research relationships as pedagogical and not oppressive. In forming such a research identity, I draw on traditions of teacher research which locate teachers as active agents in their contexts (Anderson et al., 2007; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 1986; Stenhouse, 1983).

The impetus for such an inquiry is based upon the premise that teachers hold a unique understanding of their contexts, and can offer alternatives in the construction of knowledge. This is raised in Polanyi’s (1958) conceptualisation of subjective or tacit knowledge according to which people know more than they can say, since they are not always able to articulate explicitly their meaning making processes. In fact, this goes back to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato who acknowledged that people can hold the one and the many together at the same time.

Such conceptualisations recognise that teachers store a vast amount of unspoken knowledge, and hold their own tacit theories which inform their practices. Schön’s (1983) idea of the “reflective practitioner” mirrors this argument when he argues that practitioners form their practices, while reflecting on their intuitive knowledge on action and in action. His formulation is important, as it indicates human’s inner capacity to construct and reconstruct knowledge through reflection. This means that much of what teachers do or think involves the use of their tacit knowledge in an intuitive level.

In other words, teacher research recognises practitioners as decision- and policy-makers in their schools, as they research their practices and engage reflectively in testing and generating their own theories-in-use. This suggests that finding a voice is about constructing a research identity that is owned and not dominated by disciplined and scientific informed
research that only displaces complexity from reality with common-sense and rationality (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Griffiths, 1998; Gunter, 2001). In this respect, action research can be seen as a promising research strategy for teachers who want to make an authentic contribution to the struggles for real social change, and also reclaim their status as professionals who have the capacity to contribute to knowledge generation within a systematic inquiry of action and reflection.

Action research foregrounds the idea of improving participants’ lives through their engagement that is responsive in ways that deepens knowledge and broadens action (Elliott, 2007). Through reflective inquiry, teacher researchers learn alone or with others how to better align their espoused theories with their practices, as they seek to realise educational ideals. Reason and Bradbury (2006, p.xxv-xxvi) define three approaches that seek to deal with individual or more collective concerns and wider issues:

- **First person action research/practice** is when the researcher is concerned with a personal affair. This type of inquiry is formed through self-reflection and individual action.
- **Second person action research/practice** is when the researcher comes face-to-face with others in dealing with matters of mutual concerns. This type of inquiry is based on dialogue and the development of a community inquiry.
- **Third person action research/practice** is when the researcher aims to involve others who may not meet face-to-face in order to create a wider community of inquiry. This type of inquiry is political, as it integrates the voices from the dominant discourse with those from the margins in addressing more general issues and public policies.

What is important in this formulation is the possibility of action research that enables teacher researchers not only to improve their practices, but also to advance inquiry into critical questioning and political action through collective participation. This leads Reason and Bradbury (2006, p.xxvi) to argue that, “the most compelling and enduring kind of action research will engage all three strategies”. This connects action research with democratic participation and dialogue in raising political consciousness that goes beyond individuals and their associations, and is more about a political movement that can result into real social change. Similarly, Gustavsen (2001) sees action research as a social movement where the
terrain of intervention is broadened through further participation and not just a detailed enhancement of a single case.

In this way, action research offers an alternative to understand change at the micro- and macro-level, where teachers are recognised as active agents in the use and production of knowledge. Nonetheless, action research needs to be conceptualised within its intellectual heritage in order to explain further its possibilities and enable a range of options, and not to overemphasise preferred ways of doing action research.

**Theorising action research**

The idea of action research comes from theories which place an emphasis on the social nature of action and collective creativity in addressing practical matters and raising consciousness. For example, it can be located in Lewin’s (1946; 1951) field theory in which he saw action and improvement as emerging from workers exploring their social interactions, or in Dewey’s (1933; 1938) theory of learning by doing. Likewise, the Marxian epistemology and feminist theories give primacy to reflective knowledge that enables more autonomous ways of living and knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

Habermas (1984), with his theory of communicative action, suggests the “ideal speech situation” in which practitioners can participate as equals in a democratic dialogue of practical reasoning. His conceptualisation is important because it seeks to address issues of power through democratic dialogue. However, Gadamer (1994) critiqued Habermas for creating unnecessary divides between theory and practice, since, as he argues, theory is an inherent dimension of practice, and this makes it impossible for critical theorems to escape from the particularity of their own reflection, and warrant any knowledge gained as power free.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), with their ideal of critical theory, intend to bridge this gap and build on Habermas’ ideas by introducing action research as a means of engaging with oppressive ideologies and practices that can liberate human inquiry into more democratic practices. Elliott (1991; 1993; 2005; 2007) sees this as problematic in Carr and Kemmis’ critical theory, and argues that being critical is not enough in becoming a change agent and enabling democracy. Rather, it requires the development of the motivation and capabilities
needed for exercising such agency. Therefore, he introduces the idea of “situational understandings”, where practitioners gather and interpret data together in order to establish their situational understandings through self-evaluation and critique of their situation, and, based on that awareness, to form their future actions.

All of this sets the basis for the development of co-operative or collaborative inquiry (e.g. Kemmis, 2001), and the notion of the learning organisation (e.g. Argyris and Schön, 1996; Senge, 1990) along with the rise of consultants or critical friends working collaboratively with people in their setting in order to facilitate their reflexive inquiry and improve their situations and practices. For example, Senge (1990) conceptualises “levers” as purposeful actions that aim to change behaviour of an organisation, where “high leverage” actions are the ones that can change the tacit knowledge of people and not just the refinement of existing practices. Argyris and Schön (1996) make a similar distinction when they refer to “double-loop” and “single-loop” learning. The former connotes transformational responses and radical alternatives to existing practices through critical questioning, whereas the latter involves improvements to existing practices and skills, without any questioning on the structures that support them.

Constructivist theories of learning (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978) and leading (Lambert et al., 2002) offer similar perspectives, since practitioners are seen as constructors of knowledge and are encouraged to adopt a shared inquiring stance in gathering and interpreting data for a shared sense of purpose. Here, “interruptions” (Ainscow, 2005) in knowledge construction serve as metacognition processes of learning how to learn or unlearn, since they create “disequilibrium” in thinking (Lambert et al., 2002; Piaget, 1985) and challenge deeply held beliefs about ways of knowing and doing which are reformulated in the light of new alternative knowledge.

Likewise, in activity theory (Engeström, 1987; 1999a; 1999b; 2008; Engeström and Miettinen, 1999) transformational or expansive learning occurs through facing and resolving tensions and contradictions. Practitioners’ agency is also acknowledged in the intervention processes, as reflective communication and visible action open up the zones of proximal development in order to interlink social actors with their potentially transformed shared
objects/concerns. What is important about activity theory is that it recognises the complexity and issues of power in relationships as individuals pursue their shared aspirations. This requires mindfulness in an action research project, because it might mean manipulation and contrived discourse in maximising organisational performance, rather than enabling participants to meet their own concerns.

This theorisation has many implications for teacher researchers when undertaking action research, where, for example, having a problem-solving approach is not enough in changing what constrains agency, as this might imply compliance and refinement of existing practices, or improvement according to government policies (Kemmis, 2006). This means that, in order to fulfil its promises to social transformation and active participation, action research also needs a problem-posing orientation as a means of questioning and transforming the status quo in more constructive ways (Tripp, 1990).

As I have argued, Kurt Lewin’s (1951) dictum that you cannot understand an organisation unless you try to change it captures this idea, since attempting change can enable the critical questioning needed for bringing about real transformations. Consequently, action researchers are encouraged to become policy-makers and not just about how to make policies work better (Ozga, 2000). Such an inquiry can enable a connection of the personal with the collective at the micro- and macro-level, since it can generate knowledge for personal and professional transformation, and also contextual regeneration (Anderson and Jones, 2000; Braithwaite et al., 2007; Noffke, 2009).

Given this theorisation, my idea of finding a voice within the dominant research discourse is about doing action research that connects with the struggles for real social change and democratic development. As Kemmis (2001, p.96) explains, such critical research goes beyond functional or practical knowledge in enhancing outcomes or self-understandings, since “it aims to connect the personal and the political in collaborative research and action aimed at transforming situations, to overcome felt dissatisfactions, alienation, ideological distortion, and the injustices of oppression and domination”, because this inquiry is “for, as and mindful of social justice” (Griffiths, 2009, p.97).
In other words, I am arguing for action research as an inclusive and enabling project. This endorses the idea of conducting research “with, for and by participants” and “looking toward more just educational practice” (Noffke, 2009, p.21), where the teacher researcher facilitates participants to learn how to become autonomous agents in ways that enhance their associational knowledge, as they learn to research with others. In this way, they can become more aware of their situations and form their representational knowledge that allows them to take control of their fortunes (Park, 2001). In my view, such a methodological approach is closer to the conceptualisation of radical collegiality, where professionals can work in more productive ways with those at the school level. At the same time, as this analysis shows, this can enable deeper understandings of how to move forward thinking and practice within particular school contexts and educational systems. Thus, my position of finding a voice within the dominant research discourse is about doing action research that aims for the development of collaborative inquiry, and this requires its own theorisation.

**Theorising collaborative inquiry**

So far, I have argued that developing a shared inquiry stance within the field of investigation can help to explore the potential of radical collegiality to move forward thinking and practice in that it can be deliberately designed to enhance and enable active agency. As I have explained, such an approach suggests research as a dialogue (Coulter, 1999) in pursuing a “critical pedagogy of place” (Furman and Gruenewald, 2004), where participants are included and enabled to engage with research processes as change agents in order to meet their own concerns and not unified transformations. All of this can enable a better understanding of the barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve school change.

It can be argued, therefore, that the approach that I am proposing is about co-researching. Nevertheless, co-researching that is a teacher-led initiative and inclusive to that extent needs to be theorised, so that alternatives can be revealed and explained. In this respect, I explain that co-researching features standpoint and voice research, and all this can be conceptualised within the ramifications of radical collegiality.

*Co-researching as standpoint research*

Standpoint research acknowledges silenced people or marginalised groups as constructors of knowledge from a particular experience and position. It also recognises that voice cannot
represent an authentic voice of a social category. Instead, inequalities exist between and within social categories, as they differ in time, space and relations (Arnot and Reay, 2007). In this sense, the notion of voice entails a range of sub-categories or sub-voices (Bernstein, 2000). Therefore, knowledge generation from a particular social category is more about multiple knowledges, experienced from a similar location (Thomson and Gunter, 2007).

Here, Bernstein’s (1990) distinction between social and pedagogic identities is helpful in understanding the role of voice (or sub-voices) in standpoint research. Social identity rejects the idea of a unitary or neutral social classification, as it is formed within power relations. On the other hand, pedagogical identity appears to be educative and political, since it is developed in order to challenge power relations in ways that restore social identity as equitable to other social identities. Unlike Moore and Muller’s (1999) critique that standpoint or voice research deals only with experiential knowledge and exclusive voices of those who are silenced or marginalised, Bernstein (1990) explains that voice discourse/research needs to have its own pedagogic voice in recognising and realising power relations and their boundaries, so that possible barriers can be overcome.

This is important because in a research project, voice-elicitation (i.e. listening to the views of participants) does not assume change in power relations within and between social categories. Rather, it can be forceful when power relations are recognised and challenged through certain pedagogies. For example, Willis (1977), in his book Learning to Labour, elucidates the voice of a group of working-class “lads”, but his theorisation neglects to develop a pedagogic identity among those “lads” in raising political awareness and enabling them to overcome barriers for better life chances. The argument, here, according to Arnot and Reay (2007, p.318), is that researchers need to recognise that “social classifications only work through pedagogic relations and interaction”.

The implication is that standpoint research seeks to develop capabilities and reflective deliberation in challenging implicit and unexamined power structures which undermine social equality and inclusion. Hence, the approach of co-researching that I am advocating foregrounds standpoint issues, since experiences and power relations need to be explored and
interrogated from a particular location, so that they can be transformed productively. In this sense, co-researching can be about finding a voice from a particular location.

Co-researching as voice research

Ranson (2000) argues that, in order to become capable of addressing effectively their problems, communities need to promote active citizenship by including and developing the capabilities of the variety of voices that represent them. This assumes that the local cultural capital of communities is recognised as having a “considerable potential not just for the community-building desired by policy-makers, but also for unsettling identities and enriching learning” (Thomson, 2006, p.82).

The implication of this is that co-researching should not be confused with voice-elicitation, where participants are viewed more as data sources. Rather, it needs to be seen as voice research, where participants are enabled as data inquirers and change initiators, so that they can develop their capabilities for active citizenship within a politicised framework. For example, there is growing research on student consultation, where students make explicit their views about school improvement (Flutter, 2006; Rudduck et al., 1996; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004), school’s self-evaluation (MacBeath, 2000), curriculum (Arnot and Reay, 2007) or teaching and learning practices (Rudduck, 1996; 2006). It seems, though, that such an inquiry does not necessarily mean the development of a pedagogic identity in recognising and challenging oppressive or dominant structures from a particular position. On the other hand, student voice research, in which students conduct research and bring their own data as a means of making their views explicit, has the potential to lead to further problematisation and action inquiry by designing and, even, implementing change (e.g. Ainscow and Kaplan, 2005; Bragg and Fielding; 2005; Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Gunter and Thomson, 2007; Thomson and Gunter, 2006; 2007).

Yet, voice research assumes dialogue and political inquiry in restoring social identities and overcoming barriers to participation. In this sense, co-researching as a teacher-led initiative is about working within the ramifications of radical collegiality within which professionals engage in meaningful dialogues with the localised complexity of voices in order to improve constructively their situations.
Co-researching as radical collegiality

It is critical to consider, though, the extent of radical collegiality in co-researching, given that, as Fielding (1999) argues, collaboration is an individualistic process in seeking and receiving resources which may dissipate or disappear, as soon as the task is completed, priorities change, or the driving force is weakened. On the other hand, he goes on, collegiality is a more robust relationship, since it is concerned with the enhancement of democracy and the “development of good persons” (Fielding, 2006).

However, as Gunter (2001) argues, the conditions for radical collegiality are rather problematic, since they challenge power structures. This leads Ainscow et al. (2006a, p.182) to argue that, in practice, collaboration and collegiality are not easy to disentangle, as “collaboration may need to be a forerunner to collegiality”, where experiencing practical gains can set the basis for the development of more communal aspirations in the long-term. What this means for co-researching is that radical collegiality, although central to the development of democracy and productive change, is more helpful if it is conceptualised as a struggle in its form and substance.

In other words, my view of finding a voice within the field aims to improve the lives of the participants through the development of a critical school-based research, where the localised complexity of voices can be involved as data inquirers in becoming aware and changing their situations in mutually beneficial ways. In this way, knowledge is pluralistic and dialogic and seeks to enable active agency and productive change. The importance of this is that collaborative inquiry can itself be seen as a form of leadership that is more participatory and collegial, as it can be purposefully designed by professionals to include and enable the wider school community within school improvement processes. All of this can enable a deeper understanding of its implications to overcoming barriers to progress and participation. Such an inquiry, though, is a politicised practice, buttressed with values, and this requires openness to the methodological principles and choices that underpin it.

Methodological principles

In this kind of research, where social relationships are the basic unit of analysis and research development, methodological principles need to be thought in and on action with “ethical
sensitivity” (Somekh, 2006). Foremost, this suggests that the intellectual freedom of those being involved needs to be protected. As Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p.77) argue:

Protecting intellectual freedom means that pedagogies must proceed from an understanding of the individual’s capacity for originality and critical engagement, and not represent themselves as emancipatory when in fact they are a subtle form of imperialism through a sophisticated process of manipulation.

Having, however, a framework of ethics can be of limited importance, since unique or unpredicted circumstances may constrain its use. Ethics cannot be regulated, but they need to be considered in context and in process. In this respect, I found the notion of ecological ethics helpful in assisting my thinking.

An ecological approach to ethics, according to Flinders (1992), is an ongoing process of recognising that all participants are important to the whole (Collins, 2004). Within this framework, informed consent is approached with cultural sensitivity, rather than just informing participants and getting approval, since research interests and relationships might change. Avoidance of harm is about recognising that the individual is part of the whole, and both need to be respected, as they are interconnected. Given that thick descriptions are essential in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and also political action cannot be anonymous, confidentiality and anonymity need to be approached with responsive communication. This implies that participants need to agree with the way research findings are reported, so that their dignity and privacy can be protected (Pring, 2000).

All of this requires reflexivity on how to best accommodate ethics and the research agenda. Being reflexive in a socially critical research project is not only about how to enlighten, but also about how to enable participants to take action and put in effect their aspirations. Therefore, making sense of a situation is not just about applying theories and methods. Rather, it is an ongoing process of meaning making and critical questioning in using theories as a means of “thinking otherwise” (Ball, 1995, p.266). The researcher is more of a “cultural critic offering perspective rather than truth” (Ball, 1995, p.268), not least because contexts are not “static, neutral or controllable” (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2008, p.12), and
knowledge is produced under certain conditions and power relations (Ozga, 2000; Popkewitz, 2000).

This assumes everyday politics in negotiating power relations and making practical judgements that have an empowering effect and contribute to real change. Griffiths (1998) draws attention to the significance of connecting power with productive and democratic purposes. By this I am not arguing for the demolition or elimination of existing structures, but how to make political and practical judgements that legitimise or invent other socially just structures.

This supports the idea of knowledge as dialogic and pluralistic, where the researcher engages reflexively with others in order to improve what they are currently know and do, not just in technical terms, but in ways that can be liberating. Here, the notion of social capital is particularly helpful in understanding research as a dialogic and democratic discourse. However, my notion of social capital holds a different view from that of Putman (2000), according to which the deployment of social networking can contribute to economic prosperity and community flourishing. This assumes regulating and hegemonic relationships of trust and reciprocity that seem to silence social antagonism, exclusion or domination within and between networks (Hughes and Blaxter, 2007).

My understandings of social capital resonate much more with Bourdieu’s (1990) formulation, where social capital, as other capitals, is not equal or homogenous but interrelated with other capitals as people struggle for social justice. Consequently, I agree with Ball (2008) that social capital is about the democratic participation of others in public dialogues, and not just the investment in social relationships that has a return.

What this means for a socially critical project is that it needs to be accessible in terms of participation and research findings in ways that can have a political and social effect on the lives of participants. In this sense, validity and quality in research come from democratic scrutiny and participation in the use and production of knowledge, aimed to increase opportunities for better life chances (Griffiths, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2006).
Methodological principles shape research’s theoretical orientation and being explicit about them provides coherence in research, and also recognises partiality. Values are not universal or common. Instead, they imply the adoption of particular politics in making methodological decisions. My view of finding a voice within the research discourse and the field of investigation was conceptualised within the politics of radical collegiality and its potential for democratic development.

Summary

Positioning the self as a teacher researcher who investigates the issue of school-based change management in her own school, I explained how my changing perspectives led me to modify my research approach from ethnography towards an approach that could enable me to explore the potential of radical collegiality. In explaining all of this, I theorised my position as finding a voice, while, at the same time, enabling others to find their own. This led me to develop the argument that collaborative inquiry that is inclusive directly to its context can foster the critical edge in teacher research, since knowledge is pluralistic and dialogic, and seeks to enable active agency. Such an inquiry, I argue, can have a more dynamic and leveraging effect, contributing to research that is unique, shaped in its context of social making. In other words, I theorised my inquiry within the aspirations of radical collegiality. This, I argue, can offer deeper and richer understandings of how those within schools can manage the challenge of bringing about positive improvements.

Theorising the self in research is important, since this can facilitate the researcher to decide on methods and techniques in ways that increase trustworthiness. The next chapter focuses on the issues shaping the methodological aspects of my research framed around the reality that this project was conceived, developed and worked on within my changing stances and during my time of working as a teacher in a particular primary school in Cyprus.
CHAPTER 4

From methodology to methods: The issue of trustworthiness

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I theorised my position as a teacher researcher who studies the issue of school-based change management in her own school, while engaging in productive dialogues with the localised complexity of voices. In other words, as my research continued, it increasingly involved me in supporting the development of collaborative inquiry in which participants are enabled as co-researchers to become aware of and improve constructively their situations. I argued that such an approach can offer privileged insights in relation to the potential of radical collegiality in moving forward thinking and practice within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus. Having explained the evolution of my methodological orientation, I now turn to how I developed a research design that could facilitate the development of collaborative inquiry as a model of change in a trustworthy manner.

In explaining all of this, I draw attention to the complex processes involved as my own thinking developed, and as I attempted to negotiate the implications of my changing stances with other stakeholders within and outside the school. To assist my thinking, two conceptual maps were developed, so that my research roles and methods could be located and explained, as the research progressed from ethnography to collaborative inquiry. I draw on various ways of carrying out social research, particularly ethnography, action research, voice elicitation and voice research. I also explain the three cycles of research and development involved in the study. An illustration of the research in practice documents how I immersed in the daily life as a teacher researcher. Furthermore, I give detailed explanations, underpinning my choices about the methods and techniques adopted and developed. Additionally, I specify how the accumulated and multi-perspective data were analysed.

Developing two conceptual maps

As the study developed, two conceptual maps, influenced by the conceptualisation by Reason and Bradbury (2006) of action research, referred to in the previous chapter, emerged. These became important as a means of explaining the development of collaborative inquiry as a
model of change, and providing insights into my research roles and methods used when building the research’s trustworthiness.

The conceptual map of collaborative inquiry as a political model indicates the possibility of research in addressing wider issues and policies (see Diagram 1). As shown in the diagram, the move from first person research to second and, then, to third shows the importance of each approach to the development of collaborative inquiry. This assumes that each approach potentially instigates the development of the other, whereas the cyclic move emphasises the flexibility of research that may result into another approach at any point of action or reflection. This means that an individual concern potentially can become a mutual concern and, then, a political matter, as a wider inquiry stance is created.

**Diagram 1: The conceptual map of collaborative inquiry as a political model**

In order to understand how my school manages change (first person research), during the second year of the study, I sought to enhance any knowledge gained by involving participants as co-researchers (second person research), first, in researching processes into change and, then, during the third year, based on that awareness, in designing, implementing and evaluating change that could have a political effect (third person research). The implication of this is that the researcher needs to adopt particular methods and techniques which can facilitate participants to move into more active forms of research participation and action.

The map also indicates that each approach can be fulfilled and sustained without jeopardising the others. This means that the development of collaborative inquiry as a political model can lead to more independent ways of knowing and acting, alone or with others. This, though, may imply a shift of focus, as the shared concern might be different from the researcher’s
original concern. Therefore, the researcher needs to build the safeguards of his/her research, since decisions and negotiations need to be in accordance of what the research is about and what the situation allows. The conceptual map in Diagram 2 explains how such safeguards can be mounted.

**Diagram 2: The conceptual map of collaborative inquiry as a reflective model**

The conceptual map of collaborative inquiry as a reflective model supports the idea that the move to other approaches can deepen understandings, as it can provide insights into possible barriers faced by individuals, while collaborating and bringing about meaningful change. While being located in the centre, first person research holds an accumulative effect, as it gazes upon the other approaches in order to reach to a deeper understanding of the situation, whereas this awareness can form the basis for further reflection and action alone or with others. In this sense, the individual researcher maintains his/her scrutiny throughout the research inquiry, and develops methods and techniques for self-reflection and democratic scrutiny.

Table 1 offers an overview of what this entailed in real time activity when using the two conceptual maps for the development of collaborative inquiry as a model of change and building the research’s trustworthiness. It also shows the roles of the researcher, and the methods and techniques used for each approach. Specifically, the researcher, in investigating an individual concern (the issue of school-based change management), uses methods and techniques for documenting reality, eliciting and scrutinising participants’ views, while also maintaining a reflective stance (first person research). At the same time, in order to reach at a better understanding of the situation, s/he becomes co-researcher and adopts methods and techniques which enable participants as co-researchers, first, in researching change within
their school, and, then, in designing, implementing and evaluating change (second person research) that may lead to a wider inquiry stance and political action (third person research).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Overview of collaborative inquiry as a model of change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher’s roles</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First person research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Individual researcher</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher investigates an individual concern (school-based change management) and maintains a reflective stance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second person research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Individual researcher as co-researcher</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher as co-researcher facilitates participants to research school-based change management and, based on that awareness, to design, implement and evaluate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third person research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Individual researcher as co-researcher</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher as co-researcher facilitates participants to address wider issues and policies by creating a wider inquiry stance when designing, implementing and evaluating change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods and techniques used and developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First person research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Photo-elicitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reflective practices:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Case study report</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Research toolkit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Photo-voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Peer-debriefing</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Second person research</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Case study report</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Research toolkit</td>
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<td>- Photo-voice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Third person research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Case study report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Research toolkit</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Photo-voice</td>
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</table>

It is important to note that the summary in this table conceptualises trustworthiness when making claims about the research’s utility and knowledge. In what follows, I provide a thorough account of how this developed through the years of the study, and what it involved in practice. First of all, I give detailed explanations about my choices on methods and techniques.

**Developing a research design**

Theorising the self and values in the previous chapter led me to consider possible ways forward of connecting my research with my work, as I wanted to address complexity and not to eschew it, by actually involving those with whom I everyday encounter the difficulties of schooling. In so doing, during the early stages of the research inquiry, I sought to develop a
research design closely related to that of collaborative inquiry as a model of change. This process was carried out over three and a half school years (September 2005-December 2008), since in this way I could map school change through time, and also within the development of collaborative inquiry.

However, the school in question posed significant challenges, as it served an increasingly diverse student population from low socioeconomic and different ethnic backgrounds. At the start of the research, the intake of bilingual and foreign students was increasing significantly (30%) compared to the national average (6.7%). All of this raised important questions as to how, as a teacher in this school, where staff changes are also enforced annually, I could develop such a research design, since I had to negotiate my research roles within such a challenging and changing context, where one of my roles was to develop and sustain a research framework for eliciting and scrutinising participants’ views. A different role could be seen that of maintaining and developing personal relations with them in order to facilitate their active participation in research processes. In practice, all of this evolved through what I came to see as three interlinked cycles of research and development.

The first cycle could be considered as first person research, since I was interested in mapping school change for a whole school year and a half (September, 2005-December, 2006), whereby this knowledge was co-constructed and interpreted in order to enlighten thinking and inform practice. This time was also invested in negotiating my researcher identity, since this is quite unusual in Cypriot schools, and building trust. This preliminary analysis provided insights into how I could develop a research design that would be feasible, given the complexities and uncertainties of the social and transitional relationships particularly during periods of contextual turbulence. In Yin’s (2003) terms, this time could be considered as a pilot phase, since I was testing hunches, theories and methods with “an essentially exploratory function, where some of the research questions are methodological” (Robson, 2002, p.185), which set the basis for a more explanatory design.

The second and third cycles involved the development of collaborative inquiry (second and third person research), where participants were enabled as co-researchers in order to investigate processes into change and, based on that awareness, to design, implement and evaluate change (second person research/second cycle) that could lead to political action.
(third person research/third cycle). For this purpose, the research groups of teachers, parents and students were formed. Here, my intention to include policy-makers from the early stages of collaborative inquiry turned out to be impossible, since the inspector of the school felt that this was inconsistent with her role as an evaluator. Nevertheless, this kind of involvement was anticipated to occur with the development of research into third person research.

The development of the second and third cycles occurred over the next two years (January 2007-December 2008). In this way, I was able to map school change through time, allowing me also to reveal its possibilities as a social endeavour, whereby participants can find meaning in research purposes and connect with the struggles of others for a better quality of life and positive improvement.

In developing my approach, I was cognisant of the possible constraints of collaborative inquiry. For example, it assumes the active involvement and commitment of participants, which may be denied at any stage, or research purposes might be undermined by other priorities and more individual concerns. Consequently, I decided to maintain the research approaches used during the first cycle throughout the development of the second and third cycles. In other words, I retained first person research alongside the development of collaborative inquiry as a means of avoiding the danger of being trapped in a set of relationships, which might become stale, impoverished or strategic because of factors in the context that were outside my influence.

Table 2 is helpful in illustrating how the research progressed from first to second and third person research through the years of the study. In particular, it presents the development of the three cycles through the research’s critical time-points. These occurred during the period between September to December each year, when new members arrive and research negotiations take place (e.g. getting consent, forming the research groups), and the time between January to September which implied the continuance of the research.
As noted earlier, it can be seen that first person research was maintained throughout the years of the study (first cycle). Initial findings of the first school year set the grounds for developing a research design of collaborative inquiry as a model of change. This was initiated during the second year, after investing sufficient time for research negotiations. During this time, participants as co-researchers investigated school change (second person research/second cycle). The following year, participants continued their collaboration and, after research negotiations, used the insights gained from their research in order to design, implement and evaluate change (second person research/second cycle) which could result into political inquiry (third person research/third cycle). These collaborative efforts continued into the fourth year, which was considered as the closure of the research.

In this respect, research negotiations posed their own risks and challenges. For example, during the early stages of my inquiry, there was a crucial period when I came to realise that focusing alone on headship as a locus for leadership was inconsistent with my understandings of leadership as a socially constructed process. This is when I decided to include other voices in my research. All of this raised a concern about how to deal with research aims and strategies that were becoming increasingly wider in scope, and might be seen as exploitation or entrapment.

Additionally, while being unfolded within transitions of membership, where participants arrive and depart every year, the research placed considerable attention on the development of social processes which could facilitate their engagement and disengagement with research processes. This led me to examine the development of research patterns which could be taken up every year, and help build up the research’s trustworthiness. In what follows, I explain how I developed such patterns when getting consent, forming the teacher, parent and student research groups, confirming and disseminating research findings.
Getting consent

In a study, where the basic unit of analysis is social relations, participants need to be informed about what the research involves and agree with it (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This was a major challenge, as consent from a variety of stakeholders needed to be secured at different points in the process.

Firstly, I got permission from the Ministry for every year of the study, so that my research identity could be protected. In addition, informed consent from teachers was obtained formally and informally. At the beginning of each school year (critical time-point September-December), new staff members were informed informally about my research role and, afterwards, in a more formal way, I gave a power-point presentation during a staff meeting in order to explain my research agenda and initial findings.

In addition, parents and students were informed with relevant letters at the beginning of each school year. Regarding the parent and student research groups, informed consent was secured by giving them the research plan and purposes (see appendix 1) in order to review, agree with and sign. This also facilitated their commitment to the research project.

Forming the teacher, parent and student research groups

Research groups made up of teachers, parents and students were formed through voluntary and democratic procedures, as these were enabled within existing structures (e.g. student councils). Autonomy was granted by giving them the right to terminate their participation, miss a session and veto sensitive observations.

In forming the teacher research group, an inclusive approach was adopted, since all teachers were welcomed to participate at any stage of collaborative inquiry. A research toolkit was developed (see appendix 2) as a means of facilitating their engagement with research processes. Specifically, six teachers participated during their first year of collaboration (second year of the study), and four during the following year (third year of the study), since four participating teachers were transferred to another school, and only two newcomers joined the group. During the last phase of the research (third and a half year of the study), the group continued its collaborative efforts and welcomed one new member. Meanwhile, two of its members were transferred to another school.
In forming the parent research group, I faced many challenges, since most of the parents were bilinguals or foreigners, had heavy working hours and seemed to be largely missing from school’s activities. Therefore, in my effort to enable wider participation, I sent an informative letter in Greek and English in which parents could indicate the time and days that they could meet with me. Although only eight parents responded, I felt that this was encouraging, given the demands of the research which assumed a series of meetings for a whole school year(s). As the group progressed with research and development, informative letters and venues to welcome further participation were organised but with limited involvement.

In practice, forming and retaining the parent research group was a fragmented and time-consuming process. For example, during the first year of their collaboration (second year of the study), three members terminated their participation due to new job responsibilities, whereas, the following year (third year of the study), two members abandoned the group for personal reasons, and the only new member had to join and leave the group three times, given that he had to deal with the uncertainties of being a political refugee. As a result, only three members continued their collaboration throughout the completion of the study, whereas, by the end of it (third and a half year of the study), two new members joined the group.

Regarding the student research group, in order to overcome the teacher effect, where students tend to give answers which satisfy their teacher, I selected students from all classes, and involved an external volunteer researcher as an observer, during our first meetings. Students were selected voluntarily from their class councils. A 10% mixed-age (6 to 8 years old) and gender sample of the student population was formed which varied from seventeen to nineteen students, since some of them left the school for various reasons, whereas some others joined the group as a reward from their teachers for good behaviour. In forming a representative research group, some students had to be selected on the basis of ethnic background, since class councils consisted usually of Greek-Cypriot students. Students who have been in the research group were eligible to continue the following year. In particular, all students continued their participation.
Another issue that created tension was that of removing students from their classrooms, or disappointing them in case something went wrong and we had to abandon our research. In order to ameliorate this, I decided to apply to the programme Eco-schools, a European initiative approved by the Ministry and implemented during school time. In this way, I could meet with students as part of the fulfilment of the programme, and our meetings could be continued anyway.

*Confirming and disseminating research findings*

Great emphasis was given to confirm and disseminate research findings as a means of providing space for dialogue, raising awareness and stimulating participation. Confirmation of the research findings was secured in a number of ways. For example, the case study reports (see appendix 3) were used as a way of validating and disseminating research findings with teachers, before their departures and during their arrivals. In addition, the posters, developed by the parent and student research groups (see appendices 6, 7, 8 and 9), were used for disseminating and confirming parents’ and students’ findings, followed by presentations at the end or the beginning of the school year.

Indeed, developing patterns for research negotiations proved to be important in mounting the safeguards of the research through time and particularly during changes in membership. They also provided a great opportunity to negotiate the research’s language with participants, relate to it and, at another level, challenge it (Pring, 2000). How the research looked in practice is what can enable a better understanding of what all of this involved in real time.

**The research in practice**

Table 3 explains in a little more detail how the research progressed from first person research to second and third person research, within the years of the study. It also shows the changing roles of the researcher and the development of methods and techniques used in establishing the research’s trustworthiness while developing collaborative inquiry as a model of change. It also indicates the outputs of the research activities.
Table 3: The research in practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Progress of research</th>
<th>Roles of the researcher and actions involved</th>
<th>Methods and techniques used</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>First person research/ethnography</td>
<td>The researcher investigates the issue of school-based change management and uses methods and techniques for documenting reality while, at the same time, maintaining a reflective stance.</td>
<td>Documenting reality:  - Document analysis  - Participant observation Reflective practices:  - Case study report  - Reflexive journal  - Memo  - Member checks  - Peer-debriefing</td>
<td>• The researcher co-constructs the case study report with staff.  • The researcher develops patterns for research negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>First person research is maintained and develops into second person research/ethnography and collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>The researcher investigates the issue of school-based change management and uses methods and techniques for documenting reality and eliciting participants’ views while, at the same time, maintaining a reflective stance. Additionally, the researcher enables participants to become co-researchers in order to research the issue of school-based change management and make their views explicit.</td>
<td>Documenting reality:  - Participant observation Eliciting participants’ views:  - Interviews  - Photo-elicitation Reflective practices:  - Case study report  - Reflexive journal  - Memo  - Member checks  - Peer-debriefing Co-researching:  - Case study report  - Research-toolkit  - Photo-voice</td>
<td>• The researcher includes the voices of parents and students.  • The researcher forms the teacher, parent and student research groups.  • The researcher develops and pilots the teachers’ research toolkit with the teacher research group.  • The parent and student research groups investigate change within their school with the technique of photo-voice.  • The teacher research group and staff investigate change within their school by updating the case study report.  • The student research group presents its findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>First person research is maintained and develops into second and third person research/ethnography and collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>The researcher investigates the issue of school-based change management and uses methods and techniques for documenting reality and eliciting participants’ views while, at the same time, maintaining a reflective stance. Additionally, the researcher facilitates participants to become co-researchers in order to design, implement and evaluate an improvement process that might have a political effect.</td>
<td>Documenting reality:  - Participant observation Eliciting participants’ views:  - Interviews Reflective practices:  - Case study report  - The initiation of change technique  - Reflexive journal  - Memos  - Member checks  - Peer-debriefing Co-researching:  - Case study report  - Research-toolkit  - Photo-voice</td>
<td>• The parent research group presents its findings.  • The teacher research group attempts to improve parent-teacher relationships.  • The parent research group takes action in order to support newcomer and foreign families of the school.  • The student research group focuses on improving safety within the school.  • The parent and student research groups evaluate their improvement efforts with the technique of photo-voice.  • The teacher research group evaluates its improvement effort and change in general by updating the case study report and using the initiation of change technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ½</td>
<td>First person research is maintained and develops into second and third person research/ethnography and collaborative inquiry</td>
<td>The researcher investigates the issue of school-based change management and uses methods and techniques for documenting reality while, at the same time, maintaining a reflective stance. Additionally, the researcher facilitates participants to continue their improvement efforts.</td>
<td>Documenting reality:  - Participant observation Reflective practices:  - Case study report  - Reflexive journal  - Member checks  - Peer-debriefing</td>
<td>• The student research group presents its findings.  • The parent research group disseminates its findings by organising a station, exhibiting its course of action.  • The research groups continue their improvement efforts.  • The researcher carries out a grand member check.</td>
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</table>
As I have explained, the first year of the study was more of a pilot phase and was invested in establishing trust relationships and creating a researcher identity based on ethnographic approaches. This process started as soon as I got permission from the Ministry. Then, I selected the school on the basis of position availability, and on the condition that the head teacher would move to a different school the following year, as my initial research interests were related to headship/leadership succession.

After getting consent from participants and presenting my research’s orientation, I began my inquiry as a participant observer, attempting to maintain a reflective stance. Additionally, available documents of the school were taken for consideration. In recognising the hierarchical status of the head teacher, which could be seen as supporting or possibly undermining my research, I considered it important to have regular debriefings with the current (and successor) head regarding my research purposes and future actions.

During this phase of the research, I gave considerable attention to identify social processes that could facilitate the development of collaborative inquiry as a model of change from different positions. It is here that I saw the development of case study report(s) as a means of testing and confirming my own interpretations, and also a great opportunity for involving teachers in research processes and taking into account their voice. Consequently, by the end of the school year, I co-constructed a case study report with teachers in order to deconstruct it by putting it into further scrutiny in a staff meeting, before its final shape. The use of the case study report as offering an analysis of the school stimulated reflection, and, in a way, prepared the ground for the development of collaborative inquiry. It also highlighted the need to develop patterns for research negotiations which could enhance trustworthiness.

During the second year, time was invested in research negotiations, before embarking on any kind of research inquiry. Research negotiations provided the opportunity for including the voices of parents and students, and forming the research groups (i.e. teachers, parents, students). Parallel with participant observation and my reflective practices, I used interviews with all teachers and the technique of photo-elicitation with the parent and student research groups. Yet, in strengthening any arguments being made, I sought to explore the research’s utility and claims to knowledge through the development of others and practical ways
forward. In other words, participants were enabled as co-researchers in investigating change within their school.

In so doing, the teacher research group and staff had to update the case study report, whereas the parent and student research groups with the methodological tool of photo-voice had to take their own photographs, develop their posters and present their findings. The posters were also developed in a printed form (see appendices 6 and 7). By the end of that year, students gave a power-point presentation to the rest of the students and teachers. Parents gave their own presentation to parents and staff in Greek, English and Arabic, during an afternoon, at the beginning of the following year.

During the third year, based on that awareness, the research groups were enabled to design, implement and evaluate their own initiation of change. After research negotiations, participants had to decide their focus of concern and actions to be taken, enclosing the possibility of creating a wider inquiry stance and addressing wider issues and policies. In the meantime, I maintained my reflective practices and continued mapping change, using participant observation and interviews with teachers.

The teacher research group chose to improve its situation by working closer with parents. The research toolkit, which was developed and piloted the previous year, was used as a means of facilitating their engagement with these processes. As the research progressed, their idea of working closer with parents was taken up as one of the school’s aims. Wider interventions were organised, whereby parents were invited to attend seminars, observe lessons, escort students in field-trips, assist in the classroom and help to improve the physical appearance of the school building. In order to grant teachers’ autonomy, whole school strategies needed to be approved by the majority of teachers, whereas individual schemes were analysed and supported by the rest of the group or me, acting as a facilitator.

The student research group focused on increasing its sense of feeling safe within the school, and sent letters to various interested parties, such as the Parent Association, the mayor, the local School Board, the regional fire-inspector and the canteen caterer, followed by meetings with them. They also promoted a campaign for healthy eating.
The parent research group elected to support foreign and newcomer families of the school. They sent an informative letter about the school to the Minister of Education and Culture, followed by another letter regarding their findings and reflections. They also sent a request letter to the head teacher of the Adults Centre for providing afternoon Greek lessons at the school. Moreover, they developed a package with useful information about the school and the country to be given to foreign and newcomer families. This was praised by the Ministry, as it was considered pioneering work at a time when the Ministry was also seeking solutions to the challenges raised by the increasing presence of foreign students. In addition, they created a unit in the school, where clothes, food and stationery were collected on a voluntary basis for those in need. Furthermore, they organised a summer school for all the kids in the area.

By the end of the year, participants had to evaluate their improvement process. In particular, all teachers were involved in updating the case study report and, due to particular circumstances, I used the initiation of change technique, developed by Ainscow et al. (1995), only with the teacher research group as means of evaluating their sense of control and commitment over school initiated change. The parent and student research groups evaluated their initiation of change with the technique of photo-voice, whereby they took their own photographs and developed their posters (see photograph 1) which were also developed in a printed form (see appendices 8 and 9).

By the beginning of the fourth year, students gave their presentation of findings to the rest of the students and staff, whereas parents organised a station, exhibiting their course of action (i.e. their posters, a video-clip of the summer school, the package), during an afternoon parent-teacher meeting. Meanwhile, I continued my research inquiry in documenting reality and maintaining a reflective stance. After research negotiations, participants decided to continue their research inquiry. By the closure of the research, as part of their improvement process, teachers gave presentations to parents about homework. Parents continued their interventions (e.g. gathering clothes etc), and also hired a teacher for helping students with their homework. Students had a meeting with the new cantina caterer and continued their campaign for healthy eating. In order to put the data into further scrutiny, I carried out a
grand member check with participants, whereby staff had to review the case study reports and posters, and the parent and student research groups had to reflect on their posters.

However, at this point, it is important to stress that the move to third person research was a fragmented process, as it entailed the involvement of those in more powerful positions in questioning the status quo and, indeed, challenging their own privileged or, in some cases, de-privileged position. For example, the mayor admitted that he had no authority over schools, and this was a big issue for the city hall. Nevertheless, all of this strengthens the argument that such an inquiry can deepen understandings and offer greater insights.

In other words, all of this shows how I developed a school-based change management model. More importantly, the development of collaborative inquiry provided an opportunity to consider its implications as a model of change that enabled me to track developments through time. In this way, I was able to explore the dynamisms developed among newcomers and established members (i.e. staff, parents, students), as the research progressed from ethnography to collaborative inquiry. Here, considering the fluidity of membership which was noted throughout the years of the study, ‘newcomers’ were considered as being those school members (i.e. staff, parents, students) who had just arrived at the school, whilst ‘established members’ were defined as school members who had been in the school for more than one year.

Table 4 offers an overview of participants throughout the years of the study and within the development of collaborative inquiry. It shows how many participants, newcomers and established, were involved, from different groups and at different stages of the research. The table also demonstrates how changes in staff and the research groups occurred during each of the years of the study. In addition, the table captures some of the complexity amongst those arriving, established and also departing school members, as well as their involvement with the research processes. I have already explained how the research groups were formed and, in the next part, I give detailed explanations of how this membership instability occurred during the years of my research (see also appendix 4 for a more detailed account).
Next, I explain in more detail the methods and techniques adopted when addressing this complexity and developing collaborative inquiry as a model of change in a trustworthy manner.

### Methods and techniques

Methods and techniques provided the means for data collection and interpretation, whilst also helping to facilitate the development of collaborative inquiry in a trustworthy way. Here, the concept of triangulation was adopted as a pluralistic approach to research and not just as a narrow methodological concept of mixing methods, since the multiplicity of voices was recognised and enabled in research processes (Pring, 2000; Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Table 5 summarises the forms of triangulation that were used.
Table 5: The concept of triangulation within the development of collaborative inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First person research</th>
<th>Second person research</th>
<th>Third person research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual researcher</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Case study report</td>
<td>Case study report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Photo-voice</td>
<td>Photo-voice</td>
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<td>observation</td>
<td>Research toolkit</td>
<td>Research toolkit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>Photo-elicitation</td>
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<td>Reflective practices:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case study report(s)</td>
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<td>The initiation of</td>
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<td>change technique,</td>
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<td>(Ainscow et al.,</td>
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<td>1995)</td>
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<td>Reflexive journal</td>
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<td>Memos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member checks</td>
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<td>Peer-debriefing</td>
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Triangulation in first person research was used as a means of documenting reality, eliciting views, confirming and reflecting on research findings. Triangulation with and within second and third person research served to integrate the multiplicity of voices, as participants from different locations were enabled as co-researchers in order to investigate and challenge the status quo. In this way, claims to knowledge were multi-perspective and struggled over purposes and actions. Table 6 shows when the triangulation of methods and techniques occurred through the research’s critical time-points.

As shown in the table, first person research methods were maintained throughout the study. Second person research methods occurred during the second year, after research negotiations. They also continued into the following year and developed into third person research, after research negotiations. Collaborative inquiry continued for another half year. The timeline of triangulation also supports the idea of collaborative inquiry as a political and reflective model, where the researcher adopts particular methods and techniques in order to enable participants to move from respondents to co-researchers and change initiators, while, at the same time, gazing upon research processes and findings through self-reflection and democratic scrutiny in order to develop richer understandings. In what follows, I explain the actual methods and techniques used.
Table 6: The timeline of triangulation in the development of collaborative inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-point</th>
<th>Research/Methods</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sept 05-Sept 06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First person research</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Document analysis</td>
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*Document analysis*

Given that documents offer rich contextual information in deconstructing social reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2002; Stake, 1995), staff-meeting records were taken for examination, so that I could be able to understand decision-making before my arrival.

Additionally, I was interested in examining how staff changed over the years. This, though, was problematic, since no records were kept anywhere officially or unofficially. Only from 1997, the District Education Office kept records of the school. In this respect, helpful
information was obtained from a year-book of the school, issued in 1992, celebrating its thirty years. All of this indicated the fragility of the method, considering also that school’s reports were confidential and inaccessible.

Nevertheless, the presence or absence of documents provided important information about school’s background and history. Yet, what is being interpreted from document analysis is an individual process, and this requires the researcher to ask questions about findings and their relation to the multiple realities of being studied. These concerns pressed the need for adopting other methods and techniques which could enhance trustworthiness.

**Participant observation**

In response to this, I used my role as a teacher of the school who is present during those daily interactions of schooling that shape processes into change, and became a participant observer in observing the relational nature of decision-making, or what Ball (1987) refers to as the school’s micropolitics. Participant observation, as documented in the research literature, is considered as a key method in social research, since it offers direct data of the phenomenon being studied (e.g. Ball, 1985; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2002).

Therefore, I kept a research diary, where I recorded on the field daily experiences, including information about timelines, issues, people being involved, feelings and outcomes. Taking advice from Woods (1986), I recorded observations as unobtrusively as possible and, sometimes, just entered key words or phrases that could be used later to jog the memory when taking extensive notes about incidents observed or informal interviews.

Participant observation, though, carried its own limitations, since I could not be present to all the social interactions happening in the school. Moreover, as a social agent, I had my own understandings, beliefs and personal affiliations which could lead me to overlook issues important to others. As Pring (2000) argues, participant observation is a “filtered” process and, in response to this, I saw interviews as a complementary method.

**Interviews**

Interviews were used with all staff (i.e. teachers, deputy heads, head teachers), including the members of the teacher research group, where, in combination with participant observation,
the interplay of structure and agency of what is said to be experienced and being experienced could be better understood. Robson (2002, p.272) argues that interviews can be a great source of information, as “the human use of language is fascinating both as a behaviour in its own right, and for the virtually unique window that it opens on what lies behind our actions”.

Great emphasis was given to minimise its limitations as a social relation. Thus, the interview guide was given to participants in order to prepare themselves. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out as a means of giving participants the opportunity to elaborate further on issues of their concern. In creating a supportive environment, participants were asked to select the time and place of the interview, and whether they preferred tape-recording or note-taking. Moreover, the interview transcripts were returned for verification or modification. In particular, most interviews took place after school time, since staff felt too tired to give an interview during school time. The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to one and a half hour.

As I was particularly focused on understanding school-based change management and its implications for school leadership, the arrivals and departures of staff were seen as a great opportunity to gain such insights. Therefore, during the research’s critical time-points, September-December, I conducted exit interviews with staff members who were about to depart, and entry interviews with staff members who had just arrived. Exit and entry interviews for the critical time-point September 2008-December 2008 were not possible, since this was the last phase of the research and there was lack of time. In addition, breakpoint interviews were carried out during the critical time-points December-January (usually before the Easter vacations) in order to give all staff members the opportunity to offer their perspective, and also examine how they experience leadership during this phase of their engagement.

This tactic of the round of interviews proved to be helpful, since it showed the changing nature of social relations between the arrival, adjustment and departure of staff members. The questions used during all the interviews were broadly as follows:
• How was/will/is it (be) for you to be a teacher/deputy head/head teacher in this school?
• What have you considered as the most important thing to do, before departing from/when you arrived at/while working at this school?
• What are the problems and difficulties you have confronted so far in this school?
• Have you noticed any changes in your practice?
• What kinds of changes or improvements you have pursued/will pursue/are pursuing in this school? Have you considered sustainable school development? Please explain.
• The fact that there was/is/will be a change of head teacher/deputy head, how does this influence you?

The first four questions aimed to assess how staff members experience their work during their arrival, settlement and departure in order to be able to understand the dynamisms developed between transition and change processes. The following question aimed to reveal how their socialisation is connected with sustained improvement and productive change, whereas with the last question, they could offer their perspective on how they understand the role of school leaders during change processes.

However, not all interviews were possible with each participant, as consideration was given not to turn interview into a burden. Therefore, members of the staff, who were about to give three interviews within the year, were given the opportunity to miss breakpoint interviews. Staff members, who felt that had nothing to add or change from their previous interview(s), were entitled not to participate. Considering that some staff members were absent with sick leave, attention was given to have from all participants at least one interview within the year. Specifically, during the second year, I conducted four exit interviews, three entry interviews and eight breakpoint interviews, whereas the third year, I carried out five exit interviews, six entry interviews and eight breakpoint interviews.

Here, I must add that interviewing staff was a time-consuming and exhausting process which could not also be taken up with students or parents. In addition, I wanted to use a method that could enable students or parents to express themselves without feeling intimidated by my
status as a teacher of the school, or as a researcher taking a PhD study. This led me to view photo-elicitation as a promising method in eliciting parent and student views. This method was also conceptualised as a method in the hands of participants in order to enable their active participation. In this way, photo-elicitation was enhanced into photo-voice.

*Photo-elicitation and photo-voice*

Image-based inquiry, where photographs are shown to participants is seen as a helpful approach in revealing the social significances of their experiences and understandings (e.g. Cappello, 2005; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 1986; 2002; Hazel, 1995; Hurworth, 2003; Schwartz, 1989; Thomson, 2008; Thomson and Gunter, 2006).

Thomson and Gunter (2007) argue that photo-elicitation can be an appropriate methodological tool in standpoint research, not least because it offers access to the inside perspective of participants’ lived experiences and is closer to their experiences. At the same time, relations of power and authority can be exerted, and conversation can be invigorating (Cappello, 2005; Clark-Ibanez, 2004), as the “visually arresting” (Harper, 1986, p.26) is revealed through the eyes of the participant, and the familiar in being seen in unfamiliar ways.

There is a concern, though, whether participants may require training on how to read images, so that their shared meanings can be assessed, and methodological strategies can be planned (Schwartz, 1989). As Atweh and Burton (1995) add, training and preparing raise confidence and build capabilities which can prevent participants from suffering in a research project. These considerations were taken into account when developing a research design for eliciting parent and student views (see appendix 1, guiding steps 1-4).

Yet, as I have explained in the previous chapter, elicitation does not assume active agency. Thus, the method of photo-voice was considered as an appropriate research tool for enabling student and parent voice. Hurworth (2003) and Lykes (2001) argue that photo-voice, where participants take their own photographs, can be a powerful tool in encouraging dialogue and promoting personal and community change. For example, Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998), Miles and Kaplan (2005) and also Ainscow and Kaplan (2005) used photographs taken from students in order to grasp the complexity of their well-being, and stimulate
reflection and critique within their schools. Kaplan (2006) argues that participatory photography can address and readdress changes or issues over time within and beyond the school. All of this can be particularly important in a research project which unfolds over time, and seeks to understand change through time.

In other words, photo-elicitation was conceptualised as a multi-layered approach in order to facilitate students and parents to become from respondents to co-researchers. As a result, a research plan was developed which entailed a series of steps that could help participants to move from first person research and the use of photo-elicitation to second and third person research with the use of photo-voice (see appendix 1).

Steps in first person research involved: a debriefing about the project and its code of ethics, an initial discussion around the relationship between school change and leadership, participants’ training on how to read images and use the cameras (e.g. multiple meanings and how different techniques affect understandings), participants’ code of practice and a critical dialogue around the issue of school-based change management and school leadership with the use of given images (photo-elicitation).

The selected photographs (see appendix 5) presented intimate dimensions of leadership, which in my view could encourage discussion about its relationship to school improvement. The photos, some taken from different angles as a means of enabling “a new awareness of their social existence” (Harper, 2002, p.21), were presenting: the head teacher’s office, the head teacher’s office of the school where students move after three years, the school, the staff room, the former head teacher’s new office and school, the office and staff room of a retiring head teacher in a small rural school and one classroom. The questions for the photographs were of the following type:

- What do you think that this picture tells you about school change and leadership?
- What does it mean for you to have a new head teacher/teachers/students/parents at your school?
- Have you experienced any changes/problems/difficulties/progress with the arrivals/departures of school members (i.e. staff, students, parents)? Please explain.
- How was it for you to have your former head teacher as a head teacher?
- How will it be for you if you were at the new school of your former head teacher?
- How will it be for you to move to your future school and have a new head teacher/teachers/students?
- How will it be for you to be in a school which is smaller than yours, and the head teacher will retire?

The interviewing aimed to assess how students or parents experience school change under different occasions of change in membership and staff turnover, and how they relate this to productive progress within their school. This could also provide insights into how these social groups perceive the role of school leaders during such processes. The interviews were carried out either with the whole research group or in pairs. Participants were asked to write their comments, so that I could gain access to their individual point of view.

Nevertheless, this process was time-consuming (November 2006-April 2007) and had to be postponed during the Christmas and Easter holidays. Additionally, photo-interviewing with young students (age of six) had to be handwritten by me and, after some sessions, this process seemed to be tiring. This led me to use role-play as a complimentary consultation technique (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004) in order to stimulate and not to lose students’ interest. Here, students could device roles, based on the theme of the photograph, before writing their comments. An alternative design might entail fewer photographs, where photo-interviewing can be tape-recorded and carried out in pairs, without the frustration of getting the whole group together every time.

Accordingly, given the insights from photo-interviewing, as a next step (second person research), participants could investigate how change is managed within their school by taking their own photographs (photo-voice). Parents and students could use their agreed code of practice and focus on the research question: “How did you experience change in your school?” After selecting and contextualising the photographs (storytelling), they could prepare their posters and present their findings to an audience of their choice with or without my help.
Based on that awareness, they could design, implement and evaluate an improvement process (second and third person research), where the main research question could be: “How can you the parents/students improve your school life?” This assumed a focus requiring improvement, and the possibility of creating a wider inquiry stance. Moreover, this development could be assessed with the use of photographs and the development of posters, followed by a presentation of findings to an audience of their choice. During this phase, participants could also explore the sustainability of the technique in bringing about improvements within their school.

In this way, photo-elicitation was enhanced into photo-voice in order to facilitate parents and students to become from respondents to data inquirers and change initiators. Similarly, a research toolkit was developed as a means of facilitating the teacher research group to move into co-researching.

*Research toolkit*

Given the difficulties of meeting as a group, during or after school time, a research toolkit was developed in order to enable and facilitate teachers’ engagement with their improvement effort to work closer with parents. After a brainstorming of what this might entail, as a facilitator, I volunteered and prepared it (see appendix 2). Its rationale was to enable wider and active participation, since teachers could implement and reflect on their initiation of change in more independent and autonomous ways. The research toolkit included:

- an action research guide regarding principles, characteristics, quality and steps in collaborative inquiry
- an opinion finder for detecting group’s dispositions about the focus of improvement
- an opinion finder for investigating parents’ point of view regarding homework, student arrival, student and teacher absenteeism
- a multiple-choice questionnaire for exploring parents’ beliefs on issues that could improve parent-teacher relationships
- a timeline table for facilitating teachers to keep records during each semester about an issue requiring improvement (possibly resulting from the opinion finder or the questionnaire), their proposed interventions and reflections on outcomes and processes
• a structured observation schedule for facilitating teachers’ engagement with the collection and reflection on evidence
• parent invitations for participating in various school activities (e.g. attend seminars).

The action research guide was devised as a way of raising awareness and confidence about such processes of research inquiry, whereas the opinion finder was developed for detecting group’s dispositions on the proposed change, and stimulating dialogue, especially with new members. Additionally, the opinion finder for investigating parents’ point of view regarding homework, student arrival, student and teacher absenteeism was developed, because these issues were considered major challenges in parent-teacher relationships and, along with the multiple-choice questionnaire, could provide insights into designing an improvement process which could be mutually beneficial.

During the implementation phase, teachers could use the timeline table and the structured observation schedule for monitoring and reflecting on change, whereas parent invitations for participating in various school activities could be used as intervention strategies. Of course, a more sophisticated research toolkit could be devised, but a major challenge when developing this toolkit was to keep it simple and accessible, as participants could find it difficult to use or time-consuming.

Nonetheless, as research cannot be perfect and knowledge cannot be absolute, this necessitates the use of reflective practices in enhancing trustworthiness, where all this experiential, presentational, propositional and practical knowledge can be put under further scrutiny and reflection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

**Reflective practices**

“I only know that I know nothing”
(Socrates, Greek philosopher, 469-399 B.C.)

Being reflexive is about being aware that any knowledge or wisdom gained is limited by its very awareness of ignorance. Lincoln and Guba (2003, p.283) stress that reflexivity, “is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner,
as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself”. This led me to consider various practices in maintaining a reflective stance over the research inquiry.

Unlike Pollard (1980; 1985), who was also researching his school for a PhD study, I did not want to deny or overcome my teacher identity but rather to address its complexity. In this sense, reflective practices ensure that my position as a teacher researcher is considered “thoughtfully” (Nixon et al., 2003) and challenged productively, where the politics of doing school-based research combine with its utility as a “conceptually informed practice” (Gunter, 2005a; 2005b) in critiquing and improving the status quo dialectically. In what follows, I explain how I developed such reflective practices for esoteric review and democratic scrutiny.

Case study report(s) and the initiation of change technique

The case study reports provided an account of the inquiry and findings, so that probing and negotiating of outcomes with participants can be enabled. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise, this enables the researcher to reach to an understanding of the context by providing all the necessary information which can facilitate participants to come to bear with their own tacit knowledge, and probe on findings (Stake, 1995).

The development of the case study report for the first year of the study raised many anxieties, since I had to deal with all the dilemmas of reporting (e.g. style of writing, what to include, etc). In response to this, I saw the construction of the case study report as a collaborative effort with the staff. In this way, I could juxtapose my own interpretations with staff’s, and also engage into dialogue about possible ways forward.

In being aware of my privileged position in terms of data collection, I suggested taking the responsibility of developing the report. Before doing so, we had a debriefing of what this might entail, and also teachers volunteered to give an anonymous commentary about how they experienced change in their school. The draft of the case study report was given back to teachers, and we had a thorough discussion in negotiating and finalising changes, during a staff meeting. In its final form, the case study report entailed:
• a description of methods and the issue of investigation  
• a description of the school  
• a description of the staff  
• a description of the student population  
• a description of the parent population  
• concluding remarks and ways forward  
• an appendix with the names of the staff for each year.  

The case study report was given to staff at the beginning of each year for stimulating responses, and modification by the end of each year (see appendix 3). In this way, the case study report was conceptualised as being an interpretation of reality at a specific period of time which could be deconstructed in order to be reconstructed collaboratively, and that as a means of putting data into further and wider scrutiny. This tactic proved to be helpful in enabling staff to reflect and connect with research purposes. It also facilitated the formation and sustainability of the teacher research group in bringing about change.  

In addition, the initiation of change technique, developed by Ainscow et al. (1995), was used for evaluating staff’s commitment and control over school change in order to understand whether their participation was paternalistic and reactive, or reflective and dynamic during processes of change. Although this technique is concerned with change both internal and external, I decided to use it as a way of being able to assess staff’s commitment and feel of control over internal change. This could help me to understand how they connected with the struggles of others and their own for positive improvement.  

Originally, the technique was scheduled as a whole staff activity, but because of particular circumstances, it was postponed and, then, cancelled. As a result, it was carried out only with the teacher research group. In particular, the members of the group were given the two sets of five statements, as found in the Cambridge Manual of Research Techniques (Ainscow et al., 1994), where the one maps staff’s commitment over school initiated change, and the other their sense of control. Then, they were asked to indicate the statement that best described their view. The completed sheets were analysed using the key for commitment and control for school initiated change, whereas the totals for each of the five statements for
commitment and control were entered into the matrix representing the contrast or not between their feel of control and commitment over school initiated change.

It can be argued that this technique is limited by the fact that it is not used for both aspects of change, internal and external, or in combination with the other techniques, developed by Ainscow et al. (1995). On the other hand, its use needs to be seen as part of the triangulation process and in combination with the rest of the reflective practices. The reflexive journal was another, a more esoteric though, reflective practice which helped me in being aware over research processes and findings.

**Reflexive journal(s)**

Taking advice from Lincoln and Guba (1985), I used a reflexive journal for self-review, where I kept personal notes about my puzzlements, methodological decisions, anxieties and worries about the issue of investigation and research processes. My research diary, where I kept my field notes, was also my reflexive journal. Specifically, parallel with my field notes, I made entries of my reflections, where my theoretical and methodological framework interplayed in scrutinising the self and research inquiry.

Journals were also given to the second head teacher, parents and students at the early stages of the research inquiry in order to make entries about their thoughts and reflections. However, diaries, being limited by the fact that I was going to review them, and that keeping a diary is more of a personal habit, were abandoned from their early stages. Following Burgess (1981) suggestion, any entries to participants’ diaries served as precursors to interviews (or photo-interviews). My reflexive journal also provided the basis for the write-up of memos.

**Memos**

Memos were used as a means of having a conceptual look at the accumulated data, and avoiding the danger of being confronted with “an undifferentiated collection of material, with only one’s memory to guide analysis” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006, p.191). Therefore, memos helped me in being able to construct and document my reflections, and also identifying issues and emerging themes as the research progressed.
Additionally, memos facilitated my engagement with the construction and modifications of the case study report(s), where my own interpretations could be put into further and democratic scrutiny with member checking. In this respect, member checks were seen as an important reflective practice.

**Member checks**

Respondent validation, as argued in the research literature, is critical, since it offers the researcher the opportunity to confirm and negotiate research findings (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Member checking was carried out formally and informally. For example, the co-construction and updates of the case study report(s) with the staff, the development of posters and presentations of findings by the parent and student research groups and the return of interview transcripts served as formal member checking. On the other hand, informal member checking occurred during staff meetings, personal conversations and informal interviews, where participants were asked to confirm or elaborate further on arising issues.

In this case, member checking was carried out not only for confirming research findings and responses with participants, but also for challenging and enhancing interpretations through action. This form of member checking served to mount trustworthiness in many respects, since knowledge was not only multi-perspective, but also enhanced, as participants and others could connect with research purposes and seek practical ways forward.

While it was possible that my research inquiry could be enmeshed in knowledge imperialism, or what seems common-sense and already known, I used peer-debriefing, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), with an uninvolved teacher and friend in challenging and being explicit about the self and research. In this way, I could probe on my biases, meanings, explanations and methodological considerations.

**Peer-debriefing**

Peer-debriefing was carried out once a month, and we had face-to-face discussions which served not only to enhance the scope of the debate, but also to render it meaningful by searching for alternative explanations and revising hypotheses. This veers towards what Lincoln and Guba (1985) see as negative case analysis, or what Elliott (2007) considers as
being suspicious to the presence or absence of consensus. Furthermore, peer-debriefing presumed a therapeutic function, since it helped me to cope with stress and the demands of the research.

Being reflexive, though, should be seen as a way of reassessing choices and opportunities, and this is more about voice authenticity. In this respect, methods and techniques were selected and developed as a means of facilitating the development of collaborative inquiry as a model of change in a trustworthy way. Next, I explain how all these multi-perspective and multi-layered data were analysed, not least because how facts are interpreted and scrutinised in reconstructing reality enhances the research’s trustworthiness.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis was a particular challenge within a project that was so complex. It involved a complex process in which the construction of data was reconstructed to synthesise the whole in a meaningful and trustworthy way, and this process had to be ongoing from the very conceptualisation of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

My research inquiry, however, rejects the idea of data deduction or induction, since both processes can be seductive strategies in avoiding complexity. Data deduction serves to refute or verify a grand static theory, which only denies the use of theory as offering possibilities and thinking otherwise. On the other hand, data induction takes a ground theorising perspective (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in deriving to a theory from the generated data, assuming that the researcher can take out his/her social form. Ozga (2000, p.83) critiques both approaches and argues that “this seems to oversimplify the complexity of the kinds of data we are dealing with, and also places the values and orientations of the researcher outside the framework of enquiry”. She goes on to suggest that data analysis needs to be seen as being more about challenging the obvious or the unfamiliar through “democratic scrutiny and participation”.

Bearing this argument in mind, in my study data analysis, as an ongoing process of meaning making, was a synthetic processing of data deconstruction and reconstruction by putting them into further scrutiny with member checks and presentations of findings. In addition, the
utility of the research was tested via the move into second and third person research, since this implied the endorsement of research purposes by participants and other interested parties.

More specifically, at one level, data analysis entailed a systematic processing of data unitising, categorising and developing patterns within and between the categories in order to develop the case study reports and posters which were further scrutinised, first, with the research groups and, then, with a wider audience. Patterns and themes were generated according to critical perspectives on school change and leadership, and served not to manifest regularity or predictability but to acknowledge that therein lies the possibility of change, and, as much as coherent as they sound, exceptions and contingencies can grow more complex, as more details are revealed. Contradictory, conflicting or possibly irrelevant units of information were taken into account and considered as individual categories to be scrutinised.

At another level, data analysis also presumed a thorough individual probing of the whole case study and carrying out a grand member check with participants. In particular, the parent and student research groups had to review their posters, and teachers had to review the case study reports and posters. In avoiding the traps of tokenism or manipulation, I decided to carry out this process with each research group separately. In other words, the data were deconstructed and reconstructed from different perspectives in order to synthesise the whole.

**Summary**

I have argued that how school change can be achieved in the context of Cyprus can be better understood and explained if the localised complexity of voices is taken into account and enhanced into more active forms of research participation and action. In this chapter, I set out to explain how I developed such a research design that could facilitate the development of collaborative inquiry as a model of change in a trustworthy manner.

In so doing, two conceptual maps were developed as a means of assisting thinking. In practice, this entailed the development of three interlinked cycles of research and development, as the research progressed from ethnography to collaborative inquiry. This involved the development or adoption of particular methods and techniques that could
facilitate participants from a particular position to move from respondents to data inquirers and change initiators. In order to enhance trustworthiness, the researcher continued mapping processes into change and putting data into further reflection and democratic scrutiny throughout the development of collaborative inquiry.

In the next part of the thesis, I continue this journey, where I engage in analysing and interpreting the data. This, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p.37) explain, is “artistic and political”. In other words, it is about establishing the research’s trustworthiness after the research inquiry.

In particular, Part 2 illustrates how the school members (i.e. staff, parents, students) of one primary school in Cyprus managed change and development over a period of three and a half years. Each of the following three chapters analyses participation and decision-making, as new school members arrive at the school, newcomers and established members learn how to work together, and some other members depart from the school community in order to demonstrate how the new school dynamic, as this was also formed within the development of collaborative inquiry, shaped processes of change in a context where the policy framework is highly directive and staff changes are enforced annually. The implications of these findings are discussed in Part 3 which provides critical answers to the question of how school change can be achieved within the centralised education system of Cyprus. It also explains the barriers that need to be overcome, and draws out the implications of this for leadership.

At this stage, it is important to stress that the account does not aim to identify people with particular views, strengths and weaknesses. Rather, it explores the dynamisms developed among newcomers and established members considering that significant membership changes were noted throughout the years of the study. Therefore, with respect to unique experiences and capacities, in what follows, I present the variety of voices in order to demonstrate the dynamisms embedded within such changing relationships and the development of collaborative inquiry. Of course, the roles of the two head teachers became increasingly important, as they appeared to be key authority figures in the school and, therefore, their individual voices are more prominent.
PART 2

School change and development in the educational context of Cyprus

Introduction

In the first part of the thesis, I explained that within the Cypriot education system there seems to be an official model of change which discourages the development of more engaging relationships and positive change, as a standardised approach to progress is adopted. In examining alternative ways of thinking about change, I argued that radical collegiality has the potential to overcome barriers to participation and progress, not least because on this view teachers can work in more productive ways within their school communities. This assisted my thinking in arguing that the development of collaborative inquiry as a model for fostering change can provide a better understanding of how this centralised education system can be improved in such ways. Such a research approach, though, places considerable attention on the challenge of trustworthiness, as discussed in the preceding chapter.

In this part of the thesis, I draw on my empirical data in order to describe and analyse how the school members (i.e. staff, parents, students) of one primary school in Cyprus managed change over a period of three and a half years. At the same time, this analysis shows how, as a teacher researcher in this school, I sought to explore the potential of radical collegiality. In particular, the next three chapters look more closely at the processes shaping decision-making during the arrivals, alignment and departures of school members for every year of the study as a means of making explicit the reasons and patterns of change within such transition processes where the policy context is also highly directive. At the same time, each chapter focuses attention on the efforts of school members to overcome (or not) barriers to participation and progress in order to draw together ideas about leadership practices that can facilitate productive change. This analysis demonstrates that school-based inquiries, facilitated by forms of leadership that are more collegial and participatory, can encourage possibilities for positive improvement.
In what follows, I provide an account of the school and its community in order to help construct a picture of what it felt like to manage school change, while, at the same time, exercising or receiving leadership in that particular setting. This analysis also builds on the argument that space occurs, but that can be further challenged by localised complexity.

The school

The context for my research was a public primary school in the heart of the city of Larnaca, a small town of about 50 000 people. The school was established in 1962 (see photograph 2) in order to serve children in the surrounding area, and began with one head teacher, three teachers and 198 students who were accommodated into three classrooms and one staff room. As the needs of the community grew, extra classrooms were added in the existing building, implying further uncertainties regarding safety regulations. Now, there is a three-sided trapezium building, with no specific features to distinguish it from the concrete schools built at that time (see photograph 3).

In 1979/80, the school was divided into two “cycles”, where in Cycle A children are in the age range of 6 to 8 years, and in Cycle B, 9 to 11 years. As a result, within the same building, two separate organisations co-exist, with their own head teacher, staff and students but one parent body as a means of securing a sense of overall unity. My research focus was on Cycle A.

In particular, Cycle A, as Cycle B, feels like a separate institution, since it contains its own staff room, head teacher’s office and classrooms. There are no art, gym or music classrooms, cafeteria or spaces for teachers and students to get together and relax. Moreover, the playground has nothing in particular, except the new football sports ground and kiosk which both have suffered from vandalism (see photograph 4). Vandalism, though, was partly resolved when a private security

Photograph 2: The school, 1962

Photograph 3: The school, 2008

Photograph 4: The kiosk
Photograph taken by most of the students of the 2007/8 research group in order to show vandalism.
company took over. At the start of this research, there were no decorations on the walls or hallways, whereas by the end of it, there was a complete transformation (see photograph 5).

The surrounding area of the school, which is an indication of the socioeconomic background of students, presents striking contrasts in many respects. Most of the neighbourhoods could be characterised as suffering from urban decay, whereas some of the houses or buildings could be seen as more affluent or veering towards regeneration. Additionally, the low rents in the area have attracted a lot of low income families with diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, related to various political situations. So, for example, in some areas, indigenous people live alongside political refugees from the Middle East and economic refugees from the former Soviet Union, Sri Lanka and Philippines.

Consequently, the school can be seen as serving a complex and diverse student population which itself can suggest challenges to school-based change. This also needs to be seen in relation to population movements, since, as I will argue, these seem to create further uncertainties. In what follows, I provide an overview of these changes regarding staff, parents and students.

**Staff, students and their families**

While the context of the school presented significant changes and stark contrasts within the years of the study, there were also important changes in the staff and student population which in essence shaped processes of school change and development.

**Staff changes**

Policies on staff mobility\(^2\) facilitated the routinisation of staff changes, since this appeared to be an anticipated yearly phenomenon. Although useful information was obtained from a year-book of the school celebrating 30 years from its establishment, there was a “black-box”

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\(^2\) When this research started, the maximum time which teachers were allowed to spend in a school was eight years, which gradually decreased to six years. Newly appointed teachers, deputy heads and head teachers must work away from their base (their home city or village) for at least two years. In addition, teachers are allocated to schools according to a system of points and the needs of the system (see Chapter 2).
regarding staff changes until 1999. At that point, the District Education Offices of the
Ministry of Education and Culture, which are responsible for the supervision and staffing of
schools in their districts, adopted new guidelines but without any clear purpose. This, in my
view, is itself an indication of how policies on staff mobility pervade the system
unquestioned. The following analysis of the school’s staff changes illustrates all of this.

Table 7: Staff changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Inspectors</th>
<th>Head teachers</th>
<th>Deputy Heads</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962-1992</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1999</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the school overall had possibly more than fifteen head teachers within forty-
seven years. More importantly, within the last decade (1999-2009) there was a change of
four head teachers, six deputy heads and forty-nine teachers. It should be noted, too, that the
school had a new inspector every one or two years, except the time between 2004-2008/9,
where the inspector remained in position.

By the completion of this research, there was a significant change of staff. Within the years
2005/6-2008/9, teacher changes varied from 53% to 65%, with one exception of 29%. This
was during the second year of the study when a new school was built in the area, and some
students had to enrol there. Regarding the management team, there was a change in headship
during the second year of the study (2006/7), followed by a change in one of the two
positions of deputy heads the next year (2007/8), and a complete change of deputy heads in
the final year of the study (2008/9).
Furthermore, most staff worked in that school from one to three years. Only three teachers completed their maximum time, which progressively decreased from eight to six years, according to new regulations. Two of them left the school during the second year of the study, and the other one during the third year. Here, I must add that when I started my research in 2005/6, I was a newcomer teacher and, by its completion in 2008/9, I was the only established teacher with the longest time in the school.

All of this shows that the school has experienced high staff turnover for each year of the study which could be seen as constraining meaningful working relationships (see also appendix 4 for a more detailed account). This, however, became even more complicated by unexpected changes in the student and parent population.

Student and parent changes

Alongside the staff changes, there were also significant movements amongst the student and parent population over the years of my study and, indeed, within each of the years. Anticipated changes for every year took place when third grade students had to move to Cycle B, and when new students joined the school at first grade. Alongside these changes, there were changes during the year, as some students moved to or out of the area.

In particular, the student population for every year of the study changed constantly and varied from 234 to 245 during the first year, 155 to 175 the second year, 160 to 175 the third year. A major change in the student and parent population occurred during the second year when a new school was built in the area, and one third of the student population had to register there. Another big change was a sudden flow of political refugees from the Middle East which started by the end of the second year and continued the following years, changing the intake of bilingual and foreign learners from 30% to almost 50%, whereas the national average attained only 9%. This also led to changes in the number of students requiring or acquiring social support from the Welfare Office. Interestingly, though, the Parent Association consisted of only Greek-Cypriot parents.

Nevertheless, these population changes led to a more complicated story of instability, pointing to see the issue of school-based change management and its implications to leadership as a contextual and socially constructed process within which the agency of
people is also shaped by circumstances beyond their own making. The struggle to address more productively the challenges of schooling and this localised complexity is documented within the stories of individuals.

**The story**

In the following three chapters, I present the stories of key actors as they enacted upon and attributed meaning on these changing relationships and situations, whilst, at the same time, attempting to improve school life. As coherent as this pattern sounds, in reality, it varied over time, as democracy and social justice were strengthened or weakened. Bearing this in mind, the narratives I present reveal some of the everyday complexity of entering, participating and exiting a school community, while, at the same time, attempting to improve school life and struggling for active citizenship within a highly directive policy framework.

As I will show, the way school members enter, participate or exit their school community can create a school dynamic that can encourage or discourage positive improvement, not least because school life can be looked at and improved differently from particular positions. In this context, the way formal leaders (e.g. head teachers, inspector) connect with the struggles of the localised complexity of voices seems to play an important role in enabling or not such processes of change. All of this confirmed a view of leadership as a dynamic relationship, shaped among various social actors and their unique situations, which can be powerful when those involved are facilitated to collaborate towards shared concerns.

In particular, during the first year, the head teacher, bearing in mind her limited time within the school, took total control of the school’s work. This surfaced functionality, since she was interested in making the school work efficiently, and pressured others to respond according to particular standards and procedures. Stagnation was evident in almost every aspect of school life, as there was no expansion of learning and practice into more radical approaches to schooling.

On the other hand, during the second year of the study, a new head teacher enabled a degree of professional freedom amongst her staff as a means of facilitating positive change. This stance, though, was experienced as being either oppressive or liberating, not least because members of the staff believed that they had limited chances in bringing about radical change,
given their available means. In this sense, the new dynamic lacked the power to move individuals into more active roles, and stagnation continued dominating school life.

During the third and a half year of the study, although individuals appeared to be more knowledgeable about their situations with the help of methodological tools, they still seemed to be trapped in pursuing the changes they would like. Nonetheless, collaboration from different positions, while being a teacher-led initiative, appeared to be hopeful, since it managed to bring together diverse individuals, with different interests, potentials and powers, to work towards shared and, hence, more legitimate concerns. In fact, this was forceful when courageous forms of leadership were evident, particularly when those in more powerful positions connected actively with the local struggles of people, since this could mean going against policies and the status quo. All of this pointed to the potential of radical collegiality within the educational context of Cyprus, as meaningful change from within is possible, despite the constraints that might exist.

The next three chapters present this story in a more detailed way, and serve to reveal how the school members of one primary school in Cyprus managed change and development over a period of three and a half years. The development of collaborative inquiry within the years of the study serves to make more visible the barriers that need to be overcome so that school change can be achieved within such a centralised education system, such as Cyprus. At the same time, this points to leadership practices that can be promising in overcoming possible barriers to participation and progress.
CHAPTER 5

Making sense of a changing context

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe how developments occurred within the school during the first year of the study. In so doing, I draw from my empirical data, where I focus on the arrival, alignment and departure processes in order to enable an understanding of how the interplay of structure and agency facilitated or not the development of a school dynamic that could enable positive change. This account of the school focuses attention on the issues and decision-making which, in my view, shaped in most respects processes of change.

Initially, the school welcomed nine new teachers, including myself. The head teacher was assigned to the school the previous year and was about to move back to her ‘base’, her home town. Four newcomer teachers and two established members were about to move to different schools the following school year. Furthermore, some students were expected to transfer to a new school built in the area. At this stage, my engagement with the fieldwork, as I explained in Chapter 4, was more of an exploration process, where I kept a low research profile and simply mapped change processes as a participant observer, paying attention to those distinct social interactions shaping decision-making. As my initial interests were in headship succession, the voice of the head teacher was louder than the other voices. Later, with the co-construction of the case study report and exit interviews with the teachers, the voices of staff became more visible.

This analysis shows that the way individuals entered, participated or exited their school community seemed to be a functional process and not an organic connection with the school’s particularities. The head teacher appeared to hold a key role, since her way of mediating policies and power status within the school was highly influential in shaping decision-making. More specifically, this head teacher, given her limited within the school, focused on control and consensus. Staff members, in experiencing the pressure to respond

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3 Teachers are assigned to schools by central authority. Initially, teachers ask for a transfer to another school in January. Transfers are announced in May and are finalised by September (see also Chapter 2).
according to standards and procedures, within also time constraints, were observed to participate in a mechanistic way, without getting actively involved with the politics of schooling. At the same time, parents and students seemed to be largely missing from decision-making processes within the school. In this sense, the new dynamic created seemed to lack the power to bring individuals closer to shared concerns, and enable their active engagement.

**Staff arrivals**

According to my observations, the arrival of newcomer staff was fraught with challenges, as it was uncertain whether policies on staff mobility were fair or fairly applied. It was also evident that socialisation processes seemed to serve the maintenance of the status quo, considering that the head teacher appeared powerless to make routine decisions, without consultation.

*The apparent rationality of policies*

Initially, according to my initial observations and reflections, it was unclear whether newcomer teachers were placed at the school because their potential was recognised. It seemed that policies on staff mobility had an apparent but false rationality.

During my observations, most discussions in the staff room were dominated by anxiety and despair, since all newcomers were forced to come to that particular school. This led some of them to see their engagement as episodic. For example, according to two newcomer teachers:

I didn’t want to come here because... and I will ask for a transfer. I want to return to my base. They don’t understand how difficult it is to travel everyday for so many years. I am tired.

(Teacher 6)

Those of us who don’t have a permanent contract are like pawns... wherever there is a position, they send us. I have changed three schools so far, and I have only four years of working experience. At least, I have a lot of points and when I get a permanent position, I would be able to go to a school that I would like.

(Teacher 7)
It seemed that the policies on staff mobility created such individualistic cultures that disconnected agency from meaningful engagement. According to the head teacher, some teachers were also able to manipulate policies in order to avoid the cultural identity of students and move to a different school. As she explained during in a staff meeting, early in the year:

As you have noticed there are still changes in staff. The moment they find out that the school has so many bilinguals and foreigners, they want to leave… and you know what this means… they will find somebody to help them to change school and, they will send me another teacher… and I will have to make changes again in the programme.

(Head teacher 1)

As is implied by the head’s remark, another issue that seemed ambiguous was that of patronage and exploitation. In fact, she believed that personal acquaintances or a disinterested parent body could put the school in a difficult and marginal position. On that issue, the head teacher explained:

Here I am a stranger, because I am from another city and I don’t know anyone at the District Education Office. Inspectors first take care of their favourite schools which have local head teachers, or because the parent body is aggressive. Look, I have again special cases of teachers and these are cases that are officially known... And not just that, it is almost October, and still we are struggling with the programme because someone will come or go. For your information this is not happening in other schools...

(Head teacher 1)

Reflecting on this, it seemed that the policies on staff mobility constrained staff from visualising the self as part of the school community, since these appeared to serve more individual concerns, rather than more collective. As I saw it, this unproductive workplace turbulence surfaced functionality, and in a way managed to create a dynamic of
disengagement. All of this seemed to be further strengthened by unsupportive socialisation processes.

Unsupportive socialisation processes

Based on my initial observations and reflections, the hesitance to engage productively with the school’s particularities was further challenged by unsupportive socialisation processes. It was noted that newcomer teachers experienced a cultural shock, and felt intimidated by the status of the school, considering its diverse student population. This, though, facilitated some established members to present themselves as experts and dominate decision-making. Indicatively, some of them were sarcastic about improving the physical appearance of the building because of vandalism. In fact, they referred to a time when a team of inspectors visited the school and had to decorate the entrance of the school just before their visit in order to get positive marks.

Such unsupportive socialisation processes seemed to be intensified by organisational arrangements that were previously agreed, or imposed by the inspector. As the head teacher explained, she had specific instructions from the inspector about the responsibilities that some teachers would take. Moreover, during the previous year, the head teacher had promised amnesty to some teachers for the following year in order to convince them to take first grade classes. All of this implied that some teachers were in a more privileged position during the initial decision-making period.

In addition, enforced staff changes seemed to add further challenges to socialisation processes. For example, as the head teacher explained, the teacher who applied as a co-ordinator for an improvement programme was transferred to another school, and this implied that someone else had to be forced to take over. Similarly, some parents were negative about having certain teachers for their children. Under these conditions, taking important decisions could not be but a flawed process, as the head teacher explained during an informal interview:

The beginning of the school year is the most challenging for the head teacher, because you want to please your colleagues, but you also need to consider what is best for students, and this, in my view, comes first. This year is a troubled
one, and I am not proud of myself that I have made agreements, but I wanted the school to work. At least, I am not the only one; teachers have made agreements with the parents or the inspector… Where does this leave me? I must use my own means to what is left for me to make the school work and for this year.

(Head teacher 1)

It was noticeable that this initial engagement of newcomers and established members placed a premium on individual purposes and overshadowed more shared concerns. This was facilitated by the fact that students and their families seemed to be largely missing from any decision-making, whereas the head teacher, as the key leader of the school, appeared to be powerless in taking drastic actions or enabling others to do so. How did this initial set-up influence the agency of those who embarked on this journey? The alignment of newcomers and established members shows how people managed to cope with their localised complexity.

**Attitudes, relationships and practices**

After the period of induction, my later observations and reflections were more about the maintenance of a status quo which seemed to favour functionality. The head teacher appeared to be an important figure in shaping this dynamic, since, in her effort to make the school work efficiently and effectively, focused on control and consensus. This seemed to confine participation into particular roles and standards. At the same time, it assumed the marginalisation of those who did not fit into these frames. Working within this dynamic, opportunities for positive change seemed marginal.

This was even more evident as far as parents and students were concerned, not least because the channels for participation in decision-making seemed to be blocked. For example, critical incidents (e.g. vandalism, bad behaviour, school failure) were dealt with quickly or silenced, without any fundamental questioning. It seemed that being cynical about change, while pathologising students and their families, was a taken-for-granted recipe in avoiding the challenge to question institutional reality in order to transform it. According to the head teacher:
Nobody can really do anything to change things, no matter how hard you try. At the end, you accept this and you give up. When I first came to this school, I tried some things, but I didn’t get the response I was expecting and things looked the same, despite my struggles. For example, I was very careful to keep parents informed about how the school worked and the progress of their children, but it was like throwing eggs on a wall. You see that the kids who are good come from good families, and those who have problematic behaviour usually face multifarious problems, complex, if not unsolved. Tell me what can I do with my power as a head teacher? I can’t go into their homes and check up on them, or tell their parents how to raise their children, or even tell the social worker how to do her/his job. It is very difficult, and at the end you compromise.

(Head teacher 1)

Moreover, it was observed that the arrival of new students within the year was treated by staff and parents with tolerance and, in some cases, with disrespect, since it was seen as an opportunity for bargains and exchanges. For example, when the inspector decided to transfer a student to another classroom because of bad behaviour, the affected teacher was assured that no new students would be placed in her classroom. Such bargains, legitimised by authority, according to other observations, seemed to undermine the agency of newcomer students.

What seemed to contribute to this sense of disengagement was teachers’ common belief that completing the books prescribed by the Ministry was the safest way to gain respect from parents and superiors, even though this was considered by most of them as irrelevant to their interests and capabilities. For example, during a staff meeting, some teachers pointed out that personal in-service training was irrelevant to their classroom practices, but important only for their professional portfolio, since what they taught or did in school was largely defined by the Ministry, and not by what they were capable of doing. As the head teacher explained:

I know that among my staff, I have very competent teachers, and when the inspector visits the school they do good lessons. It is not easy to be innovative
when you have the pressure of the book, marking students’ work and the everyday preparation, especially in this school. I was a teacher, too, and I know. To be honest, when I came to the school as a newly appointed head teacher, I wanted to try a lot of stuff (from her training), but now I realised that I am happy to run the school as it is. You can’t go to a school and do whatever you want, especially when you have a time limit, or you have so many issues to take care. There isn’t enough time to do the basics, and you will do more? On the other hand, do you think it is easy for a head teacher or a teacher to be innovative, such as devising a new curriculum? How it can happen? Not all of us have the skills to do this, and how do you deal the case of a teacher who wants to do more than s/he is capable of? As a head teacher, I have the responsibility of the school, and I must see first the interests of the students. When I will go to my other school and have time, I think, I will be able to do some things, but again staff changes can’t be avoided, and this means going backwards and forwards. What can I say… at least here we have managed to have a friendly climate in the staff room.

(Head teacher 1)

As my observations suggested, the head teacher admitted that, given the demands of her position and her available means, she was pleased to run the school as it is, whereas time constraints led her to see change as a risk. As a result, she focused on rules and procedures, and avoided the complexity of change. For example, informative post-it notes were circulated throughout the school day, and also staff meetings were devoted in reading the correspondence from the Ministry, and the processes that needed to be followed. As she explained:

During my headship here, I came to realise that it is very difficult to change the things that you don’t agree with. It needs persistence and patience and sometimes compromise in order to survive. I mean that I tried to go along with my teachers’ philosophies regarding the profession. I tried to help them improve, but it needed a lot of energy which, at the end of the day, I wasn’t able to offer. At least, I thought, I had to make those who were not that punctual to comply with the regulations, and I was mindful in maintaining a friendly climate.
in the staff room which is very difficult to achieve and, in order to do so, you need to give up some things that you see as important… In other words, what I have found in this school, I have tried to respond to. The fact that some of our missions failed to be accomplished, I believed it is because of conservatism, and in a tendency not to work more than they have to.

(Head teacher 1)

It seemed that, in a sense, the head teacher ended up preserving the status quo that she criticised. She felt powerless and unwilling to advocate any strong positions that could help the school move forward, as this could also disturb her good relationships with staff.

At another level, all of this implied that the classroom was established as the teachers’ private domain, strengthening, as I saw it, isolation and individualism. For example, in order to convince teachers to implement in their classes the improvement programme running in the school, the head teacher introduced the idea in such a way that teachers’ autonomy and ways of working could be protected. So, for example, she suggested the use of prepared worksheets which teachers could use in their own time, narrowing, in my view, collaboration into resource exchanges, rather than more collegial relationships where teachers could collaborate and question productively what they were currently doing. However, although teachers complied, their engagement with the programme seemed to be only episodic, “just for show off to the head teacher”, as one established teacher explained.

On that issue, my other observations were also about episodic engagements with proposed changes. According to an established teacher who was about to move on to another school:

In my time here, I haven’t noticed any big changes. The head teacher and staff tried to adjust accordingly. I don’t know, I can’t say that anything big happened. There was always a struggle to compromise with what the inspector expected, or what the head teacher expected. On the other hand, given their limited time, they couldn’t impose on us what to do… In other words, we could continue doing what we were used to, except when we were asked to do something else, and this again was not sustained.

(Teacher 1)
In reflecting on my observations, it seemed that stagnation dominated school life, as those in formal positions lacked the time and will to address productively school’s particularities. Even when the inspector visited the school, everybody seemed to be working together in order to ‘fabricate’ reality according to the inspector’s preferences, and not how to engage in productive dialogues about possible ways forward. For example, lessons had to be performed according to the inspector’s guidelines. Such engagements, though, raised significant issues about values and accountability, since some teachers appeared quite strategic. For example:

_Established teacher 5:_ I wanted her (inspector) to see me. I am running out of my ready lessons.

_Newcomer teacher 10:_ They want us to behave like that. It is impossible to make all day perfect lessons the way they want them.

This implied, according to other observations, that the status quo needed to be defended by any means, as the inspector was seen as someone who can be manipulated. What also helped the maintenance of the status quo was the fact that the head teacher with her commitment to regulations and procedures was able to minimise the role of the inspector in interfering at the school level. This helped the staff to feel more comfortable with the inspector’s visits, since they were seen as episodic alterations of the status quo. As the head teacher commented:

Being a head teacher for the first time and in this school was a challenge, a bet with myself. I wanted to succeed in my new post. Soon though, I discovered how difficult and demanding this was, as I have explained. I have tried to respond to the many difficulties I faced everyday, the mental exhaustion and multi-responsibilities which I was not prepared for... I wanted to prove to myself that I can make it and wanted to show to others that I deserved this position. It is one thing to delegate responsibilities and another to be successful, because when you delegate, you also need to make sure that these people have done the work, and let’s not forget how demanding this can be for the teacher who has classroom responsibilities. It is easier to overlook or carry out their tasks too quickly. So, I prefer to be proactive and more organised and when you
work as much as possible according to the book, I have noticed that you have less interferers or oppositions. There is a sense that the school is working properly and there isn’t any tension. It is important for teachers to feel that they have a head teacher who holds the school together.

(Head teacher 1)

Indeed, it was noted that the head teacher took total responsibility for the school’s work and struggled to succeed. Yet, surviving the challenges of her position seemed to be at times a lonely and uncertain business. As she noted:

In my stay here, I think, I have helped the school, although I am not so sure because I wasn’t aware what the previous head did and I am just repeating situations.

(Head teacher 1)

Overall, according to my later reflections, implementing regulations, pleasing the inspector, completing the books and maintaining a friendly climate in the staff room, all seemed to be paramount in shaping the staff’s working relationships. It was evident that the alignment of newcomers and established staff members, despite their differences and moderate clashes, was formulated in a functional way. This narrative was further challenged, as some school members were about to leave the school.

**Coping with departures**

It seemed that the way most individuals saw their departure was more of an exodus, a kind of redemption from what was oppressing them, accompanied, though, with a sense of irreparable loss. Those who stayed developed their own supportive networks in coping with feelings of inadequacy and despair. Nonetheless, departing from the school seemed to be another formality, without any consideration on how to address productively this internal turbulence.

It was evident that those who were about to leave the school showed disengagement in many respects and created supportive networks which could facilitate their departure. For example, the head teacher, before her departure, tried to involve staff in decision-making as a means of
enabling resourcefulness and rejuvenation. However, most of the teachers continued to show disengagement. As the head explained:

In order to change things, it requires some kind of art, because teachers don’t want to do more than they are expected or used to. You need to read the situation. I tried to bring into my mind theories that I knew to see where I stand, to be proactive. I have tried to be fair, as much as I could. It is better to be organised, so that time won’t be wasted, and more importantly to enable others who can and want, to exercise leadership roles, exchange opinions and ideas. It helps your work. In this school I didn’t have the response that I was expecting and that’s why I modified my expectations.

(Head teacher 1)

Interestingly, the head saw the implications in the research I was doing:

That’s why I saw your work as shaking the still waters. It created a new prospective, and I was inspired. You reminded me of myself when I came to this school and wanted to do things, but I got stuck. It is important to feel that something happens for better and for all.

(Head teacher 1)

Yet, although the head teacher appeared willing to involve teachers in decision-making, she was not willing to take any risks. For example, when I suggested the idea of an improvement process, she was hesitant in implementing it, because she did not want to leave any unfinished business which could mean disrespectful criticism from superiors. As she commented:

I want to implement an improvement process, but do you see it happening within a short time? As you said, you are interested to see continuance and furtherance, and to be honest I don’t want to start something and leave it unfinished, because then they will say, what kind of head teacher is she who is not able to work with her teachers and get on with her responsibilities? Teachers might say yes, but it
is another thing to actually do it, and I don’t want to face criticism, such as when the teacher who applied for the improvement programme left, and I couldn’t find any teachers to take over. And when I said it to the inspector, she criticised me that I wasn’t organised enough to foresee situations, or able to convince my teachers. You see what happens when something goes wrong? I think it is better to leave it for now. Let’s do the co-construction of the case study report, which can be helpful and also for the next year.

(Head teacher 1)

In this way, the head teacher appeared unable to pursue her aspirations, or enable others to do so. In this sense, departing from the particular school was a relief from a status quo which challenged unproductively her leadership capacity and stamina. As she explained:

In my two years as a head teacher in this school, I got very tired, because on the one hand, I had to confront a difficult school and, on the other, I had to give solutions to so many problems… I know that I have neglected certain areas that I couldn’t respond, because of what was already going on within the school. Besides, the particular school didn’t allow me to act otherwise.

(Head teacher 1)

On the other hand, it was noted that the head teacher was more willing to manoeuvre policies, just before her departure. This was the case when all the bilingual students, as well as those who did not need extra help, were included in the application form for extra support teaching hours. The head teacher believed that in this way the school would be benefited during the following year, given that a lot of students come during the year, and no extra hours are given for them.

Likewise, departing staff, as they explained, saw this phase of their work as unchallenging. It seemed that changing schools was something that they were used to, and was seen as another formality but emotionally fortified. In particular, they felt stressed that they had to abandon their comfort zones, and move to a new working environment. On the other hand, they saw their stay as a rewarding experience, but they were relieved with their departure,
since they felt emotionally distressed while working in such a challenging school. The following narratives from two departing established teachers illustrate this complexity:

When I came to this school, I was shocked with all that bilingual students… I felt lost... somehow I didn’t know what I was doing. The books were not responding to the students’ level. I was shocked with how low students’ achievements could be… I was shocked with the fact that some families had serious economic and social problems… It was a difficult period, but on the other hand, I feel ready to work in any school… I will miss the friendly climate we had here.

(Teacher 5)

I believe that I have grown up as a teacher, despite the fact that I have twenty years of working experience... For example, this is the first time that I have come up with so many bilinguals… Every year was fuller... I think, I will never forget the difficult cases of students that I had to deal with everyday… However, I was able to understand myself better, my weaknesses as a teacher… I don’t like changing schools, but this is part of our job… certainly I will miss the friendly climate, but I think it is time to move on, because I got tired in this school.

(Teacher 1)

In this sense, exiting processes presented to be more about coping strategies that could help individuals to endure change at the personal level. Similarly, I was noted that departing students devised their own supportive networks. Most of the group of students- who were about to move to the new school- believed that, since their new school was a new establishment, it would have all the features (e.g. big playground, modern facilities, new friends) that would make them feel more happy and safe. On the other hand, there were some students who saw the change with despair, since this implied the loss of their friends and loved teachers.

In the same way, most of the parents and staff seemed to be anxious about this movement of students. In particular, they believed that this could lead to the school’s ghettoisation, since
the proportion of bilinguals was about to increase from 30% to nearly 40%. While this was an important issue, it was seen as a natural consequence, not least because those at the school level seemed to lack the power and will to defend the interests of the school. According to the head teacher:

The way I see it, unless parents wake up, this school will be ghettoised. If I consider how the District Education Office treats this school, then there is no hope… Bilinguals or foreigners go there, where they will find low rents or where others, such as them, live in that area, because it is easier to adjust. Anyway, we will wait and see. I won’t be here, so you will wait and see…

(Head teacher 1)

Equally, as I observed, the teachers who were about to stay created their own coping strategies in order to endure the changes in membership, especially in headship. These, in my view, were more of defensive strategies that could help them survive a possible poor or demanding headship, and guard their status as experts. As one deputy head said to the other deputy, “You the father, I the godfather”.

It seemed that the forthcoming arrival of a new head teacher was seen as a routine, without any consideration on how they could engage productively in their new working relationships. As raised in a staff meeting, during the discussion of the end of the year case study report, this was partly because almost all staff saw their stay as episodic, given that the next or the following year was likely to be their final year at the school. This, in turn, seemed to strengthen passivity and resigned detachment towards improvement.

Reflecting on the whole situation during the first year of my study, it seemed that the enforced staff changes formed within policy pressures and structured hierarchy, managed to alienate staff from the politics of schooling. As one established teacher noted during the co-construction of the case study report:

All the things we said about our school are happening in other schools, too, because everyone has to leave at some time, and everywhere we go is the same,
you have to follow the book and regulations, because the inspectors want this. Everything else is more work and nobody recognises it. Of course, our school could look better, but I do not think that it is within our responsibilities to initiate change.

(Teacher 4)

In other words, as I saw it, exiting processes posed their own challenges to the development of more engaging relationships. It seemed that the policies on staff mobility, combined with the head’s’ emphasis on control to deliver the policy agenda, blocked the spaces for bottom-up initiatives and constructive engagements.

**Summary**

This chapter illustrated how change and development occurred within one primary school in Cyprus for a whole school year. In so doing, it showed that the dominance of hierarchy and policy pressures seemed to leave limited space for local decision-making and active agency. At the same time, rapid changes in membership and workplace turbulence were seen as routines and episodic alterations, leading staff to see their engagements in terms of personal gains, despite the demands of their localised complexity. The head teacher as a key authority figure in the school seemed to play an important role in shaping this dynamic of disengagement and her voice is prominent in this chapter.

In particular, she appeared powerless to introduce the changes that she was aspiring, given her limited time within the school and the policy constraints within which she worked. In this sense, the head seemed to be locked in her imposed working and social conditions. As a result, she took total control and pressed others to respond according to procedures and standards. This seemed to confine agency into carrying out the requirements of job descriptions and specified roles. As a result, teachers participated in a mechanistic way, and appeared disinterested or unwilling to engage with critical questioning and radical transformation. Likewise, students and their families seemed to be missing in regards to decision-making processes within the school.

All of this confirmed an impression that the school is simply a building, rather than a social institution, not least because school life appeared to be disconnected from its wider social
context, and participation looked procedural rather than radically engaging. It was noticeable that there was limited space or will for the development of radical collegial relationships, as agency and participation were largely prescribed and ruled. The analysis in the following chapter continues to map change and development in that particular school for another school year, where I focus on issues and decision-making that, in my view, formed the new school dynamic and its potential for positive change.
CHAPTER 6

Exploring more engaging forms of participation

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe change processes within the school during the second year of my study. In particular, I describe the development of a new dimension of collaborative inquiry, where the research groups of teachers, parents and students were formed as a means of taking into account their voice and enabling their active participation. Specifically, the parent and student research groups made their views explicit through the technique of photo-elicitation, and also investigated progress within their school using the methodological tool of photovoice. The teacher research group investigated school development by updating the case study report with the rest of the staff. At the same time, I retained first person research methods, and continued mapping school change using participant observation, interviews with staff, and also maintaining a reflective stance.

The following account demonstrates how this new school dynamic, formed through different phases of membership engagement (i.e. arrival, alignment, departure), shaped processes of change and development. During the year, changes shaping this dynamic involved the arrivals of a new head teacher, who returned back to her base, and only three new teachers, since the size of the school was reduced. In addition, one deputy head and six teachers (three established and all newcomer teachers) were expected to be relocated to different schools the following year. During the same period, an unexpected flow of political refugees started arriving at the school.

Specifically, the contribution of the new head teacher, while enabling professional freedom amongst her staff, was seen at various times as being either oppressive or liberating. It was evident that imposed hierarchies and agendas constrained in most respects the new dynamic from enabling active agency. This was a key issue, as stagnation continued to dominate school life. Nevertheless, collaborative inquiry seemed to facilitate the development of more engaging relationships, given that diverse individuals with various potentials and powers were able to come to together and form their representational knowledge which set the basis
for future collaboration and action. This analysis also builds on the argument that formal leaders play an important role in shaping the dynamisms embedded in change processes.

More arrivals

My initial observations during the second year were about socialisation processes which seemed to be unsupportive to the human potential available within the school. I witnessed how the new head teacher, in her effort to be accepted and enable change, showed respect to professional judgement, but, as a response, she faced conservatism. Meanwhile, parents and students continued to be rendered invisible in decision-making.

Professional freedom and conservatism

I observed that teachers saw their new working relationships as another formality and not as an opportunity to address the school’s issues, despite the efforts of the new head to facilitate change by enabling professional freedom. What seemed to create further challenges was the fact that the local inspector used her authority in order to make her role visible. All of this seemed to constrain productive participation.

Initially, certain established teachers used their insider knowledge in order to dominate decision-making and preserve the status quo. For example, some maintained their original position of presenting the school as beyond change, while pathologising its social context. As the one deputy head explained during a discussion with the new head teacher:

Change? There is no room for change here. Look opposite. You see that building? Cheap rents. All the foreign workers or even the locals with low socioeconomic status come to live there or around the area. Do you think they care if their kids are learning? They don’t have anything to eat and need to work all day. There is no time for that. Do you think they will be bothered about change? That’s not a priority. We are lucky enough, if they learn the basics … and this is already very difficult as you see.

(Deputy head 2)

All of this discouraged the new head from discussing change during the early period of her time at the school. As the head teacher explained, she wanted to be accepted and gain
respect from all her staff. Therefore, she preferred to be cautious regarding change and tradition by not taking sides, or advocating strong positions. For example, in discussing her diary entries from September to November, as there was a strong sense of stagnation that she was aware of but unwilling to deal with, she noted:

As the head teacher of the school, I am in the middle of a lot ongoing things. To take a decision, I need to think the consequences and reactions from teachers, parents, students, grandfathers, the School Board and so on. Indeed, in a way, I wished, I could change some things, but as a new head here, first, I need to understand where the school stands and why. I don’t want to get caught in disagreements, or accidentally be involved in alliances that both could cause clashes and alienation. I want to see how others think and act, so I can help them, accordingly …to see what I can do for them. Everyone is different and, therefore, each school has its own rhythms and problems which the head teacher needs to acknowledge, and, then, if you are lucky enough, you can bring change, because this means that others also want change, and hopefully they might want the same change.

(Head teacher 2)

Indeed, she believed that by avoiding imposition, and encouraging or supporting innovation, she could gain the staff’s trust and commitment towards change. In other words, the head teacher saw change as an outcome of professional judgement. As she explained after a few weeks in the school:

…The way you want to manage a school depends on your personality and beliefs… I mean what kind of person you are, what kind of character and ideology you have. All these shape the way you act, and I like to work as being part of a team… In my short time here, I feel that we are behind in some issues, such as… I have made some suggestions, but still teachers are afraid of trying something new. I will try though to convince them… Of course, I understand that you can’t go to a school and do whatever you were used to. You need to behave respectively of what you have found, and work with others for the best.

(Head teacher 2)
This approach of the head was seen by most of the staff as an important factor in sustaining healthy and not competitive relationships among them. However, professional freedom seemed to be inadequate as a strategy for moving teachers towards an acceptance of change. For example, even though some of the issues raised in the case study report, discussed at the end of the previous year, were used in their discussions, these were not deployed as a means of taking action. Instead, their attention seemed to be focused on protecting vested interests. As a departing established teacher explained:

This year I had an anxiety about how the new head teacher would look like in her position. I wouldn’t say that I had a vision that I wanted to meet, I think, I prefer the established. As I said, I was more worried if we could communicate, cooperate, if she would be organised. I believe that, in order to function properly, a school depends a lot from the head teacher. Of course, we could do a lot, as we said (in the case study report), but there isn’t any time for that now…

(Teacher 2)

On interviewing the arriving staff, it became clearer that the way they interpreted their working relationships seemed to hinder them from seeing themselves as part of the school, leaving them to pursue more individual purposes. As one newcomer explained about his likely period in the school:

One year at this school is enough. I feel that I want to work in a rural school next year, because I prefer small schools.

(Teacher 16)

What seemed to pose particular challenges to this initial socialisation was the fact that the head teacher appeared particularly vulnerable towards the structured hierarchy. In particular, it was noted that she was unable to go against the decisions of the inspector, or take any decisions without consultation. In my view, this seemed to undermine her status as a key leader of the school, while establishing the power of those in higher positions.
A striking example of this was the head’s decision to follow the inspector’s orders about the overstaffing of the first grade classes, despite the fact that most of the staff disagreed. In particular, the head teacher registered more students than the number limit in order to get one more teacher. This was denied and, in order to deal with this issue promptly, the inspector suggested using most of the extra support teaching hours for bilingual students to divide the two classes of first grade into three, during Greek Language sessions. Although certain teachers were concerned about this arrangement, the head teacher, as she admitted, felt intimidated by the status of the inspector and proceeded accordingly. The affected teachers complied, because, as they explained, they felt powerless to advocate a different position. In addition, the parents were only partially informed about the new arrangement, since it was presented as beneficial.

In this way, the head was seen by most of the staff as unable to answer back to her superiors, and this, in turn, seemed to discourage them from assuming more active roles. For example, after this incident, a departing established teacher noted:

It is one think to talk about change, and another to actually do something. Here we can’t have what normally we are entitled, and we will do more? I am not saying that is someone’s fault, but I mean look at the situation… the head teacher can’t do what she thinks as best, and I will do it? Also, the union seemed unhelpful about this issue… You can’t say or do anything else, because if you do, you are either a bad teacher, or that’s not your job to do so… I mean there is nothing you can do, unless superiors tell you to do so.

(Teacher 7)

Reflecting on this, it seemed to me that this initial interplay of structure and agency played an important role in making visible who was powerful and who was less powerful. Hierarchy pressed for compliance, and confined agency into particular job descriptions and roles. Similarly, parents and students continued to assume passive roles.

Passivity
As I have noted, parents and students continued to participate according to rules and procedures, without any serious engagement in relation to decision-making within the school.
In fact, my initial interviews with them pointed to difficulties in expressing their own views about schooling.

In this respect, the use of photographs proved to be an appropriate methodological tool in gaining access to their experiences and points of view. More importantly, photo-elicitation managed to facilitate discussion even among bilinguals or foreigners. It also helped them to overcome much of their misunderstandings about their potential in assuming more active roles and bringing about positive change. For example, both groups related leadership with headship. However, through a critical questioning of photographs, many were able to reach to an understanding of leadership as an inclusive and enabling practice, where others than the head teacher can lead and enable others to assume similar roles in order to bring about meaningful change.

Initially, this photo-interviewing showed that both research groups (i.e. parents and students) saw staff turnover as an opportunity for renewal. Specifically, they saw the arrival of the new head teacher as a fresh start, but they had mixed emotions about changes in teachers. On the one hand, they did not want to lose their loved teachers, and on the other, they believed that certain teachers did not fit with the school. As most of the parents and students explained, staff turnover was welcomed when this assumed improvement and positive change. According to some students:

It is good that we have a new head teacher, because she might give more attention to the school.

(Newcomer Student 16)

It is good to have a new head teacher or teachers, as long as they learn us something new.

(Established Student 8)

Every head teacher who comes to the school improves it, because each one of them thinks differently.

(Established Student 11)
It is good that we change leaders because they make changes, and it is also good, because it is possible that the other leaders (who left) got tired at this school.

(Established Student 9)

Indeed, both groups saw the new head as a saviour, since she was a local person who, according to the policy, would be able to stay at the school for more than two years. According to an established parent:

It’s good to have a head teacher who is a local person, because she knows better the problems of the area, and has the opportunity to stay enough time in order to help our school. I think, she is very willing to do so, at least, from what she says in our meetings with the Parent Association. Of course, she might need some time to adjust, but we will wait and see what she can achieve. At least, she would stay enough to promote her vision.

(Parent 1)

As raised above, it was noted that both groups saw improvement in the hands of those in more privileged power positions. In this way, both groups were keen to talk about how difficult change was during socialisation processes, since much of it depended on the goodwill and honesty of established teachers who may not welcome attempts to introduce changes. For example:

I don’t think that it is easy (for newcomer staff) to make changes, because they need to get to know the school first and what others want. They need to have a meeting and agree. I haven’t noticed any changes with the previous head last year or the current head teacher so far.

(Established Student 12)

This year we have a new head teacher and teachers, but I think because they want to fit in, it is so difficult for them to start making changes. I am sure that some of them, who have been into the school for so long, don’t want change at all, because if they did, they would have done it.

(Established Parent 2)
Examples such as these showed how passivity and functionality seemed to dominate school life. As noted, parents and students saw themselves as passive recipients of schooling, whereas the formal leaders of the school, such as the head teacher and staff, seemed to lack the power and will for active decision-making. This initial set-up, according to my later observations, interviewing and reflections, determined in many respects the alignment of newcomers and established members.

**Alignment**

As I observed, learning how to work together under these conditions triggered new dispositions in relationships. The new head teacher, while enabling professional freedom amongst her staff, was seen at times as being either liberating or oppressive, not least because staff saw radical change as impossible within the particular school and given their available means. Parents and students continued to be missing from decision-making.

*The new dynamic as liberating*

It was observed that the shift in headship style from one involving control and consensus to an emphasis on professional freedom and consultation enabled a number of teachers to pursue their aspirations, to some extent at least, while others continued to show disengagement. It was noted, though, that assuming more active roles, such as questioning and altering oppressive structures, proved to be quite difficult within imposed hierarchies, policy pressures and prominent changes in membership.

At first, on interviewing teachers, most of them saw the new head as lacking administrative control and felt more vulnerable to arising and challenging issues. For some, this created a sense of nostalgia for the previous head, fortified some times with emotions of despair. As a departing established teacher explained:

> I believe that if we had the previous head teacher, who was more dynamic, much more organised and more aware of the whole situation at this school, we could move forward into something better. The new head still learns about the school’s problems, and what the situation looks like. Of course, I don’t think that she is not trying. Besides, she is very positive to our suggestions and very
willing to help. Because of different working style, we can’t expect a lot from the new head.

(Teacher 2)

Later on, though, as most of the teachers had to admit, this approach of the head enabled them to develop professionally and increase their self-esteem, since they felt that they could use constructively their professional judgement. As one established teacher explained:

This year the different management style has made me to become more organised, to confront problems, not to be discouraged. I have learnt that there is always a solution, and, therefore, I realised that I can handle a situation without feeling that this is someone else’s responsibility… of course, it is risky to throw yourself out there, without knowing that you have a safety net, given that there is always someone above someone, and decisions are taken at the top.

(Teacher 9)

As noted above, however, not all teachers were willing to assume more active roles, since they felt vulnerable in case something went wrong. All of this created a need to learn from the new head teacher. This, however, was differentiated according to teachers’ professional needs. For example, one established teacher stated:

Beyond her management skills, I would like to see how the head teacher teaches, to get in my classroom and tell me “Would you let me teach this to them (students)?” This could really help me, instead of saying to me “here you are good, or here you need improvement.”

(Teacher 4)

Whilst another established teacher who was about to depart commented:

The head teacher is someone who you can turn to, you can trust and is able or willing to help you. If you look at the top, and you feel that there’s no one, then, what’s the point of having head teachers? To do paperwork?

(Teacher 2)
It seemed that for some teachers, the new headship meant consultation and consensus, whereas for others, cooperation and professional freedom. In this way, as noted and explained, those teachers who welcomed their professional freedom saw the new headship as enabling their agency to become successful, without feeling intimidated by the breadth of situations, or that they are in need of control. An established teacher explained:

Last year, I felt the stress of the head teacher, which is understandable since she felt her time limit and wanted to forestall things. I think you should not underestimate what others can do by themselves. This year it is different, the head teacher induces positive and calm relationships with her staff. We are professionals and we can cope; there’s no need to be stressed.

(Teacher 14)

Furthermore, I observed how the head teacher showed respect to the everyday professional work. In particular, she was less directive or persistent with bureaucratic procedures and more flexible rather than controlling to suggestions. This seemed to help most of the teachers to cope with the demands of the particular school in a positive way. According to an established teacher:

I like her style of dealing things. It’s something missing from our schools. You know how some heads want to make show offs, and at the end miss the whole point. Here we need to focus on kids, because our kids have a lot of problems, and the head teacher is more open to such suggestions.

(Teacher 3)

It was evident that the head teacher approached decision-making in more humanistic ways as a means of facilitating teachers to survive the challenges of schooling and the demands of the particular school. Additionally, as raised in the interviews and through my observations, the head’s personal health struggles, which were reflected in the way she preferred to work, inspired most of the staff to become more emotional responsive, and focus on the person, rather than on criteria and regulations. A departing established teacher explained:
I like the head as a person, and she is very inspiring, especially if we consider that she is facing serious health problems which, though, she didn’t let them to affect her work. This is very important. She is a person with a personality, she has her own point of view, knows her boundaries, is not imposing, and I don’t feel that I am in need of control… I feel very lucky to have her. I know that the pervious head was more organised, but let’s not forget that she used much of her personal time to do so. I don’t think that the new head doesn’t use her time at the school wisely. Also, she is very open to suggestions. I admire her, because she managed to combine successfully work and personal life. This is very inspiring. I feel now that I need to see my students, to really see them. You know, as unique individuals, with their own backgrounds, personalities and problems. This year, I feel more relax in this school, and I can talk with the head teacher about matters that bother me.

(Teacher 6)

In fact, most of the teachers were keen to talk about how the new headship style helped them to balance work and personal life. This provided a means of improving their well-being, and increasing their commitment to work. At another level, it seemed that this dynamic facilitated teachers to connect with my research’s purposes, since the teachers (five established members and one newcomer), who showed an interest to participate in the teacher research group, had to admit that the style of the new head made them feel comfortable enough to take the responsibility of an improvement process. Similarly, this approach of the head teacher helped my research with the students, especially when I faced conservatism from some staff and a parent. Specifically, the head teacher used her authority and professional status in order to convince others about the importance of implementing such initiatives. For example, she devised supportive structures, such as making changes in the time-table, so that students could meet without missing the same lessons every time. As the head teacher commented during a staff meeting:

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4 The teacher research group decided to focus on improving parent-teacher relationships. A research toolkit was developed and piloted as a means of facilitating their engagement with research processes.
I can understand why some of you seem reserved about this (the research), but I believe that this is very beneficial for the kids and, believe me, as a head teacher of the school, I talk with students, and they are more interested about their school. In fact, we need to work with more such schemes, where students can come together and talk about their school, not just sit in the classroom, listen and write or play with their pencils.

(Head teacher 2)

Likewise, this stance of the head was seen by most of the students in the research group as an important factor in enabling their agency and bringing about positive change. For example, some of them saw their participation in research processes or the interventions of the teacher research group when piloting the research toolkit as an effect of the new headship style. An established student noted:

I took this picture (see photograph 6) because now our behaviour has changed. Kids don’t push because the new head is more strict and advice us. Also, we have painted the walls (an initiative of the teacher research group as a means of working closer with parents) because the head teacher listened to us and agreed. Last year, the previous head was not listening to us, because she wanted to do her job… just learning things, only that was her worry, and she didn’t care about the school…

(Student 12)

Reflecting on the whole situation, it seemed to me that the head teacher, while enabling professional freedom amongst staff, facilitated the development of collaborative inquiry as a teacher-led initiative. This managed to create space for active and collective participation from different positions. For example, when the teacher research group piloted the questionnaire from the research toolkit, one established teacher got limited response. In reflecting with the rest of the group, the teacher explained:

Photograph 6: Drawings on a wall
Photograph taken by a student of the research group in order to show positive improvement.
Indeed, I realise that there is always a better way of doing things. I never thought that you need to go after your goals all the way, and search for alternatives, ask why things don’t happen, instead of waiting from others to think or act as you expect them to do… Now, I realise that I could do better, and try some of the ideas that the rest of you used.

(Teacher 7)

As I noted during other observations, initiating and reflecting on change with others proved to be helpful in revealing and overcoming barriers to progress. It seemed that, in experiencing the benefits of dialogic and reflective conversation, the research groups were able to develop a shared responsibility regarding the possibility of change at the school level. As a newcomer parent admitted:

I like coming to our meetings because I have come to understand things that I never thought to question and not just that, I believe that we can do things and if I leave this school, I will come and help. I am disappointed with all these things that I see and learn. We need to do something.

(Parent 6)

Reflecting on the evidence collected, it seemed that the new dynamic, shaped mostly by the contribution of the new head, was seen by most individuals as enabling their voice to be heard and taken into account. This was more evident with the development of collaborative inquiry. However, as I saw it, the new dynamic also lacked the power to move towards more powerful positions and radical engagements, not least because it was seen at the same time as a burden.

The new dynamic as oppressive

The new dynamic was also seen as being frustrating, or even oppressive in many respects, partly because individuals seemed to have limited chances to influence situations within imposed agendas and inequitable hierarchical structures. The following narratives from different participants capture some of this complexity:
For the head teacher it is not easy to make changes, because she needs to agree with the teachers and not with students, because students are not leaders in the school, they are only classroom leaders. So, it seems to take a lot of time to come to an agreement, because they need to get to know each other.

(Established Student 9)

There weren’t any changes during the years, or this year I felt any changes. The head teacher needs time to show her work. I think it would be wiser for her to engage into dialogue with parents, so that problems could be resolved quickly. She shouldn’t rely only on one group, such as the teachers, so she won’t be misled because of particular interests.

(Established Parent 3)

You see, here (in Cyprus), we change schools, and, at the end, you end up knowing different people, but you don’t have the opportunity to develop good social relationships, you don’t feel that you have colleagues that you can rely on them… This year, I also feel oppression. I feel that I come to the school just to get on with the day, and avoid conflicts. Change looks little and mainly is decorative which it’s not bad, but still it does not give answers to our problems as a school.

(Established Teacher 2)

I heard, too, how the head responded to the situation that led to these remarks:

In my time, here, despite my willingness to show respect and support to teachers, I have seen that there is a predominance of job description. By this I mean that most teachers won’t do anything more than they have to do… Of course, I came here with the best intentions, but everywhere I look there is a strong culture of conservatism that I am trying, though, to change…

(Head teacher 2)
On interviewing teachers, it seemed that, for some, professional freedom was experienced as oppressive, given that it implied more time and energy, or an oversimplification of school’s work. As a departing newcomer teacher explained:

The working style of the new head is clear now. As such, I believe that certain individuals have become more organised, because they don’t like things just to get on by chance. On the other hand, some seized the chance and do nothing…However, I think that in this way, I couldn’t work as I would like, because, at the end of the day, I got very tired or I didn’t have the time to do the things I wanted…

(Teacher 15)

At the same time, professional freedom seemed to be insufficient to support active participation within imposed agendas and hierarchies. According to the departing deputy head:

I believe that the head teacher of a school no matter how good she is, she cannot make big changes, given these circumstances (the centralised system). And if you try something without the blessing of a superior, then you might get in the spot, and it won’t be for good…

(Deputy head 1)

During other observations and further interviewing, I noted that most teachers were disappointed by the fact that much of what they were aspiring was forgotten, or constantly postponed by arising issues or policy pressures. This seemed to be particularly challenged when almost all teachers felt that their everyday or progressive collaborative work was not recognised by superiors. For example, most staff were disappointed by the fact that the effort of the teacher research group to improve the physical appearance of the school with the help of parents and students was not praised by the inspector.

This provided an example for some staff to see participation in the improvement process as disturbing and adding to their workload, without any significant benefits or privileges. As the departing deputy head stressed to me: “You don’t have an evaluation, and you are doing
more than you are required. You are a masochist”. In the same way, the teachers of the research group were confused about what this improvement process could entail, and even cynical about its impact, as noted during the following conversation with a departing established teacher:

Established teacher 6: I don’t feel important. Who recognises your work? They remember you when they want something.
Teacher researcher: You are important, even though you don’t realise it. For me at least you play an important role, because, with what you do or say, you influence and shape situations. This improvement process is an opportunity to explore our potential.
Established teacher 6: I guess so. But if you want this to succeed, then you need to organise it, and tell us what you want from us to do, so that we can help, because if you rely on our goodwill, then nothing will come out of this.

Examples such as these showed that teachers, being used to problem-solving approaches and imposed agendas, seemed to be unable to act or think differently, despite the opportunity offered to act otherwise. This led me to develop a research toolkit which could enable problem-posing, and help teachers to retain a focus on change and progress.

Meanwhile, experiencing conservatism and conformity from most of the staff, the new head teacher admitted vulnerability, and used myths and story-telling in order to make explicit her ways of working and inspire active engagement. This, though, had marginal effects. As the head teacher explained in one of our debriefings:

To adjust to a school is not a problem, because you get used to it with experience. There were schools which I will always remember, because teachers were more active. They were willing to do more and took initiatives. There wasn’t that feel of conservatism to such an extent, e.g. take the book and go on. Here, I am impressed that they don’t want to leave their students to participate in a research… Indeed, I have noticed that a lot of teachers are in a way absent, because the new model of headship does not fit with what they were used to. In
a way, they have idealised the past, and are not apt to change. I talk a lot about my previous school, because I want to give an example of how my work looked liked, and how teachers responded. I have admitted that I am not such an organised person, but I would like to try things with my staff, because we all have something new to learn from each other.

(Head teacher 2)

In addition, it was evident that organisational and hierarchical structures posed further challenges to her role as the key leader of the school, because what she aspired had to be in negotiation with powerful others who appeared unsupportive in many respects. For example, the head teacher, as well as most of the staff, talked about how uncooperative the local School Board was in providing resources for equipment, and upgrading school’s infrastructure.

This was also seen as a major issue by the parent and student research groups. They believed that a well equipped school, modern facilities and safe infrastructure could improve their sense of belonging and well-being. The fact that this was denied was interpreted by most of the parents and students as indifference from those in higher positions and responsible for school’s progress. At the same time, some parents talked about the lack of political power in attaining even what they were normally entitled. As an example, they referred to the fact that all the schools in the area had an assembly room, except their school.

Similarly, it was observed that the presence of another school within the same building seemed to add further challenges to positive change. Nearly all staff talked about how disturbing this was, given that each school approached policies in a different way and had different issues to address. Likewise, this division was experienced by most of the parents and students as being unproductive, and also a great barrier to community belonging. An established parent noted:

I don’t understand why the two schools cannot agree, and take some drastic actions together. There is a lack of communication and we see it, because each school decides differently, and this is not good, because it is as if we have two
different schools, with different issues, and, in my opinion, they have to deal the same problems.

(Parent 4)

Moreover, the inspector seemed to play an important role in constraining active agency, as she continued to use her authority in order to make her role visible. This was interpreted by the head teacher and staff as a way of undermining their professional judgement. As a departing established teacher explained:

I think that the particular inspector wants us to behave in certain ways. You know, I am the powerful here and you are not, I say what to do and you do it. But, on the other hand, the head teacher is very nice, and doesn’t want to have a conflict with her. So, no matter how much the head teacher is trying, the inspector with her attitude is not helping. I don’t think that what she wants or does are always helpful or appropriate for this school.

(Teacher 2)

On that issue, some teachers pointed out in their interviews that the focus on evaluating their individual classroom practices and finishing the prescribed books shifted attention from what they saw as important, and also limited any possibility to address the school’s problems as a team.

Parents, however, seemed to be satisfied with this orientation of finishing the books, and puzzled about anything different. On the other hand, students felt boredom and dissatisfaction but more secure in classroom practices that were book-based. All of this reflected a sense of passivity and dependency regarding decision-making, since both research groups appeared to be unable to identify themselves as bearers of their fortunes.

In a similar way, rapid changes in headship seemed to create further ambiguities in relation to their active involvement. As two established students commented:
It is not good to change head teachers, because there isn’t enough time to get used to them.

(Student 8)

A new head teacher needs to leave us finish one thing, and then start doing another. I am not sure if we are continuing anything from last year.

(Student 11)

Likewise, some established teachers expressed the view that being forced to change so many head teachers during their stay impaired the development of communal relationships and a shared vision. They stressed that the arrival of new heads usually implied the investment of sufficient but important time in understanding their new working conditions. Having witnessed the bargains and deals that took place over the years, without any meaningful outcomes, some of them talked about how they experienced compromise, disappointment and dissatisfaction. As a leaving established teacher explained:

In my seven years here, I have changed four head teachers. I can’t say that we had a vision for this school. Everybody comes and goes, and there isn’t time for a shared direction. I got disappointed and compromised, but I would like to see the Eco-programme (the research with students) becoming a reality, before I go.

(Teacher 2)

It was a common belief among school members that accelerated changes at the top could lead a school to stagnation. This tied closely with the head’s concerns during one of our debriefings:

I know that I wasted much of my time in defence, but you can’t go to a school and do whatever you were used doing. You need time to understand by yourself, and not to be carried away by others when taking important decisions, such as what happened at the beginning of the year (with first grade). I was a novice and I was taken by the pressure of the moment. Also, I had above me the inspector who was very imposing.

(Head teacher 2)
Then, she added in her interview:

> Now, I feel that I have started realising where I am, without feeling the need to rely on others to inform me, and being deceived. Definitely next year, it will be different, and I won’t allow any “discounts”. Our school needs special attention.  

(Head teacher 2)

Reflecting on this whole issue, it seemed that, in coping with frequent headship successions, individuals learnt how to devise surviving strategies which, though, seemed to undermine active agency and productive work. As noted above, the head teacher chose to defer her success for the next year, instead of taking immediate action.

Within this dynamic, it seemed that the alignment of newcomers and established members was at the same time in most respects constraining. Individuals seemed to lack the will and space to work in more radical ways, despite the potential created with the contribution of the new head and the development of collaborative inquiry. As noted, disengagement was more evident during departure processes.

**More departures**

Prominent departures of individuals at the end of the school year seemed to create a new dynamic of destabilisation in school life. This seemed to favour functionality, despite the fact that practice was becoming more demanding, especially with the arrival of political refugees at the school.

During that year, the arrival of fourteen students, who were asylum seekers from Iraq and Palestine, created a lot of uncertainties. Classes exited the student number limit, and teachers felt unable to respond to such a student intake, because of language barriers and what were seen as unsupportive guidelines from the Ministry and the inspector. The fact that the head teacher admitted vulnerability to the whole issue, created further uncertainties. She explained at a staff meeting:

> I can understand your worries, but I can’t do anything else. I have to register them, they have the approval from the Education District Office. That’s our job
and we need to cope with it. They are kids, too. Now, I am not sure how these kids would be benefited at this time that we are at the end of the year.

(Head teacher 2)

Even so, it seemed that avoiding students’ cultural capital was a coping strategy for most of the teachers. According to an established teacher:

The situation with political refugees is out of control. I didn’t expect it to be like that and I have asked to stay here. Those who will leave are so lucky. This school is being ghettoised, and I will tell everyone not to come here. It’s worthless, especially if you think that you are treated in the same way with those who work in homogenised schools. Who is in a better position?

(Teacher 4)

This seemed to create a situation of winners and losers. Characteristically, the staff, who were about to leave, saw their departure as a relief from the particularities of the school, and the way decision-making was played out, whereas the teachers, who were to stay, felt anxious and disappointed. Under these conditions, it seemed easier for most of the staff to show resignation. For example, the teacher research group decided to defer the implementation of their improvement process for the next year, considering the prominent changes in staff, and the pressures created by the arrival of political refugees. As a leaving established teacher and member of the group explained:

I don’t want to do anything more. I am tired. I am sorry, but I want to leave from here. The first grade is a challenge with all these new students who we don’t know how to deal. In my new school, I will start this (working closer with parents) from the first day, because it is very important to have parents with your side.

(Teacher 7)

All of this led most of the staff to see change as fragile and usually in the hands of those with more formal power, who usually appeared as uncaring outsiders. For example, the staff in updating the case study report concluded:
Considering the mobility of teachers and the challenging context of the school, stagnation is evident. To put it simply, there is no expansion of learning as participation looks procedural. If we take out the initiative of working closer with parents, then the update of this account would have remained the same. Improvement efforts seem fragile, and support from above looks unhelpful. Within this context of imposition, school life seems to be disconnected from the real lives of people at the school level, as it seems to be limited space for alternatives and reflective thinking.

(Case study report 2006-2007)

However, such practitioner learning, as it was enabled within reflective processes, proved to be uncomfortable for those with more formal power. An example of this was when the inspector was annoyed by my comments in my personal report\(^5\), where I wrote: “*I feel that my school is in a disadvantaged position, since its problems become accumulated, rather than addressed*”. The inspector, as she explained to me and the head teacher, felt exposed and that I should also feel the same. Therefore, in being mindful of my ethical framework, I decided to compromise with her suggestion by adding that by this I mean the time-consuming processes resulting from a centralised educational system.

In this respect, the head teacher played an important role in mediating the imbalance of power and status within her school, especially when such critical and discouraging incidents occurred. For example, after this incident, the head teacher explained to me:

> It is better to ‘bend’ a little with such types of persons who, because they hold a position, believe that they can do whatever they want. If she was open to dialogue, we wouldn’t have that (the overstaffing of classes)... If we had a different inspector, I believe that a lot of things would have been different. I know that my teachers are intimidated by her, and I think I have contributed to this. You know that I try to mediate things, so that we can keep a balance.

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\(^5\) Teachers by the end of the school year complete their personal report form in which they made available their in-service training and work within the school. This report is reviewed by the head teacher and inspector and is recorded in teachers’ portfolio which is managed centrally.
Otherwise if I had listened to her, everyone would want to leave from this school.

(Head teacher 2)

Indeed, it was noted that, in experiencing what seemed to me like oppression from above, the head teacher felt unable to lead the school as she wanted. At the same time, this discouraged her from taking risky decisions that could support school’s work. For example, she was unwilling to proceed- as the previous head teacher- when completing the form for the extra support teaching hours for bilinguals, because she wanted to avoid any possible criticism from above. All of this, according to my later reflections, seemed to contribute to stagnation.

This sense of stagnation was also experienced by the parent and student research groups. In fact, functionality was seen by some parents and students as contributing to anachronism, since the school was seen as lacking behind in terms of equipment and infrastructure. In developing their posters, both groups were eager to talk about how past and prominent changes in staff seemed to undermine the school’s progress. Moreover, they saw change at the school level as small scale, tenuous and mostly for cosmetic purposes, even though they believed that their voice was taken into account more seriously this year, mainly because of their participation in research processes. As raised in the students’ poster (see photograph 7):

There has been change because of the Eco-project (their research), and our school looks better because we were heard…I think there weren’t any other changes besides the Eco (their research), the rest have remained the same. We want more.

No one sees what happens in the toilets. Why the head teacher and teachers didn’t take the initiative to improve them?
Indeed, all students continued to see change as a responsibility of those in more powerful positions, whereas parents were keen to note that stagnation was a shared responsibility. According to the parents’ poster (see photograph 8):

Even though this year, the head teacher shows more interest towards the kids, and they seem to love her, we are at the end of the year and very few things have been done towards school’s sustainable development. The stagnation of the school is evident. The solutions are rather superficial. This might be also our fault, because as parents we don’t claim things.

In a way, it seemed that collaboration managed to raise awareness and enable active participation. For example, students, in presenting their findings, managed to get into dialogue with the rest of the students and staff. In my view, the whole process proved to be fruitful in most respects. In particular, the head teacher praised their effort, and admitted that some of their findings looked as surprises, such as the situation in the toilets. At the same time, most of their peers and teachers seemed to share similar concerns and aspirations.

All of this helped the student research group to develop a sense of community belongingness. As a result, they felt confident enough to continue their effort with an improvement process in the following year. This, however, seemed to be undermined by prominent changes in membership. As raised by one of the students in relation to their poster:

I took this picture because there were some improvements, because of the Eco-project (their research), but these improvements were not transferred to the other school. Now, I am worried that I am going to the other school, because I don’t know the leaders there.

(Established Student 5)
Such concerns, according to other observations and reflections, showed students’ vulnerability and dependency on adults for facilitating their active and meaningful participation, particularly in times of destabilisation and change.

However, most of the adults in the school seemed to hold a passive position, despite the space created with the development of collaborative inquiry. For example, the parent and teacher research groups felt uncomfortable to make their voice visible in public spaces. Both groups believed that their critical understandings could discourage some individuals from active work, or could put them in a difficult position with powerful others. As a result, the staff decided to update the case study report for internal use only (i.e. give it to new staff members for reflection and updating by the end of the next year), and the parent research group, being puzzled about the extent of their role in influencing situations or shaping policy, chose to defer their presentation of findings for the next year.

Reflecting on this, it seemed to me that individuals devised their own surviving strategies in coping with exiting process. At this phase of their engagement, even though they were becoming more aware of their situations with the use of methodological tools (i.e. photo-voice, case study report), they still felt trapped in pursuing the changes they would like.

Summary

In this chapter, I described how change and development took place for another school year in a particular primary school in Cyprus, where I focused on issues and decision-making that, in my view, determined in most respects the way change was approached. It was evident that the new school dynamic seemed to be particularly shaped by the approach of the new head teacher, who, in her effort to be accepted and enable change, showed respect to professional judgement. This caused destabilisation in relationships, as the new dynamic was seen either as being liberating or oppressive, given that individuals had to realise their aspirations within a context of imposition and the dominance of hierarchy. Therefore, even though the new dynamic entailed some potential, it still lacked the power to enable positive change.

At the same time, barriers to active participation became more visible with the development of collaborative inquiry and the use of methodological tools. This was important, as it managed to enable critical questioning and reflective thinking, leading to more active forms
of participation, which also set the basis for future engagements. Here, the head, with her stance, seemed to play an important role in facilitating the development of collaborative inquiry. All of this pointed to the important roles of school leaders in facilitating or enabling others to pursue their aspirations, and contribute to progress.

In spite of these positive developments, the changes that occurred seemed small and tenuous. Stagnation was experienced again in most aspects of school life from different positions and throughout the year, mainly because those at the school level seemed to lack the space and will to get actively involved with the politics of schooling both at the school and policy level.

The account of the following year’s developments in the next chapter illustrates how the new school dynamic shaped processes of change. In particular, the account focuses on the struggles of the research groups, while attempting to improve school life and address productively their everyday localised complexity.
CHAPTER 7

Addressing barriers to participation

Introduction

This chapter reveals how a new school dynamic, as this was formed within the arrivals, alignment and departures of diverse individuals, shaped school change and development during the third and a half year of the study. Firstly, I describe the dynamic developed during the third year, when the school welcomed a new deputy head and six new teachers. The other deputy head was about to retire, and the one who had just arrived, along with six teachers (four established and two newcomer teachers), were expected to be relocated to different schools the following year. Additionally, more political refugees continued registering at the school, changing the total intake of bilingual and foreign students from 30% to almost 40%.

This account is mostly constructed using the voices of members of the three research groups, where teachers, parents and students continued their collaboration and were facilitated in order to design, implement and evaluate an improvement process. In particular, the teacher research group focused on working closer with parents, whereas students attempted to improve safety within the school. In addition, parents tried to support newcomer and foreign families of the school. The account is also informed by my own research inquiry, where I interviewed staff, and maintained my reflective practices and participant observation.

I close this part of the thesis with the analysis of the last phase of my research, where I mapped processes of change as a participant observer for another half year. Here my account takes the form of an exploration of the dynamic developed in order to consider in further detail the implications of my findings in relation to change processes from different positions. During this fourth school year, there was a complete change in the two deputy head positions, and nine new teachers arrived at the school. Five newcomers were expected to move to different schools the following year. Moreover, political refugees reached 30% of the student population, whereas the total intake of bilingual and foreign learners attained almost 50%.
The analysis I provide shows that more engaging forms of participation seemed to create space for positive improvement. It was noticeable, in particular, that the research groups managed to create public tensions and bring, to some extent at least, positive change. On the other hand, change from various standpoints was not a straightforward process within a context of imposition. Specifically, participating staff seemed to be interested in changing the less threatening aspects of parent-teacher relationships, whereas the student research group appeared to be the most vulnerable group in enabling change. Only the parent research group seemed to be more willing to pursue change in more radical ways.

Clearly, the lack of authority at the system level for such initiatives seemed to constrain individuals from becoming visible and visionary. In this context, the way that formal key leaders, especially the head teacher, connected with the struggles of the research groups for school improvement was catalytic in most respects. Nevertheless, this account demonstrates that meaningful change is possible, even though it involves struggles.

**Further arrivals**

It was noted that socialisation processes presented different engagements, since this year the development of collaborative inquiry managed to enable the research groups and other individuals to cope with their new working conditions in a reflective way. This was not an easy process, since imposed agendas and hierarchies pressed for compliance and passivity.

*Functional participation and awareness*

The way most newcomers entered their school community was once again a routine of fitting in with particular posts and roles. Unsupportive socialisation processes seemed to contribute to this dynamic of disengagement, whereas the efforts of the research groups to initiate change seemed to play an important role in enabling more active forms of participation.

Once again, too, the way newcomer teachers were socialised into the style of the school by some established teachers served to discourage their active involvement, and strengthen prejudices about the geographical and socioeconomic position of the school. This, as all newcomer teachers were eager to note, contributed to emotional distress, and reinforced conservatism towards change. According to the newcomer deputy head who was about to depart the following year:
On my first day here, a colleague told me “Welcome to hell!”, and it troubled me. I wanted to see the extent of the problem by myself, and see how I can deal with it. I’ve heard about the school, but I wasn’t that sure, and, at that time, I got frightened. Now, I have realised that the whole situation is difficult because of the huge diversity among our students. For example in my classroom, I have six Cypriots, six from Lebanon, Georgia, Iraq, Ukraine and Poland, five kids that have the one parent from Moldavia, Russia, Philippines and Iran, three kids that their parents are English-Cypriots and one student from Greece. Our discussions (in the staff room) are dominated by frustration for the whole situation within the school. As you see the situation is already difficult, and change looks impossible.

(Deputy head 3)

Another issue that created tension was the fact that seniority was seen as an important factor in shaping decision-making within the school, since the new deputy head managed to influence decision-making towards this direction. In particular, it was decided that the teachers with more years of experience would be in a better position when selecting classes. Reflecting on this, it seemed that such decision-making enabled functionality, since it failed to take into account the agency of teachers, and what they were capable of doing. At the same time, this seemed to create feelings of exploitation and disrespect. An affected newcomer teacher who was about to depart the following year explained:

When you are young they consider you as nothing, even though that this is my fifth year (of working experience), there is some kind of exploitation. I felt this when they gave me the first grade, without wanting it, because I had the less working experience. This affects you a lot, and affects your work within the school, you get discouraged, because they don’t take you into account. You become invisible.

(Teacher 22)

In this way, as explained by most newcomers, the awareness from the case study report, although helpful in understanding the particularities of the school, seemed to be sidelined by
such unsupportive socialisation processes. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, induction processes seemed to pose further challenges to progress, not least because these required the investment of sufficient but important time. For example, the head teacher, who had experienced stagnation the previous year and anticipated change, saw the improvement process of the teacher research group as a future engagement because of the newcomers’ socialisation processes. As she explained during a staff meeting:

Bringing parents closer is crucial, and that’s why I believe that it needs to be one of the school’s aims, since in this school we need them to be close to their children’s learning, to understand how to help them, and also how we can help them. I understand that the new colleagues want time to get to know their parents, but let’s keep it at the back of our mind and, when you are ready, we can take decisions as a school. Last year, the group tried some things and was successful, and we can do the same this year.

(Head teacher 2)

Likewise, time-consuming induction processes seemed to constrain participation in the teacher research group. From our initial meetings, the two new members made it clear that they wanted time to get familiarised with their new working conditions, before embarking on change, which also seemed as an unknown territory. As one argued:

I like the idea, and I feel much more comfortable in this school to try some new things, but I feel that it is too soon to engage into such initiatives, because I think, we need to get to know the school, the students and what the whole situation is about. I would like to be sure about it, and what we really want to achieve, before start changing things.

(Teacher 19)

Even so, the use of the research toolkit seemed to encourage participation, since it enabled dialogue and reflection on possible ways forward. According to the other new member:
This is quite helpful. I mean it keeps you focused, without feeling that you are on your own. It offers you perspective, without feeling excluded. Now, I am not sure what I will try, but, at least, I have an idea what this might be about. Of course, first I need to understand where I stand in this school.

(Teacher 18)

In this respect, collaborative inquiry seemed to create space for productive participation amongst newcomers and established teachers. For example, the two newcomer teachers who joined the group saw their participation as a way of gaining acceptance and respect. Additionally, one was inspired by the possibility of change, since she felt that the school had remained the same from her time as a student. Professional freedom was seen again as an important component in facilitating their connectedness with the purposes of my research.

On the other hand, the rest of the newcomer staff saw no future in the school, and seemed to be disconnected from any kind of improvement. As they explained, they were anticipating moving out from such a challenging school, and mostly participated according to required standards and procedures. Professional freedom was seen as oppressive, since they believed that they had limited chances in influencing situations. For example:

Because I have a lot of bilinguals in my classroom, I don’t try something innovative... I don’t see any future or potential for me in this school, and because of age and the low level of students, it is very difficult for me. I feel that I get more tired. I think that this school should not be working with that way. The Ministry is not responding properly to our problems, because the inspector can’t see the situation with a human decency, and, at the end, you just follow the regulations, and do your job. If they are not interested, then you are not interested, too.

(Deputy head 3)

And:

I believe that I can talk to the specific head teacher, and that she will try to help you, but, in matters of administration, I think that we are behind. I believe that it is matter of character to be able to have a key leadership position, because not all
can make it in such positions. There aren’t any drastic solutions so far, and everything seems like going with the flow of the day... Given this situation we have to find solutions by ourselves, and this is stressful, because the inspector expects certain things to happen. I hope that I will be transferred the next year, because also of the distance.

(Newcomer Teacher 23)

Reflecting on this whole situation, it seemed to me that most members of the staff, being used to rapid changes in membership and top-down resolutions, became alienated from the politics of school improvement. Meanwhile, as I observed, the head teacher was eager to use this time persuasion in order to convince more teachers to participate in the teachers’ improvement process. As she pointed out after my presentation regarding my research:

I strongly support this initiative and, as we said, we need to include it as one of our school’s aims. I know that, for some, it may be too early to try things, but this time we need to focus at first grade at least, and do a lesson for the parents. These parents are new to our school, and I think it would be very beneficial for our school and for your work to show to them how you perform, so that we can gain their trust and commitment.

(Head teacher 2)

Nonetheless, while some teachers complied with the head’s request, and performed a lesson for parents to attend, it seemed that their engagement was just another formality, without any questioning or future action. This was in contrast with the experience of a departing established teacher who was a member of the teacher research group. In fact, that teacher saw her engagement with change as being rewarding and fruitful, since it enabled her to grow professionally, and pursue improvement in a reflective way. As she admitted:

I like this idea, because I have the chance to talk with my colleagues about important things without feeling intimidated by competition. It is something we do it for us and for making our work life easier. I didn’t have a big response from parents at my presentation, but that’s ok. That’s something that we need to think about it. At least, I am happy that some showed up, and I think, they got
benefited and might influence others. Also, the experiences we are gaining, and the resources we are producing are already helping us for the future, and help others who want to use our ideas. I am happy about it, although I am leaving next year, but I will try to use this idea at my new school.

(Teacher 3)

Such contrasting experiences, alongside other evidence, revealed the complexity involved when creating practitioner partnerships, since, on the one hand, they could mean collaboration and cooperation and, on the other hand, coercion and constraint. On reflecting on this, I came to realise that overcoming such barriers required attention to the diversity of interests and capabilities. In this respect, as I noted, the use of methodological tools (i.e. case study report, research toolkit, photo-voice) helped to resolve such dilemmas, since these seemed to create spaces for reflective dialogue and reconciliation.

This was particularly noticed with the new student research group when reflecting on their poster of the previous year (see photograph 9). All the students appeared more aware of their situation, and also particularly anxious and resourceful in taking the responsibility of an improvement process. According to two established students:

We need to change a lot of things. Can we improve all the things that we have put in our poster which don’t let our school fly?

(Student 15)

I can’t wait to get started. I think we should improve these things one by one. You know start from safety, then go to health and so on… We can work in teams and each team can be responsible for each category.

(Student 16)

Their critical engagement with evidence led them also to acknowledge that their aspirations had to be in negotiation with adults, who were seen as holding the responsibility for the school’s progress. As a departing established student explained:
In the poster, we showed that when the adults (of the school) listened to us, nice things happened. But will they listen again? I am not sure about it, because this time we need a lot of help.

(Student 11)

Such reflective thinking and awareness held promise that, in some way, it would lead to the possibility of designing successfully an improvement process, while avoiding possible barriers. On the other hand, after reflecting on their poster, the parent research group felt particularly vulnerable in shaping situations. As was explained, they seemed to be worried about the extent and limits of their involvement in initiating change. Some saw their findings as a discomforting criticism, and wanted to avoid public scrutiny. An established member of the group explained:

I showed the poster to my husband, and he was very surprised with what we have found. But he was concerned whether this is our job to question these things. I mean, he wanted to point out that there are people who get a lot of money to improve education, and how they will react when they hear all this, because there is a lot of criticism of their work.

(Parent 3)

Insights from such incidents revealed the complexity of becoming aware and deciding on change, especially when there was lack of space for such active and local decision-making. They also showed the social nature of becoming an active agent, since individuals, as social agents, bring into the process their life histories, and personal strengths and weaknesses. All of this placed considerable challenges on my roles as a facilitator in enabling the research groups to overcome any feelings of subordination, and pursue change from their position, despite the constraints.

*In the pursuit of change*

My observations suggested that taking a position and actualising seemed to be far from easy within imposed agendas and structures. This was further challenged by the fact that the head teacher accepted oppression from above. For example, during my observations in the staff
In this situation, I saw how, whilst admitting vulnerability towards superiors, the head teacher tried to balance power within the school in a positive way. However, this was not easy for her. For example, her unwillingness to take a risky decision during the previous year when completing the form about the extra support teaching hours, contributed to an uncomfortable situation, since more asylum seekers kept registering with the opening of the school. This created frustration amongst some staff, especially when the head teacher admitted that she was just following instructions.

It was evident, too, that such decision-making seemed to contribute to passivity and disengagement, since instructions had to be followed without any questioning and regardless of their worth. This became even more problematic when decision-making was approached in terms of individual gains, with some hints, though, of more shared concerns. For example, as a response to the whole situation, a newcomer teacher took the initiative to get in touch with the parent research group, so that more drastic measures could be taken. The group, being associated with the Parent Association of the school, sent a letter to the District Education Office, after making known their intentions to both head teachers of the two schools (Cycle A and Cycle B).
All of this contributed to what became a complex situation. The inspector criticised the head teacher for not foreseeing or making known the extent of the situation, despite the fact that she was the one who authorised students’ registration. As a result, the inspector took some extra teaching hours from other schools and transferred them into the school. In this way, although acting in an authoritative way, the inspector was seen by the head teacher and staff as taking a risky decision to support the school. According to the head teacher:

For this manoeuvre we need to give her a credit, because without these hours we would be lost. Fortunately, she acted in favour of our school, although this means that other schools were deprived of their benefits… I think that this was an outcome of that incident with Elena’s report last year, because I know that she got upset and wanted to show that she is capable.

(Head teacher 2)

Reflecting on this incident made me to realise how problematic the whole arrangement was, since it constrained dialogue, and rather made more visible the powerful in decision-making. It also showed the unproductive isolation of schools, since decision-making was made away from and not with the affected schools, where for example they could collaborate in order to solve a common issue, such as that of bilingual or foreign students. In addition, the particular teacher could be seen as exploiting the work of the parent research group, since her concern had an immediate effect in her classroom. All of this revealed the complexity of power relations, resulting from becoming aware and taking decisions that could be neither pretty nor comfortable. Competing interests seemed to overlap with more shared concerns, making more blurred the line between oppressive and liberating actions.

Later, the new arrangement was seen by the head teacher and staff as an outcome of that incident with my report the last year, since the inspector appeared more willing to help the school. This contributed to a situation, where I was seen as someone who speaks up and is in position to take risks. Additionally, as revealed during the interviews, talking to or having a conversation with me helped most teachers to cope with the demands of their work. For example:
I feel good that I can talk to someone who at least shows an interest to understand what it feels like to work in this school. It helps me not to feel alienated, and it takes out the pressure of trying not to say things that might upset someone.

(Deputy head 3)

Having an interview or discussing my understandings with you made me feel accepted. What you are doing is important, because you see that there are still people who are trying to change things, and do something about it. But from what I see and hear, it is not that easy, especially when you had to deal with the particular inspector.

(Newcomer Teacher 20)

All of this led me to examine possible ways that could help me make more visible my role as a teacher researcher/facilitator in order to avoid conflict, mistrust, potential exploitation and dependency as much as possible. Therefore, I decided to have regular debriefings about the development of my research with the head teacher and staff, and also the research groups, so that negotiations could take place more openly, and reconciliations could be reached through dialogue. I hoped that this would help individuals to learn how to deal responsibly and responsively with their everyday complexity.

On another occasion, this proved to be important when the parent research group was thinking to write a letter to the Ministry. Therefore, teachers and students had to be informed about it, and offer their perspective, so that a better framework towards change could be developed. Moreover, this opening of dialogue seemed to help the research groups to gain respect within the school, and feel confident enough to make their voice visible. This was the case when the parent research group decided to proceed with their presentation of findings.

Indeed, making their voice visible appeared to be a rewarding experience, since parents managed to defend their views in public, confront criticism, and also acknowledge the diversity of interests that they needed to reconcile in bringing about improvements. For example, the former president of the Parent Association praised their effort and suggested collaboration with the new school built in the area. The head teachers of the two schools
were keen to point out that their effort was also helping their work, since they believed that the system was constraining them from working productively and taking drastic decisions.

At this stage, it was noticeable that collaboration from different positions managed to raise awareness and bring together diverse people, newcomers and established members, towards the possibility of change. At the same time, it revealed the complexity of pursuing change within a context of imposition and rapid changes in membership. Under these conditions, the alignment of newcomers and established members presented different challenges, especially when the research groups attempted to implement change.

Alignment

I noted that the new dynamic in the school presented a more complex picture of ambiguity, as the research groups attempted to address productively their everyday localised complexity. Table 8 offers an overview of what this entailed, as the research groups of teachers, students and parents were facilitated to collaborate in order to design, implement and evaluate their improvement process.

Table 8: Overview of collaborative inquiry during the 3rd year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research group</th>
<th>Focus of improvement</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teachers       | Improve parent-teacher relationships | Initial interventions involved:  
✓ attend presentations  
✓ receive informative letters and notes  
✓ keep a personal touch with them  
Wider interventions involved:  
✓ help to improve the physical appearance of the building  
✓ attend seminars  
✓ observe and support classroom work  
✓ escort students in field-trips | Teachers managed to improve, to some extent, parent-teacher relationships, but their effort lacked an authentic/active involvement, as parents were given passive roles, and also teachers continued to maintain a passive position in relation to the politics of schooling. |
| Students       | Improve safety       | Interventions involved:  
✓ send a letter to the mayor about safety problems within the school, followed by a meeting with him  
✓ send a letter to the cantina caterer about healthy products being sold at the cantina, followed by a meeting with her  
✓ write a letter to the fire inspector about the exit ladder, followed by a meeting with him  
✓ promote a campaign about healthy eating  
✓ make known their concerns to the Parent Association and the School Board with the help of the head teacher | Students appeared to be the most vulnerable group in bringing about improvements within the school, as their effort had to be in negotiation with adults, who were not always able or willing to take into account their voice. |
| Parents        | Support newcomer and foreign families | Interventions involved:  
✓ send a letter about the school to the Minister of Education and Culture, followed by another letter about their key findings  
✓ send a letter to the Adults Centre for providing Greek lessons at the school in afternoon time  
✓ develop a package with useful information about the school and the country to be given to foreign and newcomer families  
✓ collect clothes, food and stationery on a voluntary basis  
✓ organise a summer school for all the kids in the area | Whilst being less reliant on organisational and hierarchical structures, parents appeared more willing to take risky decisions, and this enabled them to pursue change in more radical ways. |
Staff working for change

Reflecting on the progress of the teacher research group, it seemed to me that, although their effort proved to be important in challenging the status quo and improving school’s relationships with parents, it still lacked an authentic involvement. Specifically, the group seemed to be more interested in changing the less threatening aspects of their effort, and lacked the courage to engage in actions that could be seen as radically engaging, since parents were given passive roles, and also teachers maintained their passive position in relation to the politics of schooling. The head teacher’s position played an important role in this respect.

In particular, I observed that the enthusiasm of the new teacher research group faded away, as their everyday complexity was becoming more demanding with the arrivals of more political refugees. At the same time, teachers appeared more cautious and reserved in implementing change, because they believed that this could trigger further criticism of their work.

What seemed to discourage their active involvement was the fact that some staff continued to be cynical and indifferent about their initiation of change. In addition, pressing and arising issues seemed to constrain the head from connecting actively with their improvement effort. For example, the group’s interventions had to be postponed when a new policy needed to be implemented. All of this seemed to hinder the teacher research group from finding the time and will for joint action. The following narrative from a newcomer member captures this complexity:

I would like to have much better communication with the parents, do workshops etc. In this school, I feel particularly the need to get closer with the parents, and this research has brought it to the front line. Some teachers might be better in this (bringing parents closer), because they have the skills, and look more decisive and have confidence, because they have been to the school and feel more comfortable. It is difficult though that some colleagues tend to avoid change… I think that certain things could be done differently and better, but because there is no pressure, some teachers take advantage of this. Part of the
responsibility goes to the head teacher, as she could delegate responsibilities and claim things, but she trusts us, and has so many things to attend to. She is interested in the school’s sustainable development, but it would be better, if all we could work together for this.

(Teacher 18)

Additionally, various inner and outer forces seemed to undermine their efforts. For example, the long absence of a group member created instability during the group’s meetings, and also the head’s health problems implied emotional distress and further delays in authorising change. Under these conditions, the teacher research group appeared more willing to utilise those interventions that were seen as less intrusive or time-consuming, such as inviting parents to attend presentations, sending informative letters and notes to parents of their classroom, or keeping a personal touch with them.

In working with the group as a facilitator, whilst also being a teacher of the school, I was conscious in matching what we said with what we did. This implied that their efforts needed to be challenged when they looked stale or impoverished. However, this was not easy, as the new members of the group were still struggling to adjust to their everyday and increasingly demanding complexity. As a newcomer member had to admit:

We talk about change and it’s good, but here it is so difficult. For example, in my class, I have twenty one students and the twenty one have a problem at home…I feel bad that I don’t do anything of what we said, but I get so distracted everyday in dealing with problematic behaviours, and I feel that I have nothing to give more. At least, I feel comfortable in the staff room… students cannot be fixed, or their problems cannot be solved. It needs more than a single teacher to deal with all these, but it doesn’t mean that I don’t like coming here (in group’s meetings), I like our conversations, because you learn, you exchange opinions, even if you are not actually doing something about it, because others do, and so there is always something to learn.

(Teacher 19)
It seemed, then, that in their effort to adjust, new members were beginning to normalise the taken-for-granted assumption that change was impossible or insignificant in that particular school, given its demanding social conditions and their available means. All of this required further problematisation and reflection within the group, so that their improvement efforts could be continued despite the constraints. As a result, interventions at the school level were seen as a more appropriate approach to change, since the research group believed that in this way all parents would be benefited. While being supportive of the group’s work, the head teacher authorised the inclusion of their improvement process in the school’s practices. This gave the group legitimacy among their colleagues, even though it implied further negotiations and reconciliations. According to three members of the group:

This feels so much better, not only because we are actually doing it, but also because we get more positive responses from the rest of our colleagues… you know they feel that they are benefited, too.

(Newcomer Teacher 18)

I totally like this development. It is much better rather than just trying to do it in your classroom, and when? When you have to deal with so many things everyday, it is very difficult. At least now, it looks a much better approach towards parents, you know some could feel excluded, or that their teacher is not doing something as the other one…

(Newcomer Teacher 19)

I believe this is better… We have a whole perspective, and it can be inspiring for other colleagues to get involved, or, at least, not to try to discourage us.

(Established Teacher 3)

Indeed, this approach seemed to have a greater effect even among the most resistant and reluctant teachers. For example, the one deputy head, who as an established member was defensive of the status quo, had to admit that this effort changed her worldview. As she explained, having bilingual parents in her classroom to support her work with foreign students helped her to improve significantly her situation. As a result, she found meaning in
research purposes, and connected with the improvement efforts of the teacher and parent research groups. In particular, she volunteered to support parents’ work with the summer school, whereas, the following year, even though she retired, she returned to the school voluntarily in order to help foreign students to learn the Greek language.

Despite this positive progress, it seemed that parents were given expected roles, such as helping and attending and not learning or questioning. For example, teachers involved parents in activities that could be seen as conventional, such as helping to improve the physical appearance of the building (see photograph 10), attending seminars, supporting classroom work and escorting students in field-trips.

When I raised the issue in a staff meeting, it generated a lot of debate. The head teacher and staff were defensive about the developments taking place. As they explained, they were doubtful about the potential of parents getting actively involved in decision-making processes, and were concerned about any outcomes which could put them in a difficult position with superiors. The following discussion is illustrative:

*Head teacher 2:* I don’t think that it is possible to involve parents to that extent. Here, they don’t come to what we are offering to them, and they will get involved in more demanding (e.g. get involved in decision-making)?

*Established teacher 4:* Have parents in a staff meeting to discuss and take decisions? How this will happen with all the bilinguals and political refugees? No need to mention the socioeconomic background of the rest. This is not possible, and what we are doing is already enough. Most of them don’t show up in parent-teacher meetings, or they didn’t show up when we did the presentations, and they will do more?

*Head teacher 2:* I think it is better to concentrate on what we are doing, besides we don’t know how this will turn out, and already we had a lot of troubles.
In this sense, as I saw it, the lack of a shared agreement and courage to take a risky decision blocked the spaces for a joint political action that could be seen as a liberating process for both, teachers and parents. However, improving school life was a multi-layered approach, since this was related to the other improvement processes, where parents and students were enabled as co-researchers in making visible their voice and taking action.

**Students struggling for change**

It was evident that the student research group appeared to be the most vulnerable group in shaping situations within the school, given that their improvement effort had to be in negotiation with me and also the head teacher, their teachers and parents, who were not always able, or willing to support their aspirations. In other words, giving voice to students, in order to speak up in an adult’s world, was a significant challenge.

At first, reflective dialogues within the group led students to adopt as a focus requiring improvement their sense of feeling safe within the school, since this was seen as an immediate concern and workable from their position. After reflecting on their poster in order to find possible ways forward, a departing established student noted:

> Because within our school we don’t see anything happening, we could say what we think to other people who have more power, such as the President or the Minister, and when we tell them how things are, they might feel guilty and give us what we want.

(Student 9)

This raised a concern of involving the voices of powerful others who could be more supportive of their vision. Such engagements, though, needed to be authorised by the head teacher, who, as noted, played an important role in supporting students’ work. Specifically, the head saw the whole effort as a positive process in raising students’ confidence and enhancing their capabilities. As she explained:

> I thought that this year I would have the time to do other things that I would like, to be closer to students and, of course, to my staff, but with all the arising issues and my personal issues, I found myself trapped in this position. I want to be
next to you with what you’re doing with students, as much as this position allows me, because you see that the kids get interested about their school and feel respected. We need to raise their self-esteem, because without it, they won’t be able to survive.

(Head teacher 2)

However, according to my later observations and reflections, it seemed that engaging with outer associations made more visible students’ vulnerability in decision-making, especially when some adults seemed to hold a passive, if not a resigned position towards change.

For example, their visit to the mayor’s office (see photograph 11) was a discouraging experience, since the mayor had to admit his de-privileged position in decision-making regarding schools and schooling. This, in a way, implied his neutral position in relation to the outcomes that the students wanted to achieve. The fact, however, that the mayor promised improvement within the limits of the community made students feel valued, particularly when the parks around the school were cleaned.

In a similar way, their meeting with the cantina caterer (see photograph 12) for providing healthier products seemed to have only episodic effects. At first, their meeting was fruitful, since both sides presented their arguments, and reached an agreement. However, their arrangement collapsed, as soon as it implied possible profit damages to the caterer. More worryingly, the parents and staff not only accepted this unpleasant turn, but also supported it, since they did not want to disturb their relationships with the caterer, or expose the school to bad criticism. As the head teacher explained:

We told her many times that she shouldn’t be selling these things, but she says that the rent is too high, and with all those poor students and political refugees who basically don’t buy anything, she has to sell these things, because they
attract students. She has a point here, she needs to survive, and, on the other hand, we don’t want the school not to have a cantina…

(Head teacher 2)

Of course, this required more critical and reflexive responses, so that students could be able to continue their effort, without feeling excluded from the social of the school, or that there is no space for action. In this case, the economic survival of the cantina and the prestige of their school needed to be reconciled with their concerns about safety. Therefore, they decided to proceed with a campaign about healthy eating. For example, they posted flyers at the cantina (see photograph 13), and made short visits to classes from time-to-time in order to give advice about healthy eating and healthy products being sold at the cantina.

Furthermore, their letter to the fire inspector about the exit ladder revealed that the ladder was not meeting all safety regulations. The inspector also pointed out that the school had unsettled obligations from 2004. Nonetheless, the way this was handled by interested parties was flawed in many respects. The fire inspector acted as a consultant, since the issue was left upon the school and the School Board to settle it. Unfortunately, no further action was taken.

Reflecting on this incident, such messy interactions point to the fragility of students in influencing situations. It could be seen as an example of how stagnation pervaded not only school life, but also the wider system. As an established teacher commented:

What did you expect, the government will sue itself? Everyone throws the ball to someone else, and no one takes responsibility.

(Teacher 9)

This got more discouraging when the adults in the school, who were assumed to support the students’ work, appeared powerless or unwilling to do so. For example, the group made known their concerns about the state of the benches (see photograph 14) to the Parent Association which responded and proceeded by requesting new benches from the Ministry.
However, the Ministry denied this, on the basis that children get overweight, as they spend most of their school time sitting. Interestingly, parents accepted this response without any further action.

Examples such as these confirmed an impression that collaboration from the students’ position was not embodying a levering effect that could lead eventually to change, since their effort had to be in negotiation with adults who were not always able to support, or interested in student voice. On the other hand, as a teacher researcher/facilitator of their improvement effort, I came to acknowledge that frustration and anger resulting from such disrespectful decisions needed to be handled with pedagogies of rethinking and reframing, so that students could be able to continue their effort through the search for alternatives and possible ways forward, even within the constraints.

As noted earlier, this was also facilitated by the supportive stance of other adults, especially the head teacher, who, on certain occasions, was willing to take risks. For example, she respected the students’ decision to make known their letters and outcomes to the local School Board, despite the fact that she anticipated strong and disrespectful reactions towards her. As she had to admit:

I will send the letters, and I will get a phone call saying “Dear, you don’t know how to do your job and you put your students to do it?” And then, I will hear it again. Anyway let’s send them, and we will see. But, knowing how they think, they will disregard it, as they always do. Here, they don’t take us into account, the head teachers…

(Head teacher 2)

So, students needed to confront and overcome unjust practices of disrespect when bringing about improvements. At the same time, this implied that they needed to overcome their own unjust practices. For example, when the students were asked to write their individual letters
to the mayor and the fire inspector in order to reconstruct them into one, the bilingual and
foreign students were resistant in writing their own because of language barriers. This got
more difficult when some students expressed relief about it, since they were doubtful about
the capabilities of those students. In addition, there was the case of a parent who did not
want her child to write the letter to the fire inspector, because she believed that this was
beyond students’ work and responsibilities.

In this respect, reflective dialogues within the group proved to be important in understanding
and avoiding the dangers of silencing difference by peers or adults. Such reflective thinking
enabled a view of change as an ongoing process, where outcomes were seen as the driving
force, and not the end of a dead end. As two established students explained:

I like what we do, because we do something, and then, if we don’t succeed, we
can redo it and again, and every time we can redo it…

(Student 13)

I like coming here to our meetings, because we don’t give up. Also, we miss
lessons, but not in a bad way, because we do other things that are important to
us.

(Student 9)

In my view, it seemed that in the process for active citizenship in an adults’ world, students
were faced with competing interests and values, and had to confront disrespect and
marginalisation. All of this had to be met with more reflexive responses which seemed to
encourage their active and positive involvement with the politics of schooling. Here, the
head teacher played an important role in facilitating (or not) their initiation of change. Yet,
their voice in bringing about meaningful change was in process with the voice of parents,
who, as noted, appeared more powerful in most respects in realising their aspirations.

*Parents struggling for change*

It was noticeable that the parent research group seemed to be more willing to take risky
decisions that could support the school’s work in a meaningful way. Formal school leaders
seemed to play an important role in enabling or not their active agency.
Primarily, the group had to face its own vulnerabilities. Indeed, working towards change featured some functional and individualistic responses, since there was little sense about the development of a shared agenda. For example, one established member abandoned the group, because she believed that the focus of improvement (supporting newcomer and foreign families) was not helping her situation. She believed that, as a foreigner, she also needed support but not in a way that was encouraging more foreign families to come to the school. As she explained:

I don’t see how we help our school by helping these families. We said that we are doing this, because we want to see our school to get better and with what we are doing, we will bring more such families. I am from Moldavia and all I hear lately is about people from Iraq and Palestine. My daughter told me that her classroom is full of them, and I don’t like it, because they constrain the teaching level. I remember how difficult it was for me, my kid and the teacher when I came here, and now I see the same thing happening constantly, with all these new students coming to the school.

(Parent 6)

Similar concerns were also raised from other parents and some staff members who believed that the focus of improvement shifted attention from other local families that might need help. Such reactions seemed to discourage the group from getting actively involved, particularly the only new member, who was an asylum seeker and connected with the research’s purposes.

What seemed to add further challenges to this inner instability was their dependency on me for answers and holding the group together, which, in a way, implied the maintenance of their neutral and passive position. Another issue that created tension was the fact that the group lacked any authority in bringing about change within the school. As an established member explained:

I am not sure how we can pull this off. I mean with what authority? We are not the Parent Association, and they might be thinking, “what are we trying to prove
with this group?” I don’t know, maybe we could say that we are a committee from the Parent Association. What about the teachers? Do they like what we are thinking to do? I know that the head teacher sees us as a form of help, but what do others think?

(Parent 3)

It was evident that the group seemed to be confused about its potential in shaping situations. All of this implied constant probing, so that parents could clearly define their role and intentions. For example, the group came to realise that their interventions needed to be authorised by the head teacher, even though this could imply further delays or negotiations. At another level, this involved the development of diplomatic skills in associating their effort with other school activities and interested parties, so that they could gain trust and respect amongst members of the school community. So, for example, they tried to connect their effort with the improvement effort of teachers. This was the case when they volunteered to help the teachers to improve the physical appearance of the building. Likewise, one group member, who was the vice president of the Parent Association, used his position in order to represent and defend the group’s work during their meetings.

In this sense, dealing reflectively with their vulnerabilities proved to be essential for sustaining their improvement efforts. Additionally, as observed, being reflective helped them to deal constructively with membership instability and disagreement, given that this created space for dialogue and resolution. As an established member explained:

There’s no perfect solution, and that shouldn’t mean that we won’t do anything, because someone says a different opinion, or because there is someone you are afraid of his/her reaction.

(Parent 1)

However, what appeared to be crucial for the survival of the group was the strong and professional support of the head teacher, who was willing to authorise their presence as a group and their decisions. More importantly, in times of despair, she encouraged their work by attending their meetings, or having debriefings with them, so that a better framework of
change could be developed. This stance of the head seemed to facilitate the group to develop more critical and reflective responses to change. All of this also pointed to the roles of school leaders in working productively with those at the school level and facilitating positive change, not just any change. For example, when the group was thinking to support foreign students by finding local families to help them with homework, the head teacher alerted the group about its possible dangers. According to the head teacher:

These kids don’t have anyone to help them. Their parents don’t know the language, but I’ve given some thought at your idea, and it occurred to me that we might get into trouble, because we need to have records of these families that will help. For example are they mentally healthy, have they been to prison? And we have to admit that we don’t know what others do when they close their door.

(Head teacher 2)

Within this dynamic, my impression was that the group became more confident and willing to take risky decisions that could support the school’s work in a meaningful way. For example, it took a lot of courage to send the letter to the head teacher of the Adults Centre for providing afternoon Greek lessons at the school, given that this assumed active decision-making from their position without any authority. The fact that this was endorsed by the head teacher and staff helped them to feel more comfortable with such a risky decision. The most significant outcome, however, from such courageous involvement was the possibility it entailed of creating a wider inquiry stance, and bringing about positive change within the school.

Meanwhile, the fact that their request was accepted facilitated the group to gain respect within school community. At the same time, the whole process created space for reflection and questioning. For example, the group was concerned by the extent of awareness of their school leaders, since both head teachers appeared unaware about this possibility of having Greek lessons at the school(s) during afternoon time. They also came to realise that their effort could be marginalised or undermined by school’s priorities, bureaucracy or hierarchy.
All of this helped them to increase their confidence and commitment to the project. As an established member argued:

I am not expecting to change things from one day to another, because some might not be interested in what we are doing, or have other priorities, but we also need to understand that change is small steps, besides Rome was not built in a day. Of course, we don’t know by the end of the day what people would say about our effort, or what we are trying to do will be as good as we imagine it. Sometimes, I feel that we are daydreaming. We do things with which some might get annoyed… but I think we need to shake them up.

(Parent 1)

It was observed that engaging with change was more of an unknown territory, and taking drastic decisions required a lot of reflection, courage and professional support, as this entailed major risks. A striking example of this was the idea to send a letter to the Minister of Education and Culture about how they saw the situation within the school in respect to the growing number of foreign students and their efforts to help them. In fact, their effort provoked various responses, and pointed to the complexity and risks entailed when acting towards more shared concerns.

Specifically, the Minister showed an interest in visiting the school and others in the surrounding area. As a result, most teachers got annoyed, because they felt discomfort in making known their everyday challenges in such new public spaces, or disbelieved that such a risky decision could have any dramatic results. According to a departing established teacher:

We said that things were difficult, but there was no need for the Minister to come. We have the inspector, and now, we will have this? Besides, I don’t think that anything will change dramatically. Of course, on the other hand, it’s good to come and see how the situation looks like, although I am not so sure about the outcome of this, because the inspector will want to show off.

(Teacher 9)
Moreover, the Teachers’ Union saw the visit of the Minister as a great opportunity to claim benefits for the teachers. Therefore, members of the Union visited both cycles in order to convince the staff to join the schools in the Zones of Educational Priority. Both head teachers opposed this on the basis that this decision might lead to the ghettoisation of the schools. As the head teacher explained:

I don’t see a reason for entering the school in the Zones of Educational Priority, and from what I know all these schools are ghettoised, and I am sure that nobody (referring to staff) wants to work in such schools. I don’t know what they really are or how they work, but we, the head teachers, won’t allow it as long as we are here.

(Head teacher 2)

Furthermore, the inspectors of the two schools gave specific instructions as to what should be said and done during the visit. According to the head teacher:

We have specific instructions to tell you that what is going to be said during the visit of the Minister should not target anyone, or attempt to insult any person. So, in other words, we need to say and show that everything works for the best.

(Head teacher 2)

As a response to all of this, the group decided to proceed with another risky decision, and gave the Minister another letter during his visit, in which they elaborated on their key findings and reflections. However, the responsibility for answering back to the Minister and parents was delegated to the inspector of the school. This created frustration among the members of the group, since, in a way, it implied the maintenance of the status quo, and the strengthening of inequitable hierarchical structures.

As I have noted, the inspector appeared defensive of the status quo, and manipulative in achieving apparent agreements with them. For example, the inspector presented herself as mindful of their views but disrespectful later on with her actions. This was the case when,

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6 Zones of Educational Priority consist of schools located in a deprived area and cover primary and secondary education. A more flexible curriculum is adopted and teachers work with less teaching hours.
even though she agreed to help the school regarding the number of political refugees, by the end of the year, she authorised the registration of more such students, exceeding also the number limit allowed in classrooms.

Nevertheless, members of the group seemed to be able to defend their point of view, without feeling intimidated by the status of the inspector. What discouraged them, as they explained, was the possibility of victimising me, given that I was seen as the driving force behind their efforts. Such concerns required pedagogical relationships in enabling the group to flourish and expand on ideas and actions without my presence. This, though, was achieved mostly at the personal level, as our collaboration was not easy to abandon.

Reflecting on these developments, the group decided to divert its interventions towards actions that could have a direct impact on the lives of all students, and where most of the negotiations could take place directly with them. This led them to the idea of organising a summer school. Here, the group had to go through long and exhausting bureaucratic procedures, before getting approval from the Ministry and other interested parties. Nonetheless, they managed to accomplish this with success, and sixty-five students (see also photograph 15) attended the summer school. Furthermore, the group received great reviews from other parents and citizens. The head teacher seemed to be pleased with this development. As she explained:

What you are doing with this group is very important, because with this summer school a lot of kids will be benefited. It is also good for the public eye, because it shows that we care, and these parents care for all the kids.

(Head teacher 2)

On the other hand, this engagement was in contrast with their other interventions, since much of what they were aspiring was put on hold by school’s priorities or head teacher’s absenteeism. More importantly, the way others connected with their effort was not always an enabling process. For example, the development of the package (see photograph 16), which included useful information about the school and the country, translated in English and
Arabic, was praised by the Ministry, but it was not used as a means of engaging into dialogue with the group and shaping policy. Additionally, both schools used the package when they wanted to demonstrate that the school was working towards the inclusion of foreign and bilingual students, rather than how to create space and include parents in decision-making.

Furthermore, their initiative to gather clothes, food and stationery (see also photograph 17) on a regular basis for those in need managed to achieve an alteration in school’s routines by mobilising individuals to help and connect with their struggles. But, at the same time, it surfaced hostility, since some parents and teachers expressed a concern that this might attract more such families in the school, which could imply further barriers to classroom learning.

It was noted, too, that there were times that the group felt trapped by the complexity of improving school life, and the diversity of interests that they needed to resolve. Of course, this implied more reflexive responses on how to best accommodate all the dilemmas that they were encountering in practice. For example, the idea of the summer school was an outcome of such reflective thinking.

By and large, it was evident that the development of collaborative inquiry managed in most respects to enable active agency from different positions, in spite of the localised complexity, and also prominent changes in membership.

**Further departures**

As in the previous years, it seemed that departing from the school was just another routine for most individuals. The research groups, however, in experiencing the benefits of making their voice visible, appeared more aware of their situations and willing to continue their efforts. As noted, the use of methodological tools seemed to be particularly helpful in raising awareness and enabling active participation within the school community.
For example, in evaluating their effort, the teacher research group felt comfortable in implementing change, but they came to acknowledge that their initiation lacked a serious questioning about power structures and underlying assumptions regarding schooling and education. In becoming aware of this, the group got even more discouraged. According to one newcomer member:

Indeed, what we did were just some isolated activities and, at the end, we didn’t do grand or radical things. But how could we? We have above us people who don’t want us to do otherwise. We can’t turn things around. I mean, we have the union for these things, and I don’t know if they see things as we do, and also these things take time and time flies. We have to cover the curriculum, and whatever they come up at the Ministry. There’s no space or time to do such things.

(Teacher 19)

As I have explained, engaging in innovative practice had to be in accordance with policy constraints and structured hierarchy, which both pressed for compliance and passivity. As a result, most staff felt vulnerable in making their voice visible in public spaces. Therefore, their participation in updating my case study report was agreed again on the basis of reflection and for internal use only (i.e. give it to new staff members for reflection and updating by the end of the next year), instead of using it as a means of making public their critical understandings.

Of course, as I have noted, such reflective processes helped them to develop a better understanding of their situation. In particular, they saw action research processes as significant steps forward, but not enough, though, to bring about radical change, within a context of imposition. According to text of the case study report:

If we take out the initiative of action research processes, then, most of this account would have remained the same. Stagnation is again evident, as there were limited opportunities to influence situations from different standpoints without any authority at the system level. Even when opportunities were offered, disengagement was evident, as, within imposed agendas and oppressive
hierarchical structures, this required a lot of courage and entailed a lot of risks. Participation in most respects looks procedural and learning is formalistic, according to certain standards. Problematisation and critical questioning on how to change what is being experienced as oppressive is too often circumvented.

(Case study report 2007-2008)

Stagnation was also a big issue for the parent and student research groups. In evaluating their implementation of change, both groups took pictures in order to demonstrate that stagnation dominated school life, despite the effort. As raised in the students’ poster (see photograph 18):

We did try to improve safety in our school, but the grown-ups didn’t help us, and also some kids of our school didn’t try enough.

According to the parents’ poster (see photograph 19):

The new school dynamic didn’t help our school’s sustainable development. I didn’t feel anything in this respect. The staff members were rather indifferent to the school or to us, but with the respond we got from the Ministry of Education for the letters and our work, we got more recognition for what we were trying to do. Basically, it will show next year when we will be more organised and will know better. Nevertheless, we tried to pull the strings, and gained some respect, recognition and acceptance.

Becoming aware, however, required further reflection, so that any dilemmas, anxieties or disappointments could be handled adequately and practically. For example, although students became disappointed with the way adults and peers connected with their struggle for
school improvement, they decided to continue their effort. While being more aware of their limits, they hoped that they could avoid the dangers which constrained their agency.

Likewise, the parent and teacher research groups decided to continue their effort the following year, even though there was a deep ambiguity in relation to the outcomes and sustainability of their effort without any formal authority. As one established parent stated:

> What we say or do is very important, but it seems that nobody listens or wants to listen. I think it would have been much more different, if we had the authority to demand certain things. We kept a low, ethical profile, because we couldn’t do otherwise and nobody (referring to those in higher hierarchical positions) got really disturbed. Now, I am not sure for how long we can keep up in this way.

(Parent 3)

Despite these ambiguities, the parent research group appeared more knowledgeable and confident regarding processes into change. As was commented by one established parent in relation to their poster:

> I believe that our effort was successful in trying to support families of our school. Personally, I didn’t expect to have such a great success after all, if we consider that what we have done is pioneering for the Cyprus context, especially the initiation of the summer school. In this way, we have contributed to the school’s sustainable development and, besides, it’s something that we will try to keep it. I find myself in a better position now in trying to improve our school, and I didn’t expect to become such an active member.

(Parent 1)

At another level, the parent research group came to realise that their collaborative efforts managed to bring the community closer to more shared concerns, leading to the potential for what might be seen as cultural change. All of this reinforced their commitment to the project. According to one established parent (explanation for photograph 20):
Generally, I believe that our effort was successful. We didn’t have the expected support, but, at least, this year, parents didn’t seem to be that prejudiced or negative, such as last year, even though we had more bilinguals this time. The whole effort influenced positively, because we showed that some families of our school, especially political refugees need indeed further support, and fortunately people responded to our requests for help. At the beginning, they were suspicious, but now with our initiation of the summer school-now that the effort is more inclusive, they have taken the right messages, and they see our effort positively.

(Parent 2)

In fact, the notable progress of the parent research group led most staff to view their work as more promising in shaping situations, since they appeared less reliant on organisational and hierarchical structures, and also more willing to take risks. A departing established teacher explained:

When parents know their limits, they can be helpful. They have nothing to lose. They have no one above them to tell them what to do, and stay here longer than we do. They can claim things and, I believe that they have better chances to be taken into account, rather than we do.

(Teacher 4)

Nearly all staff came to acknowledge the importance of finding or creating common spaces with parents who were seen previously as less capable in bringing change. This was evident when the parent research group was invited to help the school to confront uncaring decisions by those in higher hierarchical positions.

A striking example of this was when the inspector authorised the overstaffing of the first grade for the next year, and the parent research group was asked by some teachers to defend the interests of the school. After getting disappointing answers from the inspector, the group decided to make known the situation to the General Manager of Primary Education. The General Manager, who appeared to be aware of the group’s work, was more willing to take
into account their voice. As a result, he intervened at the school level and the whole situation was averted. However, the inspector, as she explained to the head teacher, who was absent at that time, was offended by the whole turn and disturbed by the parents’ involvement. The head teacher explained:

The inspector basically called me at her office to talk and, actually, wanted to criticise me. She presented herself as worried about the fact that parents were interfering and made such noise on issues that could be resolved by professionals. She basically wanted me to change my attitude towards parents and make them see that they can’t take part in decision-making.

(Head teacher 2)

According to other observations, examples of such backstage deals and bargains seemed to undermine the school’s progress, since they seemed to constrain community belonging and active agency. In spite of all this, as I noted, collaboration during exiting processes seemed to be a positive process of change, not least because it managed to create a more engaging dynamic within which more and diverse individuals learnt how to collaborate and pursue their own aspirations. More importantly, it set the basis for future engagements the following school year, even though there was an expected change in the school dynamic, considering that some school members were about to arrive at the school.

More arrivals

As in the previous years, the new dynamic pointed to the complexity of acting in more responsive ways that could support meaningful school improvement. It was evident that within a context of imposition there was limited space for active participation, leading most individuals to pursue more narrow purposes. Nevertheless, collaborative inquiry continued to create space for active agency, and, as before, formal leaders seemed to play an important role in shaping such processes in order to achieve change. However, getting actively involved in order to interrupt, speak up and engage in dialogue seemed to be particularly challenging in a context where decision-making was made at the top. Therefore, despite the notable progress of the research groups, the changes that occurred continued to remain small and fragile.
For example, after the students’ presentation of findings (see photograph 21), some new staff members expressed a concern about whether such initiatives from students could create a blame culture, or give rights to students and their parents to interfere. This required further reflection and, even though the students’ presentation was agreed as an exit strategy from the research, the group decided to proceed with one more round of interventions in order to give another opportunity to change within the new dynamic.

Interestingly, their engagement with school improvement presented stark similarities with the previous year, not least because the adults in the school seemed to be unable or unwilling to connect actively with their school improvement efforts. For instance, the student research group had a meeting with the new cantina caterer (see photograph 22) and, although they reached an agreement, this had to be abandoned again due to economic loses. As a response, the group decided to continue their campaign about healthy eating.

The evidence gathered from observations showed that change from different positions seemed to be fraught with difficulties. For example, the parent research group faced many difficulties within and outside the group dynamic. Membership instability led them to postpone constantly their presentation of findings. Additionally, their decision to hire a teacher for helping students with homework posed significant challenges, since parents had to confront issues that they were not used to, such as critical incidents with students.

Of course, all of this required further reflection and courage to find possible ways forward, instead of being passive and cynical. For example, rather than cancelling their presentation of findings, they organised a station for presenting their work during a parent-teacher evening (see photograph 23).
Moreover, as I noted, overcoming disengagement from the teachers’ position seemed to be problematic. Although teachers decided to continue their effort and gave a presentation to parents about homework, they still believed that they had limited chances to bring about change that could have a radical edge, considering their available means. It seemed that it was easier to give up, rather than to keep up with improvement. In this way, their effort was easily sidelined by arising and pressing issues. For example, the arrival of more political refugees at the school shifted attention to finding ways of making current arrangements work better, instead of questioning and transforming them.

Formal leaders appeared to play an important role in facilitating others to resolve constructively their differences and assume more active roles. For example, I observed how the inspector attempted again to patronise the head teacher in order to terminate the work of the parent research group. On the other hand, the head teacher played an important role in mediating positively the status and power of the inspector, since she was able to defend and protect the parents’ work.

In understanding how the new dynamic developed for another half year, this was not so much about identifying the reproduction of certain patterns but rather an acknowledgement that unique individuals were involved in particular circumstances, and made choices within the constraints. Whether or not they managed to bring about positive change, this has implications for making sense of how to move thinking and practice within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus. In the next section, I consider in further the implications of my study, with respect to the particularity of the individuals and their unique circumstances.

**Summary**

This chapter described how a new school dynamic, formed within the arrivals, alignment and departures of school members, emerged during the third and a half year of the study. This seemed to offer possibilities for a more positive process of change, not least because collaboration from different positions, whilst also being a teacher-led initiative, managed to bring, to some extent at least, productive improvement. The research groups, instead of being passive and cynical about change, struggled to fulfil their aspirations, and bring about
meaningful change. Here, the use of methodological tools appeared to be particularly useful in enabling their active and critical participation.

Nonetheless, creating or finding the spaces in order to make their voice heard was troubling, not least because of an absence of authority at the system level. Once again, this pointed to the roles of formal leaders, especially the head teacher who could support and enable such active inquiry within the school. The fact, though, that the head appeared to be trapped in her working conditions created further ambiguities. Under these conditions, bringing meaningful change required a deeper process of questioning and reflective thinking, whereas taking radical actions required a lot of courage and entailed major risks.

Within this dynamic, the teacher research group appeared to be interested in changing the less threatening aspects of their situation with parents, since their effort lacked an authentic involvement, given that parents remained subordinated in decision-making, and also teachers maintained their passive position in regards to the politics of schooling. Similarly, what students aspired had to be in negotiation with adults who, in some cases, appeared unable or unwilling to take into account their voice seriously. On the other hand, whilst being less reliant on organisational and hierarchical structures, parents appeared more willing to take risky decisions, and this enabled them to pursue change in more radical ways.

Although change remained small and fragile, collaboration, as a teacher-led inquiry, managed to bring diverse individuals and from different positions closer to more shared concerns, and enabled their active participation. This pointed to the potential of school-based inquiries, supported and facilitated by teachers, to enable positive change from within, even within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus.

Succinctly, in this section of the thesis, I described and begun to analyse how school change and development was managed within one primary school in Cyprus over a period of three and a half years, where, as a teacher in this school, I also sought to explore the potential of radical collegiality through school-based research and the development of collaborative inquiry.
The account of the school demonstrates that within policy constraints and structured hierarchy there seems to be limited space for active engagement with the politics of schooling. However, the dynamic created, through the arrivals, alignment and departures of diverse individuals, seemed to entail some potential for productive agency when those involved were given opportunities and supported by professionals in order to collaborate and shape decision-making towards shared ideals. This can be seen as the strength of this research, since it throws considerable light on the tensions and complexities in relation to the potential power of radical collegiality to overcome barriers to participation and progress.

The next part of the thesis looks more closely at these issues in order to provide insights into how school change can be achieved within such a challenging educational context, such as Cyprus. In particular, it focuses attention on the barriers that need to be overcome and draws out the implications for leadership practices that seem to make space for productive participation and change.
PART 3

Achieving school change, addressing complexity

Introduction

In Part 1 of this thesis, I indicated that within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus, there seems to be limited space for productive engagement with the politics of schooling. Rather, the emphasis is on delivering and implementing centrally-directed policy agendas. As I have argued, such an approach seems to discourage agency and participation, not least because it assumes that all can and should follow the national policy agenda, regardless of local conditions and human capacities. On the other hand, experiences from elsewhere suggest more engaging models, based on a belief that real change is unlikely to occur unless those within schools are enabled to have and get an agency. This assisted my thinking in arguing that radical collegiality can create space for such positive developments within a particular policy context that can also form the basis for further questioning and transformation.

While drawing on the idea of radical collegiality, I theorised my position as a teacher researcher conducting research in her own school, with an essentially transformative aspiration. In so doing, I developed the argument that teacher-led collaborative inquiry as a research strategy can enrich and deepen any understandings gained, not least because knowledge is multi-perspective and enabling, and can, therefore, provide valuable insights in relation to the potential of radical collegiality to encourage change in schools. However, while working on the ground my research roles and changing stances, I also explained how I developed a research design that could facilitate the development of collaborative inquiry as a model for fostering change in a trustworthy way.

In Part 2, I sought to describe and analyse how my school managed processes of change over a period of three and a half years. It was noted that, although space occurred within the arrivals, alignments and departures of various stakeholders, in reality, within a context of imposition, where staff turnover is also enforced annually, this left limited space for active
participation and positive change. On the other hand, the development of collaborative inquiry, as a teacher-led initiative, offered some possibilities for a more positive process of change, not least because it created space to include and enable diverse individuals, newcomer and established members, with various potentials and powers, to collaborate and challenge the taken-for-granted.

Now, in Part 3, I reflect on these experiences in more detail in order to offer an understanding of how school change can be achieved within the Cypriot education system, which, as in many other countries, is highly directive and unsupportive to bottom-up approaches to change. In particular, Chapter 8 looks more closely at the barriers faced by diverse individuals in order to reveal the factors that limited agency from bringing about positive change at the personal, interpersonal and political levels. It argues that overcoming barriers to participation and progress requires politics of voice and active representation. This, in turn, draws attention to the potential power of radical collegiality to move a school and a system towards the development of more engaging alternatives.

Chapter 9 reflects further on these findings, and considers the implications of the study in order to suggest possible ways forward within the Cypriot centralised education system. This analysis builds on the argument that an approach to change that is school-driven and based on inquiries, facilitated by forms of leadership that are more participatory and radically collegial, can create space for productive interrogation and action. All of this has implications for the roles of formal leaders, and also the wider policy-making and policy-makers, given that active participation from different levels is unlikely to occur without the structures that can support such developments. Finally, Chapter 10 considers the wider implications of the study for those in other contexts who wish to work towards radical collegiality and the development of more democratic projects.
CHAPTER 8

Overcoming barriers to participation and progress

Introduction

In this chapter, I look more closely at the barriers faced by diverse individuals at the personal, interpersonal and political levels in order to consider possibilities for improving school life productively. Firstly, I examine the factors that seemed to hinder individual growth from different positions (i.e. staff, parents and students) and, then, relate this analysis to the struggles of the collective in improving school life and achieving school change. At the same time, this analysis leads me to consider my role as a teacher researcher, facilitating processes into collaboration and inquiry from different positions.

As I will demonstrate, finding a voice, while collaborating with others to find and make present their own voice, cannot be controlled or easily enhanced, particularly within a policy context that discourages such engagements. This points to the roles of formal school leaders, especially head teachers, who can legitimate and authorise decisions that advance such wider and active participation within their schools. I therefore argue that overcoming barriers to participation and progress within a highly directive policy framework, such as Cyprus, is likely to involve the development of different forms of politics, one that promotes voice and active representation. All of this points to the potential of radical collegial relationships to move forward thinking and practice within a school and a system.

Politics of voice and active representation

In Part 2, I demonstrated how successive dynamics of destabilisation in school life, formed within imposed hierarchies and agendas, seemed to create the conditions for withdrawal and passivity, instead of generating new possibilities with the arrivals, alignments and departures of various stakeholders. It seemed that the politics used by individuals were narrowly defined, and articulated according to self-interest and gaze. From this point of view, stagnation seemed to dominate school life.
On the other hand, collaboration, as a teacher-led inquiry, managed to bring an alteration to the school dynamic in a positive way, not least because it facilitated diverse individuals, regardless of status and power, to come together and get engaged with the politics of schooling in a meaningful way. In this sense, interpersonal growth seemed to enhance personal growth and facilitate political action. This, however, appeared to be particularly challenging in the Cypriot policy context, mainly because of an absence of authority at the system level for such initiatives. This pointed to the roles of formal leaders, especially the head teacher who as a key authority figure in the school could authorise and facilitate such engagements.

As I have shown, moving towards such radical ways of working and learning was not easy within a context of imposition and successive changes in the school dynamic. It was evident that, despite the effort and the notable progress of collaboration, change remained fragile and, in some cases, narrowly pursued. There also remained a deep ambiguity in relation to the outcomes of such processes, given that some social groups were more able to make their voices heard, whereas others struggled for recognition, or seemed unwilling to make present their aspirations in the wider policy-making.

In spite of this, the progress that was achieved pointed to the potential of collaborative inquiry, as a teacher-led process, in bringing about, to some extent at least, productive change from different positions. Such an inquiry, as I have demonstrated, entailed complex processes of decision-making in order to find possible ways forward within the constraints. In other words, it necessitated the development of different forms of politics that emphasised the importance of enabling voice and active representation, simply because without the active participation of formal leaders, with more or less formal authority, collaboration from different positions was unlikely to occur and become a positive process of improvement.

All of this supports the argument developed in Chapter 2 suggesting that moving towards radical collegiality can create the conditions for productive interrogation and participation within a particular policy context, not least because the school gets closer to the genuine engagements of the “learning community” (Fielding, 2006), or the “pedagogically engaged school” (Smyth, 2007). In such contexts, professionals, regardless of power and status,
engage not only with each other, but also with the localised complexity of voices in reciprocal processes of learning in order to shape decision-making towards owned and shared aspirations. This kind of micropolitics guards against the possibility of narrowing down decision-making into policy implementation. Rather, the emphasis is on development framed within the aspirations of an inclusive community. On this view, those within schools are given resources and opportunities to become policy-makers in their contexts (Ozga, 2000), such that “alternative improvement strategies can be developed” (Raffo and Gunter, 2008, p.403) that can disrupt and transform narrowly defined agendas, not just within a school, but also within a system.

Therefore, the kinds of practices that can facilitate radical collegiality to emerge are both manifestations and contributors to a democratic way of life, and, as I have argued, school-based inquiries can provide space for reviewing thinking and practice in such ways, not least because these can be based on dialogue, reciprocity and participation, essential to the development of more democratic agendas. Whether or not such transformations take place can help to identify the barriers that need to be overcome, and also the leadership practices that seem supportive of exploring ways to overcome such barriers.

The following analysis takes into account these considerations in order to reveal what seemed to hinder the localised complexity of voices (i.e. staff, parents, students) from becoming active agents in their school, before collaborating (personal level), while collaborating (interpersonal level), and when attempting to bring about change (political level). This analysis focuses attention on the kinds of politics that constrained or enabled individuals to overcome barriers to participation and progress. Furthermore, it offers a means of understanding how school change can be achieved within centralised education systems facing similar situations or aspirations. In this respect, I focus on common themes, whilst always attempting to respect the uniqueness of individual experience.

**The staff in the struggle for improving school life**

The heads and teachers in this study appeared to be trapped in their imposed working conditions, as the dominance of hierarchy and the pressure to deliver centrally-directed change seemed to close down the spaces for active engagement with the politics of schooling. Moving, therefore, from a position of despair and disengagement to a position of
informed judgement and political action was far from easy. The politics used by staff reveal the barriers that prevented them from assuming more active roles at the personal, interpersonal and political levels.

**The politics of the individual**

Being nurtured in a culture of servitude, where imposed agendas and policies had to be met, regardless of their worth, staff seemed to be discouraged from being critical or creative with their new working relationships. For example, both newcomers and established members felt lonely in dealing with the everyday complexity of schooling, but there was not any mobilisation in addressing this common concern as a collective. In this way, entering, participating or exiting a school community was experienced as another formality.

This sense of loneliness was further influenced by the fact that the national policies on staff mobility and staffing of schools seemed to favour self-interest and serendipity, instead of enabling productive participation. As I have demonstrated, every year there was an expected but significant change in staff, leaving limited space for long-term or meaningful engagements. As a result, staff appeared reactive rather than active to the new dynamics developed. This led them, in most cases, to adopt dysfunctional strategies when coping with change in the workplace, where for example there were some staff who saw their engagement with the school as another formality rather than as an opportunity for reinvention. There were also some other staff who saw their engagement with the school as being episodic and not as one of joining in a particular community with its own history, possibilities and challenges.

Initially, it was noted that socialisation processes were formed according to particular interests. For example, established members were often interested in protecting the status quo, whereas newcomers focused on how to gain benefits and recognition. All of this entailed a lot of bargains and withdrawals that, in my view, did not permit some interests to be considered as more shared. As a result, the development of a common agenda seemed utopian, particularly within a policy context that, in most respects, seemed to discourage staff from cooperating, building trust and learning from each other.
While inevitably socialisation processes seemed to be constraining, the alignment of newcomers and established members was also fraught with difficulties. It was clear that the staff, being familiar with frequent changes in membership and policy imposition, had developed dispositions that prevented them from participating meaningfully with their new working relationships. Sometimes, they appeared cynical and resistant to change of any kind, especially within a school which they saw as demanding and beyond change. It was noted, too, that, throughout the years of the study, most staff showed compliance to proposed changes, but without getting actively involved. For example, during the first year of the study, the teachers complied with the head’s suggestion to implement the improvement programme running in the school, but their involvement remained at a largely superficial level.

In the same way, exiting processes seemed to constrain active agency, as these involved mixed emotions that created a form of withdrawal from decision-making. For example, it was not easy for some staff to abandon what was a friendly climate in the staff room, but most of them were pleased with their departure, since they felt overwhelmed working in the particular school. Moreover, despite the fact that all teachers saw their working experience at the particular school as rewarding, there was not any planning or consideration of how to address barriers to progress using all the wisdom that had been gained through shared experiences.

This sense of disengagement was further intensified by the frequent changes in headship. On the one hand, I saw how the staff’s exclusion from policy-making at the school and wider policy level created a reliance on authority and, in particular, on head teachers, who were seen as key figures for helping the school to move forward and enabling others to do so. On the other hand, this was problematic, as headship changes seemed to require the investment of sufficient but important time in learning how to work together in resolving uncertainty and disagreement. It seemed that, even when the best intentions were there, this was unlikely to occur.

For example, with the arrival of the second head teacher there was, as I have described, a change of emphasis from control to professional freedom. My feeling was that this helped
some teachers to improve their capacity to respond to situations using their professional judgement. Early on, this was experienced as a source of stress and overwork, and only later on as being beneficial and rewarding. Nonetheless, there remained a few teachers who saw the new head teacher as being oppressive throughout their stay and, in most cases, were seeking to move away. At the same time, those teachers who welcomed this new professional freedom felt enabled to pursue their aspirations, but there was usually limited time and space to do so. In this sense, frequent changes in staff seemed to constrain the development of more engaging relationships within which learning from difference and different styles of working could be given space to become a force of improvement.

On the other hand, from the heads’ perspectives, holding a formal leadership position, without the freedom to become successful and enable others to do so, was a challenge. This seemed to constrain their agency from reframing it into more productive ways. Indeed, the heads in this study appeared to be vulnerable towards imposed hierarchical and organisational structures. It seemed that their professional autonomy was narrowed down to a focus on implementing policies, rather than developing and changing policies. So, for example, I have explained how difficult it was for both heads to go against the decisions of the inspector, or to develop their own improvement agendas. Under these conditions, what they saw as good decisions seemed to be risky, since this usually implied that they needed to manoeuvre policies in order to find or create spaces for such decisions to be actualised. For instance, I saw how the first head decided to register all the bilingual learners, even those who did not need extra support, in order to gain extra support teaching hours for the school.

Moreover, frequent and prominent changes in staff membership seemed to constrain the heads from sustaining the momentum of their leadership efforts, and being viewed as an integral part of the school. In particular, the first head, given her limited time within the school, felt that she lacked the space and time to challenge what was experienced as being oppressive. Instead, she concentrated her attention in making the school work efficiently. Likewise, the second head also felt that she had limited opportunities to involve staff in school improvement processes, not least because of her time-consuming socialisation processes and forthcoming changes in staff. As a response, she encouraged professional freedom in order to facilitate change, but with limited response. What seemed to be more
problematic was the fact that such time constraints managed to change the professional approach of the first head teacher, who saw control as the only means of coping with the demands of her position.

Furthermore, although being privileged with authority and expertise, the heads still were faced with tensions arising from what the staff or the rest of the school community were used to doing. Clearly, in this context, the idea of the maintenance/development dilemma, referred to chapter 2, was a key challenge to be addressed and, within successive dynamics of destabilisation, this left limited space for questioning and change. In particular, both heads believed that building trust and establishing good relationships, while avoiding conflicts and disagreements, could help them to retain a respectful status among their staff and, perhaps, eventually bring about change. Adopting such people-friendly approaches within successive membership changes ensured the maintenance of the status quo, since there was lack of time and will to advocate different positions about issues of concern. As a result, any effort to redirect practice towards improvement seemed to be a lonely and, usually, neglected business. For example, it was noted that the efforts of both heads to involve teachers in decision-making were unsuccessful, and this remained largely unchallenged, mainly because the heads did not want to disturb the friendly climate in the staff room.

In addition, the heads’ imposed organisational roles also seemed to close down the spaces for meaningful participation. In particular, their daily work and job responsibilities, along with arising and troublesome issues, distracted them from focusing on their leadership roles. It was noted, too, that they invested much of their time and energy in dealing with issues created by bureaucracy and problematic student behaviour. Moreover, matters regarding safety, well-being and standard of equipment appeared on their daily agenda.

It was also evident that the context of the school posed significant challenges to their leadership roles, mainly because making a fair decision, within a school that served such diverse student population, and with members of the staff who felt discomfort in such a challenging context, was not an easy task. For example, I saw how the second head struggled to change damaging views about the school by showing empathy, and mediating power and policies in a positive way, so that the teachers could feel more comfortable with
their working conditions, instead of being intimidated or stressed by their everyday complexity.

In this context, the heads were also faced with problems regarding staffing, given that the teachers were assigned to the school and not selected. Therefore, they needed to make sure that they all fitted in and performed well, despite the fact that some were not ready, or willing, to do so in the way that the heads aspired. Thus, for example, both heads explained how difficult it was to work with some teachers who were viewed by the District Education Office as needing closer surveillance. Nonetheless, all of this created the pressure to be always in control, which usually led to feelings of being overworked and emotional stress. For example, in her effort to make the school work efficiently, the first head used much of her personal time and was relieved when, eventually, she was assigned to a different school.

In summary, then, the heads in this study appeared to experience paradoxical and demanding roles, and successive changes in school life seemed to add further ambiguities and uncertainties. This led them to address the maintenance/development dilemma in what I came to see as a predictable manner. On the one hand, they needed to make sure that the school worked efficiently and effectively according to standards and policy agendas. On the other hand, they needed to respond to others’ expectations and capacities, so that cooperation and collaboration could be enabled, even though there was limited time and space to do so. All of this focused most of their attention on maintenance activities, such as finding ways of making the school work more efficiently on a daily basis, regardless of what they aspired to, or were capable of doing. It seemed that holding a senior position, without the structures that could support their leadership roles, was unlikely to lead them to focus on development work, where for example they could explore alternative ways of working and learning, as well as new autonomies and capacities.

In my view, all of this put at stake the heads’ credibility and status. In particular, my impression was that, within a context of imposition and passivity, heads appeared to have limited opportunities to change factors that involved taken-for-granted assumptions, or enable others to do so collectively or individually. Therefore, despite their apparent status, they were perceived by their staff members as having little or no capacity to bring about
significant changes within their school. However, this dynamic of disengagement was challenged, albeit in a limited way, through the efforts of the teacher research group, as they attempted to collaborate in order to bring about meaningful change.

*The politics of the collective*

It was evident that the efforts of the teacher research group to improve school life by working closer with parents managed to bring a positive change in the school dynamic, not least because the group and rest of the staff got closer to the fulfilment of shared concerns, despite the barriers. This involved the development of politics that aimed to promote voice and active representation, so that the members of the research group could present their views and be taken into account seriously among other similar or more powerful voices. Their efforts, though, were fraught with challenges, as it was not easy to develop a group dynamic towards radical collegiality within a context of imposition and enforced staff changes.

Initially, it was noted that the lack of space for such initiatives constrained the teacher research group from collaborating and getting actively involved. Indeed, their aspirations had to be pursued aside their everyday work and the school’s priorities. At the same time, they needed to balance with the demands of their limited time within the school and personal strengths and capacities. For example, the group needed to ensure that their efforts could be continued, despite any membership instability, as departing and arriving members usually needed time to adjust to change in the workplace.

This was further challenged by the fact that members of the group felt discouraged by an everyday complexity that seemed unbearable and not workable, not least because imposed policy agendas had to be met, regardless of their worth, and there was limited space for active local decision-making. In this way, change was seen as ambiguous, too demanding and without any recognition, whereas radical change was viewed, by and large, as impossible and beyond their obligations and power. For example, as a newcomer member of the group explained, during the third year of the study:

I feel as if there is a hole and we have fallen in, and I fall deeper… but we try, we have moved some things forward. It is difficult here for so many reasons… the minute I feel that I am moving forwards, something else occurs and I go
backwards…sometimes I don’t know what’s the meaning of all this (the research)...I am not sure that we could do anything else or better, given our circumstances and the means we have available in our hands.

(Teacher 19)

In this way, the teachers of the research group appeared to be defensive of their privileges and unwilling to take risky decisions that could help them to bring about radical change. This was strengthened by the fact that collaboration made more visible their vulnerabilities within and outside the group. So, for example, there were some members who felt that the effort could contribute to further criticism of their work, or that, without any authority in such initiatives, there were limited opportunities for them to introduce significant changes.

The way that the formal leaders of the school connected with the group’s efforts played an important role in enabling or limiting their agency. Specifically, the head teacher mediated policies and manoeuvred for spaces, so that the group could implement their initiation of change. For example, she allowed time during staff meetings for discussion of findings and progress. More importantly, she authorised the inclusion of the improvement in the school’s practices. On the other hand, the involvement of the inspector was seen in most respects as disabling, given that a culture of servitude was imposed, which seemed to discourage teachers from collaborating and developing their own agendas.

Within this school dynamic, the teacher research group appeared more interested in changing less threatening aspects, such as keeping parents informed and inviting them to attend presentations. Of course, all of this required vigilant reflexivity in order to enable teachers to reach a deeper understanding of their situation and pursue more radical forms of change. At one level, this implied that they needed to overcome their own unjust practices and vulnerabilities, so that a more powerful presence of their voice could be enabled. At another level, this assumed that they needed to gain legitimacy among the rest of the staff and powerful others, so that conflicts and mistrust could be resolved productively. In other words, reciprocity and learning from difference needed to be enhanced at all levels of participation.
The use of methodological tools and, in particular, the use of the research toolkit and case study reports, proved to be particularly helpful in moving thinking and practice forward. As I explained in Part 2, evidence was collected and scrutinised through repeated cycles of action and reflection. In this way, knowledge and practices were constantly refined and reworked. For example, after reflecting on the progress of collaboration, members of the group felt that designing interventions at the school level could help to restore reciprocity within the school, as they could gain legitimacy among their colleagues and all parents. This approach was also seen as more effective in resolving ambiguity, considering that some members of the group felt too uncomfortable in implementing such initiatives in their classroom.

More importantly, the generation of context-specific knowledge seemed to facilitate the inclusion of newcomers, since it gave them access to local knowledge, and created space for constructive engagement. As one newcomer member of the group explained, during the third year of the study:

This (working closer with parents) was always in my mind and at first I was very reluctant about how we would be able to accomplish it with all those stuff we have to do. Now, I feel more confident and, with every chance, and now as a school, we try to accommodate it; make it happen, and it wouldn’t be possible if we didn’t participate in the way we do. Of course, you have most of the responsibility, and I believe that a lot of things could be done differently and more people could get involved, if some were not that resistant. Anyway, we work with what we have, and we try our best.

(Teacher 18)

By the same token, the generation of local knowledge appeared to stimulate opportunities for the development of a shared agenda. For example, the fact that the progress of the group was openly scrutinised among the rest of the staff created space for interaction between newcomers and established members, leading to the inclusion of the process in the school’s practices. However, the inclusion of the process was not just a simple matter of handing over, where the rest of the staff could participate without having to change, or get engaged
with change. Instead, it meant that they all needed to get involved with the questioning of the structures that gave its rise, and participate as full members.

All of this entailed a complex process of decision-making. For example, the group needed to allow time for the staff to align and realign their interests, so that a shared agenda could be developed. On the other hand, the group had to confront compliance and unproductive arrivals, since some newcomers anticipated that they would be moving to another school, and were not interested in change. In addition, there were some other teachers who did not share similar concerns, and saw the effort as simply involving yet more overwork. All of this implied that decisions had to be taken even when there was not total agreement.

Despite these difficulties, such engagements seemed to create space for activism and volunteerism. For example, there was the case of the one deputy head who, although reluctant at first, connected to our research purposes and volunteered to help, not only during her time at the school, but also after her retirement. In this sense, interpersonal growth seemed to enable personal growth in more radical ways.

Meanwhile, as a facilitator of the teachers’ effort, I saw bringing about radical change, as an important issue, instead of changing the less threatening. In my view, the way most of the staff connected with the idea of change narrowed the potential of collaboration into its technical aspects. It seemed that the effort was more about the exchange and sharing of knowledge, and less about the transformation of knowledge and practice. More importantly, it seemed that some of the teachers were more concerned to maintain their powers over the agency of parents rather than transforming it, as parents were given stereotypical roles, such as attending and helping and not questioning or changing. In this sense, the staff needed to acknowledge that their efforts focused mostly on what seemed like “cosmetic” purposes, since there was only an apparent improvement of school’s relationships with parents. Staff, though, appeared defensive of their privileges and uncomfortable with the idea of bringing radical change within formalised hierarchical and organisational structures.

The politics of change

It seemed to me that the politics for collaborating lacked the criticality and confidence needed for bringing about radical change. As I have indicated, teachers usually felt
vulnerable in making their views visible among other powerful voices, and also appeared unwilling to renegotiate their powers.

It was evident too that the teachers’ marginalised position in the wider policy-making created such identities and dispositions that discouraged them from making their voice heard in public spaces. Even when opportunities were offered to make present their views, teachers seemed to prefer the maintenance of their neutral and passive position, where, for example, they could achieve some changes but not in radical ways. So, for instance, the case study report in the hands of staff, although important in making visible their views for research purposes, was not identified as a vehicle for influencing wider policy-making, or engaging into critical questioning and action with other voices.

Within this dynamic, teachers appeared unwilling to negotiate their powers, given that this could possibly entail unconstructive criticism from those in more powerful positions. As a result, when I challenged their sense of success, the colleagues saw the change already taking place as more than satisfactory, considering the agency of the particular parents and their available authority means. They also believed that radical change could put them in a difficult position with the inspector, given that this assumed as well the renegotiation of her powers and privileges. Moreover, the fact that the head teacher did not support radical change, because she also wanted to avoid any possible criticism from superiors, was an important factor in shaping decision-making towards that direction. Presumably, then, without the head’s active involvement to take a courageous decision, chances for radical change are always likely to be elusive. It can be argued, therefore, that the politics of voice and active representation that occurred in this particular case did not manage to drive collaboration towards a form of radical collegiality that could give space for the development of more engaging alternatives and widely shared agendas.

Despite these difficulties, collaboration did manage to shake, to some extent at least, staff’s insularity regarding change, and redirect efforts towards the possibility of improvement. Such mobilisation took them closer to more shared and responsible deliberations. In this context, the head teacher, even within the constraints, played an important role in facilitating collaboration. However, it was not easy for the teacher research group to move into new
roles and autonomies without any authority in such initiatives, or at least a willingness and
courage to renegotiate their powers. Nonetheless, this subtle passivity and political boundary
drawing was becoming more visible with the political activity of the other research groups,
as, on certain occasions, they appeared powerful enough to bring about mutually beneficial
change.

**The parents in the struggle for improving school life**

As I explained in Part 2, parents were largely marginalised in relation to decision-making
within the school, despite the fact that every year there was a new school dynamic, which
could also imply new possibilities and potentials. This contributed significantly to their
passive and neutral position. However, collaboration, being teacher-supported, seemed to
create some space for constructive participation. I will argue that the politics used from the
parents’ position made more visible the barriers that constrained their agency at the personal,
interpersonal and political levels.

*The politics of the individual*

As I have explained, parents acted mainly as passive recipients of schooling, since those in
authority positions denied them any opportunity to act otherwise. Even when opportunities
were offered to overcome their status of subordination in decision-making, these were
ritualised into particular procedures. For example, the Parent Association, which was
responsible for determining the views of the parents, in reality, appeared to have little
influence on decisions and processes regarding school’s policies, or even wider educational
issues. Rather, its role was narrowed to supporting the school’s activities, as these were
defined by the head teacher and staff. This meant that dialogue and meaningful participation
were blocked by the barriers that were created and sustained by the heads and staff, who, as I
have demonstrated, were not particularly interested in the views of parents.

Clearly, the socioeconomic and ethnic background of the parents was seen by most staff as
an impediment to the school’s progress. Indeed, there was a concern that parents lacked the
social and political networks that could advance the progress of the school. For example,
both heads saw the assignment of certain teachers to the school as a form of patronage by the
District Education Office. This, they believed, was facilitated by the fact that parents lacked
the information and acquaintances needed that could help them to defend the interests of the school, and become more effective in attaining their demands.

Such deficit views were reinforced when parents failed to perform their prescribed roles. On the other hand, there was little debate regarding whether parents, given their cultural or socioeconomic resources (e.g. working hours, educational background, language barriers), could actually respond to the demands placed on them, or whether parents might hold different and possibly contrasting views about their given roles. For example, some parents in the research group wanted to get actively involved with the politics of schooling but not through the Parent Association or parent-teacher meetings, since these were seen as limited in scope. For that reason, they saw my research as more promising. Either way, it was evident that staff had little interest in getting such information, and parents continue to have a largely passive position.

What was more problematic, however, was the fact that those parents from diverse ethnic and extreme low socioeconomic backgrounds seemed to be missing from the school’s activities, since, as far I could see, there was little effort from the school or the rest of the parents to get them involved. For example, the Parent Association was not representative of the parent population, as it consisted only of native Greek-Cypriot parents. In this way, any possibility to make visible their views among other similar voices seemed to be very difficult. What created further ambiguities was the fact that the staff saw these parents as unable to support the school’s work, and placed even lower demands on them, rather than providing them with opportunities to get involved.

Indeed, there was little evidence to suggest that all parents were supported or encouraged to participate in the school’s activities, since a unified approach to parental involvement was followed. This seemed to advantage the cultural and socioeconomic background of certain parents. For example, the Parent Association and senior staff of the school based their communication and activities on the assumption that all parents can read and understand the native language, or that, at least, their children would explain it to them.
Within this dynamic, the chances for the development of a shared agenda seemed to be limited, as the school endorsed behaviours that discouraged parental involvement, and also parents accepted and maintained having a passive position. The lack of resources that could help them to communicate and make felt their own aspirations about schooling seemed to contribute significantly to their sense of being passive. In this way, the experiences and knowledge of parents were considered as marginal and not essential in transforming the school’s practices. Nevertheless, collaboration from the parents’ position managed to open up some space for meaningful engagements.

*The politics of the collective*

The collaborative efforts of the parent research group to support foreign and newcomer families of the school pointed to potential that exists within mutual reciprocal processes of learning in bringing about meaningful change. In so doing, the group needed not only to be able to work together and assume more active roles, but also to gain legitimacy among other similar or more powerful voices. All of this required politics of voice and active representation.

Thus, for example, in working as a group, this meant that the parents needed to learn how to make present their voice and assume more active roles. Moreover, they had to learn how to make space and include new members, who might have different ideas, capacities, or could be more self-motivated, rather than more principle-concerned. At the same time, this assumed that they needed to be able to cope with their other engagements, or associations that were not supportive of their critical and expressive self, such as with their participation in the Parent Association.

By and large, the lack of authority in such initiatives made it more difficult for the group to find the time and space to collaborate. My feeling was that time constraints discouraged some parents from disputing or defending. For example, given the time limit of the group’s meetings, there were times that the voices of some parents were louder, more passionate and committed and, therefore, more able to influence their peers towards their aspirations. Similarly, the lack of space, where parents could engage in critical discussion with other voices and shape decision-making, entailed the risk of rendering collaboration into multi-task and not voice, as change could happen but without changing oppressive power structures.
All of this implied that the individual voices, as well as the group’s collective voice, needed to be present or fairly represented in dialogues for school improvement.

Consequently, while their effort was a teacher-led initiative, I needed to manoeuvre for such spaces where all members could participate fully and with confidence in order to overcome these barriers, and make claims and judgements that honoured their way of thinking and capacity of arguing not only as individuals, but also as members of the group and the school. The methodological tools of photo-elicitation and photo-voice seemed to be particularly helpful in this respect. For example, the development of parents’ first poster and the presentation of findings seemed to facilitate their active participation, as they had to defend their perspectives amongst their peers and the wider community. At the same time, the knowledge generated raised awareness and introduced an element of criticality as they searched for possible ways to move forward.

I also noted that the generation and use of this contextual knowledge seemed to play an important role in the development of a shared responsibility. Sharing and reflecting on such knowledge seemed to create the conditions for constructive engagements with the wider community and their other associations. So, for example, one member of the group felt confident enough to defend the group’s views at the Parent Association in order to gain their trust and support.

Whilst these developments were important in facilitating collaboration, reaching a shared agreement was not an easy process. As I have shown, this usually involved a lot of temporal settlements, disagreements, alliances, emotions of despair and, even, schisms from the group. For example, this was the case when one member abandoned the group after a year and a half of collaboration, because she disagreed with the direction that the effort was taking. Her exit caused a period of turbulence within the group dynamic, and this necessitated further reflection on how to addresses productively such internal instability and disagreement.

In this respect, reflection processes seemed to create space for productive engagements with the politics of schooling, since these were not only about problem-solving, but also about “problem-posing” (Smyth, 1985; Gunter, 2001) in finding better ways of learning, taking
action and confronting consequences in partnership. For example, such reflective thinking led to an understanding that poor parent-teacher relationships needed to be improved as a means of gaining legitimacy within the school. At one level, this implied that I needed to facilitate the opening of those spaces that were, in a way, closed to parents but open to me. So, for example, I communicated the progress of the group with the head and staff. Additionally, I tried to bridge their efforts with the efforts of the teacher research group, which, in my view, were similar in scope, since both were seeking to transform parents’ agency.

At another level, this implied that powerful others needed to connect actively with the group’s effort as a means of opening those spaces that were closed to me, such as authorising their decisions and presence as a group. Certainly, without the head’s strong support and authorisation of their work, much of what they aspired to would have remained at an abstract level. This was particularly experienced when the inspector appeared to undermine their efforts, and the head teacher defended and supported their work. However, this also assumed that their efforts were mediated by the head’s willingness, ability or vulnerabilities to enable their effort. For example, as I have explained, there were times that some interventions were delayed or abandoned, because the head was caught up in bureaucracy, did not agree, or was not willing to take risks. Of course, all this necessitated more reflexive responses, so that parents could continue their efforts, despite the barriers they were facing.

Arguably, becoming more aware of and addressing reflectively the factors that limited their agency within and outside the group dynamic facilitated the parent research group to collaborate towards shared concerns. This required different forms of politics, as the spaces for such constructive engagements seemed to be totally missing and, therefore, needed to be initiated or managed reflectively and practically. Within this dynamic, the parent research group appeared confident enough to engage with the politics of schooling in more radical ways.

The politics of change

The politics used for bringing about positive change from the parents’ position required high levels of participation and representation, as their subordinated position in decision-making assumed that their effort had to be in negotiation with other powerful adults who, in some
cases, appeared unwilling to listen to their views, or unable to support and enable their active agency.

In many respects, having no authority in decision-making, but engaging with powerful others in order to attain it, seemed to be risky. For example, the idea of launching a summer school posed significant challenges, since this required a lot of effort and skills in convincing other powerful adults at the Ministry to authorise it. At the same time, this involved a lot of uncertainties, given that the parents of the research group, as well as the Ministry, were not familiar with such initiatives, and this resulted in dealing with a lot of bureaucratic procedures. More importantly, any failure could mean the termination of their effort, and the exposure of those who endorsed it. Therefore, the parents had to use their best available means (e.g. my role as a facilitator, support from the two heads, help from the retired deputy head) to manage constructively these tensions.

Yet, this intervention was the most striking example of their commitment to bring about positive change, and lead to what I saw as courageous decisions. Reflecting on the whole progress of the parent research group, I wrote in my reflexive journal, towards the end of June 2008:

All these backstage deals and exchanges are the essence of an organisation and basically inform thinking and action. Taking decisions on who gets what and, not on how individuals can reconcile their differences through dialogue, is problematic. I think I was fortunate enough to have in the research group of parents, members who placed a premium on school’s interests. Making themselves visible in this way helped the valorisation of their effort from staff in times of despair, and also enhanced their self-respect and confidence. In fact, I was surprised with their progress, since I remembered how stiff and confused they were when this research started, and now they have come to a situation where they are not afraid or intimidated by authority to have a say and defend it with their own means. Of course, this is not as promising as it sounds, since injustices of disrespect, misrecognition and exploitation are not easy to
overcome. It’s an arena of struggle, but at least their struggle is more visible than ever.

It was evident that their collaborative efforts managed not only to supplement, complicate and confuse, but also to enhance and enrich the everyday complexity in ways that could be seen as mutually beneficial. As a result, the group was able to restore in a way their subordinated status in decision-making, and gain respect from other interested parties. For example, the parent research group was seen by most staff as having better chances of making tensions public, and influencing decision-making towards the school’s interests. Of course, there were reasons for careful optimism here, not least because the teachers continued to sustain their powers over parents, in spite of the group’s notable progress and constructive involvement.

Nevertheless, the move towards political action showed parents’ weaknesses in collaborating as a group without my presence. Indeed, the amount of trust placed on me created a strong dependence on my role in holding the group together and facilitating their agency. This was reasonable enough, since our long-standing collaboration created such a dynamic which was not easy to abandon or erase. On the other hand, their efforts, while being teacher-supported, meant both the closing and opening of public spaces in which parents could get involved in dialogue with other similar or more powerful voices. For example, as a teacher of the school, I could open some spaces that were closed to parents, such as with the head teacher and staff, whereas parents, while being less reliant on hierarchical and organisational structures, could open some other spaces that were closed to me, such as with the inspector or the Ministry. This, though, required careful consideration as to how to interrelate constructively those spaces.

By and large, the constructive opening and interrelating of public spaces pointed to the reciprocal nature of pedagogical relationships in alleviating school unhappiness and achieving school change. For example, the group engaged with the voices of those in the dominant discourse, such as the policy-makers at the Ministry, and was able to influence decision-making towards their aspirations, implying that their concerns were becoming more
widely shared. In this sense, meaningful change was unlikely to occur without a deeper commitment to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

It seems, therefore, that what helped the group to gain legitimacy was their principled concern for democratic dialogue and public scrutiny, so that their aspirations could become widely shared and pursued. This proved to be particularly important, as it enabled the constructive use of power and power resources. For example, the head teacher saw the effort of the group as communally shared and, therefore, continued to support and encourage their work, despite the attempts of the inspector to undermine it.

Of course, not all shared the group’s aspirations, or were able to do so all the time. It was noted, for example, that some interventions could not be authorised by the head, such as the idea of hiring a teacher to help students with their homework. Dealing with all these tensions and contradictions, required further reflection and more critical responses in order to reach at a better understanding of the situation and develop other more engaging alternatives. Thus, for example, the idea of organising a summer school was arrived at from this kind of politics, since this assumed that all the negotiations could take place directly between them and the Ministry which appeared more interested in listening to their voice and could authorise their decisions. At the same time, this intervention was seen as more inclusive and socially responsive to the particularities of the school and its social complex.

Despite the notable progress of the parent research group, change continued to remain fragile, not least because of a lack of authority at the system level. As I will explain, this also acted as a great barrier in regards to the inclusion of student voice in school improvement processes.

The students in the struggle for improving school life

The students seemed to be the most vulnerable social group in relation to processes of decision-making within the school, since adults dominated decision making. As a result, students appeared to be passive bearers of schooling, since there was lack of space and will to get them engaged with critical questioning and change. This, though, was challenged with the engagement of the student research group in school improvement processes. The
following analysis reflects on the factors that seemed to hinder students from participating as full members in the particular school at the personal, interpersonal and political levels.

The politics of the individual

It seemed that the pressures placed on students by a narrowly defined and articulated policy agenda, too easily discouraged them from seeing themselves as having a full part in the school. In particular, formal or book-based knowledge seemed to dominate school life, blocking any space for alternatives, since students were expected to comply with this experience, rather than to question and transform it creatively and meaningfully. It was evident too that such experiences of schooling seemed to be seen to be quite irrelevant and remote from their real world experiences. For example, as raised in their poster, vandalism in the school was an ensuing and unresolved problem, but it was not discussed in their classrooms. It was also true that some students seemed to experience one reality at home that was more inviting, while living a different one at the school that they found to be more hostile and estranged. This was the case, for example, with the situation in the toilets, which was seen by most students as an unwelcome place, implying that the adults in the school had no interest in their well-being.

In addition, the fact that the school adopted unified approaches for the inclusion of diverse students seemed to create further ambiguities. It appeared that most students lacked the cultural resources and support which could enable them to participate accordingly to the standards placed on them. For example, political refugees were expected to adjust to the demands of schooling, even though they had to deal with survival issues. Of course, as I have demonstrated, most teachers acknowledged the difficulties that their students were encountering, but instead of trying to get them engaged, they lowered their expectations. In this way, it was possible that the students who most needed support to become involved in schooling were more likely to be ignored and excluded.

Moreover, the lack of public spaces where students might engage in critical questioning with their peers and adults limited any possibility of them assuming more active roles. For example, student councils were controlled and managed by the staff, and, as a result, student participation seemed minimal or tokenistic.
In other words, the adults in the school, as well as the wider policy context, involved students in ways that required them to accommodate to the status quo. Successive dynamics of change in school life did not permit the opening of those spaces that could enable their active participation. Adults maintained their powers over them, blocking any dialogue and reciprocity in decision-making. It can be argued, then, that students suffered from the politics of schooling in the sense that they were denied any opportunity to contribute to the development of their school, and become active agents. Collaboration, though, seemed to facilitate the opening of some spaces for meaningful student participation.

The politics of the collective

The efforts of the student research group to increase their sense of feeling safe within the school showed the potential and limits of student voice in enabling change in the particular school. Whilst student collaboration, as a teacher-led process, managed to include students in school improvement, still there were reasons for careful optimism, given that their aspirations had to be in negotiation with other powerful adults who were not necessarily interested or always able to take into account their voice. In this way, driving collaboration forward from the students’ position required different forms of politics of voice and active representation.

Initially, I found that the students had little understanding of their role in shaping decisions. As with the parent research group, the use of the methodological tools helped them in most respects to make explicit their individual views, and raise awareness within the school community. This helped them to gain legitimacy amongst their peers and staff. At the same time, it facilitated their active and critical participation. As an established student commented when reflecting on their second poster:

I have observed that both posters are similar, and I can say that I haven’t noticed any big changes from one poster to the other. Most of the things have remained the same or got worse. I think this is because, as we said in the poster, we didn’t really try as hard as we could, and also grown-ups didn’t help us as they should. On the other hand, we can’t go and do as we like… again others might not want to listen, such as in the playground where nothing stays in place, especially in
the afternoon because of vandalism... even the police can’t stop them… we need
to think…

(Student 16)

Indeed, while engaging with the generation and use of context-specific knowledge, the
student research group became more interested in their school’s progress. Nonetheless,
learning how to express their individual concerns, while engaging into conversation with
their peers in order to agree and decide on actions, was not a straightforward process. For
example, there were times when some students showed disrespect towards the views of their
peers, whereas other students were more interested in imposing their views, rather than
listening to the different perspectives. Additionally, time constraints seemed to discourage a
few students from taking active roles, such as disputing and defending.

Bearing in mind that all of this could limit student contributions, or lead to the exclusion of
some individual voices, I needed to manoeuvre for or create spaces where all students of the
group could participate as full members. For example, while developing their posters, I was
mindful to increase the possibilities of a democratic and meaningful dialogue. Therefore, I
included photographs or wording from all students. In this way, they could all elaborate and
debate on their views among their peers and teachers.

I found that democratic processes and reflective dialogues were promising ways of enabling
the group to collaborate and pursue change in partnership. Nonetheless, this was troubling
within a school that accommodated students to the status quo, instead of enabling their active
participation. So, for example, the group needed to learn how to deal with tokenistic
participation in other engagements, such as within their classes or with the school council,
which was in contrast to their roles within the research group. Moreover, being used to
imposition, the students were faced with periods of stagnation when they could not make a
decision and where they relied on me for answers. Equally, some teachers viewed students’
involvement in decision-making as noise, instead of voice, whereas a parent saw students’
effort as beyond their responsibilities and appeared to undermine it.
It is here that the head teacher, with her status as a school leader, played an important role in mediating positively such unpleasant reactions, and supporting the students’ work. This also meant that students got access to power resources (e.g. authority, communication with the parent body), which enabled them to gain legitimacy and become more effective with their decisions. Of course, this also implied that their efforts were mediated by the head’s powers or willingness to endorse their decisions. So, for example, I have described how the decision of the group to improve the cantina in terms of healthy eating was endorsed by the head teacher, but was not supported when the caterer decided to abandon the agreement with the students. Here, the pressures placed on the head in relation to the school’s reputation and her personal relationship with the caterer did not allow her to connect actively with their effort, in this respect.

Despite these difficulties, it was evident that collaboration enabled the student research group to get actively involved with school improvement processes, even though the spaces to do so were controlled by powerful adults. All of this pointed to the role of politics of voice and active representation for fostering student collaboration towards the possibility of bringing about positive change within their school.

*The politics of change*

The student research group was more than willing and enthusiastic to address wider issues and policies regarding safety in order to initiate positive change. Yet, their efforts had to be in negotiation with adults who in most respects did not manage to drive their effort into radical change. Thus, the politics used for bringing meaningful change were fragmented, and their initiation of change looked particularly fragile.

It was noted that the students’ effort, while being a teacher-led initiative, was constraining, considering that much of their negotiations had to take place with me. And of course, I was also subject to power structures and relations. This required vigorous reflexivity in facilitating students to decide on change that could enable the inclusion of their voice in school improvement processes, without feeling discouraged about potential barriers or negative outcomes. Whilst finding spaces for making student views visible was important, the lack of authority for such initiatives made it even more difficult for their voice to be taken into account seriously. As Fielding (2007, p.308) argues, there is “almost complete absence
of the development of public spaces where the voices of young people can engage in conversation with each other and with adults who make up the internal and external community of the school”.

Indeed, although their efforts did make more visible the inconsistencies of policies and practices, the way that most adults connected with their aspirations was problematic. So, for example, the cantina caterer disrupted their effort when she abandoned her agreement with the students because of economic loses. Of course, this led to more reflexive responses in resolving such tensions and contradictions, by making judgements and channelling frustration and anger into alternatives that could have an effect. For example, after the incident with the caterer, instead of abandoning their efforts, the students decided to promote a campaign about healthy eating.

In reality, finding alternatives was important, since this reinforced the students’ confidence and sense of belongingness, especially when some adults and peers were actually willing to listen and take into account their voice more seriously. At the same time, having a defensive framework raised their awareness about the world, and also helped them to become knowledgeable social agents, who not just learn and develop within the boundaries of formalised procedures and knowledge, but also question, make judgements and decide on collective actions that may lead to positive change. So, for example, the fact that the head teacher appeared to be a good listener facilitated their active involvement. This became increasingly important, as it enabled students to feel more confident about their project and increased their sense of control over of change, especially in times of turbulence or stagnation. Thus, for example, the head authorised decisions which could put her in a difficult position, and this helped the students to feel valued and respected, and also become more responsible about the outcomes they wanted to achieve.

It seemed, therefore, that student voice, in order to be taken into account seriously, required a form of politics created and supported by powerful adults. This suggests that student collaboration could not survive and become a positive force of improvement within the Cypriot context without the presence of a driving force, and also the connectedness of their
head teacher. All of this had implications for my roles in mobilising collaboration towards radical collegiality.

**The teacher researcher in the struggle for improving school life**

In coming to terms with stagnation in almost every aspect of the school life and limited opportunities in decision-making, I struggled as a teacher researcher to find the space for my own voice to be heard. In the same way, I found it difficult to engage in dialogue with other voices in order to both understand and improve school life. All of this pointed to the importance of focusing on politics that could facilitate voice and active representation.

**The imperative for politics of voice and active representation**

As I argued in Chapters 3 and 4, in my efforts to conduct “thoughtful research” (Nixon et al., 2003), I sought to overcome any barriers through repeated cycles of action and reflection, where the politics of doing school-based research were considered thoroughly and challenged productively. In particular, problem-posing approaches helped me in dealing critically and creatively with ethical dilemmas and difficult questions about equality, representation and fairness. Furthermore, my reflective practices helped me in coping with the reality that what I thought and did was always provisional and partial, and that a critical questioning of the taken-for-granted, based on forms of dialogue and public scrutiny, could lead to the development of different and more enabling alternatives.

Consequently, my main concern was not so much about functional threats related to, for example, membership changes or policy imposition, but more about how to enable active participation within membership changes and a context of imposition. Therefore, I saw it as being important to act fairly and open in order to gain participants’ trust. Foremost, my privileged position as a teacher in the school proved to be helpful, since, as far as I could tell, I was trusted that I would act with professional judgement and integrity. This did not mean that trust or respect were to be taken-for-granted.

In practice, I sought to avoid any harm or exposure by being watchful and respectful of participants’ worldviews and capacities. This enabled me to value the importance of the particularity of individual voice, show empathy to individual concerns and act fairly. In this way, I hoped that participants could combine, mix and develop their potentials in order to
create a more powerful presence of their voice as a group and members of that group. So, for example, my collaboration with the research groups brought together adults and children with diverse experience, age, ethnicity and capabilities. This assumed that I needed to understand individual experiences and take into account their cultural and socioeconomic background in order to facilitate their active engagement and collaboration. For example, a member of the parent research group was a Muslim and, therefore, some days for their meetings had to be avoided for religious reasons.

At the same time, as Griffiths (2003, p.102) argues, successful partnerships recognise the differences of individuals, where potential barriers arising from various imbalances can be resolved through “conviviality, reciprocity and a huge range of forms of communication”, as “relationships are mortal… and need care and nurturing over that time”. So, for example, before the groups’ meetings, time was allowed for informal talk and discussion, and also the fact that participants got a copy of their poster created anticipation for the next one. All of this was aimed to prevent fatigue and create caring bonds with the participants, so that collaboration could be sustained and enhanced.

While collaborating with diverse social groups, I also learnt to understand and respect human experience from particular positions. Therefore, I sought to honour and draw on different voices when attempting to challenge the status quo. For example, when the parent and student research groups appeared to be unaware about some policies, I acknowledged the need to help them overcome their misunderstandings, so that they could be taken into account seriously, without being viewed as ignorant or less capable. At the same time, I needed to show respect to their concerns and aspirations in improving school life, and not to impose my own views.

However, through my attempts to be a good listener, I became more aware of participants’ vulnerabilities and who had more influence on others. In this way, I was privileged with knowledge that could help me set the course of the research, especially when things looked difficult. This required reflexivity in avoiding imposition of any kind, and rather protecting participants’ intellectual freedom. It also implied that the voices of participants needed to be fairly present and represented in school improvement processes. Such an inquiry proved to
be a complex process, as power could not be equally shared not only within the partnership, but also within formal hierarchies.

This meant that I needed to learn how to manage uncomfortable situations and emotions, which could potentially jeopardise my research, or, indeed, my career as a teacher. For example, as I was shouldering the responsibility of the project, there were times that I felt that I had to confront examples of disrespect, manipulation and patronage. Moreover, there were other times that I felt lonely and alienated, especially when some saw certain interventions as unwelcome. For example, when the parent research group decided to gather clothes, food and stationery for those in need, some teachers and parents got disturbed, since they believed that such interventions could bring more such families into the school. In addition, my research inquiry was infused with feelings of guilt when I could not respond to my roles as I was anticipating, or that I was criticising the contributions of the participants and their happiness.

All of this necessitated vigorous reflexivity in dealing constructively with such barriers. At one level, I was anticipating that I would be able to enhance my own and participants’ self-respect and criticality, so that we could be able to express ourselves with confidence, speak up and take action in changing what was experienced as being oppressive. This required sensitivity and reflexivity during data negotiation in order not to discourage but to enable active participation. So, for example, when the teacher research group felt satisfied with their initiation of change, I had to comply with their sense of success, despite my own beliefs. In this way, I was aiming to retain a focus on improvement that could possibly lead to more radical ways of thinking and acting.

At another level, though, I needed to find the spaces, or create the conditions, where the voices of the social research groups (i.e. staff, parents, students) could be taken into account seriously, since these spaces seemed to be totally absent. This assumed that they needed to gain legitimacy amongst powerful others within and beyond the school community. All of this required a lot of courage and more reflexive and critical responses in order not to abandon their effort, or pursue change in a superficial way, but to become more aware of and creatively responsive to the dangers that limited their agency. In this way, it was hoped that
they could gain the trust and respect needed so that powerful others could connect actively with their struggles for school improvement. So, for example, this proved to be important when the General Manager was aware of the parents’ work and, therefore, was more willing to take into account their views.

Consequently, collaboration as a teacher-led initiative, and as an approach to school improvement, needed to be initiated and managed reflectively and practically within its specific context, so that a more robust sense of collaboration could be enabled. This involved a principled and value-laden effort in finding a voice, while engaging into dialogue with others to find their own. The conditions for such engagements proved to be problematic, as the spaces to do so seemed to be closed down by a policy context that discouraged such initiatives in so many ways. Once again, this pointed to the roles of formal leaders, who, while being privileged with more formal power and expertise, could authorise and facilitate such positive processes into change. For example, without the active support of the second head teacher, collaborative inquiry from different positions was unlikely to occur and become a positive process of change.

In other words, as I came to see my role and the roles of other professionals, it seemed that overcoming barriers to participation and progress required a form of politics that emphasised on voice and active representation, not least because holding a formal leadership position is not simply a functional position because of custom and practice within a unitary organisation, where imposed agendas have to be met, regardless of their worth and local conditions. Rather, it is more about policy-making, in socially and politically complex situations, aimed to advance local people as active and radical agents in their schools.

This shifts attention to the potential of radical collegiality within education, where professionals, such as teachers and head teachers, can engage not only with each other, but also with the localised complexity of voices (i.e. parents, students) in meaningful dialogues and constructive engagements for the realisation of shared ideals. Arguably, moving towards radical collegiality can foster a more positive approach to school change, even within a centralised and highly directive education system, not least because school improvement processes become more radically engaging, which uphold the development of a democratic
way of life. As Fielding (1999, p.29) argues, “radical collegiality, thus, becomes the dynamic of the dialogic school, a school whose boundaries and practices are not the prisoner of place and time, but rather the agent of an increasingly inclusive community”. In the next chapter, I reflect further on these issues in order to consider how radical collegiality can be enhanced and become a force for achieving school change within the Cypriot policy context. This also leads me to explore further the leadership practices that seemed to facilitate such developments to take place.

**Summary**

This chapter has thrown light on the barriers faced by different groups in their effort to bring about change within a particular primary school in Cyprus. It demonstrated how the dominance of hierarchy and the pressure to deliver centrally directed change seemed to create the conditions for passivity and disengagement. At the same time, the annual enforcement of staff turnover seemed to add further barriers to participation. Under these conditions, there seemed to be limited space or will for the development of a shared agenda that could be seen as mutually beneficial.

On the other hand, it was evident that the development of collaborative inquiry, with the use of methodological tools, helped to make more visible the barriers to participation from particular locations. It also enabled the active engagement not only of those involved, but also of others who found meaning in such processes of change. This was important, as it pointed to the potential of teacher-led inquiries in facilitating diverse individuals to find ways between the constraints in order to work as a collective towards a better status of school life.

There are, therefore, reasons for cautious optimism here, even though, despite their promising outcomes, such processes remained fragile, since hierarchy and policy pressures remained as dominant factors. It was noted that collaboration, in some cases, involved radical questioning and action, whereas, in others, it only led to a refinement of existing practices. In addition, there was a concern that engagement with change from different positions had an uneven and limited effect, given that some social groups managed to achieve a more powerful presence of their voice, whereas others remained silenced, struggled for recognition, or appeared unwilling to pursue radical change. Nonetheless, progress within the collaborative inquiry provided space for further reflection and the development of
more engaging alternatives. Of course, it was acknowledged that the lack of authority for such initiatives at the system level posed significant challenges in ensuring the presence of these groups in decision-making.

All of this points to the important potential contributions of formal leaders, particularly head teachers, who with their authority and professional status, sometimes played an important role in enabling and supporting meaningful participation. It was noted that the way that formal leaders pursued their aspirations, or connected with the struggles of others at the school level, shaped in most respects change processes. However, within the fragmented policy context of Cyprus, formal leaders seemed to be locked, and as a result, change from particular standpoints appeared to be fraught with difficulties.

Nevertheless, the progress that was achieved also points to the potential of teacher-led inquiries in creating the conditions for more participatory and engaging alternatives, despite the constraints that might exist. However, as I have indicated, moving towards more radical ways of working and learning cannot be controlled or easily enhanced, not least because these are constructed within relationships, under certain conditions and in context of power differences. Thus, they are highly political and socially complex. I argue, therefore, that addressing barriers to participation and progress is likely to require the development of different forms of politics that encourage voice and active representation to be enacted within a school’s micro-political situations. In this sense, leadership practices that facilitate such developments become more participatory and radically collegial. In saying this, I am not arguing for a romantic view of localism, or change as outcome orientated, but rather the use of collective and communal action as a means of changing oppressive and dominant practices. In the next chapter, I step closer to these issues in order to consider how these barriers can be overcome. In this way, I position the findings of my study alongside others who have carried out related research.
CHAPTER 9

Achieving school change

Introduction

In Part 2 of this thesis, I demonstrated how diverse groups with various potentials and powers responded to the challenge of bringing about positive improvements within their school. As I explained in the previous chapter, taking into account these differences seriously in order to enable those involved to have active and collective participation requires a different form of politics, one that emphasises voice and active representation, initiated and managed reflectively by professionals. In other words, this revealed the potential to encourage moves towards radical collegiality, even within the centralised education system of Cyprus.

In this chapter, I step closer to these issues, drawing on the lived experiences and struggles of the people in the school in order to consider how school change might be achieved within such a centralised education system. This leads me to develop a model for fostering school change. This model supports a school-driven approach to change, and focuses on factors that, in my view, bear on the development of more local and democratic agendas. It therefore reinforces the importance of developing leadership practices that are more participatory and radically collegial as a means of creating and sustaining space for such productive interrogation and action.

Achieving school change: the case of a centralised education system

This thesis addresses one of the most important challenges facing education systems all over the world: how can school change be achieved? More specifically, it offers insights into whether within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus, there is space for productive participation and positive improvements, given that its policy context assumes a standardised and highly directive approach to change.

My findings contribute to this debate, building on the argument I developed in Chapter 2, that policy imposition and structured hierarchy can act as great barriers to progress and participation, not least because diversity and agency are not enabled. Rather, they are
homogenised in order to achieve similar outcomes. On the other hand, as this study shows, a school-driven approach to change, based on notions of inquiry and collaboration, can encourage possibilities for positive change and sustained improvement. However, resolving the diversity of interests that are present in order to make decisions that contribute to the progress of the school in a productive way is likely to involve, as I argued in the previous chapter, different forms of politics of voice and active representation. Therefore, my study also confirms that overcoming possible barriers to participation and progress is a highly political and socially complex process.

As I have demonstrated, it is not easy for individuals with various potentials and powers to resolve constructively their differences, particularly within a policy context that discourages democratic and active participation, and seems indifferent to the development of local agendas. Nevertheless, and despite these difficulties, there is considerable evidence to suggest that space can be created when those at the school level are facilitated to collaborate in order to shape decision-making towards shared concerns and aspirations. This supports the views of others who have argued for greater interdependence among schools and individuals through collaborative inquiry, not least because such inquiry processes have the potential to overcome barriers to participation and progress through constructivist dialogue and learning (e.g. Ainscow and West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2003; Noffke, 2009; Reason and Bradbury, 2006; Street and Temperley, 2005).

As I argued in Chapter 2, an alternative approach to school change is not so much about the development of a learning organisation where relationships are unified, and where participants only learn and develop within the boundaries of the organisation and for the fulfilment of organisational gains. Instead, it is more about the development of what Fielding (2006) sees as a “learning community”, where those within the school are enabled to get engaged with the politics of schooling constructively and creatively.

Unlike those researchers who adopt a functional, if not an exclusionary, approach to school improvement and change (e.g. Creemers, 2002; Fullan, 2001; 2006; 2008; 2009; 2010; Harris, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2008; Harris and Lambert, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; 2007; Sammons et al., 1995; Stoll and Fink, 1996), the findings of this study lead me to propose a
challenge to much of the dominant thinking in the field. That is to say that school improvement should not be about controlling or coercing individuals to respond according to organisational procedures and criteria in raising organisational performance and delivering imposed agendas. Rather, it should be more about how to create and sustain the conditions for active and democratic participation, not least because, without the active involvement of those at the school level, schools might end up becoming disinterested places where only some voices count, while others remain silenced and marginalised. On this view, the school is more likely to become a “moving school” (Rosenholtz, 1989), as it constantly seeks to find ways to address barriers to participation and progress.

Research about teacher voice (e.g. Elliott, 2007; Carr and Kemmis, 1986), student voice (e.g. Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2006; Thomson and Gunter, 2006; 2007), parent voice (e.g. Ranson et al., 2003; Tveit, 2009; Vincent and Martin, 1999), and also community voice (e.g. Baun, 2003; Ranson, 2000; Reeb, 2006) confirms the argument of Ainscow and West (2006) that schools and their communities have an untapped potential to improve themselves, which is usually ignored within systemic improvement strategies. The findings of this study support this literature, and reveal the potential of the diversity of voices in changing the taken-for-granted. Consequently, I agree with those researchers who view school improvement as part of a democratic project, where other and more engaging alternatives can be developed (e.g. Apple, 2006: Fielding, 2006; Griffiths, 2003; MacBeath, 2006; Raffo and Gunter, 2008; Ranson, 2000; Thomson and Gunter, 2007; Thomson and Sanders, 2010).

However, this study also adds to these ideas, in that I have demonstrated that a more democratic approach to school improvement requires a form of leadership that, according to Foster (1986, p.185), “must be critically educative: it cannot only look at the conditions in which we live, but it also must decide how to change them”, and thus is more of “a worthy and worthwhile template for collaborative growth and inquiry” (Gronn, 2009, p.317). This draws attention to the potential of radical collegiality to foster the conditions for positive change, since it assumes dialogue, inclusiveness and agency. Such an approach to leadership, as suggested in Chapter 2, requires mutual learning processes within which professionals engage with others in order to realise higher social ideals.
Thus, I disagree with those authors who locate leadership in the hands of particular individuals (e.g. heads, senior teachers), within formal hierarchies and unitary organisations, and also consider it as a mechanism for driving up organisational performance, translated as effective local practice (e.g. Chapman and Harris, 2004; Day et al., 2001; Day et al., 2011; Fink, 2010; Hargreaves and Fink, 2004; 2006; Harris, 2004; 2006; Harris and Lambert, 2003; Lambert, 2003; 2005; Leithwood and Day, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2010; Muijs and Harris, 2007; Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2003; Schein, 1992). Such elitist and homogenised approaches to leadership, as supported by some other researchers, have little relevance in real time activity and are contested (e.g. Barker, 2007; Bell et al., 2003; Gronn, 1996; Gunter, 2001; Hoyle and Wallace, 2005; O’Shaughnessy, 2007; Rayner and Gunter, 2005) not least because they neglect to take into account what I have found, that individuals and their contexts are in a dynamic relationship and, therefore, leadership cannot be controlled or easily enhanced. Rather, my findings lead me to agree with those researchers who also view leadership as a communal and democratic process that goes beyond the boundaries of the school and challenges the presence of hierarchy in order to enable the most affected by schooling to have a say over decisions that affect them and take action (e.g. Foster, 1986; 1989a; 1989b; 2004; Gunter, 2001; 2005a; Woods, 2004).

All of this leads me to suggest a model for reaching such high levels of participation and achieving positive school change within the Cypriot centralised education system. Theorising grounded understandings, I argue, can help to inform the local struggles of people, whilst, at the same time, offering a critique of the context. I further argue that such theorisation can be helpful for those who face similar concerns elsewhere, or want to learn from difference.

**A model for achieving school change**

The model that I am proposing adopts a school-driven approach to school improvement, and provides insights into how school change can be achieved within a centralised educational system, such as Cyprus. It suggests a more democratic approach to change characterised by an agenda setting that is collaborative and radical collegial, not least because such arrangements are more likely, in terms of Ainscow et al. (2012), to interrupt and transform existing knowledge and practices. It follows, therefore, that the model suggests a change process that can be worked and reworked on the ground, informed by an institutional
framework that validates constructive dialogue and participation. At the same time, this
draws attention to the role of leadership in creating and sustaining such spaces so that those
at the school level can assume more active roles and develop their own agendas. Of course,
within the highly centralised and hierarchical system of Cyprus such developments are
unlikely to occur without the development of supportive policy frameworks and structures.

In particular, the model (see Diagram 3) focuses attention on factors that, in my view, can
enable schools to manage the challenge of bringing about change in more productive ways.
In so doing, it sets an agenda for action that is likely to challenge existing assumptions,
practices and relationships within a school. Consequently, its use requires the development
of leadership practices that can create space for inclusiveness, where diverse individuals from
a particular location can present their views and be taken into account seriously.

Diagram 3: A model for achieving school change

Inclusiveness, collaboration and inquiry
Is the diversity of voices facilitated to collaborate
in order to investigate and overcome barriers to progress?

Democratic responsibility
Is the diversity of voices fairly
represented in school improvement processes?

Local agendas
Is the diversity of voices enabled
to develop their own agendas to change?

Authority
Is the diversity of voices given space
in school improvement processes?

The implication of this is that the different voices (e.g. teachers, parents, students) that exist
within a school need to be enabled to become engaged with the politics of school
improvement in a meaningful way. Foremost, this means that overcoming possible barriers
and resolving the diversity of interests requires using notions of collaboration and inquiry, as
within such processes more engaging alternatives can be developed. On this view, the
politics of schooling become more participatory and radically engaging. This also suggests the development of local agendas, which are more about how to critique and transform policies and practices. Otherwise, it is likely that an oppressive status quo is only being refined and reformed, rather than radically transformed. However, enabling a democratic representation of voices in school improvement processes is unlikely to occur and be sustained unless it is given some authority at the system level, or at least the active participation of formal leaders who can legitimate decisions that promote and enable active agency from different levels. This also assumes that formal leaders take greater responsibility for the processes involved.

The model aims to identify opportunities to foster inclusive and active participation using notions of collaboration and inquiry. It assumes a change process that involves professionals, within and beyond the school, collaborating not only with each other, but also with the localised complexity of voices in order to investigate and overcome barriers to progress. All of this assumes the development of more participatory and radical collegial forms of leadership.

More importantly, the model allows contrasting of the experience of the Cypriot education system with that of other contexts as a means of learning from difference and “making the familiar strange” (Ball, 1995). It must be stressed, however, that this model does not imply a particular formula that can be used across schools or educational contexts. Rather, it offers a perspective that is principled and theoretically grounded, and which helps to better understand and not to control the everyday reality. Such an understanding can enable reflective thinking, so that taken-for-granted assumptions can be questioned and, where necessary, transformed creatively and, if possible, everyday. Therefore, the model should be of relevance to those who encounter similar situations in their schools, struggle for inclusive and active participation, or want to learn from difference. In what follows, I explain in more detail how these factors can facilitate positive school change.

Inclusiveness, collaboration and inquiry

A key finding of this research was the potential of voice from particular positions (i.e. teachers, parents, students) in challenging the taken-for-granted. As I have demonstrated, although the participation of diverse social groups in school improvement processes was
uneven, and their initiation of change remained fragile, there is evidence to suggest that collaborative inquiry enabled their active participation.

The first argument that I want to make here is that enabling voice from a particular location in change processes is important, mainly because it makes more visible the particularity of experience and barriers faced by individuals from their position in assuming more active roles. This can, as this study shows, point to the different forms of politics that need to be used in order to enable individuals from their position to become change agents, or, what Ozga (2000) envisions, policy-makers in their schools. So, for example, students experienced differently school life, and required different politics when attempting to change the taken-for-granted.

However, as I explained in Chapter 3, voice is not stable or unified. Inequalities and injustices exist amongst individuals, since they bring on stage different capacities and capabilities, and can draw from different power resources (e.g. hierarchy, tradition, expertise). By implication, therefore, individuals need to be facilitated to come together as equals in order to decide on action that can be mutually beneficial. In this way, the ambiguities of school life can be reduced, since the negotiation of powers and privileges can take place more openly, and decisions can be contested or disputed through dialogue and participation. As this study shows, forms of collaboration and inquiry seem to facilitate the opening of those spaces, where learning from difference can sometimes lead to new and more powerful partnerships of learning. Foremost, my findings suggest that collaborative inquiry can reduce the ambiguities and uncertainties created by successive dynamics of destabilisation in school life and unified approaches to schooling, given that it creates space for social interaction and productive engagements among diverse individuals with various potentials and powers, since the emphasis is on addressing common issues and concerns.

Clearly, as within the study, the use of appropriate methodological tools can play an important role in facilitating diverse individuals to collaborate and get engaged productively with the politics of school improvement, since they assume agency and participation. So, for example, the development of the posters or the case study reports created space for constructivist engagements among newcomers and established members not only from a
particular position, but also with the wider school community. This relates to what Bates (2006) argues, referred to in Chapter 2, that education should recognise diverse citizens as active agents, and thus must provide them with tools which can enable their active agency in influencing decisions towards the development of a just society.

Nonetheless, as I have demonstrated, relationships can become self-interested, dominating and oppressive and, as a result, reciprocity can be disrupted. It is here that the formal leaders within a school have an important role to play in enhancing the potential of collaboration and enabling differences amongst individuals to become a positive force of improvement. As I have found and argued throughout the study, this requires leadership practices that seek to develop a “pedagogic and interrogative voice” (Bernstein, 1990; Fielding, 2006) in promoting and sustaining reflective thinking, so that individuals can be enabled to engage with the politics of schooling as whole persons and develop as active agents. For example, I needed to ensure that all the individual voices of the research groups were heard and taken into account. It was hoped that in this way they could engage with confidence in conversation with their peers and other more powerful voices. At the same time, I needed to facilitate their active agency not only to express and defend their views as a group, but also to become aware of and transform the power structures that constrained their agency.

It was evident that voice presented to be forceful when power relations were recognised and challenged through critical questioning and collective action. It was noted, as I explained, that the progress of collaboration within the research groups occurred from a political awareness and a growing commitment that power structures can be transformed collectively, even when choices seem to be limited.

On the other hand, when voice lacks its interrogative tone, change might be limited in scope, such as with the efforts of the teacher research group. This confirms what I argued in Chapter 3, that real transformations are unlikely to occur without the critical questioning that can advance inquiry into political action. In this sense, becoming aware, without becoming politically active, can be limiting, as this might mean that existing practices are simply refined rather than transformed.
However, as this study demonstrates and is supported in the literature, the conditions for political activity can be problematic, since power is not easily abandoned or something to be negotiated (e.g. Griffiths, 2003; Gunter, 2001; Heywood, 2000; Vincent, 2003; Yeatman, 1994). For example, although teachers’ assumptions about their sense of success were challenged, this did not manage to mobilise their collaboration towards radical collegiality, since they appeared unwilling to negotiate their powers. At the same time, as discussed by others (e.g. Angus, 2006; Fielding, 2001; 2006; Gunter and Thomson, 2007), radical engagements, such as student voice (or also parent and teacher voice), might be exploitative and guided to increase organisational performance, masked as an organic diversity by the multiplicity of engagement and people-friendly behaviours.

All of this might suggest that voice needs to be linked, as also argued elsewhere (e.g. Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003; Griffiths, 2003; Gunter, 2005a; Vincent, 2003), with the wider picture and policy agenda as a means of restoring inequalities among different voices and creating better connections between them. Otherwise, it is likely that some voices might become self-gazet and uncritical, whereas some others might continue to be marginalised and silenced, despite the effort. Arguably, this requires leadership practices that can create the conditions for an organic interdependency between the variety of voices that exist within a school, where learning from difference and reciprocity can be enhanced beyond a single voice. As Smyth (2006a, p.282) explains, “we need spaces of leadership from which young people can speak back regarding what they consider to be important and valuable about their learning”.

It is here that, in my view, the diversity of voices needs space to engage into meaningful dialogue with each other, so that reciprocity and meaningful participation can be enhanced, instead of being controlled or suppressed. As this study shows, school-based inquiries can create space for such dialogic encounters and productive participation. For example, the research groups needed to enable others’ connectedness with their aspirations. This resulted in the creation of spaces for public dialogue, such as their presentation of findings, which served to facilitate reciprocal scrutiny, and the refinement of purposes and aspirations. In this way, a voiced concern could become a shared and communal concern, creating in this way a wider inquiry stance. This can be particularly important, since a diverse representation
of voices in school improvement might enclose the possibility of the constructive opening and interrelating of public spaces.

Of course, as I have demonstrated, such spaces need to be initiated and managed reflectively, since not all might be interested in listening to the diversity of voices, and those who might need to be adequately convinced. Therefore, formal leaders, especially head teachers, hold a key role in creating and sustaining such spaces, since without their active, if not courageous participation, these spaces are likely to close down. As within the study, the way that the head teacher connected with the struggles of the research groups for school improvement was an important factor in enabling their active agency and mobilising collaboration towards the potential of radical collegiality. Riehl (2000) takes a similar stance when she argues that school leaders need to be in position to foster new meanings about diversity, promote inclusive cultures and practices within their schools and build positive relationships between their schools and communities in order to respond to student diversity. In this way, formal leaders can be seen as using constructively their authority in response to “a relentless commitment to equity, voice and social justice” (ibid, p.71).

This shifts thinking away from limited metaphors, such as reform deliverers or policy implementers, towards other ways of thinking. It suggests that school leaders need to be able to find the “good sense” of policies (Gramsci, 1971; Lipman, 2004) and make decisions that foster inclusive and active participation within their schools. As Raffo and Gunter (2008, p.409) argue, a democratic approach to leadership is “about empowering disadvantaged groups to engage more fully with education and to control its direction in order to meet particular needs”. This is relevant to research which emphasises that the problematics of schooling should be addressed through educational leadership that promotes dialogue, reflexivity and collective action (e.g. Bates, 2006; Foster, 1986; 1989a; 1989b; 2004; Gunter, 2001; Lindle, 2004; Raffo and Gunter, 2008; Shields, 2004; Smyth, 2006a; 2006b; 2007). Presumably, then, schools need to be able to develop their own agendas, if such developments will take place.

**Local agendas**

As I have demonstrated, notions of the school as a unitary organisation, such as in the Cypriot educational context, where all must participate in the same way in order to achieve
similar results, has little meaning in the development of schools as learning communities. Equally, research from English speaking contexts reveals that a policy agenda of standards is exclusionary and partial, since it favours particular types of knowledge and engagement (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2006a; Ball, 2008; Gunter, 2001; 2005a; Vincent, 2003). Thus, it is likely that a decentralised notion of decision-making, one that addresses the particularities of schools and their social complex, has the potential to create and support the spaces for meaningful participation from particular positions.

That is to argue that schools in Cyprus need to operate more as “specific social institutions” (Ball, 2008), where local knowledge is valorised and transformed through processes of democratic participation and scrutiny, and not controlled or narrowed down to policy implementation. In this sense, the diversity of voices is considered essential in the creation and transformation of their school contexts. As Ranson (2000, p.266) argues, learning communities involve their citizens in “determining how their communities to be governed and changed”. It is possible, too, that decentralised decision-making can actually revitalise active participation from particular positions, rather than homogenising agency with standardised processes and outcomes. Moreover, it perhaps also means that, in order to prioritise their own needs and develop their own agendas, schools need to become more autonomous. However, as Gandin and Apple (2002) emphasise, the devolution of responsibility should be based on democratic participation and not on imposed criteria and regulations that might have no meaning or relevance to the particular school community.

As I have found and is argued by certain other authors, forms of collaboration and inquiry seem to strengthen democratic processes in respect to the emergence of local agendas and the development of a shared responsibility (e.g. Ainscow and West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2012; Gandin and Apple, 2002; Ranson, 2000). Gunter (2005a, p.107) explains that “knowledge production as research” enables a better and deeper understanding of the context and people, and this, in turn, can facilitate the development of locally determined agendas which are communally shared and widely pursued. The significance of this is that it might lead to differentiated and innovative practice, and also the emergence of radical forms of collaboration, which eventually can lead to an organic interdependency among the variety of voices in relation to the outcomes they want to achieve. So, for example, the parents’ idea to
organise a summer school was considered pioneer work and mobilised in most respects active participation from different levels.

As this study shows, formal leaders were seen as key figures in such social learning processes and transformation. The emphasis on this is that it has significant implications for their leadership roles within the school. This is likely to involve the development of collaborative arrangements within which formal leaders not only ensure that all voices are included and facilitated to participate as knowledgeable and change agents, but also engage with them in order to gain insider knowledge and legitimacy. It follows, then, that the formal leaders of a school, especially head teachers, need to be given opportunities to become more local in order to develop a deeper understanding of the context and be in position to prioritise local needs. This is related to research that argues for allowing sufficient time to school leaders in order to succeed in their new position within the school (Fink, 2000; 2010; Thomson, 2009). For example, I have documented how difficult it was for both heads to develop their own agendas, or to create teams and networks, given that national policies on staff mobility implied rapid changes in membership.

It is likely, then, that this possible collegial expression of leadership can offer an opportunity for resourcefulness and creativity in decision-making, while also facilitating critical and constructivist learning. So, for example, both the head teacher and the research groups were learning from each other how to pursue change in more constructive ways. As a result, this enabled each group to develop its own approach to change, which, in some cases, enabled more radical responses. This confirms, what I argued in Chapter 2, that a broader view of leadership is socially orientated and goes beyond narrowly defined organisational gains, not least because it seeks to enable those at the school level to address productively their own needs, rather than unified transformations.

While creating the conditions for local decision-making is vital for mobilising individuals to collaborate and develop their own agendas, Ainscow and Howes (2006) are concerned with the possibility that the space for reviewing thinking and practise in context might be interpreted and used for particular and, even, conflicting agendas. As within the study, the teacher research group maintained their powers over the agency of parents, despite the
notable progress of the parent research group. In this sense, context-dependent strategies might be viewed as drawing boundaries, in that they can be seen as excluding those who fall outside the categories of reciprocity and belonging. Furthermore, making local decisions might mean taking decisions that are intolerant or disrespectful to other communities. The implication of this is that a localised approach to school improvement might lead to the individualisation of issues, or even the polarisation of schools and their communities. In overcoming such barriers, I argue that individuals within and across different school communities need to be given authority at the system level, so that the diversity of voices and perspectives can gain, what Heywood (2000) calls, “legitimate power” and, therefore, not only are recognised as important in the development of their schools, but also are held accountable for their choices.

Authority

My view is that the politics of schooling might become more attractive to the localised complexity of voices, if individuals are given formal authority in respect to change processes within the school. This might suggest that the diversity of voices in school improvement processes needs to be supported with the development of supportive authority tools and policy directions that can encourage and sustain collective, if not radical participation. As this study illustrates, the lack of authority at the system level discouraged in many ways the research groups from collaborating and changing the taken-for-granted. Indeed, there were times when those in my study felt that they had limited chances to bring about radical change, or assume more active roles, even when opportunities were offered. It was also true that collaborative participation without any authority was used to serve particular interests, or, even, was rendered invisible by authoritative means. For example, the parent research group remained marginalised in decision-making, in spite of its notable progress.

It can be argued, therefore, that an authority status can encourage more and diverse individuals to participate in school improvement processes, given that it assumes that the particularity of experience and ideas is recognised and given legitimacy. Such a turn can, in my view, challenge the presence of superiority and dominant modes of engagement and knowledge, since it can create space for participation and dialogue in the use and production of knowledge. As Gunter (2005a, p.99) argues, the democratisation of knowledge encourages the development of teachers (or parents and students) as “public intellectuals” in
contesting and developing policies, and in this way learning is not functional and mechanistic but socially critical and liberating which can lead to the development of more engaging alternatives and better local agendas.

At the same time, an authority status can ensure a diverse representation of voices in school improvement processes that does not necessarily requires the presence of a driving force in initiating or sustaining it. For example, among the many challenges facing this research was that of finding time to collaborate, since there was a complete absence of space for such initiatives. This relates to research that argues for the institutionalisation of collaborative arrangements as part of a wider systemic strategy in order to become equitable (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2006a; 2006b; Ainscow and West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2012; Fielding, 2006; Gandin and Apple, 2002). So, for example, this might mean providing space for student or parent-led initiatives supported by professionals.

This also leads me to argue that giving an authority status to the diversity of voices in school improvement processes might require an approach that enhances the autonomy of individuals and their schools. For example, the parent research group was able to put into effect the idea of the summer school because parents appeared to be less reliant on hierarchical structures and bureaucratic procedures, and also their participation was on a voluntary basis. Here, the discussion was not so much about an agenda setting but more about the difference they wanted to make, without worrying so much about profits and losses, or the implementation of rules and procedures. It seems, therefore, that a more autonomous authority approach can help avoid the dangers of “contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves, 1994), as discussed in Chapter 2, according to which individuals are brought together on a temporary basis to achieve a particular purpose. Instead, it can facilitate a dynamic of “schools-within-schools” (Fielding, 2006) through which hierarchies can become less visible and more dialogic. As I noted, an absence of authority in such initiatives can lead to a reliance on hierarchy and top-down resolutions. So, for example, the development of collaborative inquiry needed to be authorised by the head teacher and not by the macro-politics of schooling.

Furthermore, it was evident that what helped the research groups to gain legitimacy was that of public scrutiny and open discussion of findings. The implication of this is that a diverse
representation of voices in school improvement should also require a form of formal accountability with an emphasis on productive dialogue and resolution. This, I argue, can enable individuals to become more thoughtful of their decisions and actions to be taken. So, for example, the fact that the teacher research group was unwilling to engage in dialogue with other voices constrained in most respects their improvement efforts. In the same way, engaging with different forms of public dialogue can facilitate more and diverse people to connect with local struggles for school improvement. At the same time, it might mean that other communities should be involved in such public dialogues, especially when some decisions and actions to be taken might affect them. In this way, improvement initiatives can be democratised by becoming more diverse and inclusive to the variety of perspectives that exist within and beyond a school.

It should be noted, though, that recognising the potential of the localised complexity of voices and creating the conditions for active participation does not necessarily mean that all will automatically become active agents in their school contexts, or that opportunities will not be dominated by some voices. It was evident that not all had the time, or were interested in collaborating. It was also true that not all those involved felt comfortable enough to challenge power structures.

By implication, therefore, a politics of voice in school improvement requires a politics of active representation as a means of ensuring that more and diverse individuals can be involved with the politics of change with and through their representatives. Here, Gronn’s (2000; 2003a) notion of distributed leadership helps to conceptualise the relationships between the different voices and their representatives as interdependent and reciprocal, not least because, as Thomson (2010, p.62) explains, “sharing change leadership shifts the ownership to those who are intended to carry it out. It ensures that change is designed incorporating the range of perspectives that exist in the school”. Therefore, the representative politics that I am arguing for does not imply that responsibility is devolved or concentrated in the hands of particular schools and their formal leaders. Rather, it is enhanced through democratic participation and public scrutiny.
Democratic responsibility

The principle of democratic responsibility, proposed here, is what Young (2000) defines as a process of “authorisation and accountability”. On this view, formal leaders not only ensure a fair representation of the localised complexity of voices at the micro- and macro-policy making, but also are held accountable for their choices. This suggests engaging relationships with the localised complexity of voices, as well as with other formal leaders at different levels. In other words, this is about moving towards a fuller sense of radical collegiality, as reciprocity and inclusiveness can be enhanced beyond the school level. What I am suggesting is the development of a much greater emphasis on local agendas through active representation (Stoker, 2006; Young, 2000). This, as I have already argued, means that formal leaders are not just policy implementers but policy-makers in enabling and facilitating those who they represent to assume similar roles and develop their own agendas.

It was noted, however, that the heads and teachers in this study, although formal leaders in their schools or classrooms, appeared to be locked, since they had little influence over wider policy-making. Moreover, imposed agendas made reflective thinking difficult, whereas rapid alterations in school life constrained their active participation. It seems, thus, that formal leaders are unlikely to succeed, without the structures that can support their leadership roles. I therefore argue that formal leaders, head teachers and teachers, need to be viewed and supported to become active agents not only within their school contexts, but also in the wider policy-making. As Vincent and Martin (1999) argue, fostering greater participation should address issues of cultural recognition and material redistribution.

It follows, then, that professionalism and professional autonomy should not be narrowed down just to policy implementation. As this study shows, when professionals attempt to develop more meaningful and communal relationships, then it is more likely that other and more engaging approaches to change can be developed. The underlying assumption is that, while holding a plurality of knowledge based on pedagogical values, professionals can offer a more holistic and not an integrating perspective on an issue, which can be improved and transformed through pedagogic relationships on behalf of and for those who they represent. As it is supported in the literature, educational professionalism can be the most significant
factor for the promotion of inclusive leadership practices (e.g. Angus, 2006; Fielding, 2006; Gunter, 2004; 2005a; Riehl, 2000; Shields, 2004; Smyth, 2006a; 2006b).

This also assumes that formal leaders need to be offered appropriate learning tools and opportunities which can enable and facilitate their active agency in critiquing and changing the taken-for-granted towards an inclusive learning community. As Schneider and Ingram (1997, p.95) explain:

…learning tools instigate doing things differently and deviation from past patterns is encouraged. Learning tools also differ from capacity building and other approaches in that learning implies decentralisation and empowerment rather than centralised authorities imposing their will.

In this respect, as within the study, school-based research, based on forms of collaboration and inquiry, was seen as a promising strategy in creating space for active participation from different levels. So, for example, collaborative inquiry and the use of methodological tools (e.g. case study reports, photo-voice) stimulated reflective thinking and active involvement from different positions, regardless of power. This can be an indication of how processes of collaboration and inquiry can facilitate formal leaders to develop themselves as active agents not just in a technical sense but in ways that enable them to engage in mutual learning processes and collective action. It was also noted that, while such reciprocal learning processes were further enhanced, formal leaders were more likely to develop as change agents in more constructive ways. So, for example, the head teacher was able to defend the parents’ work, despite the views of the inspector.

Likewise, work by Ainscow and colleagues shows how notions of school-to-school collaboration with an emphasis on inquiry and mutual critique can become “powerful levers” for change (e.g. Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow et al., 2006a; Ainscow and Fox, 2005; Ainscow and West, 2006; Ainscow et al., 2012). In my view, such learning opportunities can be particularly important in the context of Cyprus where schools are isolated and a one-solution-fits-all approach is usually followed, leading problems and issues to be individualised and pathologised, instead of being addressed in the wider policy-making. So, for example, the
arrival of political refugees was handled by the inspector, taking decisions on behalf of the school and other schools, rather than engaging into dialogue with them in order to resolve a common issue.

Nevertheless, creating the conditions for active representation requires an awareness of its limits. Thomson (2009), talking from the heads’ perspective, is insightful when she argues that the working lives of heads need closer attention as a means of creating the conditions for active headship participation and retention. This might mean that issues affecting the everyday work of different formal leaders, especially school leaders, such as workload, demanding and paradoxical roles, need to be considered, if representation politics is going to work. As suggested in the literature, reducing bureaucracy, sharing anxiety with critical friends or networks of leaders, and minimising damaging competition can be particularly helpful in this respect (e.g. Ainscow and West, 2006; Howes et al., 2004; Thomson, 2009).

Certainly, formal leaders are not neutral agents in their school contexts, as they bring on stage their own personal characteristics, idiosyncrasies and styles of working. For example, it is noted in the literature how the succession of head teachers can lead a school from success to stagnation, or how one head teacher might be successful in one school but unsuccessful in another (e.g. Barker, 2005; Fink, 2000; 2010; Thomson, 2009). As I have demonstrated, representative politics can be highly social and political, because one’s good representative can be another’s bad representative, and also formal leaders are unlikely to act similarly for the same decision-making. What this might mean in the context of Cyprus is that formal leaders should not be regulated by external and imposed criteria that only suppress professional autonomy and agency. Instead, they need to be held accountable by democratic criteria. So, for example, this might mean that school leaders should be elected or selected from those who they represent. The experience from countries, such as Spain (Bolivar and Moreno, 2006; Fink 2010), Portugal (Fink, 2010) and Porto Alegre in Brazil (Gandin and Apple, 2002; Myers 2008), shows how headship participatory elections can lead to an increased local participation and commitment, whereas my own experience of this is far more negative, leading to situations, where head teachers are unable to make routing decisions without consulting.
I therefore argue that being elected and not assigned has important implications for the work and roles of school leaders who, in this context, are selected and assigned by central authority, and, then, are rotated to schools depending on the needs of the system. As this study shows, this seems to leave limited space for productive local participation. Moreover, the fact that most teachers, at some point of their career, get promoted to be deputy heads and head teachers seems to create a rationale, where representative politics are unimportant for those who seek higher leadership positions. Consequently, I argue that a democratically elected (or selected) formal leader is closer to the conceptualisation of learning communities, since this implies that the different voices are given legitimacy by selecting their own representative who they feel that better fits with their aspirations and is able to defend their interests. At another level, this assumes that an elected (or selected) formal leader in a learning community gains legitimacy by enhancing others’ criticalities and capacities, so that they can judge who better serves their interests. In this way, formal leaders can be seen as using constructively their authority and professional status, while, at the same time, maintaining an ethical and competitive stance.

However, it is possible that democratic responsibility in the hands of various formal leaders can be elitist, since this might serve the interests of the few who historically had more power (e.g. policy-makers at the Ministry). Furthermore, as within the study, local agendas, no matter how well they are thought through, might be lost in the wider policy-making. For example, although the idea of the summer school was praised by the Ministry, and was seen by many citizens as an important step towards social cohesion, this did not manage to influence wider policy-making. Subsequently, it is difficult to know whose voices count, or how key decisions are arrived at in a network of formal leaders. All of this leads me to argue that formal leaders need to engage with critical questioning in actually changing the system and making it more democratic. This requires the development of leadership practices that can encourage productive interrogation and scrutiny at the system level.

As this study demonstrates and is argued in the literature, a critical questioning of the structures that limit agency requires courageous forms of leadership in not abandoning but becoming aware and finding possible ways forward, despite the constraints (e.g. Foster, 2004; Gunter, 2001; Nixon et al., 2003; Smyth, 1985; 1989; 2006a; 2006b). However, as
Smyth (1985) explains, problem-solving approaches might not be enough in changing the system, as these might lead to solutions that only serve to strengthen or recreate the status quo. On the other hand, problem-posing approaches are more likely to enable the critical questioning needed in actually changing the system, as they can offer a more holistic view of how things might look better, not just for a particular school, but also across schools and educational systems. For example, within the study, political refugees were seen as a major challenge in the teaching and learning process, but there was not any serious questioning about the structures that might have prevented these students from succeeding, or whether these structures also prevented other students. Furthermore, there was not any problematisation whether this was a local or national and, even, international phenomenon, and how this was approached in other contexts. It is possible, then, that engaging with this kind of critical questioning and change can lead to the development of more creative and engaging approaches to schooling, rather than the dominant and official models imposed by central government.

However, changing the system can be difficult, since, as Ball (2008) and Gunter (2008) argue, governments want to show that, in their short time, they have done something about education. As a result, it is easier to capitalise on knowledge in order to promote their own agendas, rather than to “capitalise on the contributions of their diverse leaders” (Riehl, 2000, p.71). What is more problematic is that certain knowledge actors might cluster around the government in order to facilitate their own agendas. For example, in Cyprus, most of the members of the Teacher Union position themselves as belonging to particular political parties, making it particularly difficult to know whose interests the union members are serving. Similarly, Ball and Exley (2010, p.152) argue that the “redistribution of policy influence”, in the England policy context, through policy networks is problematic, as these tend to “illustrate not only a set of flows and a connectedness in relation to policy ideas, but also an exclusivity and closedness, as a limited set of ideas and ‘authors’ circulate and reiterate”, obscuring in this way local decision-making and genuine collaboration.

It might be true that fostering a school-driven approach to change can demand too much time and energy from the variety of voices, especially if they are accustomed to be only policy recipients. In addition, what is proposed here might be difficult in practice, as it challenges
power structures, and also suggests changes in the national policy-making. Nevertheless, there are reasons for optimism here, not least because my findings suggest that, despite the constraints that might exist, a school-driven approach to change, facilitated by collaborative and radical collegial forms of leadership, can create spaces for productive participation and agency. Of course, these spaces are likely to close down within conditions of constrained participation and agency, such as within the centralised education system of Cyprus. The model developed here reveals possible ways forward. It is emphasised that the ideas in the model are not a panacea but an alternative to thinking in the field, given that pursuing change involves complex social processes of decision-making in finding an agency among other agencies within specific contexts.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I developed a model in order to suggest how school change can be achieved within the centralised education system of Cyprus. The model adopts a school-driven approach to change, suggesting the development of more local and democratic agendas. This draws attention to the development of leadership practices that can support such developments to take place. On this view, leadership is viewed as the everyday politics in making decisions that foster greater participation and enable active agency.

More specifically, I argue that, in order to facilitate schools to manage the challenge to bring about meaningful improvements, this must involve leadership practices aimed to create space for productive interrogation and action through processes of collaboration and inquiry. This assumes that the diversity of voices that exist within a school is given space and legitimacy to develop their own agendas responsively and wisely. Therefore, those who hold formal leadership positions, especially head teachers, have an important role to play in facilitating and enabling such constructive engagements within their schools, not least because their position within such a communal framework “is responsive and responsible professionalism appropriate to and supportive of an increasingly authentic democracy” (Fielding, 1999, p.28). In so doing, hierarchy and dominant forms of knowledge can become more visible and dialogic, because relationships are not formalistic or functional but reciprocal and communal, based on critical questioning and reflective thinking. In this way, more radical alternatives can be developed that are more responsive to local agendas and shared ideals.
All of this suggests the development of more participatory and radical collegial forms of leadership.

However, without the structures that can support and enable such active agency from different levels, developments of this kind are unlikely to occur. Of course, this does not suggest that schools cannot be transformed, or radical collegiality is an unreachable ideal. Rather, it implies a complex process of decision-making in finding possible ways forward, despite the constraints that might exist. Therefore, the kind of leadership practices that are developed can play an important role in facilitating positive change. This study examined the potential of radical collegiality within the centralised education system of Cyprus as a means of gaining greater insights of what might involve to move forward thinking and practice in this context. The model developed here makes use of this knowledge and suggests possible ways forward. I close the final part of the thesis with a chapter where I consider the wider implications of the study.
CHAPTER 10

Rethinking school change and leadership

Introduction

The findings of this study point to the complexity of bringing about positive change within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus, through forms of leadership that valorise local participation and enable collective learning. Such leadership practices suggest radical collegial relationships and, as I explained in the previous chapters, this requires different forms of politics that serve to enable voice and active representation.

Bearing all of this in mind, in this final chapter, I consider the wider implications of my findings as a means of offering a perspective of what might be needed in order to move thinking and practice forward in other contexts, where those concerned with the improvement of schools and education systems are interested with the development of more democratic projects and the possibility of an alternative educational agenda that is radically engaging. Therefore, I examine the implications of my study in relation to aspects of leadership, school development and policy-making. I argue that the development of leadership practices that are more participatory and radical collegial can facilitate positive change within schools. This leads me to argue that school-based research, with an emphasis on notions of collaboration and inquiry, is more likely to improve school life in such ways, in that it can be deliberately designed to enhance the potential that exists within schools in a practical and transformative way. Certainly, all of this requires changes in policies and the development of supportive policy frameworks.

Rethinking the politics of change

While the findings of this study suggest radical collegial relationships as a means of overcoming barriers to participation and progress, Fielding (1999, p.15-16) argues that “schools are not predominantly collegial organisations, nor are they likely to be”. What this means in practice, as this study shows, is that schools need to be viewed as places where radical collegiality can be struggled for. By implication, then, the politics of change are recaptured within the aspirations of a communal framework, and as I have demonstrated,
although such processes need to be well managed, they also require the development of leadership practices that are supportive of locally determined school improvement initiatives within which those at the school level can be enabled and supported as active agents. It appears, therefore, that working for change can be highly political and socially complex, not least because enabling difference and resolving the diversity of interests in order to move towards the development of a shared agenda is not an easy process.

However, the methodological approach developed in this study provided sufficient evidence to suggest that collaborative inquiry, despite the constraints of a centralised education system, can be a powerful strategy for fostering improvements and enabling greater participation and agency in schools. It has also deepened my understandings in relation to the possibility of encouraging moves towards the transformative ideal of radical collegiality, as it made more visible the barriers that need to be overcome. At the same time, it offered privileged insights in relation to processes of change, since it enabled me to track developments through time and on different occasions. While such understandings might be particular to the Cypriot education system, in my view, they have also significant implications for leadership, school development and policy-making elsewhere.

Implications for leadership

By and large, the findings of this study support a view of leadership that is more participatory and radical collegial as a means of resolving ambiguity and overcoming barriers to progress. The kinds of leadership practices that facilitate such developments to take place are both manifestations and contributions to a more democratic and socially just way of approaching change. As I have already argued, such an approach involves active dialogic encounters within which professionals engage in reciprocal learning processes, not only with each other, but also with the localised complexity of voices whose engagements and dispositions provide both an intellectual and practical transformative ideal.

As this study shows, enabling difference in order to learn from it can lead to successful partnerships, not least because in this way leadership practices can be seen as being respectful to the different potentials of individuals in changing educational realities. So, for example, it was noted that collaborative inquiry, as a teacher-led process, managed to enable diverse individuals from a particular location (i.e. teachers, parents, students) to grow as
change agents within their school. At the same time, each of the research groups drew diverse membership, regardless of gender, age, status, ethnic and socioeconomic background which, in turn, helped to increase shared responsibility among them, as the reason that brought them together was that of bringing about mutually beneficial change.

In this regard, it is possible that some leadership practices might start as being more collaborative and problem-solving, rather than more collegial and radically transformative. For example, I have demonstrated that active participation is not a simple process that can be taken up easily, but takes time to be formulated and enhanced, since it is not easy for individuals to abandon their privileges or comfort zones in respect to more engaging relationships. This does not suggest that such practices are of limited importance or impact. Rather, they are part of the process in moving towards a more genuine sense of radical collegiality. As Ainscow and West (2006) explain, moving towards the development of more powerful collaborative arrangements might mean that collaboration may precede radical collegiality in the sense that the former can prepare the ground for deeper and higher levels of participation, as individuals learn how to cooperate and resolve ambiguity and uncertainty more productively.

However, it is the case that more participatory and radical collegial forms of leadership assume a form of distribution, and within formal hierarchies, as I have already emphasised, this draws attention to the important roles of those in formal leadership positions, particularly head teachers, in facilitating such developments to take place. Here the notion of leadership density, as argued by Thomson et al. (2011, p.247), is helpful to an understanding of leadership that “allows for both delegation and for initiative and agency” in the sense that decision-making needs to be based on dialogue and debate. This implies that distributing and sharing leadership focuses on democratic engagements whose dispositions reside on a belief that individuals can be trusted and enabled as active agents in their school contexts, so that they can develop and articulate their own agendas among other agendas. Of course, it may be that, within a policy context that both discourages active agency and seems indifferent to the development of local agendas, courageous and committed relationships can help avoid the controlling and contrived discourse of policies or the learning organisation. All of this suggests the development of politics of voice and active representation through which
collaborative and collegial practices can be developed and enhanced in ways that facilitate and enable agency and participation despite any barriers. It seems, therefore, that, without a strong and purposeful school-level leadership, such developments are unlikely to occur.

The emphasis on this is that leadership practices need to be grounded on a notion that achieving meaningful school change entails the possibility of relationships that are more communal and radically engaging through which current policies can be contested and other more engaging alternatives can be developed. Consequently, those leadership practices that seem to be promising in improving school life more productively are the ones which enable broader understandings to be formulated in the light of collective learning and reflective thinking.

This draws attention to the transformative aim of leadership within which potential barriers to progress and participation can be addressed adequately, as Nixon et al. (2003, p.102) argue, by “thinking together and acting together” in enlarged and inclusive encounters. The findings of this study show how the potentially inclusive and transformative aspects of collaborative inquiry can offer promising possibilities for improving school life in such ways, as it can be purposively designed by professionals to enable diversity and agency while approaching change. It may be that research, based on forms of collaboration and inquiry, can increase a school’s capacity to bring about positive change, while, at the same time, offering opportunities for system development and improvement, given that within such processes current practices and dominant thinking can be contested and enhanced in the light of context-specific knowledge and collective action.

**Implications for school development**

The findings of this study offer considerable evidence to suggest that school-based research, with an emphasis on notions of collaboration and inquiry, can facilitate positive change within a particular school context. As I have explained, this might involve colleagues coming together in order to investigate in partnership aspects of schooling to an agreed focus and, in so doing, is intended to enhance the collegium by involving the wider school community, thus offering the possibility to encourage wider and active participation towards the realisation of shared ideals whilst, at the same time, creating space for further interrogation and action. However, as I have demonstrated, such inquiry processes need to
be initiated and managed reflectively in order to take advantage of the potential that exists within schools to bring about productive change. That is to emphasise that, whilst increased collaboration and inquiry can be important steps towards positive change, this also requires a particular educational practice, one that is based on politics aimed to create a dynamic towards radical collegiality and the development of more democratic educational projects.

So, for example, collaboration and inquiry assume dialogic encounters and, therefore, differ from capacity building in the sense that they might go against the status-quo, allowing the emergence of local agendas with a greater sense of ownership. This might mean that those involved should be encouraged to take responsibility for the project and work through its consequences in order, not to abandon their aspirations, but to become more aware and find possible ways forward, even though this might mean taking risky decisions and confronting unproductive criticism. There is evidence, too, which shows that not all might be willing or interested in taking account the voices invoked by the dialogic inquiry, and those who might need to be adequately convinced. The emphasis here is that designing and managing collaborative inquiry requires a sense of “thoughtfulness and civility” (Young, 2000), because those involved must learn how to express and defend their interests, without becoming dominating and oppressive, or tolerant of imposition and domination.

The implication is that the dialogic encounters, which research can increasingly provide, need to be enhanced in ways that invite reciprocal critique and public scrutiny, so that the diversity of interests can be productively resolved, suggesting the development of a shared agenda that is contested, celebrated and refined collectively and creatively. This might involve the development or adoption of different forms of public dialogue, such as group talk and school-based forums, or creative work, such as art, photography, journalism, poetry, video-clips and music. For example, the development of the posters and presentation of findings facilitated critique from the wider community, and helped the research groups to redefine their aspirations towards the development of a communally shared agenda.

All of this is based on a possibility that the school can become more dialogic, as individuals are given space to articulate their wishes and projects among other voices. However, there is also evidence to suggest that powerful others might be involved in order to control, dominate
or silence voice. It is possible, too, that such spaces might close down when such inquiry processes rely overly on different forms of support (i.e. authority, expertise, external help), given that these enclose the danger of becoming controlling and manipulative in guiding practice, while making reflective thinking difficult. Therefore, attention must be given to the monitoring and evaluation process so that potential barriers such as these can be addressed reflectively and practically. This also means that the support used needs to encourage and strengthen communicative ethics and raise public awareness of what the project is about in order to foster greater interdependence among individuals and the wider community. In this way, better local agendas can be developed, as these can become increasingly shared and widely pursued. The implication of this is that the asymmetry of knowledge and access to power resources that inevitably exists within partnerships is used to change power relations and bridge differences among individuals in ways that enable and support diversity and agency.

Consequently, it is important to consider the ways in which such processes can be deepened and strengthened. What this might suggest is that engaging with research should not assume exceedingly professional knowledge and expertise. Rather, it needs to be closer to the experiences and knowledge of participants in order to encourage their active participation. In this study, the use of photo-voice proved to be particularly helpful, as participants felt confident enough to use the technique in order to develop and defend their own agendas. It might also mean that participants can be involved from the beginning stages of change in actually designing and implementing their own initiation of change as a means of finding a common ground that is closer to their interests, backgrounds and capacities. So, for example, they can decide the form of communication, the time and space of their meetings, and also the issue of concern and actions to be taken. In this way, they can develop a common language that is not overly professional and estranged but more closely to their meanings and understandings. For example, the fact that research groups were facilitated to design, implement and evaluate their own initiation of change played an important role in the formation and sustainability of the research groups, since participants found meaning in research purposes and got actively involved by taking the responsibility of the project.
All of this suggests that managing such inquiry processes must be an ongoing exploration process of thinking together and acting together, while, at the same time, asking difficult questions about voice, representation and fairness. For example, is difference (e.g. position, gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background) recognised and enabled, or are unified approaches adopted? Are some voices missing? Is care being given for the sustainability of process, or is the human factor being ignored? Are opportunities enabling, or is the agency of particular social groups and individuals being stereotyped? Are improvement agendas radically engaging and shared, or imposed and controlled? All of this offers a convincing argument that school-based research, with a focus on increased collaboration and inquiry, can enable schools to develop and manage successfully their own improvement agendas, in that it can be deliberately designed by professionals to enhance and revitalise local agency and participation in a practical and possibly transformative way which can also provide a stimulus for further developments and sustained improvement. The challenge, therefore, for those who wish to work towards such communal and educative engagements is the development of politics through which professionals can engage in reciprocal processes of learning, not only with each other, but also with parents, students and the wider community in order to become active agents of change and transform themselves. However, there is evidence to suggest that such empowering approaches to school improvement require the development of supportive policy frameworks and, indeed, changes in policy directions.

Implications for policy-making

Whilst national improvement strategies in many countries adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to school change, the evidence reported in this study demonstrates how such approaches tend to overlook local conditions and capacities and, in so doing, neglect to link practice to school priorities. The findings of this study provide sufficient evidence to suggest that a school-driven approach to change, based on forms of collaboration and inquiry, can encourage moves for improving school life in ways that enhance the potential that exists within schools. However, there is evidence that shows, how at the same time, policies can act as great barriers in putting into practice such approaches. This leads me to argue that a change in policy direction and the development of supportive frameworks can help schools to redefine their aspirations and redirect their energies and potentials towards the development of a shared agenda that is radically engaging and transformative.
So, for example, an important finding of this study points to the important roles of formal leaders, especially head teachers, in facilitating such improvement processes. It seems, therefore, that without a consideration of what might involve encouraging and supporting school leaders to work in such ways, developments of this kind are unlikely to occur. It may be that offering learning opportunities focused on collaborative and inquiry practice through, for example, preparation programmes, staff development activities or improvement projects, formal leaders can develop themselves as active agents who have the capacities and capabilities to work in response to the emergence of local agendas that are more participatory and radical collegial.

This also focuses attention on the ways in which schools work, not least because a major challenge of this study was that of finding time to collaborate and engage with research. This being the case, it seems necessary that schools need to be given space to develop their own agendas both responsively and responsibly. In order to do so, it may be that the development of relevant policy frameworks, which schools can use or relate to, can improve school practice through a combination of reflective thinking and collective action. Such engagements, most often, require changes in practices and thinking, thus offering the possibility for policy-making at the school level. However, it can be the case that giving space for collaboration and inquiry might also require the development of local management and coordination practices in ensuring that such processes are sustained and enhanced in the long-term, despite any internal turbulence, such as student mobility, changes in staff or head teachers. So, for example, the case study reports were given every year to new staff members as a means of stimulating reflection and facilitating agency.

At the same time, it is important to consider how such policy changes can enable and enhance local participation, since not all might be ready or interested in collaborating or engaging with research. It might mean that school communities need to be offered appropriate learning opportunities through which individuals can grow as change agents in ways that can deepen and strengthen improvement processes as a result of mutual critique and a challenge to improve. This also suggests that how schools are monitored or evaluated needs be reconsidered. There is evidence which shows that forms of public accountability,
based on public dialogue and debate, can increase the responsibility among various stakeholders to move thinking and practice forward. It is likely, therefore, that within such accountability regimes the potential power of radical collegiality can be mobilised. I therefore argue that policy frameworks and initiatives with an emphasis on collaboration and inquiry must encourage school communities to develop themselves in partnership as a means of bringing a sense of mutual effort to improve across the system. As Ranson (2000, p.28) argues “we can only create our worlds together”, and, clearly, increased collaboration and inquiry-based approaches can open those spaces where the potential that exists within schools can be enhanced in a mutually beneficial way and towards the aspirations of an inclusive society.

**Summary and conclusions**

In this final chapter, I examined the wider implications of the study in relation to the politics of change regarding leadership, school development and policy-making. More specifically, I argue that the development of leadership practices that are more participatory and radically collegial seem to be promising in improving school life more productively, not least because such practices are more likely to create space where the transformative and inclusive potential of relationships can be enhanced. In so doing, there is increasing evidence to suggest that school-based research, with an emphasis on collaboration and inquiry, can make space where such developments can take place, not least because it can be purposefully designed by professionals to enable wider and active participation. All of this can promote an alternative educational agenda that is inclusive to the diversity of voices that exists within a school and supportive to locally determined school improvement initiatives. On this view, the politics of schooling become more radically engaging and transformative. Consequently, national policy frameworks need to be developed in ways that encourage and enable schools to work in such ways, suggesting, at the same time, changes in policy direction towards a view of schools as sites of transformation and democratic development.

In understanding, therefore, how school change can be achieved within a centralised education system, such as Cyprus, I argue for a process that is led by schools themselves, where the main drive for school improvement must involve forms of collaboration and inquiry based on an agenda setting that is radical collegial. The benefits of this approach provide sufficient evidence to suggest that, even within such a centralised education system,
space can be created, to some extent at least, to move thinking and practice forward. While in this context, as well as in many other countries, school change is centrally directed and, most often, narrowed down to policy implementation, evidence shows how such approaches neglect to take account both local conditions and the potential that exists within schools, while, at the same time, creating further barriers to the development of other practices that are more engaging and transformative.

This draws attention to the role of leadership in creating space where such developments can take place, despite the constraints that might exist. As this study shows, leadership can be understood and developed differently within the many possibilities of improving the everyday school life. The way individuals enter, participate or exit their school community is dynamic and, although it might imply to some extent disruption or destabilisation in relationships, space can be created for productive engagement and resolution. The findings of this study show that when professionals seek to work towards the transformative ideal of radical collegiality, then such engagements are more likely to increase the occurrence of an inclusive and enabling dynamic. On this view, the politics of school improvement serve to set an agenda for action that reflects the aspirations of an inclusive community through which existing knowledge, practices and relationships are challenged as a means of achieving greater transformations.

Certainly, all of this has implications for the roles of formal leaders, particularly head teachers, who with their authority and professional status can facilitate and enable such engagements. As evidence shows, an emphasis on the development of politics of voice and active representation is more likely to facilitate active agency from particular positions not just in a technical sense of undertaking school improvement, but in a transformative and emancipatory manner of changing taken-for-granted assumptions and power relations. Likewise, this has implications for the wider national policy framework, since without the structures that can support and enable active agency from different levels, developments of this sort are unlikely to occur. As I explained, if policies are not connected with the realities and complexities of schools as specific social institutions, then this may distract and discourage those at the school level from challenging productively the status quo. Therefore,
a focus on transformative practice requires the development of supportive policy frameworks which can encourage and support such engagements.

Yet, it is true that this study “started in the midst and ended in the midst” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) of school life, and still there is a lot to know about the complexities of school change and the role of leadership. In addition, although dialogue and public scrutiny were encouraged throughout the development of study, this was limited by the very inability to include in a research project all the perspectives. Therefore, the findings of this study should be viewed as “an intellectual resource to stimulate and enable possibilities” (Gunter, 2006, p.8) that can be further enhanced by others with “continuing conversations” (Ball, 1994, p.174). In this way they offer a means of enabling productive research exchange and dialogue with those others who wish to work towards the transformative ideal of radical collegiality and the development of more democratic projects.

Bearing this argument in mind, the study has also significant implications as to how researchers investigate the relationship between school change and the potential of leadership, as well as the knowledge they produce. As I have noted, an insider perspective can offer privileged insights into how school change is achieved, and also how leadership is experienced and developed in specific school contexts. Whilst such longitudinal insider ethnographic research is rather unusual, this proved to be important. It enabled me to gain richer understandings of the processes involved which formed the basis for further interrogation and action while, at the same time, offering important possibilities for professional and contextual transformation. This might mean that a mutual problematisation of the situation with participants can lead to an alternative research agenda that has an empowering effect through which greater understandings can be developed. I therefore argue that research with an emphasis on collaboration and inquiry is more likely to provide valuable insights into how schools develop and sustain their improvements so that better alternatives can be developed. This is both conceptually and practically important, since such an engagement with research can enable the professional knowledge needed for changing what constrains educational change, thus enhancing the possibilities for active agency and participation.
In my view, the challenge is not to so much about achieving change as an end in itself, but more about how to achieve meaningful change, one that can really transform schools and make them more interesting and exciting places for all. Without the active participation of policy-makers, researchers, head teachers, teachers, parents, students and all those affected by education, school change is unlikely to have any relevance to the lives and struggles of people for positive change. More worryingly, it may not have the impact on society that could lead to better ways of living together and sharing the world. The findings of this study suggest that an approach to change that is for, with and by schools ensures that struggle for democratic development and social transformation is continuous and ongoing. This kind of change requires a view of leadership that is more participatory and radical collegial. In this respect, the transformative and inclusive potential of collaborative inquiry can be an important step towards this possibility.
References


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Draper, J. and McMichael, P. (1996). I am the eye of the needle and everything passes through me: Primary head teachers explain their retirement. School Organisation, 16 (2), p.149-163

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Appendix 1

The research plan for taking into account parent and student voice
**Research plan:**
Using **student voice** as a means of enhancing understandings in relation to processes of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Steps</th>
<th>Research process in voice research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Type of research** | **1.** prepare the ground, get consent, inform staff and participants about the project  
select the group of learners: mixed-age, representative sample of the student population, looking at their background factors, explain the selection of the group to all learners, point out that no one would feel silenced, since we will have group and in pair discussions |
| **Ethnography** | **2.** involve an external volunteer researcher/facilitator during the beginning sessions of photo-elicitation  
meet to present and discuss the project  
conceptualise the issue of school-based change and the implications this has for leadership (what is it, how they understand it, how it influences them, common understandings/definitions)  
give learning diaries to students and explain how to use them (optional)  
encourage students to write/draw their thoughts, their reflections and feelings in their learning diaries |
| **First person Research** | **3.** train students how to read images (develop a critical stance) and how to use digital cameras  
participants and the researcher bring photographs in order to initiate a discussion on reading images (multiple meanings, different techniques affect our understandings, etc)  
discuss ethical issues when taking photographs  
encourage participants to propose a code of practice  
initial thoughts about the form of the project (poster/Power Point/display) |
| **Photo-elicitation** | **4.** present a set of photographs in order to initiate a discussion in respect to the relationship between school improvement and leadership (e.g. head teacher’s office from different angles, former head teacher’s new office, the school, etc)  
the discussion can be tape-recorded and played back for reflection, if participants agree |
| **Breakpoint** | **5.** the researcher tests the credibility of the accumulated data |

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| Collaborative inquiry | 6. | • participants and the researcher devise themes in order to take pictures in respect to the relationship between school improvement and leadership  
• encourage students to work in small groups (no more than 3) and individually |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Second Person Research | 7. | • select and discuss the photographs  
• discussions are tape-recorded and played back to students for reflection, if participants agree |
| Students as co-researchers: | 8. | • develop a set of photographs to create the project  
• further discussion on emerging issues  
• whole group discussions  
• contextualise the images (storytelling)  
• codify issues, themes and theories |
| Photo-voice | 9. | • prepare and present the project  
• students may present their project by themselves or with the help of the researcher  
• students select an audience |
| 10. | • evaluate the project (participatory evaluation)  
• stimulate discussion in order to design an improvement process  
• expand the technique of photo-voice as a means of bringing about improvements and taking into account student view |
| Breakpoint | 11. | • the researcher reflects on the accumulated data |
| Collaborative inquiry | 12. | • repeat the cycle of the research process (steps 6-10): students use images as a means of bringing about productive improvement within their school  
• the focus question might be: “How can you the students improve your school life?”  
• involve students in the consultation, implementation and evaluation of the improvement process  
• explore/secure the sustainability of the technique as a means of bringing about or sustaining improvements |
| Second and third person research |  |  |
| Students as co-researchers |  |  |
| Photo-voice |  |  |
### Research plan:
Using **parent voice** as a means of enhancing understandings in relation to processes of change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding steps</th>
<th>Research process in voice research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnography</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First person research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo-elicitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. | • prepare the ground, get consent, inform the staff and participants/parents about the project  
• encourage voluntary participation  
• work in groups according to their days and hours of preference |
| 2. | • meet to present and discuss the project  
• conceptualise the issue of school-based change and the implications this has for leadership (what is it, how they understand it, how it influences them, common understandings/definitions)  
• give learning diaries to parents and explain how to use them (optional)  
• encourage parents to write their thoughts, reflections and feelings in their learning diaries |
| 3. | • train the group of parents how to read images (develop a critical stance) and how to use digital cameras  
• participants and the researcher bring photographs in order to initiate a discussion on reading images (multiple meanings, different techniques affect our understandings, etc)  
• discuss ethical issues when taking photographs  
• encourage participants to propose a code of practice  
• initial thoughts about the form of the project (poster/Power Point/display/easy moviemaker) |
| 4. | • present a set of photographs in order to initiate a discussion in respect to the relationship between school improvement and leadership (e.g. head teacher’s office from different angles, former head teacher’s new office, the school, etc)  
• the discussion can be tape-recorded and played back to parents for reflection, if participants agree |
<p>| Breakpoint | 5. | • the researcher tests the credibility of the accumulated data |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Collaborative Inquiry</th>
<th>Second person research</th>
<th>Parents as co-researchers: Photo-voice</th>
<th>Breakpoint</th>
<th>Collaborative inquiry</th>
<th>Second and third person research</th>
<th>Parents as co-researchers</th>
<th>Photo-voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6.   | - participants and the researcher devise themes in order to take pictures in respect to leadership and school development  
      - encourage participants to work in small groups (no more than 3) and individually | | | | | | | |
| 7.   | - select and discuss the photographs  
      - discussions are tape-recorded and played back for reflection, if participants agree | | | | | | | |
| 8.   | - develop a set of photographs to create the project  
      - further discussion on emerging issues  
      - contextualise the images (storytelling)  
      - codify issues, themes and theories | | | | | | | |
| 9.   | - prepare and present the project  
      - parents may present their project by themselves or with the help of the researcher  
      - parents select an audience | | | | | | | |
| 10.  | - evaluate the project (participatory evaluation)  
      - stimulate a discussion in order to design an improvement process  
      - expand the technique of photo-voice as a means of bringing about improvements and taking into account parent view | | | | | | | |
| 11.  | - the researcher reflects on the accumulated data | | | | | | | |
| 12.  | - repeat the cycle of the research process (steps 6-10): parents use images as a means of bringing about productive improvement within their school  
      - the focus question might be: "How can you the parents improve school life?"  
      - involve parents in the consultation, implementation and evaluation process of the proposed change  
      - explore/secure the sustainability of the technique as means of bringing about or sustaining improvements | | | | | | | |
Appendix 2

The teachers’ research toolkit
Guiding principles:
- inclusion
- democracy
- autonomy
- reflection
- sustainable development

Characteristics of action research:
- emergent and developmental
- participatory
- practical issues
- improve the lives of the researcher and the researched

Quality in inquiry:
- emergent and enduring
- practical knowledge
- diversity of perspectives/ways of knowing
- sustainable stance towards inquiry
- worthwhile/inspiring

Development of indicators:
- opinion finders
- questionnaire
- structured observations
- timeline table
- invitations

Guiding steps in collaborative inquiry:
- collect evidence (what is and what is best done)
- reflect (what should be)
- design (what could be)
- act (what will be done)
- sustain (how will be done)
Opinion finder

Dear colleagues please read the statement below and mark the statement that best represents you. Write your comments, if you like.

**STATEMENT**
We cannot make a big impact on progress and sustainable school development without the support of parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Please √</th>
<th>Total number of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can see both sides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree strongly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments**
Dear parents,
We need your opinion and help regarding the following issues:
- homework
- student arrival
- student absenteeism
- teacher absenteeism

Please make your comments regarding what you consider as appropriate in dealing with the above issues. Please, suggest an alternative when your suggestions cannot be followed within existing arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear parents,

Our research is aimed to improve school’s relationships with you, the parents of this school. Therefore, it is important to identify possible actions which might lead to better ways of collaborating. In order to do so, please answer the following questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How good is your school at:</th>
<th>5=excellent</th>
<th>4=very good</th>
<th>3=good</th>
<th>2=poor</th>
<th>1= hopeless</th>
<th>Comments on good things already happening and ideas you would like to see to be developed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging parents and staff to meet and discuss student progress, besides parent meetings.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering opportunities to parents to come to school and help/participate in school’s practices.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating supportive environment for newcomers and foreign parents.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping parents to manage their children’s progress.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopting strategies that sustain changes and improvements in collaboration with parents.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking into account parent views in decision-making and shaping school policy.</td>
<td>5 4 3 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Timeline table

Different semester, different needs! Dear colleagues, please complete the following timeline table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
<th>What is the situation and what is the best happening to bring parents closer?</th>
<th>What are the actions that need to be taken in order to bring parents closer?</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Semester (Sept – Dec)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Semester (Jan – Apr)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Semester (Apr – Jun)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structured observation schedule
Please keep a diary while answering the following questions (collect and reflect on evidence).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>First semester</th>
<th>Second semester</th>
<th>Third semester</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How has the intervention changed parents’ attitudes towards the school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In which way do parents participate, after the intervention (functional or radically engaging)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Has the intervention improved student learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What are the practical issues/difficulties of the intervention during change processes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What kind of changes do you think have managed to bring parents closer during change processes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear parents,

We would like to invite you to participate in a voluntary work here at our school on ___________________ and time ______. Please, keep in mind that the school belongs to you and your kids and, therefore, your participation is considered important.

Please complete!

Name: ______________________________________

Day: __________________

Time: _________________

Type of work that I prefer:
___ Help in the classroom
___ Improve the physical appearance of the school

Signature: ____________________

Thanking you in advance!
Dear parents,
We have a new student in our classroom! His/Her name is ____________________________ and he/she is from ____________________________.

Please come and meet him/her on ___________________ and time __________.

Dear parents,
In our effort to cooperate with you in more productive ways, we invite you to participate in a Parent/Guardian-day on ________________ and time ____. Please, prepare a 5’ presentation that you and your child would like to present in the classroom!

Please complete!

Name: ____________________________
Signature: ________________________

Thanking you in advance!
Dear parents,

In our effort to cooperate with you, we invite you to participate in our educational outgoing on ___________________ and time _____.
Please, come!
Name: ______________________________________
Signature: ____________________
Thanking you in advance!

---

Dear parents,

In our effort to cooperate with you in more productive ways, we invite you to participate in a seminar organised by our school on ___________________ and time _____.
Please, come!
Name: ______________________________________
Signature: ____________________
Thanking you in advance!
Dear parents,

In my effort to cooperate with you in more productive ways, I invite you to come and attend a lesson/presentation in our classroom on _________________ and time ______. Please, come!

Name: ______________________________
Signature: _______________________

Thanking you in advance
Appendix 3

The case study report(s)
..... Cycle A Primary School

Case study report(s)
2005-2008

Where before meets tomorrow...
Case study report 2005-2006

The school

This case study report presents in a succinct way the status of the school with some reflections and considerations for the future. It utilises the dispositions of staff in order to provide insights into notions of its micro-politics. In particular, it aims to link schooling with sustainable school development as a means of enabling an understanding of what prevents those at the school level to assume more active roles. Firstly, it presents school’s background, followed by an analysis of the school year 2005-2006. In other words, this case study report is an informative and reflexive account in the midst of school life.

The school

The school was established in 1962 in order to serve the kids of the surrounding area. It started with 3 teachers, 1 head teacher and 198 students. During the school year 1979-1980, it was divided into two cycles with different head teachers and staff, but one Parent Association as a way of securing a sense of overall unity within the school. In the existing building extra classrooms were added, creating further uncertainties about safety. Now, it has 16 classrooms, 2 small ones, 1 for domestic science, 2 staff rooms and 2 head teacher’s offices.

In the school year 2005-2006, both schools had 25 teachers and 480 students. Cycle A (the school in question which serves students of the age range of 6 to 9 years old) had 236 students, a number though which constantly changed as some students moved to or out of the area.

Furthermore, the next school year (2006-2007) will be a transitory year, since a new school is built in the area and a great number (1/3) of students will be transferred into that school. Along with these changes, there will be changes in headship and staff.

Staff turnover

During the school year 2005-2006, the school had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 12 teachers, 1 speech therapist and 1 special needs teacher. Also, three of the teachers worked in other schools, too.

Unfortunately, in writing this account, it was very difficult to collect data for the previous school years since no record was kept anywhere, until recently (1999-2000). This can be an
indication of how policies on staff mobility pervade the system unquestioned. A valuable source of information was an album of the school issued in 1992, celebrating the 30 years of the two schools (Cycle A and Cycle B). Additionally, staff data for the years 1999-2005/6 were collected from the District Educational Office. Thus, there is a “black-box” for the school years 1992/3-1999.

From 1962 until 1989, before the school was divided into Cycles, it had 6 head teachers. Cycle A had 5 head teachers during the period 1989-1992, and 3 during the period 1997-2005/6. It is possible that Cycle A had 9-13 head teachers in 16 years. Change in headship occurred every 2 years, with two exceptions of 5 years. If we consider the school as a unity of the two Cycles, most probably, it had approximately 24-29 head teachers in 44 years.

From 1999-2000 until 2004-2005 there was a turnover of staff from 25% to 50% (4-7 new members). In the school year 2005-2006, there was a 65% turnover. In particular, changes in staff were as follows:

2000-2001: 5 new members (36%)
2001-2002: 6 new members (43%)
2002-2003: 8 new members (47%)
2003-2004: 4 new members (27%)
2004-2005: 4 new members (29%)
2005-2006: 9 new members (65%)

Moreover, there was a new inspector every 1-2 years between the years 1999-2004/5, and not until recently, the inspector of the school has been in position for the last 2 years. The following table is helpful in understanding how staff changed over the years in Cycle A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Inspector</th>
<th>Head teacher</th>
<th>Deputy Heads</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962-1992</td>
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<td>1992-1999</td>
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<td>1999-2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In other words, the school seems to experience frequent and rapid changes in staff. The implication is that staff members seem to have limited time to build meaningful relationships and bring about productive improvement. This seems to create an impression that the school is more of a building rather than an institution.

**Headship**
Headship is quite problematic in this school, since there is a change of head teachers every two years with the longest period of five years. Frequent changes in headship managed to create a culture of cynicism, where teachers tend to ignore and resist head teachers’ improvement efforts. It is possible that these repetitive successions might have created such resilient cultures, whereby teachers cope with change by simply maintaining the status quo. Given all this, the head teacher seems to be unable to design long- or short-term improvement strategies, as there is lack of time and will to do so. Furthermore, the centrality of the system seems to constrain heads’ active involvement, since it presses for compliance according to policy criteria and central regulations.

**Staff**
Staff members seem to have good personal relationships in a friendly environment. That is one of the reasons why some of the staff did not ask for transposition. However, they tend to work in isolation, as most of their time is invested in marking student’s work, preparing worksheets and handling problematic behaviour. As a result, acting together or getting involved in improvement projects is by far constrained. Even when a change is proposed, teachers might agree with it but without getting actually engaged. Furthermore, conducting research is something considered for researchers. Professional development is regarded as a personal option, and thus it can be pulled into different directions. Teachers perform and evaluate students’ progress according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry. All of this seems to constrain teachers and students from being responsive and creative to what the situation allows and how things could be done better.

Also, staff mobility seems to prevent teachers from designing or getting involved in improvement strategies. This is intensified by the fact that the only formal feedback that teachers get is from the local inspector which is based on their individual classroom
practices. Consequently, the classroom is well established as the teacher’s private domain, and this seems to hinder staff from collaborating and building trust.

Indeed, this mobility of staff seems to constrain the development of productive relationships. The implication is that staff members need to view schooling as an extension of their selves and try to commit to improvement. The involvement with improvement projects or action research might be seen as positive steps forward. Also, problem-posing can be challenging as long as there is a constant questioning of the current ways of thinking and practice.

**Students**
The school serves a diverse student population. Students comprise many different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. In particular, most of the students come from low-income families, live on allowances, have serious family problems and are bilinguals or foreigners (they do not speak the language).

For example, 50 students are bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, etc) or foreigners (Australia, Moldavia). Some of them have divorced parents and others are under the supervision of the Welfare Office. Additionally, during the school year there is a form of **student mobility**, because some families move to or out of the area. Moreover, some of the students miss school on a regular basis. The school attracts such a diverse student population because of its location which has the lowest rents and property prices.

Furthermore, students’ achievements vary, in the sense that some students improve or get worse through time. A characteristic of the classes is the big number of students (25-30). The standardised provision of education, given that the Ministry controls educational policy, seems to facilitate the exclusion of charismatic and disadvantaged students. Students’ behaviour is idiomorphic, with some students to improve or not after an intervention, whereas some others are regarded as beyond change. Many of them have low self-esteem, emotional problems and limited experiences. In other words, each student needs special attention. It is important for the school to have a common policy regarding rewards and consequences in order to help the students to improve their behaviour.
Overall, it seems that students are rather passive recipients of schooling, since they are silenced in decision-making processes within the school. What seems to contribute to this is the fact that teachers have to finish the books provided by the Ministry according always to the recommendations/demands of the inspector. This seems to leave limited space for productive dialogue and resolution. As a result, student voice seems to be marginalised in every aspect of school life. It is possible that student involvement in decision-making might enhance their self-esteem and confidence. It would help, if there was a better cooperation with their parents.

Parents
As aforementioned, the parents of the school come from low socio-economic classes and have many different ethnic origins. As a result, most parents cannot help their children with their homework, and thus students either read with their grand-parents or at after-school clubs. Parents’ interest decreases as time goes by, but they are willing to help when problems arise. Parents and staff come together when there is a school celebration or a school seminar. However, parental participation is low. Parents seem disinterested and are largely missing from school’s activities. This might be related to the fact that there is not any official report regarding student or school progress. Teachers evaluate students according to their standards which might lead to inconsistency, where for example the one year a student might be considered as excellent, while the next year as moderate.

It should be noted though that parental involvement is controlled and shaped by the school and this might lead to exclusionary practices, since parents, regardless of their socio-economic background, are expected to participate according to the standards placed on them. Additionally, there seems to be lack of public spaces where parents and others can come together in order to challenge and if possible transform the taken-for-granted. In other words, parent voice is marginalised.

Considering the above, it would be interesting if parents were involved in school’s practices and policies, so that they can understand how education is delivered in their school and be able to contribute. There is a need to think how we the teachers can develop stronger bonds with parents, so that they can understand that the school after all belongs to them and their children. In other words, parents need to get involved with the politics of schooling.
Concluding remarks
Unfortunately, we cannot argue that the school has made a difference in the lives of our students as there is no evidence to suggest that. Only teachers can talk about their students’ progress. This again implies that the classroom is their private domain and this might mean stagnation, since teachers tend to work alone and according to imposed criteria. As such, improvement efforts depend on the good will and commitment of individual teachers and not on the macro-politics of schooling. Considering the mobility of teachers, the challenging context of the school, the policy pressures and the presence of hierarchy, we have come to a situation where school life seems to be disconnected from the real lives of people at the school level. There is limited space for alternatives and reflective thinking. Heads and teachers implement policies, whereas parents and students participate as passive recipients of schooling.

Further considerations
The problems/concerns of our school could be summarised as follows:

- Staff mobility. Local head teachers and teachers seem to avoid the school since it is considered demanding.
- Large numbers of students in classes
- Avoid pathologising students and issues
- Growing number of bilinguals
- Danger of ghettoising the school because of the many ethnicities
- Improve our practice through interaction and dialogue
- Develop a shared responsibility for improving school life
- Improve parent-teacher relationships
- Improve student-teacher relationships
- Give voice to students and parents
- Address the issue of sustainable school development through reflection processes
- Encourage active parent and student involvement
Case study report 2006-2007 (as updated from 2005-2006)

The school

This case study report presents in a succinct way the status of the school with some reflections and considerations for the future. It utilises the dispositions of staff in order to provide insights into notions of its micro-politics. In particular, it aims to link schooling with sustainable school development as a means of enabling an understanding of what prevents those at the school level to assume more active roles. Firstly, it presents school’s background, followed by an analysis of the school year 2006-2007. In other words, this case study report is an informative and reflexive account in the midst of school life.

The school

The school was established in 1962 in order to serve the kids of the surrounding area. It started with 3 teachers, 1 head teacher and 198 students. During the school year 1979-1980, it was divided into two cycles with different head teachers and staff, but one Parent Association, as a way of securing a sense of overall unity within the school. In the existing building extra classrooms were added, creating further uncertainties about safety. Now, it has 16 classrooms, 2 small ones, 1 for domestic science, 2 staff rooms and 2 head teacher’s offices.

In the school year 2005-2006, both schools had 25 teachers and 480 students. Cycle A (the school in question which serves students of the age range of 6 to 9 years old) had 236 students, a number though which constantly changed as some students moved to or out of the area. In the school year 2006-2007, it had approximately 155-175 students.

Furthermore, the school year 2006-2007 was a transitory year, since a new school was built in the area and a great number (1/3) of students were transferred into that school. Along with these changes, there were changes in headship and staff. Additionally, a great number of political refugees started arriving at the area by the end of the school year.

Staff turnover

During the school year 2005-2006, the school had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 12 teachers, 1 speech therapist and 1 special needs teacher. Also, three of the teachers worked in other schools, too. In 2006-2007, it had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 9 teachers, 1 speech therapist and 1 special needs teacher. Two of the teachers worked in other schools, too.
Unfortunately, in writing this account, it was very difficult to collect data for the previous school years since no record was kept anywhere, until recently (1999-2000). This can be an indication of how policies on staff mobility pervade the system unquestioned. A valuable source of information was an album of the school issued in 1992, celebrating the 30 years of the two schools (Cycle A and Cycle B). Additionally, staff data for the years 1999-2005/6 were collected from the District Educational Office. Thus, there is a “black-box” for the school years 1992/3-1999.

From 1962 until 1989, before the school was divided into Cycles, it had 6 head teachers. Cycle A had 5 head teachers during the period 1989-1992, and 4 during the period 1997-2006/7. It is possible that Cycle A had 9-13 head teachers in 17 years. Change in headship occurred every 2 years, with two exceptions of 5 years. If we consider the school as a unity of the two Cycles, most probably, it had approximately 24-29 head teachers in 45 years.

From 1999-2000 until 2004-2005 there was a turnover of staff from 25% to 50% (4-7 new members). There was a 65% turnover of staff for the school year 2005-2006, a 29% for the school year 2006-2007 and possibly a 43% or more (we will know by the end of September) for the school year 2007-2008. In particular changes in staff were as follows:

2000-2001: 5 new members (36%)
2001-2002: 6 new members (43%)
2002-2003: 8 new members (47%)
2003-2004: 4 new members (27%)
2004-2005: 4 new members (29%)
2005-2006: 9 new members (65%)
2006-2007: 4 new members (29%)

Also, there was a new inspector every 1-2 years between the years 1999-2004/5, and not until recently the inspector of the school has been in position for the last 3 years. The following table is helpful in understanding how staff changed over the years in Cycle A.
### Staff changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Inspector</th>
<th>Head teacher</th>
<th>Deputy Heads</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962-1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992-1999</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, the school seems to experience frequent and rapid changes in staff. The implication is that staff members seem to have limited time to build meaningful relationships and bring about productive improvement. This seems to create an impression that the school is more of a building rather than an institution.

### Headship

Headship is quite problematic in this school, since there is a high flow of head teachers (every two years with the longest period of five years). Frequent changes in headship managed to create a culture of cynicism, where teachers tend to ignore and resist head teachers’ improvement efforts. It is possible that these repetitive successions might have created such resilient cultures, whereby teachers cope with change by simply maintaining the status quo. Given all this, the head teacher seems to be unable to design long-or short-term improvement strategies, as there is lack of time and will to do so. Furthermore, the centrality of the system seems to constrain heads’ active involvement, since it presses for compliance according to policy criteria and central regulations.

However, this year the new head invested her time in socialisation processes as a means of getting to know the school, the parents, the students and the staff, and also building trust. As such, it was difficult for the head teacher to help the school move forward, or advocate strong positions that could go to the root of the problem. This was further intensified by the fact that teachers seemed to be passive about change and also, those at the top of hierarchy pressed for compliance. Furthermore, the context of the school seemed to pose its own challenges to progress, given the diversity of students and the limited space for local decision making.
Additionally, this year it was noted a different approach when making decisions, since the new head teacher seemed to be less persistent on bureaucracy and regulations, and more flexible to suggestions and respectful to teachers’ professional judgement. For some, this played an important role in facilitating their active participation.

**Staff**

Staff members seem to have good personal relationships in a friendly environment. That is one of the reasons why some of the staff did not ask for transposition. However, they tend to work in isolation, as most of their time is invested in marking student’s work, preparing worksheets and handling problematic behaviour. As a result, acting together or getting involved in improvement projects is by far constrained. Even when a change is proposed, teachers might agree with it but without getting actually engaged.

Furthermore, conducting research is something considered for researchers. Professional development is regarded as a personal option and thus it can be pulled into different directions. Teachers perform and evaluate students’ progress according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry. All of this seems to constrain teachers and students from being responsive and creative to what the situation allows and how things could be done better.

Also, staff mobility seems to prevent teachers from designing or getting involved in improvement strategies. This is intensified by the fact that the only formal feedback that teachers get is from the local inspector which is based on their individual classroom practices. Consequently, the classroom is well established as the teacher’s private domain, and this seems to hinder staff from collaborating and building trust.

Indeed, this mobility of staff seems to constrain the development of productive relationships. The implication is that staff members need to view schooling as an extension of their selves and try to commit to improvement. The involvement with improvement projects or action research might be seen as positive steps forward. Also, problem-posing can be challenging as long as there is a constant questioning of the current ways of thinking and practice.

In other words, there is a need to create an inquiry stance to issues that seem important to teachers as practitioners and community members. This year, a group of teachers came
together by the end of the school year in order to design an improvement process which will be continued the following year. More specifically, this action research project aims to improve school’s relationships with parents. Its rational is to develop a toolkit/webpage which can be used as a means of blending newcomers and established members in more productive ways. This also encloses the possibility that teachers might be able to use it in their new schools.

**Students**

The school serves a diverse student population. Students comprise many different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. In particular, most of the students come from low-income families, live on allowances, have serious family problems and are bilinguals or foreigners (they do not speak the language).

For example, during the school year 2005-2006, 50 students were bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, etc) or foreigners. In the school year 2006-2007, approximately 70 students (almost half of the student population) were bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, Bulgaria, France, Serbia, Austria, Ukraine, Romania, Kurdistan, Lebanon, China, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Poland, Zimbabwe and Philippines) or foreigners (Iraq, Palestine). Additionally, there was a major intake of students (14) coming from Iraq and Palestine which posed significant challenges and difficulties to the teaching and learning processes. Most of the students with an ethnic background were located in first grade, verifying the fact that more such ethically diverse students are attracted to the school.

Some of them have divorced parents and others are under the supervision of the Welfare Office. Additionally, during the school year there is a form of student mobility, because some families move to or out of the area. Moreover, some of the students miss school on a regular basis. The school attracts such a diverse student population because of its location which has the lowest rents and property prices.

Furthermore, students’ achievements vary, in the sense that some students improve or get worse through time. A characteristic of the classes is the big number of students (25-30). The standardised provision of education, given that the Ministry controls educational policy,
seems to facilitate the exclusion of charismatic and disadvantaged students. Students’
behaviour is idiomorphic, with some students to improve or not after an intervention,
whereas some others are regarded as beyond change. Many of them have low self-esteem,
emotional problems and limited experiences. In other words, each student needs special
attention. It is important for the school to have a common policy regarding rewards and
consequences in order to help the students to improve their behaviour.

Overall, it seems that students are rather passive recipients of schooling, since they are
silenced in decision-making processes within the school. What seems to contribute to this is
the fact that teachers have to finish the books provided by the Ministry according always to
the recommendations/demands of the inspector. This seems to leave limited space for
productive dialogue and resolution. As a result, student voice seems to be marginalised in
every aspect of school life. It is possible that student involvement in decision-making might
enhance their self-esteem and confidence. It would help, if there was a better cooperation
with their parents.

However, this year, an effort to take into account student voice by using the technique of
photo-elicitation was initiated. This assumed that students could make their views explicit
and based on that awareness to get involved in an improvement process. As it was noted,
this contributed significantly to the development of a shared sense of purpose and
responsibility, since students felt valued and respected for their views and potential. In
particular, the whole effort aims to enhance the technique of photo-elicitation into photo-
voice as a means of taking into account student voice more seriously during succession. This
can enable sustainable school development, since in this way students can develop the
capacities and capabilities needed for bringing about positive school improvement.

Parents
As aforementioned, the parents of the school come from low socio-economic classes and
have many different ethnic origins. As a result, most parents cannot help their children with
their homework, and thus students either read with their grand-parents or at after-school
clubs. Parents’ interest decreases as time goes by, but they are willing to help when
problems arise. Parents and staff come together when there is a school celebration or a
school seminar. However, parental participation is low. Parents seem disinterested and are
largely missing from school’s activities. This might be related to the fact that there is not any official report regarding student or school progress. Teachers evaluate students according to their standards which might lead to inconsistency, where for example the one year a student is considered as excellent, while the next year as moderate.

It should be noted though that parental involvement is controlled and shaped by the school and this might lead to exclusionary practices, since parents, regardless of their socio-economic background, are expected to participate according to the standards placed on them. Additionally, there seems to be lack of public spaces where parents and others can come together in order to challenge and if possible transform the taken-for-granted. In other words, parent voice is marginalised.

Considering the above, it would be interesting if parents were involved in school’s practices and policies, so that they can understand how education is delivered in their school and be able to contribute. There is a need to think how we, the teachers, can develop stronger bonds with parents, so that they can understand that the school after all belongs to them and their children. In other words, parents need to get involved with the politics of schooling.

This year there was an effort to make parent views explicit about leadership succession by using the technique of photo-elicitation. This was hopeful in the sense that a group of parents was formed, despite their general attitudes. Also, they seemed committed in using the technique as a means of bringing about productive improvement. It is hoped that the technique will help parents to move from passive respondents to active inquirers and change initiators.

**Concluding remarks**

Unfortunately, we cannot argue that the school has made a difference in the lives of our students, as there is limited evidence to suggest that. Only teachers can talk about their students’ progress. This again implies that the classroom is the private domain of teachers and this might mean stagnation, since teachers tend to work alone and according to imposed criteria. As such, improvement efforts depend on the good will and commitment of individual teachers and not on the macro-politics of schooling. Stagnation seems to dominate school life, since there is not any productive engagement. Students and parents are seen in
most respects as passive recipients of schooling, whereas heads and teachers as policy implementers.

Considering the mobility of teachers and the challenging context of the school, stagnation is evident. To put it simply, there is no expansion of learning as participation looks procedural. If we take out the initiative of working closer with parents, then the update of this account would have remained the same. Improvement efforts seem fragile and support from above looks unhelpful. Within this context of imposition, school life seems to be disconnected from the real lives of people at the school level, as it seems to be limited space for alternatives and reflective thinking. In other words, there is no expansion of learning and everything seems procedural. We need to consider how we can create the conditions for more productive ways of working and learning.

**Further considerations**
The problems/concerns of our school could be summarised as follows:

- Staff mobility. Local head teachers and teachers seem to avoid the school since it is considered demanding.
- Large numbers of students in classes
- Avoid pathologising students and issues
- Growing number of bilinguals
- Danger of ghettoising the school because of the many ethnicities
- Improve our practice through interaction and dialogue
- Develop a shared responsibility for improving school life
- Improve parent-teacher relationships
- Improve student-teacher relationships
- Give voice to students and parents
- Address the issue of sustainable school development through reflection processes
- Encourage active parent and student involvement
Case study report 2007-2008 (as updated from 2006-2007. In January 2009 was used for a grand member check)

The school
This case study report presents in a succinct way the status of the school with some reflections and considerations for the future. It utilises the dispositions of staff in order to provide insights into notions of its micro-politics. In particular, it aims to link schooling with sustainable school development as a means of enabling an understanding of what prevents those at the school level to assume more active roles. Firstly, it presents school’s background, followed by an analysis of the school year 2007-2008. In other words, this case study report is an informative and reflexive account in the midst of school life.

The school
The school was established in 1962 in order to serve the kids of the surrounding area. It started with 3 teachers, 1 head teacher and 198 students. During the school year 1979/80, it was divided into two cycles with different head teachers and staff, but one Parent Association, as a way of securing a sense of overall unity within the school. In the existing building extra classrooms were added, creating further uncertainties about safety. Now, it has 16 classrooms, 2 small ones, 1 for domestic science, 2 staff rooms and 2 head teacher’s offices.

In the school year 2005-2006, both schools had 25 teachers and 480 students. Cycle A (the school in question which serves students of the age range of 6 to 9 years old) had 236 students, a number though which constantly changed as some students moved to or out of the area. In the school year 2006-2007, the school had approximately 155-175 students. This school year, 2007-2008, approximately 160-175 students were enrolled.

Furthermore, the school year 2006-2007 was a transitory year, since a new school was built in the area and a great number (1/3) of students were transferred into that school. Along with these changes, there were changes in headship and staff. Additionally, a great number of political refugees started arriving at the area by the end of the school year 2006-2007. During the school year 2007-2008, there were great changes in staff, and also more political refugees registered at the school.
**Staff turnover**

During the school year 2005-2006, the school had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 12 teachers, 1 speech therapist and 1 special needs teacher. Also, three of the teachers worked in other schools, too. In 2006/7, the school had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 9 teachers, 1 speech therapist and 1 special needs teacher. Two of the teachers worked in other schools, too. In the school year 2007-2008, the school had 1 head teacher, 2 deputy heads, 10 teachers and 1 speech therapist. Two of the teachers worked in other schools, too. Their working experienced varied from 40 (deputy head) to 4 years and their stay at the school varied from 1 to 7 years (only one member).

Unfortunately, in writing this account, it was very difficult to collect data for the previous school years since no record was kept anywhere, until recently (1999-2000). This can be an indication of how policies on staff mobility pervade the system unquestioned. A valuable source of information was an album of the school issued in 1992, celebrating the 30 years of the two schools (Cycle A and Cycle B). Additionally, staff data for the years 1999-2005/6 were collected from the District Educational Office. Thus, there is a “black-box” for the school years 1992/3-1999.

From 1962 until 1989, before the school was divided into Cycles, it had 6 head teachers. Cycle A had 5 head teachers during the period 1989-1992, and 4 during the period 1997-2007/8. It is possible that Cycle A had 9-13 head teachers in 18 years. Change in headship occurred every 2 years, with two exceptions of 5 years. If we consider the school as a unity of the two Cycles, most probably, it had approximately 24-29 head teachers in 46 years.

From 1999-2000 until 2004-2005 there was a turnover of staff from 25% to 50% (4-7 new members). In 2005-2006 there was a 65% turnover, a 29% in the school year 2006-2007 and a 50% in 2007-2008. In the school year 2008-2009, it is expected a 50% staff turnover. In particular changes in staff and headship were as follows:

- 2000-2001: 5 new members (36%)
- 2001-2002: 6 new members (43%)
- 2002-2003: 8 new members (47%)
- 2003-2004: 4 new members (27%)
- 2004-2005: 4 new members (29%)

311
2005-2006: 9 new members (65%)
2006-2007: 4 new members (29%)
2007-2008: 7 new members (50%)
2008-2009: 7 new members (50%) expected

Also, there was a new inspector every 1-2 years between the years 1999-2004/5, and not until recently, the inspector of the school has been in position for the last 4 years. The following table is helpful in understanding how staff changed over the years in Cycle A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Inspector</th>
<th>Head teacher</th>
<th>Deputy Heads</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1962-1992</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>1992-1999</td>
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<td>1999-2005</td>
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<td>2005-2006</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, the school seems to experience frequent and rapid changes in staff. The implication is that staff members seem to have limited time to build meaningful relationships and bring about productive improvement. This seems to create an impression that the school is more of a building rather than a specific public institution.

**Headship**
Headship is quite problematic in this school, since there is a high flow of head teachers (every two years with the longest period of five years). Frequent changes in headship managed to create a culture of cynicism, where teachers tend to ignore and resist head teachers’ improvement efforts. It is possible that these repetitive successions might have created such resilient cultures, whereby teachers cope with change by simply maintaining the status quo. Given all this, the head teacher seems to be unable to design long-term or short-term improvement strategies, as there is lack of time and will to do so. Furthermore, the
centrality of the system seems to constrain heads’ active involvement, since it presses for compliance according to policy criteria and regulations.

The previous year, the new head invested her time in socialisation processes as a means of getting to know the school, the parents, the students and the staff, and also building trust. As such, it was difficult for the head teacher to help the school move forward, or advocate strong positions that could go to the root of the problem. This was further intensified by the fact that teachers seemed to be passive about change and also, those at the top of hierarchy pressed for compliance. Furthermore, the context of the school seemed to pose its own challenges to progress, given the diversity of students and the limited space for local decision making.

Additionally, it was noted a different approach when making decisions, since the new head teacher continued to be less persistent on bureaucracy and regulations and more flexible to suggestions and respectful to teachers’ professional judgement. For some, this played an important role in facilitating their active participation.

More specifically, this approach of the head teacher helped the research groups of teachers, parents and students to get actively involved in school improvement processes and bring about change within their school. This was important, since, without the strong support of the head teacher, positive improvement from particular positions was unlikely to occur within imposed hierarchies.

**Staff**

Staff members seem to have good personal relationships in a friendly environment. That is one of the reasons why some of the staff did not ask for transposition. However, they tend to work in isolation, as most of their time is invested in marking student’s work, preparing worksheets and handling problematic behaviour. As a result, acting together or getting involved in improvement projects is by far constrained. Even when a change is proposed, teachers might agree with it but without getting actually engaged.

Furthermore, conducting research is something considered for researchers. Professional development is regarded as a personal option and thus it can be pulled into different
directions. Teachers perform and evaluate students’ progress according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry. All of this seems to constrain teachers and students from being responsive and creative to what the situation allows and how things could be done better.

Also, staff mobility seems to prevent teachers from designing or getting involved in improvement strategies. This is intensified by the fact that the only formal feedback that teachers get is from the local inspector which is based on their individual classroom practices. Consequently, the classroom is well established as the teacher’s private domain, and this seems to hinder staff from collaborating and building trust.

Indeed, this mobility of staff seems to constrain the development of productive relationships. The implication is that staff members need to view schooling as an extension of their selves and try to commit to improvement. The involvement with improvement projects or action research might be seen as positive steps forward. Also, problem-posing can be challenging as long as there is a constant questioning of the current ways of thinking and practice.

In other words, there is a need to create an inquiry stance to issues that seem important to teachers as practitioners and community members. The last year, a group of teachers came together by the end of the school year in order to design an improvement process. More specifically, this action research project aimed to improve school’s relationships with parents. Its rational was to develop a toolkit/webpage which could be used as a means of blending newcomers and established members in more productive ways. This also enclosed the possibility that teachers might be able to use it in their new schools.

This effort continued this year and showed how difficult it was for newcomers to get actively involved, as they found themselves trapped in their new working conditions and the particularities of the school. Nevertheless, the whole process brought at the front line an important issue, and in a way encouraged participation and reflective thinking towards a shared concern. Additionally, as the research progressed, there was a wider involvement, since interventions were designed at the school level. This pointed to the potential that exists within partnerships and the development of a shared responsibility.
However, there was a deep concern about the impact or the sustainability of such collaborative efforts, without any authority at the system level, and also the fact that parents were actually given stereotypical roles rather than radically engaging. The implication is that there is a need to be cautious about improvement projects, because they might not actually bring radical transformation. This though requires further problematisation.

**Students**

The school serves a diverse student population. Students comprise many different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. In particular, most of the students come from low-income families, live on allowances, have serious family problems and are bilinguals or foreigners (they do not speak the language).

For example, during the school year 2005-2006, 50 students were bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, etc) or foreigners. In the school year 2006-2007, approximately 70 students (almost half of the student population) were bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, Bulgaria, France, Serbia, Austria, Ukraine, Romania, Kurdistan, Lebanon, China, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Poland, Zimbabwe and Philippines) or foreigners (Iraq, Palestine). Additionally, there was a major intake of students (14) coming from Iraq and Palestine which posed significant challenges and difficulties to the teaching and learning processes. In the school year 2007-2008, 75 (almost half of the student population) students were bilinguals (Russia, Moldavia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, England, Bulgaria, Serbia, Austria, Ukraine, Romania, Kurdistan, Lebanon, China, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Poland, Zimbabwe and Philippines) or foreigners (Iraq, Palestine). This year again there was a major intake of students coming from Iraq and Palestine (14-18). Most of the students with an ethnic background were located in first and second grade verifying the fact that more such ethically diverse students are attracted to the school.

Some of them have divorced parents and others are under the supervision of the Welfare Office. Additionally, during the school year there is a form of student mobility, because some families move in or out of the area. Moreover, some of the students miss school on a regular basis. The school attracts such a diverse student population because of its location which has the lowest rents and property prices.
Furthermore, students’ achievements vary, in the sense that some students improve or get worse through time. A characteristic of the classes is the big number of students (25-30). The standardised provision of education, given that the Ministry controls educational policy, seems to facilitate the exclusion of charismatic and disadvantaged students. Students’ behaviour is idiomorphic, with some students to improve or not after an intervention, whereas some others are regarded as beyond change. Many of them have low self-esteem, emotional problems and limited experiences. In other words, each student needs special attention. It is important for the school to have a common policy regarding rewards and consequences in order to help the students to improve their behaviour.

Overall, it seems that students are rather passive recipients of schooling, since they are silenced in decision-making processes within the school. What seems to contribute to this is the fact that teachers have to finish the books provided by the Ministry according always to the recommendations/demands of the inspector. This seems to leave limited space for productive dialogue and resolution. As a result, student voice seems to be marginalised in every aspect of school life. It is possible that student involvement in decision-making might enhance their self-esteem and confidence. It would help, if there was a better cooperation with their parents.

However, the last year an effort to take into account student voice by using the technique of photo-elicitation was initiated. Students made their views explicit and based on that awareness were involved in an improvement process. As it was noted, this contributed significantly to the development of a shared sense of purpose, as students felt valued and respected for their views and potential. This constructivist dialogue helped them feel responsible for their school’s progress. The whole effort aimed to enhance the technique of photo-elicitation into photo-voice as a means of taking into account student voice more seriously during succession. It was hoped that this could enable sustainable school development, since in this way students could develop the capacities and capabilities needed for bringing about positive school improvement.

Indeed, this year their research progressed into photo-voice. Students tried to improve safety within their school by focusing on the exit ladder, the benches, the toilets and the school’s
canteen. As it appeared, this enabled their active participation in a positive way. The whole effort seemed to be particularly difficult as it depended on the connectedness of powerful adults. It showed how vulnerable young learners can be in an adults’ world. Of course, without the head’s active support, whenever this was possible, none of this would have occurred.

**Parents**
As aforementioned, the parents of the school come from low socio-economic classes and have many different ethnic origins. As a result, most parents cannot help their children with their homework, and thus students either read with their grand-parents or at after-school clubs. Parents’ interest decreases as time goes by, but they are willing to help when problems arise. Parents and staff come together when there is a school celebration or a school seminar. However, parental participation is low. Parents seem disinterested and are largely missing from school’s activities. This might be related to the fact that there is not any official report regarding student or school progress. Teachers evaluate students according to their standards which might lead to inconsistency, where for example the one year a student is considered as excellent, while the next year as moderate.

It should be noted though that parental involvement is controlled and shaped by the school and this might lead to exclusionary practices, since parents, regardless of their socio-economic background, are expected to participate according to the standards placed on them. Additionally, there seems to be lack of public spaces where parents and others can come together in order to challenge and if possible transform the taken-for-granted. In other words, parent voice is marginalised.

Considering the above, it would be interesting if parents were involved in school’s practices and policies, so that they can understand how education is delivered in their school and be able to contribute. There is a need to think how we can develop stronger bonds with parents, so that they can understand that the school after all belongs to them and their children. In other words, parents need to get involved with the politics of schooling.

The last year there was an effort to make parents’ views explicit about leadership succession using the technique of photo-elicitation. This attempt was hopeful in the sense that a group of
parents was formed, despite their general attitudes. Also, they seemed to be committed in using the technique as a means of bringing about productive improvement. It was hoped that the technique could help parents to move from passive respondents to active inquirers and change initiators.

Indeed, this year, parents with the technique of photo-voice managed to get actively involved with the politics of schooling and bring about meaningful change, despite the constraints. Additionally, they managed to get into dialogue with powerful others (e.g. the Ministry) and gain legitimacy. It was noted that without the head’s active support, whenever possible, much of this would have remained vague. This was important as it pointed to the potential that exists within partnerships when they are based on reciprocity and trust. However, not all powerful others were willing to support their active involvement and this required further reflexivity in not abandoning their effort (e.g. summer school).

**Concluding remarks**

Despite some positive progress, we cannot argue that our school has made a difference in the lives of our students as there is limited evidence to suggest that. Overall, stagnation seems to dominate school life, since productive engagement is constrained in numerous ways. Also, students and parents are seen in most respects as passive recipients of schooling. Improvement efforts depend on the good will and commitment of individual teachers and not on the macro-politics of schooling.

Considering the mobility of teachers, the challenging context of the school, along with policy pressures and the presence of hierarchy, we have come to a situation where school life seems to be disconnected from the real lives of people at the school level, as it seems to be limited space for alternatives and reflective thinking. To put it simply, there is no expansion of learning and everything seems procedural. **If we take out the initiative of action research processes, then, most of this account would have remained the same.** Stagnation is again evident as there were limited opportunities to influence situations from different standpoints without any authority at the system level. Even when opportunities were offered, disengagement was evident, as, within imposed agendas and oppressive hierarchical structures, this required a lot of courage and entailed a lot of risks. Participation in most respects looks procedural and learning is formalistic according to certain standards.
Problematisation and critical questioning on how to change what is being experienced as oppressive is too often circumvented.

**Further considerations**
The problems/concerns of our school could be summarised as follows:

- Staff mobility. Local head teachers and teachers seem to avoid the school since it is considered demanding.
- Large numbers of students in classes
- Avoid pathologising students and issues
- Growing number of bilinguals
- Danger of ghettoising the school because of the many ethnicities
- Improve our practice through interaction and dialogue
- Develop a shared responsibility for improving school life
- Improve parent-teacher relationships
- Improve student-teacher relationships
- Give voice to students and parents
- Address the issue of sustainable school development through reflection processes
- Encourage active parent and student involvement
Appendix 4

Overview of participants
Appendix 4: Overview of participants

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Appendix 5

The selected photographs for eliciting parent and student views
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The staff room

Head teacher’s office and staff room in a small rural school, where the head teacher will retire.

The small rural school

A classroom