Passion, Pragmatics and Politics

Senior women leaders in further education: an exploration of leadership style and identity

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ABSTRACT

Despite the radical equal opportunities legislation of the 1970s and the more recent Equality Act of 2010, women are still under-represented in senior leadership roles across the professions and industries. In the case of Further Education, whilst the incorporation of colleges in the early 1990s stimulated a growth in the number of women middle managers, this has not been reflected in a corresponding number of women senior managers and leaders.

Using narrative and autobiographical approaches, this study draws upon the experiences of seven past and current senior women leaders in the Further Education sector:

- firstly, to identify the voices of a largely unheard minority group in an often overlooked educational sector

- secondly, to explore largely male dominated leadership theory through the lens of the leadership practices of the women leaders.

General leadership theory is investigated and gender-specific aspects are discussed. A range of literature concerning women leaders in education is reviewed whilst the impact of past and present political and economic turbulence on the Further Education sector is charted. The findings indicate a high degree of commonality across the research participants in terms of leadership practice and identity and confirm the absence of a holistic leadership theory. Two key themes of a mosaic of leadership theories and the iterative nature of the personal and professional in identity are identified. Recommendations for policy, practice and further research are made to broaden understanding about, and opportunities for, women in senior leadership positions in Further Education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Opening Comments

My introductory chapter gives the background to my study by, firstly, identifying a major 'bump' (Andrews 2011), where something does not quite fit. Namely, how women are underrepresented in senior leadership roles in Further Education (FE). This is followed by a reflective account of my personal interest in women leaders. Starting with my first (and only) experience of a woman college Principal, I then offer a rationale for including an autobiographical account of my professional career. This personal perspective is the kernel of my research and supports and strengthens my decision to use a narrative methodology. Thirdly, I profile key developments in the FE sector, noting the impact of changes in governance and curriculum. My research questions are presented and the structure of my thesis outlined.

General Context

Since 1975, International Women's Day (IWD) has been celebrated every March in the UK in recognition of successful campaigning by the Suffragettes for voting rights for women to be established; it also serves as a reminder of continued injustices experienced by women. As an example, despite over forty years of equality legislation (Equal Pay Act 1970; The Sex Discrimination Act 1975; Equality Act 2010), women are still under-represented in senior leadership roles across the professions and industries. Figures for 2013 show that, despite small increases in recent years, in FE colleges 41% of Principals were women, whilst 61% of managers and 64% of the total FE workforce were women (Women's Leadership Network 2013). In 2014 only 20.7% of FTSE 100 board members were women (Vinnicombe *et al* 2014). At the same time, women have become more noticeable in management and leadership positions (Evans 2010).

The education sector continues to be a focus for political and economic ideologies - this is particularly evident in FE which over the years has been tasked to:

> deliver the skills and knowledge essential … for an economy seeking a strong position in a globalised political world. (Lumby and Foskett 2007 p.85).

More specifically, the sector has been commanded by the current Government to lead in the creation of three million apprenticeships by the year 2020 (Department for Business, Education & Skills 2015b).

Given that women form a large percentage of the workforce, that equal opportunity policy would encourage a similar proportion of female leaders, and that women leaders can offer valuable insights and guidance, it is important to understand why there are not more of them when, as Evans (2010) identifies, the current climate of:

> globalisation and the subsequent necessity to manage diversity, the economic and political environment. (p.348)

provides more opportunities for women to lead. It is also crucial to appreciate what women leaders in FE are undergoing in times of change and pressure, to identify any resulting lessons, and to assess their potential impact on the ability of teacher trainers, teacher trainees and policy makers to optimize experiences of student learning in colleges, as Smith (2011) suggests:

> how narrated lives, improvising I's that signify beyond presumed singularity, register shifting national, global, and posthuman imaginaries. (p.565)

It may be possible to challenge the (largely) male developed theories of leadership and to articulate one based on a more balanced recognition of gender. In her review of key feminist debates, Bryson (1999) concludes that true equality is impossible whilst we abide by laws and regulations written predominantly by men; as she says of women:

> although they may have freed themselves from dependence upon individual men, they have become dependent upon the patriarchal state. (pp.14-15)

Although the lack of gender equality described above, by which I mean lack of gender equality for women, is often seen as a problem for women only (Blackmore 1999; Durbin 2015), it is an issue for the whole of society if an inequity persists. The imbalance between numbers of women and men senior leaders, generally and specifically in FE, and the disproportionate number of women middle managers in FE who do not progress to senior managers is significant. This is noteworthy not only because of the actual disparity in the numbers in FE, but also because of the underlying societal and cultural influences which support the continuation of gender

inequality. Despite recent increases in the number of senior women leaders in FE, this represents only incremental growth and the:

> gradual assimilation of women into activity areas generally associated with men (Durbin 2015 p.16)

as encouraged by the equality legislation of the 1970s. However, this increase does not reflect the numbers of middle managers who are women and is thus unacceptable. What is needed is more radical action to ensure that the principles of social justice are fully realized (Gewirtz 1998; Bogotch 2000; Durbin 2015). More radical action could include, for example, the introduction of quotas or targets for the number of women in senior leader roles. This is often seen as a contentious issue (Deem *et al* 2000, Reay and Ball 2000, Durbin 2015) but one which has been successfully introduced in other European countries (Ellis 2014, Rankin 2015). Raising the profile of women in this way increases the numbers of role models, develops the opportunities for mentoring by senior women leaders and expands the recruitment pool. This in turn provides for organizations to experience, and expand their learning about, the ways in which women lead and thus contest prevailing male cultures (Deem et al 2000, McTavish and Miller 2000, Reay and Ball 2000, Morley 2013, Durbin 2015).

However, an awareness of the issues is only the start of the process – remedying them will be the harder task; as Durbin (2015) concludes:

> understanding the problem is part of the important journey towards achieving gender equality at these senior management levels but identifying and delivering the potential solutions may be a little more challenging. (p.15)

Personal Context

> *After years of macho male leadership styles we were thrilled to welcome the first woman Principal to our college. She promised openness, participation, democracy – her door would always be open to us. Within two months she had slammed the door shut and so it remained until she left three years later.* (Researcher's reminiscence)

<u>The place of an autobiographical perspective</u>

In retrospect, I feel that I was over-harsh in my judgement of her behaviour and that I succumbed to *'prescriptive gender stereotyping'*, explained by Heilman (2012 p.114), in making judgements about people based on expectations of what they *'should be*

like' rather than how they actually are. Heilman describes how such stereotyping can inhibit women's opportunities for promotion to senior roles, as their failure to meet expectations is deemed to be a failure in performance. Whilst I do not fully subscribe to Heilman's hypothesis that gender stereotyping accounts for all instances of discrimination that women experience in work, her ideas challenge the basis of my judgements about my experience of having a woman leader. This, in turn, led me to wonder whether 'imposter syndrome', little researched apart from Avelis (2013), which I have often heard used by women colleagues and friends to describe themselves, is about women's own prescriptive stereotyping. It is conceivable that women feel themselves to be imposters in leadership (or perhaps any) roles because there is a mismatch between how they think they should be thinking and behaving and how they are actually performing. In addition, there may be a sense of feeling out of place which has parallels with Reay's (1997) discussion on the relationship between class and women academics. She concludes:

> I suggest the female academic from a working-class background is unlikely to feel at home in academia. (p.21)

Indeed, this study could have explored the intersection of class and gender with women leaders; however I chose to focus on gender.

Taking into account my insight as mused upon above, my experience of a woman Principal stimulated my curiosity about how women adapt to, and become absorbed into, senior roles in FE in times of change. I have focused on women for two reasons: a) because there is a dearth of gender-specific academic literature directly related to this area and b) to help make sense of my own story and experiences. I am concentrating on FE because most of my own professional practice has focused on this sector. The context is related to times of change because education is in flux at present and there is perhaps merit in understanding the impact of such changes on a leader

My personal context, my autobiography, summarizes what has informed me as a researcher and what I bring to my research. Stanley (1992) writes of the *'ontologically shaky character'* of those who write about themselves and others, which she explains as:

questions concerning the nature of 'authorship': a single hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself emeshed [sic] with other lives which give hers the meaning it has. (p.14)

Shaky or not, my experiences and beliefs are the threshold for my research and these articulate closely with, and support, a qualitative approach.

My study is undertaken through narrative methodology. Whilst carrying out both the literature search and interviews with my research participants, my engagement with many of the issues seemed to deepen - both emotionally and intellectually - and it became apparent that much of what I was discovering reflected my own experiences. Whilst this may seem to be obvious to others, it was an epiphany for me - for whom even writing in the first person feels an alien experience and whose academic writing to date had been in the distancing, formal, third person. This allies with the *'sting of memory'* discussed by Denzin (2014 p.32) where there is a gradual comprehension that, through undertaking a narrative of others, one realizes that one is a part of the dialogue, not only as a researcher but also through one's own life history. This duality of role, I now understand, has affected the way in which I have developed the shape and approach of my research and resulted in a synthesis of perspectives to provide new insights for me and my research participants (Thomson 1995). I have been influenced by the writing of Nash (2004) who explores the power of *'personal narrative writing'* which allows for the articulation *'of strong and distinct voices'* (p.2). His argument is that we can only really do justice to other people's stories if we understand our own stories.

Nash (2008) acknowledges that writing one's personal narrative can be a challenging task which requires more *'creativity and candour'* (p.2) than might be the norm for most research projects. Like Nash, I am determined to '*move toward my vulnerability and sing my song in my own style, even if it is off-key at* times' (p.20) whilst trying to ensure that my thesis is not just a 'vanity project'. The point, and indeed the strength, of consciously addressing my autobiographic element is to encourage and maintain a reflexive stance throughout the research process (Denzin 2014).

If it seems worthwhile and important to lay out, and examine, my professional development and career (Theoharis 2007), comments from my participants about

influences and experiences of their earlier lives have prompted me to reflect also on that time of my life, as it will undoubtedly have influenced my later career. This examination, this singing of my own song, now follows.

<u>Singing my own song</u>

A 'good' education was considered to be an imperative by both my parents. I was the first from both sides of the family to (eventually) go to university and obtain a degree and I am still the only person across the older and younger generations to have achieved a master's level qualification. There may well be an element of '*sibling striving*' to my achievements (Lamb and Sutton-Smith 2014 p.199). Both my parents came from poor working class families from different continents, meeting and marrying in Japan when my mother was in her late teens. They quickly had three children and my mother never worked or studied again. My father was an officer in the Royal Navy and they lived the life of, and would have described themselves as, the middle class and education was key to avoiding the poverty they had experienced. My father set an example by studying during his forties for business and legal qualifications, whilst working full time. A pattern I now realize I have unconsciously replicated and not untypical for a first born child *'internalising parental voices'* (Sinclair 2007 p.62). With all my father's time taken up with work and study, my mother had to run the house and bring up the children - very much a traditional role for a woman in 1950s Britain (Nicholson 2015). My mother's story was that 'he was working so hard for us' and that 'of course, your father has a brilliant brain' which meant that the household revolved around his needs and wants, resulting in a benign tyranny, akin to Gewirtz's (1998 p.478) economic imperialism.   My mother was clearly an accomplished and knowledgeable woman, yet her take on our family dynamics left me with a feeling of ambivalence about the value of education, as she had never returned to studying. I absorbed her belief in the superiority of men, evidenced by the deference accorded to my brothers by both my parents. This apparent submissiveness to men was very much part of the culture in the UK at the time. Nicholson (2015), in her narratives of women during the 1950s, observes how *'backward looking'* they may have been in seeking some stability after the ravages of the Second World War:

> And if bringing it [the traditional role of women] back meant acceptance of injustices, prejudice and inflexibility on the men, then that was because many women themselves were conditioned into believing this to be the natural order of things. … Even highly intelligent and self-aware women raised no objection to being sidelined. (p.45)

My 'ambivalence' led to several years of educational discord, much to the disappointment of both my parents. I found 'A' level study tedious, was bored by the first year of a law degree (uncannily emulating my father's profession - unconsciously adopting a *'dutiful daughter'* role identified by Swindells 1995 p.206) and was clear that I never wanted to teach. My view changed when after two years' of office work I was given an opportunity, by my male manager, to train adults. Similarly to two of my research participants, Iris and Elizabeth, it was my mother who encouraged me in my training. My father, in a comparable way to that of another of my participants, Ivy, could not see the point in, as he expressed it, my *'giving up a perfectly reasonable job'* to become a student.

On completion of my studies (which my mother did not live to see), I found work with government sponsored courses and then eventually a permanent job in a college. I had definitely found my forte!

Starting work in 1980 in FE gave me an opportunity to experience and observe the incrementally changing face of the sector, although it was not until the 1988 Education Reform Act that radical change was introduced and formalized. The top half of the considerably hierarchical structure of the college I worked for was dominated by men. In addition, departments and sections were defined by gender; for example, sciences and engineering were mainly men whilst arts and social care were mainly women, in terms of both staff and students. I was the first graduate to be employed within my section - typified by my female line manager as '*that upstart who thinks she knows it all because she has a degree'* (Researcher's reminiscence); and the first woman in the college to be promoted to a senior lecturer role (via a previous promotion). My experiences paralleled some of the early changes in the sector with new staff being expected to be graduates with a teaching qualification and the start of the shift towards women middle managers (Simmons 2008). I took opportunities as they presented themselves in the way of many of my research sample. The culture of the time was a benign paternalism which echoed my

childhood experiences. Although this might not have been quite the golden time of my memory it was undoubtedly when I lost my heart to the 'local tec' as it was commonly called. There was a degree of social engineering with our students, reflective of an interventionist social justice stance (Bogotch 2000), via government sponsored courses designed to prepare unemployed young people and adults for jobs. Having discovered my 'forte' I was very idealistic about what I saw the college offering in terms of an alternative or second opportunity for people to study in a safe supportive environment. Having disliked my time in the sixth form of a school and having returned to study in my early twenties, I felt a huge amount of empathy with the student body in general and with my own students in particular. It is this empathy that still sustains me in working in education today. In this way my life and the lives of my students over the years have become entwined and there is a sense of *'being inside the whale'* (Hannabuss 2000 p.103). This position enabled me to experience at close hand the glories and goriness of such a view! From an academic researcher perspective Sikes and Potts (2008) counsel caution, as researchers:

> need to give thought to the possible consequences that may follow from such investigations because this is research which can give rise to specific methodological and ethical issues. (p.5)

During my college career, I was mentored by two male Vice-Principals who were in place during my time there. This contact with older, seemingly powerful men, very capable, intelligent and dedicated to the FE sector and who freely discussed the challenges of the sector and their role within it, counteracted, in some way, my view of the role of men and led me to wonder at the dominance of men in my college and in the sector.

I have always been an active member of cross-organizational committees and working parties in my professional career. I wanted to make a contribution to the college, to be involved with change, and I was keen on getting the 'bigger picture' on college matters, whilst remaining all too aware that I was 'bit' player within the picture. This 'now' awareness accords with Smith and Watson's (1998) claim that all autobiography starts with 'amnesia' from which the blankness is then populated by snippets of highly subjective memory from a dual perspective that is:

> the narrator is both the same and not the same as the autobiographer, and the narrator is both the same and not the same as the subject of narration. Moreover there are many stories to be told and many different and divergent storytelling occasions that call for and forth contextually marked and sometimes radically divergent narratives of identity. (p.109)

My appointment as a senior lecturer coincided with the start of a far-reaching shake up of the FE system whereby colleges moved from Local Education Authority (LEA) control, becoming corporations with a greatly increased autonomy for their finances. My role, as Staff Development Co-ordinator, was a new one with a brief to organize and deliver an annual staff development programme for all College staff. This was to be based on individually identified developmental needs within the parameters of nationally identified guidelines – all nested within a closely monitored budget for which I had complete responsibility. It was important to me that everyone was treated fairly and I took a strong social justice perspective on this. I felt as if I were in the vanguard of something exciting and, like several of my research participants, I had the opportunity to become involved with all parts of the college and with most of the staff. I was certainly getting the 'bigger picture' about the college and also about Government positioning on the sector. My five years in this staff development role represents a watershed in terms of my view of FE and in terms of my career. I am reminded of a French saying along the lines of 'love is blind; marriage restores sight'. I had, I now realize, been an idealist about the power of education to enable and empower others, based on my deeply held humanist beliefs. What I began to struggle with was the organizational behaviour I observed within my college.

I learned to accept, albeit reluctantly and even now not fully, that an imperfect organization can deliver a positive and inspiring experience for learners.

As I review this section of my career I can see that as I, in some ways, shattered the glass ceiling (of which I wasn't fully aware) as a woman, I also shattered many of my beliefs, which in turn tested my values. This meant that I took actions which were, as I described them to myself at the time, expedient to achieve a particular purpose. When interviewing my participants in this research there were times when the atmosphere changed, when there was an awkwardness in the air as they described similar activities which compromised their values. At the time of interview I was aware of feeling quite judgemental about their actions however, having now explored

some of my own behaviours I feel far less judgemental and more understanding. Clearly I had forgotten my own actions and experiences! Although what I have been engaged with is not quite autoethnography, this experience chimes closely with Sikes and Potts' (2008) observation that:

> autoethnography, like any other type of research from the inside, can raise issues for relationships, can give rise to ethical dilemmas and, what is more, can provoke personal questioning and uncertainties which may be uncomfortable and difficult to deal with. (p.5)

I believe that such actions of expedience and compromise might represent the 'underbelly' of pragmatic leadership; an aspect that I had not considered or recognized whilst reviewing the research of Mumford and Van Doorn (2001) and Mumford *et al* (2008).

As legislation, policies and processes moved the college towards incorporation I was supportive of the development and thought, having enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in my role, that whole college autonomy would benefit staff and students. This support ended abruptly when, on incorporation, the whole of the senior management team of the college immediately awarded themselves a generous pay award - way above that of the rest of the staff. Functional areas were introduced, to replicate those previously provided by the LEA, and I was offered a role in the newly formed Personnel Department. Disillusioned by the whole incorporation outcome and not wishing to change from my academic role, I declined the offer and returned to a full time academic role as course leader for a new higher education (HE) course.

Having been a key player within the structure and politics of the College for five years, I felt strange and alienated in my new role. However, being involved in the establishment of an HE profile for the College gave me an opportunity to research and lead a new development which led to a cross-college role for the provision of such courses. Shortly after this I became a middle and line-manager and a staff governor. In these two roles I spent much of my time deflecting the diktats of senior management as the college slowly took on the mantle of new managerialism and we were exhorted to work smarter, work leaner and achieve targets. At the same time, as staff governor, I felt a tension as I wanted to ensure that I gave due recognition to the voice of the staff I represented whilst, through a feeling of loyalty to the college,

bonding with senior management to present a united front to non-college members of the Board of Governors. In effect, I was of the Board and yet – not. Again a dual role of an insider and an outsider with the potential for insight and perplexity (Clough 2002; Sikes and Potts 2008).

After yet another structural change, I had a feeling of *déjà vu* and ennui and left to start a career in HE in a senior leadership role. Here I found that universities were going through similar funding imperatives to FE and I was very well placed to understand, manage and lead on the ensuing challenges. After seven years I stepped down from this role, moving to another university working as an Associate Lecturer.

Given the nature of my research and its relation to my own experiences, I occupy a post-modern ontological position in my belief that I cannot write convincingly about myself or others independently of my society, culture and language. However, this position gives rise to a further complexity of understanding the self, and others, within the assumptions of society, culture and language; what Gilmore (2001) refers to as *'the interpenetration of the private and public'* (p.13). This phrase has quite a harsh and aggressive tone to it, perhaps deliberately so. Examples of the melange of the private and public include the historical exclusion of recognition of women's autobiography as a legitimate genre - thus trying to assert a voice; the difficulty of portraying an understandable account within a dominant hegemony, for example, colonialism, class or religion - thus confronting embedded beliefs. There is a sense in which the personal can be used to challenge the political (Stanley 1992; Swindells 1995; Smith and Watson 1998; Gilmore 2001). The muffling of women's voices declared here has parallels with the dominance of, and focus on, men in leadership theory which will be considered in my literature review.

In a play on words Stanley (1992) writes that *'the auto/biographical I is a seeing I, a seeing eye'* (p.21) which I interpret to mean that autobiography is a fusion of the looking in and the looking out and it is an image which, I believe, relates to the feeling of the insider/outsider role I have experienced whilst carrying out my research. On reflection, my experiences seem to coalesce into a delicate and intricate spider's web with a clear pattern which shimmers on an autumn morning.

FE Context: Economics, Politics and Change

There is a general consensus (Leathwood 2000; Bathmaker and Avis 2005; Armitage *et al* 2007; Jephcote *et al* 2008; Blair 2009; Avis *et al* 2010; Richardson and Wiborg 2012) that the nature, role and governance of FE colleges changed considerably from their formal inauguration in 1944 to incorporation in 1993. Such changes can be charted as their metamorphosing from technical colleges to corporations; from offering apprenticeships to degrees; from a male dominated workforce to a female one; from local authority to quasi-autonomous control; from a public sector ethos to one of the private sector and from a student to a market focus. In some instances, there is a sense of *déjà vu*: for example, proposals to reduce the numbers of vocational courses - in 1979 (The Mansell Report) and again in 2011 (The Wolf Report); promoting the value of apprenticeships - in 1995 (the introduction of Modern Apprenticeships) and 2011 (The Education Act 2011).

Stoten (2011) gives a succinct summary of the perceived purpose to the government of FE colleges:

> a convenient vehicle for local, economic and social regeneration, as they are able to act both independently or as part of a local hub of diverse educational providers (p.155)

However, in spite of the changing mix of function experienced within FE, the underlying *raison d'être* has remained unchanged - the notion of serving the economy and community, as Jephcote *et al* (2008) note *'promoting economic growth, social cohesion and social justice'* (p.164). Stoten (2011) is critical in his analysis of how the FE sector has been directed over the last thirty years, citing the pressures of *'economic instrumentalism, New Public Management and Public Choice theory'* (p.155). This is an indication of how the rhetoric of incorporation (about, for example autonomy, freedom from the shackles of LEAs) was but a chimera, as power now lies wholly with central government (without the palliative filter and protection of the LEAs).

The FE sector has now been manipulated into a situation whereby it straddles the secondary and HE sectors as well as industry and service sectors, thus serving many and varied stakeholders. This can be seen as a positive stance in that it provides a focal point for diverse interests and can ensure that there is a provision of

education and training that is of mutual benefit to all. On the other hand, it is most unlikely that the expectations of all are understood, let alone met (Jephcote *et al* 2008). Orr (2009) adds support to this view and surmises that from a political and ideological perspective, the FE sector will not succeed in meeting expectations or government targets due to misplaced assumptions about the hegemony of *'connections between social justice, economic competitiveness and education'* (p.479).

Current attention is being drawn to FE in particular as offering solutions to the economic turmoil. Bathmaker and Avis (2005) note that '*English FE is gaining a more prominent role in the context of new policy imperatives'* (p.48) and there are numerous education bills and papers (Besley 2012) which are forcing educators to take on new, and possibly not welcome, roles:

> policy is seen to be driving teachers into an increasingly managerial and performative mode, where measurement of productivity and displays of 'quality' are paramount. (Bathmaker and Avis 2005 p.48)

The FE sector is often referred to as the 'Cinderella sector' (Ward 1997; Avis and Bathmaker 2007) implying that it is neglected and exploited. Kennedy (1997) decided that a clear definition of FE was hugely challenging because of the breadth of its educational undertaking and the depth of expectations about what it will deliver. She notes:

> Yet, despite the formidable role played by further education, it is the least understood and celebrated part of the learning tapestry. (p.1)

To some extent, senior women leaders are themselves the Cinderellas of the sector in research terms, as so little exploration about their experiences has been undertaken.

Change has been a constant for FE in recent years, presenting many challenges in managing the ensuing changes for FE leaders. Blair (2009) emphasises how modifications to systems, processes and funding in FE have been imposed in an attempt to respond the economic needs of the time:

> changes in FE are not of its own doing and FE colleges have had to change with the times. This does not mean that these changes have been quickly and easily adopted as changes in methods and cultures are difficult

> and take time … we can begin to see how the function of FE has changed as the history of the society around it has unfolded. (p.96)

The scale, rate and imperative of change are not peculiar to the FE sector; indeed, they are being experienced across much of the public sector within the UK (National Institute of Economic and Social Research 2012). For example, Wilson (2013) in his reflections on school leadership, identified a few of the trials that schools face from:

> greater pressures of public accountability in meeting performance targets … the marketization of public services and increased competition … demographic trends leading to far greater ethnic and cultural diversity. (p.2)

all of which are pertinent across all educational sectors. He sees these as ethical issues and proposes that an authentic leadership approach is most appropriate whereby leaders *'translate their understanding, values and principles into action'* (Wilson 2013 p.2). This perhaps assumes that such attributes are positive!

In his discussion of the changes in educational policy, Stoten (2011) states that *'colleges confront an increasingly challenging future'* (p.157). Such challenges will include the effective management of the concomitant changes and these changes will cover a range of urgency, size, time-scale and kind.

A key change imposed upon FE was the move from Local Education Authority (LEA) control to that of semi-autonomy upon incorporation in 1993. Simmons (2008) captures this development as a change from *'the patriarchal peculiarities of local authority control'* (p.267) to a collegiate managerialism of a chief executive. The FE sector was expected to manage not only the externally driven economic changes but also the historical internal legacies of legislation. Jephcote *et al* (2008) describe how these are experienced by staff in FE colleges as:

> of work intensification, of new managerialism, of coping with the endless pressures of change. (p.164)

A neat definition of 'managerialism' is elusive, as it appears to be an umbrella term which includes notions of: transferability of management expertise, codification of working practices through rules, regulations and policies, clearly delineated functions and a sharper accountability (Gleeson and Shain 1999; Locke and Spender 2011). Wright (2001) characterizes it thus:

a managerialist agenda which also favours doing rather than reflection, action rather than thinking and concentration on means rather than ends. (p.277)

Whilst Mercer (2009) is perhaps more scathing in her suggestion that:

new managerialism is the process by which private sector practices and values are applied to public sector institutions, in a bid to make them more efficient and effective, thereby offering tax payers greater value for money. (p.349)

It is an ideology associated with the direction of government policies over the past thirty years to make the public sector more efficient in terms of finance and labour. There has been much criticism of the adoption of managerialism within FE and it is also evident in secondary schools and higher education (DiTomaso and Hooijberb 1996; McLay and Brown 2001; Wright 2001; Priola 2007; Blackmore 2010). It could be argued that the only way in which the FE sector could respond to significant change was to mimic the managerialistic practices of the private sector, as it was forced down the route of the marketisation of its staff, courses and services. However, it is not clear why it was felt that this was the only acceptable practice, or whether other approaches were considered.

Central Focus and Questions to be Examined

The core of my empirical research is the narratives of seven women leaders who work, or have worked, in FE colleges. These narratives are considered and analysed within the historical and political contexts of FE, with a consideration of the impact of change and how it is managed. Commonalities of experience that are identified are contextualised within theories of leadership and identity.

The key questions to be considered were:

1. To what extent do the experiences of senior women leaders in FE reflect gendered leadership theory?
2. What leadership theory predominates?
3. How does identity inform leadership style?

Subsidiary questions were:

- What are women's commonalities of experience in FE leadership?
- What are the key current and anticipated changes in the sector?

- How does a narrative investigation contribute to the discourse on women leaders?

This focus on women is not to imply that the experience of women leaders is necessarily different from that of men leaders in FE - rather, it is a critical enquiry into a particular gendered experience (Burns and Walker 2005) and thus provides an opportunity to think about leadership in diverse ways. This notion is succinctly captured by Grogan (2010) who writes of how women are 'reshaping' educational leadership as their numbers in leader roles increase which means:

> they have earned the right to challenge the way things have always been done, and the power to shape the profession differently. (p.786)

The term 'gendered leadership' is used to represent two related aspects of the way in which the roles of women and men are explored and represented in leadership theory. The first aspect refers to the process by which early leadership theories, developed by and about men, not only inform later and current leadership theory but also prevail today. The effect of this is to establish a masculine authority in leadership – an authority which is reinforced by current managerialist practices experienced in FE and the public sector in general (Blackmore 1999). My second interpretation of gendered leadership relates to ideas about how women lead. I believe that concepts have been developed to describe women leaders' behaviour and characteristics to segregate and distance them from those of men which in turn reinforce female stereotypes – rather than achieving a recognition and celebration of how women might lead differently.

Structure of Thesis

My thesis is organized into six chapters, each of which charts a discrete aspect of my research process. My first chapter presents the external and personal contexts within which the research is situated. Having identified the key concerns of the study, Chapter 2 explores the relevant theoretical underpinnings of leadership and identity issues. Chapter 3 offers a rationale for an interpretive methodological approach to the collection and analysis of the experience of women leaders. The subsequent analysis of the gathered data is shown in Chapter 4 using narrative analysis and in Chapter 5 using thematic analysis; this latter chapter includes the

discussion of my findings. Finally, Chapter 6 pulls together the threads of my research to make recommendations.

Closing Observations

In this chapter I have presented a pluralist underpinning to my thesis, which is both personal and professional. My research is nested in the disparity between numbers of women in middle management roles and those in senior leader ones; as Leathwood (2000) notes:

> Within FE, although women have made inroads into middle management, it appears that men are retaining their hold on senior management positions. (p.164)

Aspects of my career in FE and some of the significant underlying elements of my pre-career life are considered and my ensuing ontological and epistemological positions are established. I have considered the legitimacy of autobiography as a way of examining my life experiences which in turn adds legitimacy to the writing of the narratives of others. At the same time, whilst my autobiography underpins my research, it is not a part of the analysis due to my reluctance to be so involved. Moving away from the personal, within the external environment, I have described and appraised the FE sector as the context in which much of my career, and that of my participants, has unfolded. Finally, I have presented my research aims and given an indication of the structure of my thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Opening Comments

In this chapter, I demonstrate where my main reading has been focused and critically engage with these areas to illustrate some of the key ideas I have identified to be pertinent to my research aim. I believe that by doing so the relevance to women leaders and the influences on key thinking about their roles will become apparent.

Leadership theory is pivotal to this thesis, so the greater part of my reading has concentrated on this area. The first part of my review establishes an understanding of what is meant by leadership, disentangling its meaning from management. This linguistic clarification provides a foundation on which to focus on leadership theory in more detail. I start with an analysis of the development of leadership theory over the past hundred years to give a broad historical perspective to today's ideas and their relation to women. The next section explores salient issues in educational leadership, showing how government policy has influenced the leadership ideas around devolved, distributed and social justice principles. Strong feelings about fairness and equality of opportunity in education radiated from my pilot interview. This inspired me to return to, and further develop, my initial review of social justice leadership. I realized I had made assumptions about how it was intrinsic to educational leadership and I had therefore, initially, glossed over its importance. Having appraised research on general academic leadership, I evaluate, more specifically, research into women in academic leadership roles. This is still an under-researched area, particularly for FE, and, in the main, the existing research focuses on the expansion of women middle managers. I had hoped to find literature on women themselves writing about their experiences of academic leadership but was unsuccessful. My research, exploring leadership theory through the narratives of women leaders, contributes to these last two areas by giving a voice to the leadership experiences of senior women in FE. I conclude my exploration of leadership ideas with an amplification of my understanding of leadership and gender.

The final section of this chapter examines aspects of identity. It was not my intention to adopt a grounded theory approach to my research. However, my experience in this study has not been one of undeviating linearity. Instead, it has been one of

regular iteration, as my analysis has opened up further features of research. I have experienced, as Mishler (2010) describes, *'a continual dialectic between data, analysis, and theory'* (p.297) which aligns with Denscombe's (2003) depiction of testing out *'emerging concepts'* (p.117). However, whilst grounded theory was an influence, I did not intend to achieve theoretical saturation because it did not match my methodological intention. Issues of identity arose from my initial analysis of my first interviews, particularly from my pilot interview, and it became a theoretical area to explore further, to deepen understanding of my participants' narratives. As Sinclair (2007) urges: *'To go forward in developing and deepening leadership, we … first need to go back'* (p.55) which involves a degree of *'self-knowledge'* and knowledge of *'background'*. An additional motive for exploring identity was that Luttrell (2010) suggests that identity, along with culture, mirrors the deliberations about the insider/outsider role which I have discussed in more detail when writing about 'autobiography' as an approach (see Chapter 1). Giddens (1991) theorizes about the notion of 'self-identity', which is *'continuity across time and space … as interpreted reflexively'* (p.53) thus giving an 'ontological security'.

Leadership Theory: General

This section will explore leadership theory to provide both a context for this study and an underpinning for the construction of a typology for the analysis of my findings. Such an approach is supported by Bush (2010) who argues for recognition of the place of leadership theory in the practice of leaders, particularly as an aid to *'critical reflection'* (p.267) to enable leaders and organizations to *'learn and to learn from their learning'* (Rowley 1997 p.83). Clegg *et al* (2011) provide a further rationale as they note that key people influence and shape organizations and society and that:

> leaders can and do change society, so it is imperative that they do so in a socially responsible and ethical way. (p.127)

An understanding of, and reflection upon, differing leadership perspectives can support this. An additional educational perspective is given by Rowley (1997) who believes that an educational leader has a responsibility *'that extends beyond the organization into the wider world'* (p.78) as learners and students leave school, college and university. Finally, Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) argue the case for an overview of leadership theory so as to achieve *'a more symmetrical or balanced*

approach' (p.266) to understanding what makes an effective leader - as a person and as a process.

<u>Understanding of the term leadership</u>

Whilst there seems to be a consensus that '*leadership describes a relation between people'* (Clegg *et al* 2011 p.124), what is actually meant by 'leadership' can be a moot point and definitions vary according to the theoretical basis adhered to. This will be considered in more detail as the various theories are appraised. There is a fuzziness about the use of the terms 'leadership' and 'management' - sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes seen to be quite separate activities and concepts. These differing views are addressed, with attempts to reconcile them, by management educators, amongst others. For example, Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) recognize these differing views in their response to a call to include specific leadership training on management development courses and they introduce the idea of one being better than the other:

> there is a tendency not only to see leadership as separate from management but also superior. (p.152)

This notion of inferior and superior relates to the nature of activities and conceptualism of each; for example, Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) postulate that:

> managers are concerned with humdrum activities and maintaining order whereas leaders are concerned with novel and exciting activities and stimulate change. (p.152)

This view is similar to that of Wright (2001) who refers to research carried out in North America on secondary school leadership, which teases out corresponding differences between management and leadership. He deduces that management is about practical, organizational aspects and that leadership is about the philosophy and moral underpinnings of what is to be done. Such deductions impact upon how those labelled 'manager' or 'leader' are perceived, that is ordinary or extraordinary respectively, and how others treat or respond to them. However, for Evans (2010) and Gill (2011), the difference is about the nature of relationships within the organization and how results might be achieved, as the latter suggests:

> leadership … deals essentially with the ability to influence a group towards the achievement of goals and … [management] with the use of authority inherent in designated formal rank to obtain compliance. (p.348)

Daft (2012) echoes this view with a slight refinement. Whilst management is seen as the steady hand on the helm of the organization:

> management promotes stability and order within the existing organizational structure and systems. (p.442)

leaders are there to 'rock the boat' in that:

> leadership means questioning the status quo so that outdated, unproductive, or socially irresponsible norms can be replaced to meet new challenges. (p.442)

In reality, they may well be complementary roles and Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) conclude from their readings and from their own research that this is likely to be the case:

> the two are related activities. There would seem to be a sense that leadership may be an aspect of managing which is overtly concerned with thinking about the long term future of the organization and fostering support for particular ideas. (p.153)

For Boyatzis (1982), managers needed to be leaders in order to effectively fulfil critical aspects of their role, for example in stimulating, inspiring and motivating their staff and others outside the organization. However, it is not necessarily the case that all managers are leaders. Whilst this is a view supported by some theorists (Chell 1993; Daft 2012), it is not a widely understood or agreed premise and Wright (2001) expresses his concern as he concludes that there is misleading government rhetoric about the nature and benefits of 'leadership', whereas what is really meant is 'management'. For the purposes of this study, the term and activity of 'leadership' will be used as an aspect of 'management' for, as Daft (2012) cogently states:

> Leadership's power comes from being built on the foundation of a well-managed organization. (p.442)

Historical perspectives on leadership theory

There are a wide range of leadership theories to explain the attributes, styles, situations, emotions, behaviours, successes and power relations of leaders (Lessem 1993; McLay and Brown 2001; Wright 2001; Hay and Hodgkinson 2006; Theoharis 2007). It is possible to chart the development of these theories from a military base

to one with a more humanistic underpinning. A clear understanding of, and agreement on, what constitutes 'leadership', is elusive, which may account for a perceived paucity of effective leaders - as suggested by Hay and Hodgkinson (2006):

> there are still shortages in the quality and quantity of people with leadership abilities. (p.144)

Furthermore, this situation has resulted from limited leadership training, which itself may have resulted from an inadequate understanding of what leadership is. Although there is a circularity to the debate so as to make it almost meaningless, such a debate does offer an opportunity to examine ideas which may or may not be given validity by the experiences and practices of those seen as leaders. Leadership theories themselves may have had a bearing on the lack of women leaders in the past, as the theories failed to recognize that women could take on such a role and, where they had a leadership role, it was simply not seen as such (Jogulu and Wood 2006). The invisibility of women in a leadership context is not uncommon; for example, Swindells (1995) notes how women's stories/autobiographies have, in the past, rarely been recognized and have been suppressed by men's stories: *'male selves passing as history, men imposing themselves as history'* (p.4). My perception from teaching leadership studies was that the key leadership theories have been researched and developed by men - especially the earlier theories. Interestingly, the later theories seem to have evolved from, or are an amalgam of, earlier ones and are not associated with any particular theorist - male or female. An added dimension to the seeming male dominance in leadership theory is offered by the research of Heilman (2012) who, in her consideration of the causes and impact of gender stereotyping on the numbers of women in leadership roles, concludes that 'agency' for men and 'communality' for women are the significant features identified. By 'agency', I understand a focus on action and choice and within this understanding she associates *'achievement-orientation, competence … inclination to take charge … autonomy … and rationality'* (p.115). By 'communality' is meant *'concern for others … affiliative tendencies … deference … emotional sensitivity'*. This offers a useful insight to the theories and certainly reflects my thoughts and findings on leadership theory.

From my review of the literature on leadership theories, I posit that there are four main categories: the characteristics of leaders (that is, what they have); how they behave (that is, what they do); the environment in which they lead (that is, it all depends); and, building upon these three, emergent theories which Sinclair (2007) suggests are *'fused with goodness'* (p.24). These aspects loosely align with the historical development of such theories and I will consider each main category with its subsidiary aspects. Whilst my focus will be on key thinking and research of the new millennium, earlier ideas are included as they provide a foundation for later ones and they contribute to the creation of continua of ideas which may help locate or place a leader.

It's what you've got – trait theories of the early twentieth century

Leadership theories earlier in the twentieth century identified 'a great man' (Jogulu and Wood 2006; Daft 2012) and looked for distinguishing 'traits' or 'characteristics' that made him different from others. By 'traits' were meant:

> more or less stable, internal factors that make one person's behaviour consistent. (Chell 1993 p.2)

The focus was on male leaders and the term 'man' was definitely not used as a generic term for all people. Jogulu and Wood (2006) hypothesize that this focus on men in leadership theories has created a barrier to women becoming, or being recognized as, leaders although they do acknowledge that there was a dearth of women leaders at the time of the development of early leadership theories. Consequently, a question remains still today as to the influence of leadership theories and theorists:

> can leadership research and subsequent theories change perceptions of the appropriateness of women in management and leadership roles, or are the attitudes relating to the appropriateness of women in such roles still influencing organizational decision makers to overlook the potential offered by more than half of the management workforce? (Jogulu and Wood 2006 p.247)

Grogan (2010) identifies a recent increase in studies of women leaders which is resulting in suggestions of certain female leadership characteristics. This refocusing may, in part, lead to a wider acceptance and understanding of women in such roles. On the other hand there is the risk of *'contentious and … unhelpful stereotyping'* (Cubillo and Brown 2003 p.287), a view supported by Grogan (2010).

To return to the idea of 'the great man': someone with a high profile, spiritual, for example Jesus Christ or Mahatma Gandhi, or political, such as Winston Churchill or John F Kennedy, would be 'deconstructed' in terms of their personality and characteristics (and sometimes, their physical aspects) in order to compile a list of distinguishing features that separated them from ordinary people, that is, non-leaders (Robbins 1993; Rowley 1997; Clegg *et al* 2011; Daft 2012). Such attributes might be *'intelligence … initiative … self assurance'* (Rowley 1997 p.80) and *'strength, bravery, integrity'* (Robbins 1993 p.367) or *'business savvy, creativity'* (Clegg *et al* 2011 p.128). These were thought to be intrinsically common to such men, although there was no proof that all leaders shared the same traits, the thinking was that 'leaders are born not made' (which has its origin in Aristotle's, no date, work). An added problem with this theory is that not all people with these traits are necessarily leaders, as Robbins (1993) opines:

> it was a bit optimistic to believe that there would be consistent and unique traits that would apply across the board to all effective leaders whether they were in charge of the Hell's Angels … or Harvard University. (p.367)

So an additional dimension or view was needed to understand what makes a leader. Other criticisms (Chell 1993; Rowley 1997; Clegg *et al* 2011; Daft 2012) include a lack of clarity as to the comparative worth of the traits, an ignoring of the prerequisites of the followers, the impossibility of any leader possessing all the necessary traits for any situation, a dearth of proof that traits were consistent and the absence of recognition that some people may develop these traits as a result of being in a leadership position, that is, cause and effect. Chell (1993) and Clegg *et al* (2011) also point out that any traits associated with leaders are social constructs which in any event are culturally determined. It is interesting to note that despite these criticisms, and particularly the male focus of *'describing traits in masculine terms'* (Jogulu and Wood 2006 p.237) and the notion of the *'white male leader'* (Clegg *et al* 2011 p.29), later research into women leaders often results in descriptions of identified, unique traits such as: *'qualities of resilience, courage and self-reliance.'* (Cubillo and Brown 2003 p.289) and *'active listening, empathy, multi-tasking, communicative ability'* (Evans 2010 p.64). It appears that research into women and leadership reflects the chronology of research into men and leadership. Alternatively, this mirroring of research may reinforce the weight of trait theory and

Rowley (1997) and Daft (2012) note a recent renaissance of trait theory, reformulated to leadership capacities (Theoharis 2007; Furman 2012). Its usefulness may be, as Chell (1993) suggests, that it provides a classification to help understand and explain behaviour. For example: John F Kennedy behaved in a friendly, sociable manner because he was confident; Winston Churchill remained calm in a crisis because he was strong and courageous. Bolden (2015) notes how ideas about a heroic, great man leader seem to be embedded and *'difficult to dislodge'* and Clegg *et al* (2011) concur, noting how trait theory continues to be used to *'critique and to reflect upon what it means to be a leader'* (p.129).

It's what you do - behavioural theories of the mid twentieth century

Behavioural theories of leadership, also known as style theories, explore the ways in which leaders behave to be effective. This accommodates the notion of leaders being 'made' (through training and development) rather than being 'born' (Rowley 1997; Clegg *et al* 2011; Daft 2012). It is likely that people will already have a certain disposition to act in a particular way, however it was thought that if certain leadership behaviours were identified then, through training, more leaders could be established. As well as suggesting that leadership behaviours can be developed and learned, style theories consider how a leader interacts with others, without judging the morality or ethics of their behaviour. That is, the behavioural options (for example focusing on staff or task, directing or inviting staff activities) are identified but not evaluated. By the 1990s certain behaviours were suggested as associated with women leaders for example, a democratic, participative style (Jogulu and Wood 2006) and others with men leaders, for example, autocratic and directive (Robbins 1993). Gardner and Cogliser (2008) add a later rider to behavioural theories as they align them with the idea of 'authentic leadership' (which is considered later in this literature review) being true to themselves, in which *'authentic leaders … exhibit behavioural flexibility … without compromising their core beliefs and values'* (p.93). Clegg *et al* (2011) assert that all behavioural theories include two aspects: the human and the task.

At the same time, post Second World War, women were still not recognized as, or given opportunities to be, leaders. Indeed, there was still a struggle for them to gain employment; as Nicholson (2015) notes:

> the dominant voices of society were conflicted when it came to women in the workplace. After the war, it had become hard to deny that women had the capacity to take on 'male' jobs. But now those who did so ran the risk of being made fun of, regarded as freaks. (p.272)

Not only were women mocked for challenging the perceived 'norm', they were also denied opportunities to work in the professions as:

> traditionalists shored up the defences with restrictions and propaganda. (Nicholson 2015 p.273)

Criticism of behavioural theories focuses on the conundrum of how leaders with varying styles could be equally effective in varying conditions. Additionally, there is a lack of identifiable empirically evidenced consistency between behaviours and organizational results, plus a reliance on overt behaviour, irrespective of intention (Robbins 1993; Clegg *et al* 2011; Cole and Kelly 2011; Daft 2012). This criticism is best summarised by Rowley (1997): *'the search for a universal best style of leadership is vacuous'* (p.81) which led theorists to a consideration of how leadership behaviour adapts according to particular circumstances. This engendered contingency theories of leadership.

It all depends - contingency theories of the late twentieth century

Contingency theories, also known as '*interactionism*' (Chell 1993 p.7), attempted to conflate previous research on leadership traits and behaviours with situational aspects in order to calculate the effectiveness of the leader (Robbins 1993; Hay and Hodgkinson 2006; Jogulu and Wood 2006; Cole and Kelly 2011; Daft 2012). Each had as its premise that:

> Successful leadership was considered to be reliant on the leader's judgement and consideration of situational factors in order for an appropriate leadership style to be chosen to cope with each situation. (Jogulu and Wood 2006 p.239)

The challenge was to identify different situations and decide upon the correspondingly appropriate style of behaviour to deal with the situation most effectively. This challenge was complicated by the differing perceptions people have of various situations; as Chell (1993) suggests, what is needed is:

> an understanding of how people label situations and consequently what meaning these situations have for them. Social norms and rules shape the

person's interpretation of the situation and thus suggest the role that should
be enacted in order to manage that situation effectively. (p.1)

Main criticisms of contingency leadership include: the near impossibility of
anticipating all contingencies; the difficulty of reaching agreement on what counts as
a contingency: the fact that a leadership style is not necessarily fixed.

However, Clegg *et al* (2011) reinforce the significant and pivotal role of contingency
theories because:

> leadership effectiveness is seen as being less dependent on innate traits or
> observable behavioural styles and more dependent on the context of leading.
> (p.133)

Contingency theories move the focus away from the individual and factor in
environmental and task elements as a way of talking about how a leader might be
effective, offering a commonly accepted definition of leadership:

> Organizational leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate
> and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the
> organization of which they are members. (Cole and Kelly 2011 p.78)

'*Fused with goodness'* (Sinclair 2007 p.24) - emergent theories of the early twenty-first century

The new millennium heralded a surge of leadership theories as academics and
practitioners continued with their attempts to distil the essence of leadership. Chell
(1993) suggests that the previous leadership theories so far considered have
'yielded few insights and considerable criticism' (p.152). However, recent enquiries
into leadership theory acknowledge early explorations whilst looking forward to
develop new ideas through 'reconsideration' (Chell 1993), 'rethinking' (Hay and
Hodgkinson 2006), 'revisualisation' (Guthey and Jackson 2008), 'redefining' (Gill
2011) and 'reshaping' (Hartley 2009) which reflect, and prepare for, global
developments and challenges in the world of work. These reformulations in
leadership thinking reflect changing ontologies and epistemologies in research
where realities morph and wax and wane according to social and cultural
interpretations.   These are emergent theories defined by a move from a positivistic
position to one of social constructivism. This shift in approach suggests that there *'is
no one objective reality awaiting discovery'* (Chell 1993 p.152).

Current leadership and organizational behaviour researchers recognize how internal and external aspects of the modern world are impacting on the work place, epitomized by Cole and Kelly (2011) thus:

> Globalization, amongst other factors, is changing the nature of the workplace and as a result managers must constantly ask how they can make best (and fairest) use of human resources to meet organizational goals. Today's workforce is older, more racially diverse, more female and more varied. (p.154)

Acknowledging these changes, new approaches to understanding effective leadership are explored by key theorists including Clegg *et al* (2011), Gill (2011), Daft (2012) and Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014). It is interesting that the seeds of these new approaches were planted decades earlier but have been reconsidered and repackaged. Key emergent thoughts about charismatic, transformational and transactional leadership are now considered in more detail.

Charismatic leadership is similar to earlier ideas about 'the great man' in that a charismatic leader:

> has the ability to inspire and motivate people to do more than they would normally do, despite obstacles and personal sacrifice. Followers are willing to put aside their own interests for the sake of the team, department, or organization. (Daft 2012 p.451)

However, women (for example, Mother Theresa and Benazir Bhutto) are now cited as examples, as well as men. It is held that such leaders emerge as a result of an emergency or catastrophe. They will have a clearly formulated and articulated vision (and are often referred to also as visionary leaders) which they successfully share with others, to stimulate them into action in order to effect change. These leaders can be a tremendous force for perceived constructive or destructive consequences. This model has been described as somewhat one-dimensional (Mumford *et al* 2008) in that *'an emotionally evocative future-oriented vision'* (p.157) alone is unlikely to be sufficient or effective unless environmental aspects are factored in. This view is supported by Gronn (2008) and Hay and Hodgkinson (2006 p.149), with the latter further criticising this notion of a 'superhero' as a *'special person'*, suggesting that the *'quiet leader'* is likely to be more effective.

Charismatic, transformational and transactional leadership theories align with contingency theories as they can fit with particular circumstances. So transformational leaders, similar to charismatic ones, rouse followers to change existing practices and perceptions whilst, unlike the charismatic, engaging with their followers to not only *'believe in the leader personally, but to believe in their own potential'* (Daft 2012 p.453). Research by Gill (2011) found these two models were more predominant in the upper levels of hierarchical organizations whilst, in contrast, transactional approaches were found at the middle and lower levels. A transactional style of leadership can be seen as the other end of a continuum from transformational - associated with managing rather than leading:

> Transactional leadership reflects a control orientation, whereas transformational leadership is empowering and inspirational, resulting in changes in people's attitudes, values, beliefs and motivation. (Gill 2011 p.87)

If this is the case, then it is not quite clear why it is always included in leadership theory, unless to demonstrate what transformational leadership is not! Gill's view also offers a fairly negative stance on the nature of management. Charismatic and transformational leaders are both associated with certain traits - for example: visionary, communicative. Additionally, transformational leaders display particular styles - for example: *'consultative, participative and delegative … flexible …'* (Gill 2011 p.85) with the potential to *'transform a follower's sense of self'* (Sinclair 2007 p.14). Weaknesses with each of these models have been identified; these include: being misguided over the self-belief of transformational leaders, a reluctance by followers to confront their transformational leader, a fixation with their vision combined with capriciousness and instability of charismatic leaders and the inability of transactional leaders to manage change. Overall, however, it is considered that there is a place at some time, in some circumstances, for each. Clegg *et al* (2011) encapsulate it thus (in a slightly mixed metaphor):

> in some situations you need a transactional leader to hold the ship steady, at other times you need a charismatic leader to create a vision and inspire the need for change, and sometimes you need a transformational leader to foster and manage the change process through to completion. (p.136)

Indeed, it may be that leaders can be both transformational and transactional (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011). They are emergent in the sense that the different approaches

surface when needed/appropriate. These aspects are further discussed in this chapter in relation to ideas about leadership in education.

Additional recent thinking about leadership centres on those of servant, authentic and pragmatic leadership. Although peripheral they present further dimensions of leadership. For example Gill (2011) characterizes servant leadership as:

> The ability or desire to serve the needs of other people is usually … the reason why leaders emerge (p.68)

acknowledging it may be a cause rather than the needs of others which drives leaders and thus may be associated with charismatic leadership. Such altruism, Daft (2012) suggests, may not accord with leaders needed in certain professions and industry. I have problems with the term, as I associate it with subservience and the master/servant relationship of old and yet, it does resonate with the desire of all my research participants to meet the needs of a particular sector of society who might benefit from the experiences offered in FE. For some, including Clegg *et al* (2011), the servant idea is seen in a post-modern context whereby the roles of leaders and followers are not clearly defined or delineated and where, in fact, many may, at various times, take on a leadership role; a form of distributed leadership.

Examination of authentic leadership is included in general leadership writings of many, for example: Sinclair (2007); Clegg *et al* (2011); Gill (2011); Daft (2012); Bauman 2013; Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014). It is an idea developed to explain leaders *'doing good'* through 'w*isdom, authenticity and humanity'* (Clegg *et al* 2011 p.156) as opposed to the opposite through *'self-serving, narcissistic and psychopaths'* as described by Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014 p.226). Much is claimed for such leadership:

> To be authentic means being *real*, staying true to one's values and beliefs, and acting based on one's true self rather than emulating what others do. Authentic leaders inspire trust and commitment because they respect diverse viewpoints, encourage collaboration and help others learn, grow and develop as leaders. (Daft 2012 p.438)

Sinclair (2007) adds the importance of *'self-awareness and acting from self-knowledge'* (p.136) as such, it is an adjunct to transformational leadership.

The idea of pragmatic leadership arose in my pilot interview and this prompted me to research the concept. However, I found relatively little information. Drawing upon their research into the United States' presidency of Benjamin Franklin, Mumford and Van Doorn (2001) found he took a practical approach to resolving difficulties, taking into account the particular problems of people within their particular environment. In a later paper Mumford *et al* (2008) develop these earlier ideas and tease out the distinguishing aspects of pragmatic leadership in comparison with those of the ideological and charismatic. They conclude that pragmatic leaders focus on the causes (which may involve people or circumstances) of predicaments, which may then be controlled in some way (rather than being goal oriented like a charismatic or ideological leader). The implication of this is that:

> These leaders will prefer logical argumentation to emotionally evocative arguments … not be framed to appeal to people in general but rather to knowledgeable elites who understand, and can induce control … . The commitment of these elites to the leader will, in turn, be based on mutual interest rather than on personal commitment to the leader. (Mumford *et al* 2008 p.147)

This suggests that a pragmatic leader may be more effective in stable environments which are susceptible to a degree of control and where the focus is on the environment rather than the personality and attributes of the leader. However, it is suggested that certain skills are needed to be a pragmatic leader, such as *'intelligence, creativity, critical thinking, judgment, wisdom'* (Mumford *et al* 2008 p.148) which parallel trait theory. In addition, my participants are working in volatile, rather than steady, settings and thus challenge the pragmatic leader profile suggested by Mumford *et al* (2008). However, these perceptions about pragmatic leadership resonate with my early interpretations of my data and are examined further in my analysis.

Closing thoughts on general leadership

Bolden (2015) implies that it might be simpler to think only about 'leadership' and 'lack of leadership'. I believe that many people recognize leadership when it is in place, and many will also have an opinion about the leader. From the early twentieth century to the present day, the early trope, and inherent mythology, of leadership theories has been toned down resulting in the emergence of transformational and

social justice theories. Rowley (1997) and Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) share a view that these two theories allow for ordinary people to understand leaders and that they also allow for ordinary people to become leaders.

Qualifications to the word leadership, such as trait or transformational can cause confusion (Hay and Hodgkinson 2006; Bolden 2015); however, these qualifiers can be seen as a lens to give focus to understand and analyse aspects of leadership. I have discussed how the different theories are connected and built upon.

Leadership: Education

Public, private and government influence

Schofield *et al* (2008), Gill (2011) and Middlehurst (2013), have deliberated the differences and similarities between, and required for, effective leadership within the public and private sectors in the UK. There is recognition, and concern, by educational observers and writers (for example: Bush 2010; Skelton and Gorard 2011; Middlehurst 2013) that the expectations and impact of the recent Coalition Government's so-say reform agenda will result in the privatization of the public sector. Skelton and Gorard (2011) note *'the political resolve to reduce state involvement in public services'* (p.391) and Bush (2010) detects a theme of *'decentralisation of educational powers from the centre to educational institutions'* (p.266). Hartley (2009) sees this evidenced by the gradual reshaping of the education sector *'with alliances, distributions, synergies, hybrids and networks all to the fore'* (p.139). It is possible with the apparent 'privatization' of the public sector that the leadership role in the two sectors has blurred into one homogenous whole; however, there are discernible differentiations. In general these revolve around a lack of respect and appreciation for leaders in the public sector with a need for:

> greater political awareness, more collaborative and engaging leadership behaviour and exceptional influencing skills. (Gill 2011 p.51)

to be demonstrated by those leaders. Whatever the perceptions might be about leadership in the public sector, it is the case that aspects of general leadership theories are increasingly apparent in recent government research and policy development in educational leadership. In their White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (Great Britain 2011), the previous Coalition Government recognized the

key role of the head of an educational organization (albeit in respect of schools rather than colleges):

> We will support strong and confident leadership for every school; … after the quality of teaching, the quality of school leadership is the most important determinant of pupils' success. (Great Britain 2011 p.26)

The Paper expressed the government's commitment to support leadership schemes, and promised to cut bureaucratic demands on leaders' time, empower them and thus:

> will free schools from externally imposed burdens and give them greater confidence to set their own direction. (Great Britain 2011 p.31)

It is encouraging that the cruciality of the role is acknowledged for schools and yet disappointing that there were no similar statements in relation to FE. Two models from other European countries were given as examples for effective leadership; those of 'distributed' leadership from Sweden, and 'devolved' leadership from Norway. (Although Sahlberg (2015) cautions against adopting educational approaches from other countries; because of cultural differences and problems with how the information is presented, for example, it may be over-glossed). The international research of Leithwood *et al* (2006) and Barber and Mourshed (2007) is drawn upon to show how such models lead to improvements of experience and results for staff and students in schools. Hartley (2009) sees ideas of distributed leadership as part of a policy trend which *'complement the New Public Management of the 1990s'* (p.40) to increase choice - in this case, that of schooling.   He suggests that the New Public Management mode sees distributed leadership as a *'democratic empowerment'* (Hartley 2009 p.146) where, for example, parents and students involved in schools have a say in the organizational behaviour of the school. Further deducing that:

> There appear to be two explanations of the emergence of distributed leadership: first, the failure of the 'charismatic hero' associated with transformational leadership; and second, the greater complexity of the tasks which now beset school leaders. (Hartley 2007 p.206)

Distributed and devolved leadership

Given that the current government is keen to promote particular leadership models, it is worthwhile examining these espoused exemplars further. The terms 'distributed'

and 'devolved' are used interchangeably or used as a subset of one of the other. A neat definition is elusive and there is disagreement as to whether the model is an ideology, a process or a practical construct, whether it emerges or is imposed, whether it is best experienced as top down or bottom up. However, most writings about the models include ideas around dispersed leadership, collaboration within and among institutions, managing complexity and contextual considerations (Harris 2005; Bolden *et al* 2008; Harris and Spillane 2008; Mercer 2009; Ancona and Backman 2010; Thorpe *et al* 2011).

Despite Higgins' (2007 p.7) suggestion, in her consideration of leadership styles needed for the challenges of twenty-first century Britain, that the country is not ready for '*the idea of devolved leadership and a dispersed workforce'* and her view that there is a '*feeling … that dispersed leadership is OK during stable times, but a hierarchy is what's needed in a crisis'*, distributed leadership does not have to be an alternative to other models. It is possible, and often desirable, for it to be in place alongside others (Mercer 2009; Bush 2010). Indeed, from my reading it seems to be common for those writing about distributed leadership to recommend a composite leadership approach. For example, Gronn (2008), writing about Australian educational leadership, puts forward the concept of 'hybrid' leadership which accommodates a range of leadership theories within the realities of organizational life. He claims that 'hybrid' leadership offers:

> a more accurate representation of diverse patterns of practice which fuse or coalesce hierarchical and hetararchical elements of emergent activities. (p.155)

This is a useful way of describing how people may take on leadership responsibilities and display leadership characteristics throughout an organization even though they are not formally appointed to such a role - although it is not clear how this 'representation' does actually take into account other leadership ideas. (A hetararchy is a way of showing and explaining fluid complex relationships horizontally across an organization whereas a hierarchy depicts the formal relationships in rigid vertical tiers). Similarly, Bolden *et al* (2008), in their study of UK Universities' leadership, identify organizational features of leadership and

> the need of both top-down and bottom-up leadership, not just as an ideal but as a necessity given the nature of academic work in universities. (p.130)

They discuss *'informal networks'* amongst staff (rather than the '*hetararchy*' of Gronn 2008). However, Collinson and Collinson (2009 p.367) are much clearer than Gronn about how distributed leadership as a 'blended' model provides a *'dialectical approach'* for understanding the leadership needed for the *'paradox, ambiguity and multiplicity'* context of the FE sector. Their research into a sample of UK FE college staff perceptions of leadership suggest that most of all staff wanted leadership appropriate to the immediate context (similar to situational leadership theory) - for example: having a clear vision as to the direction of the college. Additional important points were: giving delegative responsibilities and being sufficiently outward facing to manage external stakeholders whilst being aware of staff needs and experiences. These, they suggest, are:

> leadership practices that combine a paradoxical blend of seemingly irreconcilable qualities. (Collinson and Collinson 2009 p.376)

although, I do not think that there is any element of oxymoron here … rather, it is a case of agility in leadership praxis, underpinned perhaps by the post-modernist perspective encouraged by Bogotch (2000).

Despite the considerable, seductive and positive claims about distributed leadership - such as an underlying democratic element, an alignment with the prevailing hegemony, a sharing of the workload/responsibility, potential for training new leaders, a flexibility to deal with complexity, notions of inclusivity (Gronn 2008; Bolden *et al* 2008; Hartley 2009) - it is worth noting that distributed leadership is by no means the same as 'democratic' leadership and indeed there are certain critiques made of the model. For example, Gronn (2008) has a concern that there is an illusion of democracy with this model and suggests that *'the rhetoric of leadership distribution masks an anti-democratic managerial bias'* (p.154) - redolent of the public management agenda previously mentioned. This critique of 'rhetoric' and 'managerialism' is strongly espoused by others writing about educational leadership - for instance, Hartley (2009) and Bolden *et al* (2008). Bolden (2015) goes further to suggest that distributed leadership needs a strong leader in place to ensure it is effective.

I believe that a degree of cynicism is appropriate and healthy whenever rhetoric is detected and, as yet, there appears to be little evidence that, as a model of leadership, distributed leadership is successful in the educational sector (Harris and Spillane 2008; Mercer 2009). However, taking these various ideas into account, I believe that Harris and Spillane (2008) offer a useful overarching view of the general advantages of distributed leadership, seeing it as:

> a way of getting under the skin of leadership practice, of seeing leadership practice differently and illuminating the possibilities for organizational transformation. (p.33)

which is supported by Hartley's (2009) view of it as *'a perspective, not a prescription'* (p.147).

<u>The place of social justice in educational leadership</u>

There has been much emphasis by current and previous governments on the pivotal role that the FE sector bears in promoting issues of inclusivity, partnership and social justice. This is a positive move, although McCabe and McCarthy (2005) voice a note of scepticism:

> With popular use, both liberals and conservatives have embraced the term social justice to rationalize similar as well as polar opposite strategies. (p.202)

To illustrate this: the discourse on standards and achievement in education could be seen, on the one hand, as an opening for all students to be encouraged and supported to achieve (as advocated by McKenzie *et al* 2008) or, on the other hand, as a tightly packaged policy designed to tick certain boxes and to divert the debate from the tricky issues, the:

> more controversial confrontations about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and systemic inequities. (McCabe and McCarthy 2005 p.202)

Given this context, it seems wise to explore this issue further.

Much of the literature on social justice educational leadership (as it is termed, albeit grammatically incorrectly) focuses on how social justice principles might be cultivated in potential leaders. This might be done either by identifying those with a sympathetic predisposition, which aligns with trait theory, to such principles at the selection stage (McKenzie *et al* 2008) and/or through specific training in social justice (Furman 2012). Consideration of the selection and training of social justice

leaders, for whatever educational sector, does provide an opportunity to articulate and identify how social justice leadership might be evidenced in practice.

A clear encapsulation of what is understood to be social justice is not straightforward, as its meaning is drawn from different ontologies and different foci (Gewirtz 1998; Bogotch 2000; McCabe and McCarthy 2005). Indeed, many theorists acknowledge that it can be seen as a complex and confusing concept, for example McKenzie *et al* (2008) and Furman (2012). However, recognition of such complexity does not preclude attempts to offer a description through either a definition or a framework, or both. For example, McKenzie *et al* (2008) offer a trinity of *'goals'* for leaders to steer educational establishments *'out of the more entrenched inequities'* (p.112) that are experienced. They suggest that recommended goals of raising standards, producing critical citizens and ensuring appropriate organizational structures are in place, offer a '*nonessentialized'* (p.116) definition, in that it is not tethered to any one situation or any one disadvantaged group, and instead provides an opportunity to identify, understand, and thus reduce inequities within their organizations. This view accords with Furman's (2012) conclusion from her review of social justice theory and practice that:

> leadership for social justice is a process that is continually reconstructed in response to shifting needs in the local context. (p.195)

and with Bogotch's (2000) contention that:

> Educational leadership must continuously confront the issue of social justice in all its guises and deliberately make social justice a central part of educational leadership discourse and actions while, at the same time, vigilantly critique such actions and motives such that when the material conditions change, we have to start all over again. (p.3)

This suggests that social justice leadership is situationally influenced.

Like McKenzie *et al* (2008), Furman (2012) is also concerned with the preparation of educational leaders for enacting social justice. However, in a critique of the former's goal focused model she maintains that their model's weakness is an absence of any indication of the competencies needed by such leaders. To remedy this perceived deficit, she posits a threefold framework of *'praxis-dimensions-capacities'* (Furman 2012 p.202) within which lie key leadership capabilities of *'reflection and action'*.

Nonetheless, whilst McKenzie *et al* do not explicitly discuss the necessary 'capacities' of leaders, the need for reflection and action is implied as will be demonstrated later in this section.

Gewirtz (1998) has a different perspective and is focused on raising some of the troubling issues around social justice leadership to stimulate a discussion. Whilst not offering a neat definition of what is meant by social justice, she broadens the concept from a one dimensional, historical perspective of *'distributional justice'* (weak ie *'equality of opportunity'* or strong ie *'equality of outcome'*) which *'refers to the principles by which goods are distributed in society'* (Gewirtz 1998 p.470) to include a second, more contemporary, dimension of '*relational'* social justice. She further asserts that recognition of this second dimension, that is how society is structured and the corresponding connections within it, has the potential to raise awareness of power and how it is evidenced. This power is on two levels:

> Micro face-to-face interactions and in the sense of macro social and economic relations which are mediated by institutions such as the state and the market. (Gewirtz 1998 p.471)

Furman (2012 p.193) interprets relational justice slightly differently as operating at the micro level only, whereby *'marginalized groups'* are fully involved in any actions and decisions taken about them. McCabe and McCarthy (2005), on the other hand, focus on the macro level and the danger of:

> narrow market-based terms that attempt to remedy the so-called deficits students from diverse backgrounds bring. (p.202)

Gewirtz's (1998) aim is to engender a discussion about, rather than define, social justice and in doing so she adopts an activist stance whereby theorists and practitioners are called to examine the way in which educational policies:

> Support, interrupt or subvert: exploitative relationships … processes of marginalization and inclusion … the promotion of relationships based on recognition … practices of cultural imperialism … violent practices within and beyond the education system. (p.482)

Similarly, Bogotch (2000) issues a challenge to leaders to:

> encourage activists and radical intellectuals to make explicit the connections to their subjective meanings of social justice. (p.10)

thus suggesting that social justice is socially constructed and has no meaning unless one is actually engaged in the practice of leadership. This call to arms is supported by Sinclair's (2007) theorizing about *'new ways to lead'* through *'resistance, interruption and subversion'* (p.84). Theoharis (2007) draws upon both Gewirtz's and Bogotch's conceptualizations of social justice to develop a definition of social justice which focuses on *'addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools'* (Theoharis 2007 p.223) to guide his research into the social justice leadership experiences of American public school Principals (who had identified themselves as espousing the principles of social justice leadership). His key conclusion from this was to issue another challenge: *'to recast good leadership as leadership for social justice'* (Theoharis 2007 p.253) with the focus on leaders *'enacting'* social justice as well as ensuring that education establishments are equitable places.

Notwithstanding the lack of a neat, commonly agreed definition of what social justice leadership is, the differing ontological and epistemological perspectives, and the dangers of the key principles being exploited by cynical policy makers, there is a shared understanding and acceptance of beliefs which are effectively summarised by McCabe and McCarthy (2005):

> Social justice scholarship in educational leadership emphasizes moral values, justice, respect, care, and equity; always in the forefront is a consciousness about the impact of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and disability on schools and students' learning. (p.201)

The social justice leadership model works from the assumption that educational leaders have a responsibility to:

> foster successful, equitable, and socially responsible learning and accountability practices for all students. (Brown 2004 p.80)

In order to do so they:

> Challenge their own assumptions, clarify and strengthen their own values and work on aligning their own behaviors [sic] and practice with these beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies. (Brown 2004 p.81)

McKenzie *et al* (2008) agree with Brown and advocate that leaders must themselves:

> hold a critical consciousness about power, privilege and inequities in society and in schools. (p.122)

However, they believe that awareness *per se* is inadequate and that a more proactive role is necessary to become *'activist leaders with a focus on equity'* (p.114), who train and mentor their staff towards a shared critical consciousness. Such leaders can together build *'intentional, heterogeneous learning communities'* (p.117) and this view is supported by Furman (2012) who calls for leaders to undertake:

> identifying and undoing … oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones'. (p.194)

The aim is for heterogeneity not only for students but also for women leaders.

Barriers for effective social justice leadership are many and varied. For example, there is a philosophical quandary which both Gewirtz (1998) and Bogotch (2000) explore. Influenced by a post-modernism perspective they explain how such a view can impact upon moral concerns which could inhibit the realization of social justice leadership. For Bogotch (2000 p.3) a key concern is the *'moral use of power … as an educational intervention* [in an] *ongoing struggle'* and the implications of this for fairness and *'transparency'*. McCabe and McCarthy (2005 p.210) amplify the implications of educational *'moral stewardship'* by calling for a radical change of attitude and practice in education to ensure an egalitarian educational framework. Gewirtz (1998) adds to the debate on key principles and discusses the moral dilemma of *'how to balance … difference and solidarity'* (p.474). That is, the challenge of recognizing, and then acting upon, the conflicting needs and rights of oppressed individuals with the responsibility of taking collective action grounded in the connections between the individuals, based on gender or race for instance. Additional barriers include those of a more material nature such as the influence of existing organizational culture - for example, one that is fragmented and dominated by siloes and/or where social justice is not respected; the resistance of staff to engage - for example, in order to maintain the *status quo*; the demands of bureaucracy - for example, managing resources fairly whilst budgets diminish (McCabe and McCarthy 2005; Theoharis 2007; Furman 2012). Theoharis (2007) and Furman (2012) further discuss how the experience of such barriers and the necessary measures to surmount them are a *'cost or burden'* (Furman 2012 p.198)

to social justice leaders in terms of their ideologies and physical and emotional health.

A key practical strategy to manage these identified barriers is to restructure the organization in order to optimize the use of limited resources to ensure equality and parity of experience for both staff and students within the organization (McCabe and McCarthy 2005; Theoharis 2007; Furman 2012). McKenzie *et al* (2008) summarize it thus:

> The purpose for being deliberate about organizational structure and for creating proactive systems of support and attention is to significantly diminish the vulnerability of teachers and students for failure. (p.126)

This justification of organizational restructuring on social justice grounds may appear to be surprising to some, especially to commentators and critics of Public Managerialist practices, notably Gronn (2008) and Stoten (2011). It was certainly not a reason I had previously considered, having endured at least five major restructurings over twenty years in FE. However, on reflection it seems entirely logical and worthwhile, even essential, to align the way in which an organization is ordered with its key objectives, rather than seeing it as an opportunistic and self-aggrandizing activity. With regard to the personal effects of social justice leadership, research revealed that leaders focused on reinforcement of their core values, for themselves - through constant self-reflection, and others - through unambiguous communication, by establishing networks of support and by means of shared, democratic, decision making processes (Theoharis 2007; McKenzie *et al* 2008; Furman 2012).

Although governments' focus on social justice leadership has been branded as sheer rhetoric and questions raised about how it conflicts with government imposed rules, regulations and performance measures (Shain 1999), social justice remains a permeating theme and the justification for focusing on the concept is made clear by Furman (2012):

> The alarming disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes among student groups distinguished by differences in race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, primary language, and so on suggest an educational system that is *un*-just. (p.212)

Gewirtz (1998) further emphasizes its importance in the dilution of power lying within one person's remit, that is, the antithesis of Bogotch's, albeit derided, (2000) *'quasi-heroic'* leader.

The 'nonessentialist' paradigm social justice leadership posited by McKenzie *et al* (2008) and the similar conclusion of Furman (2012) echo that of the situation based theories of leadership. Similarly, the view of the social justice leader as being tasked with effecting change in staff perception and organizational culture reverberates, I believe, with the profile of a transformational leader as outlined by Gill (2011) and Daft (2012).

A social justice leadership model, however imperfect and fragmented, is one which, I suggest, will work concurrently with other models, against which the findings from this research study can be interpreted to provide a coherent illustration of what can be learned to improve the provision of FE. At the same time, the FE sector in itself can be seen as a prototype of a social justice institution which offers an alternative experience to school (post-16) and university; a sector which is underpinned by, though not always clearly articulated, values of inclusiveness and second chances (Munn and McFadden 2000).

Women in Academic Leadership Roles

The patterns and percentages - as part of the work force - of women in middle management and senior leadership roles identified and discussed in the media, are very much mirrored in the education sector. In their outline of the history of International Women's Day, the Allianz Group (2012) explain that whilst it is possible to identify progress in the recognition of women's right to equality of opportunity, there is still some way to go:

> The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about women's equality and emancipation. … With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to … their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics. (no page)

The evidence of, and reasons for, this lack of *'true equality'* have been researched in a number of ways in FE, both in this country (Deem and Ozga 2000; Leathwood 2005; Lumby 2009; McTavish and Miller 2009a) and abroad (Blackmore and Sachs 2003), and, although the focus is not necessarily on women leaders *per se*, their research offers a dimension to this study.

For example, Simmons (2008) charts the way in which the workforce in FE has changed from being mainly male in the early days, when the focus of FE was on trade and industrial apprenticeships, to now being mainly female when the focus is on services. This shift reflects the country's changing economic profile, which in itself reflects *'the new global context, where leadership styles have evolved considerably'* (Evans 2010 p.348). Simmons (2008 p.268) draws a parallel between *'a more feminised economy'* and the *'numerical and cultural feminisation of FE'* and suggests that there are *'powerful economic and social factors underlying the gendered nature of FE'*. His inference from this is that, in general, the economic move from manufacturing to services has attracted a larger female workforce, as men have rejected such non-traditional work/roles whilst, at the same time, women are seemingly more willing to accept worsening conditions of service. This swing in the gender balance in FE is reflective of changes in the British workplace since the 1970s, as noted by Wetherell (1996), marked by an increase of women into work and an increase of unemployment for men. More specifically, in the FE sector, one of the outcomes of incorporation - which gave colleges responsibility for their own organizational functions, such as finance, human resources, quality assurance, and marketing – was to increase their hierarchies by introducing more middle management roles, thus providing more opportunities for women to enter such roles. Shain (1999) agrees in her examination of the association between gender and management in the first five years after incorporation, and discusses the 'gender re-ordering' evident in middle and senior manager roles in colleges. Simmons (2008) draws a salutary conclusion:

> Consequently, the increasing proportion of women in FE could be seen as a result of the on-going degradation of this work as it becomes less well-rewarded, deskilled and codified. (p.275)

However, such a conclusion seems to be at odds with the opportunities he previously identified, which provided for women to develop their management and leadership skills. Nevertheless, he does recognize the seductiveness of a simple structural explanation for the increased numbers of women working in FE and acknowledges the influence of personal identities in women's decisions to take on the nature and demands of work in FE.

Shain (1999) adds another dimension and describes a parallel between the increase in numbers of women leaders and the changing organizational cultures of colleges which reframed leadership styles - demonstrating the 'soft skills' of communication and interpersonal skills - often associated with women. However, she suggests such skills seem to be at variance with the managerialist and performative behaviours of *'the masculine competitive values that underpin policy and practice in the FE sector'* (Shain 1999 no page).

Deem and Ozga (2000) explore this perceived inconsistency further and describe how changing cultures in colleges have reflected feminist ideology, thus attracting women into leadership roles where they are then influenced by the private sector management practices (as a result of links with trade and industry) and pressured by government economic imperatives. Bryson (1999) discusses the contradictions generated by a clash of perceptions of gendered behaviour and identifies the resulting tensions experienced by women trapped in a *Catch-22* situation:

> a man will generally lose status through 'feminine' behaviour, while a woman's exercise of 'masculine' qualities may represent acclaim to authority … in displaying the personal qualities deemed necessary to authority, a woman is also transgressing her gender role; if she succeeds as an individual, she will therefore fail as a woman, and it is as a woman as well as an individual that she is likely to be judged. (p.47)

Shain (1999), Deem and Ozga (2000) and Simmons (2008) offer a useful and convincing insight into the reasons for the boost in numbers of women in FE. However, style of management approaches is tangentially considered, which is not particularly gender focused, and the nature of leadership is not addressed.

There is little research into the challenges faced by, and responses of, women leaders in FE; what research there is has, in the main, focused on the feminisation of

the workforce. Although there are some studies on what is happening with women leaders in secondary schools (Sachs and Blackmore 1998; Kirk and Wall 2010; Yu-kwong and Walker 2010) and HE, there is a dearth of research in FE.

Given that the work of the FE sector now includes responsibility for the teaching of students previously the preserve of secondary schools and universities, it is legitimate to include some consideration of relevant research in these areas to inform our understanding of women leaders - particularly as these women fall within the public sector remit.

Both secondary schools and universities reflect not only a similar numerical picture in terms of relatively low numbers of women in senior leadership roles - as at 2013, 37% of secondary heads, out of a teaching workforce where 66% are women, (Department for Education 2015) and 14% Vice-Chancellors of universities (Grove 2013) - but also similar developments in gender politics. In her exploration of the experiences of women leaders in a British university, Priola (2007) arrives at similar conclusions to Simmons (2008) that there has been a regendering of the workforce that has created a *'flexible peripheral labour of feminized, casualized and deprofessionalized teaching force'* (Priola 2007 p.23). At the same time, management practices are seen to be distinctly masculinised, thus presenting women leaders with the challenge of surviving in such an environment without compromising their feminist principles. Priola (2007) focused on one school within a university - one that was seen to espouse a traditional male environment (albeit with a high number of women staff) so her work could be criticised as being unrepresentative of what is happening in other universities. However, her findings are corroborated by the research of DiTomaso and Hooijberg (1996), Butterwick and Dawson (2005), Blackmore (2010) and Heilman (2012).

Whatever the cause, there has been some limited increase in the numbers of women in leadership roles in FE. However, as Simmons (2008) in his discussion of the feminisation of FE, reflects:

> Increased feminisation does not necessarily mean equality has been achieved. (p.277)

and this might be explained by evidence of the *'valuing masculine organizational practices'* identified by McTavish and Miller (2009b p.362).

The current situation in education is reflected across professions and industries, as Cole and Kelly (2011) comment:

> Recent studies on the lack of women in senior management and the gender pay gap indicate that women are disproportionately underrepresented in senior management and are paid less than men when they do reach the top. (p.158)

Leadership and Gender: repositioning women

Throughout this study I make reference to gendered leadership and this section clarifies my understanding and use of the term. Previously in this chapter I have explored early leadership theories, which I deem to be gendered in that they are theories generated by male theorists about male leaders, in the absence of any recognition of female theorists or female leaders. I then investigate later leadership theory in relation to academic leadership. These latter theories evolved at a time when it was acknowledged and evidenced that women held senior leadership positions, and so such theories could either be held to be gender neutral, or seen to have resulted in a dramatic dualistic view of female and male leadership practices. That is, because women are not men but they hold leadership positions, a new lexicon of female leadership practices is needed. The purpose of this section is to consider, in the light of the identified feminization of the FE sector: firstly, how ideas around gendered leadership have been affected by gendered behaviour and stereotyping and influenced by social and cultural contexts; and, secondly, how these ideas have impacted on notions of gendered leadership.

My research has been driven by a strong feminist perspective to understand and explore the *'gendered experiences within social institutions'* (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011 p.685) as women remain under-represented in senior positions in FE. Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) further clarify the positioning and import of research from a feminist stance:

> Feminism asserts that women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of our world … since women as a group experience oppression, they have often been unable to develop their full potential or gain the related rewards of full participation in society. (p.670)

with a view to challenge, change and improve the *status quo* for women. The importance of bringing more women into senior positions is argued for, and justified, by Durbin (2015) on the grounds of social justice and business principles: social justice in ensuring a fairer representation of women in leadership roles proportionate to their numbers in the general population, in the workforce and in middle manager roles; the business case based on establishing a *'wider pool of talent'* and ensuring balanced decisions are made, to avoid *'male-centric'* approaches (Durbin 2015 p.5).

<u>Ascribed behaviours and characteristics: soft and hard</u>

Whilst I understand that there is a wide and varied corpus of writing on distinguishing features of gender, I have drawn on research into gender aspects of leadership and management, mainly, but not exclusively, in education.

<u>Behaviour:</u> In terms of perceptions of behaviour, two key aspects are evident from my exploration of the relevant research: that of mothering and that of homosociability.

The full implications of mothering behaviour in women leaders are under-researched and are not, perhaps, fully understood. However, Reay and Ball (2000) conclude that:

> the symbolic power invested in one of the most powerful female roles in society (p.152)

certainly has a twofold impact upon the role of women leaders. Firstly, women leaders themselves draw upon such representational power, in order to establish their credibility and legitimacy in their role. For example, the research of Deem et al (2000) offers an instance of a woman manager referring to herself as not their *'mum'* to a group of staff as a *'deliberate strategy'* (p.242). Clearly there is an implication that she is in a 'mum' role and although the word might be used in an ironic, or even playful, sense, in this example it does appear to be employed in order to negotiate and diffuse the imposition of an increased workload. However, the extent to which this use of maternal power might be calculated or unconscious is generally unclear from studies in this area although Reay and Ball (2000) surmise that *'it seems likely that at least some of the women promoted to powerful positions'* (p.152*)* would take advantage of it in an attempt to underpin their credibility as a leader. The second

impact of figurative motherhood is through others ascribing such power to women leaders. For example, staff may trust a woman leader to know what is best for them or they may expect to be looked after because they assume that is what mothers do and therefore staff believe that must be a function of a woman leader. The research of Deem et al (2000) in FE and HE illuminates this further, with occurrences of maternal behaviour being demonstrated, and accordingly responded to, by members of their staff. A response in child mode to maternal behaviour serves, I believe, to acknowledge maternal actions. Muhr (2007) supports observations made by Reay and Ball (2000 p.152) on the variance in view of the mothering role which, on the one hand, is *'idealized'* and *'conflated with caring'*, and on the other hand, focused on control and regulation. Although research reveals aspects of both caring and control are demonstrated in women leaders, the *'soft nurturant'* (Reay and Ball 2000 p.155) aspect appears to be romanticized as a view which predominates for women as managers and leaders. This establishes a set of behaviours to be expected of women leaders – behaviours against which they will be judged. Deem *et al* (2000) found that although there was some ambivalence amongst women managers (whether or not they were mothers) about seeing themselves in a maternal role, men did want to label them as mothers for the purpose of:

> distancing themselves from those women or as a way of cataloguing them as 'not men' or not 'real managers'. (p.243)

Such stereotypical attitudes reinforce a masculinized ethos and legitimize the role of leader as masculine, which may explain why women find, or feel, themselves to be the *'organizational other'* (Morley 2013 p.124). At the same time, such stereotypical attitudes, whilst attempting to dilute or diminish the power of women, can be seen to provide a challenge to socially conditioned understandings of leadership as essentially male.

Whilst mothering behaviour in the context of leadership describes a form of individual power (asserted or ascribed), homosociability behaviour establishes a form of collective power. Homosociability describes same sex (non-sexual) relationships and is encapsulated for men by Gregory (2009) as:

> formal and informal communication, socializing and socialization, such as male networking, male bonding and joking. (p.325)

McDowell (2001) agrees with these characteristics but suggests that they typify more informal relationships which exist alongside the more formal organizational structures. These relationships cut across work roles, class and educational backgrounds, they can develop in the workplace and at outside social events, either planned or unplanned, and they offer the opportunity for men to connect via *'the 'locker room' attributes of sex, sport and drink'* (McDowell 2001 p.185). Gregory (2009) uses 'locker room' as a metaphor for homosociability and suggests that it functions as a place of safety for men to:

> discuss their ideas about their values, motivations, fears, desires, wives, girlfriends, mistresses, sexuality, career and family on a personal level … men want to express themselves in a sexist manner … they are therefore likely to resist women's presence and views. (p.327)

Whether or not women would wish to enter the locker room is arguable.

Both McDowell (2001), in her study of male merchant bankers, and Gregory (2009) in her investigation of homosociability in the advertising industry, note how male bonding is reinforced by humour, such as 'jokes', 'pranks' and 'horseplay' and by the sexualisation of women (who are often the 'target' of the humour). Deem *et al* (2000) and Ducklin and Ozga (2007) cite instances of such male 'laddish' behaviour from their research in FE and HE, which underpinned sexist assumptions about the senior women with whom they worked. Cole's (2000) research surfaced similar examples, such as the way men tended to dominate meetings. This suggests that the early paternalistic culture I have previously described in FE has morphed into one of fraternalism where male:

> dominance is achieved not only through formal controls but also by the encouragement of group solidarity and camaraderie. (McDowell 2001 p.184)

This behaviour excludes women, thus denying, as Gregory (2009 p.342) suggests, their access to *'positions of power and authority'*. In this way homosociability upholds men's dominance in the workplace and so privileges men over women (Blackmore 1999). Furthermore, this behaviour is often encouraged by male employers and embraced by male employees; as Gregory (2009) observes, many of the men she interviewed:

> discussed the locker room [homosociability] unapologetically and with an attitude of entitlement and enjoyment. (p.343)

Characteristics: Two viewpoints predominate with regard to gender characteristics: there are distinct male and female characteristics, which could be perceived to be stereotypical; there are characteristics shared by both women and men. However, these viewpoints represent points on a continuum rather than a dichotomy. For example, Deem *et al* (2000) in their research into the experiences of women managers in FE identify a historical stereotype of the *'tough male and the subservient woman'* (p.234) - which points to a certain type of power relationship. They, amongst other theorists, stress the value of feminization of the work force as providing opportunities for male managers to consider learning from women to change their management and leadership practices. However, although I would commend any learning opportunities, there is a tacit stereotyping by stating that:

> male managers [may] choose to develop forms of femininities (parenting of staff, more consultation, greater sensitivity to the feelings and values of employees), the reverse is also possible. Some female managers may choose to adopt aggressive and status/hierarchy-driven approaches to their work. (Deem *et al* 2000 p.146)

The stereotyping is in the assumption that women bring inherent 'softer' skills to leading whereas men are 'harder' in their methods. Similarly, Shanmugam *et al* (2006 p.235) suggest that women are '*empathetic'* and men are '*macho'* in their leadership practices, whilst McTavish and Miller (2009 p.352) associate *'competitiveness'* with men. However, Reay and Ball (2000) offer a counter argument to implicit stereotyping and offer a critique to:

> essentialized notions of femininity in which homogenizing conceptions of what it means to be female depict women as uniformly nurturant, affiliative and good at interpersonal relationships. (p.145)

affirming that it is not that women and men have different characteristics but that there are *'gendered differentials in opportunities and access to power'* (p.146).

Social and cultural contexts

I have previously described the process of the feminization of the FE workforce and noted that this process has not resulted in equality for women; rather, as Deem *et al* (2000) observe:

> feminization points to the intersection of economic and social changes which position women in particular kinds of work. (p.233)

The impact of historical, current and social gendered divisions of labour are a matter observed and discussed by a number of researchers into gendered leadership, for example Deem *et al* (2000), Blackmore and Sachs (2007) and Durbin (2015). Typically, the gendered divisions studied show women employed in lower paid, less secure roles, and hence seen as lower status, and men employed in higher paid, more secure roles, and thus seen as higher status and accorded more power. The imbalance in the ensuing power relationship between women and men reaffirms the dominance of men's influence in the workplace, resulting in a male or masculinist hegemony. A number of educational researchers, including Reay and Ball (2000), Ducklin and Ozga (2007), McTavish and Miller (2009), conclude that the development and embedding of managerialist practices in FE since incorporation in 1993 have served to maintain a masculine culture. Despite the feminization of the workforce in FE, women leaders are still *'operating in a context of male hegemony'* (Reay and Ball 2000 p.145). However, it is the case that women, without imitating the behaviour of men or without wanting to be men, are succeeding as leaders in a male hegemony and are finding ways to operate within a managerialist culture without necessarily compromising their principles.

Gendered leadership

Specific gendered leadership theories are sparse; rather, there is a focus on the behaviours and characteristics which leaders may exhibit, as briefly explored earlier in this section. However, there are a few for consideration, apart from early ideas about 'the great man'. For example, it has been suggested that key elements associated with transformational leadership, that is, of collaboration, empowerment, establishment of shared goals, align with female characteristics whereas transactional elements of authoritarianism, direction, focus on results, are associated more closely with male characteristics (Leathwood 2005; Shanmugam *et al* 2006; Madsen and Albrechtsen 2008; Ellis 2014). Muhr (2011) seemingly adapts and combines these ideas in her discussion of a 'cyborg'. She uses the term 'cyborg' to mean a leader with a female body and a male mind, which she describes as a *'metaphor for female leadership'* (p.341) although she believes that such women leaders inevitably *'sacrifice their femininity'* (p.350). Androgynous leadership incorporates similar ideas about leaders possessing an array of male and female

attributes which can then be drawn upon according to the circumstances. This theory aligns closely with situational or contingency leadership theory (Leathwood 2005; Shanmugam *et al* 2006; Ellis 2014). In a different vein, Hopkins and O'Neil (2015) reflect upon the place of gender in relation to authentic leadership theory and question the extent to which women leaders can be true to themselves when operating within a masculine environment, conforming to masculine-determined principles of authentic leadership.

Leadership theory remains, I argue, male dominated for two key reasons. The first is that the early theories developed by men about men underpin and inform later theories whilst still, in some cases, retaining credence up to the present day for many commentators on leadership. The second reason is that, whilst numbers are increasing, women leaders are still in the minority and they have to work and survive in an ever perpetuating masculinized world of work. Reay and Ball (2000) note the *'conflation of leadership with masculinity'* (p.146). Due to this prevailing hegemonic culture, I believe that a mythology of gendered leadership has evolved; mythology both in the sense of a discourse about leadership which may or not be true and also in the sense of a powerful belief. My review of the literature on leadership theory demonstrates that gendered leadership will have different meanings for different people. However, because the theory is intrinsically grounded in masculinities, an opposite and reactive body of thought and theory has developed about women leaders in order to counterbalance the male perspective. Thus there are set expectations about how men and women will behave in a leadership capacity against which they will be judged; such expectations lay the foundations for Heilman's (2012 p.114) *'prescriptive gender stereotyping'*, which I explore in Chapter 1. Clearly the mismatch between numbers of women in FE at middle and senior levels can be seen to be result of 'oppression' and the mismatch needs to be addressed. However, it is recognized that an increase in numbers of senior women leaders *per se*, whilst representing some progress, is unsatisfactory; what is needed is a change of attitude whereby women in such roles are seen to be the norm (Morley 2013; Durbin 2015).

Reay and Ball (2000) concluded from their research into the experiences of women head teachers that their *'feminine positionings'* in leadership varied according to the context, such that:

> at times as a maternal figure, at times as stereotypically female, but at other times constructing an identity as a powerful person. (p.153)

With the acknowledgement of women as powerful, they make a salutary observation:

> It seems likely the powerful in society, regardless of their sex, share more in common with each other than they share with relatively powerless members of either sex. (p.150)

The implication is that it is a masculine environment and leadership approach which they share.

Whatever the theory and thinking about leadership roles might be, the persona of the leader is central and critical and an approach to this might be through consideration of notions of identity. This might be particularly useful as there is little in the literature on identities of women leaders in FE. The following section explores theoretical perspectives on identity, which are then applied in my thematic analysis and discussion in Chapter 5.

Consideration of Identity – a kaleidoscope of potential patterns

Research literature uses 'identity' and 'self' interchangeably and this practice is adhered to in the following discussion, which looks firstly at general aspects of identity and secondly, specifically at professional identity.

General aspects of identity: The notion of identity has been researched and written about from the perspective of a number of disciplines, principally those of psychology, philosophy, history and sociology. Each discipline offers some insight into how we might articulate and understand the term, although these 'insights' are often diminished by counter arguments (Scott 1998; Elliott 2001; Gilmore 2001; Mishler 2010). Suggestions as to what is meant by identity vary; indeed, Leary and Tangney (2012) hold that the: *'topic has been bogged down in a conceptual quagmire as muddy as any'* (p.4) but offer a general understanding that it is *'the capacity for self-reflection that lies at the heart of what it means to have a self'* (p.1). Elliott (2001) offers a definition of this reflexivity as:

a self-defining process that depends upon monitoring of, and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life. (p.37)

which suggests that there is a fluidity to beliefs about identity, which is supported by the research of other theorists. For example, Scott (1998) discusses the way in which historical perspectives can reinforce certain hegemonies by making assumptions about, or ignoring, the identities of individuals or groups. Recognition of, and a capturing of, the experiences of those who challenge such hegemonies (such as the white, heterosexual, male view of the world) can lead to a reinterpretation of identity – one that can be considered to be more authentic. Perreault (1998) finds an *'energy'* in the fusion of not only disclosing feminist narratives through autobiography and biography, but also of the actual process of writing about them which reshapes the self *'in a body and a community'* (p.191). In a similar way, Martin (1998) remarks upon how lesbian autobiographies have worked to:

unsettle rather than to consolidate the boundaries around identity … to … make their renegotiation possible. (p.390)

a view with which Gilmore (2001) concurs.

The idea of a duality, or more, of identity, alluded to by Perreault (1998), is considered by other theorists as a way of explaining and understanding behaviour which varies according to circumstances. Goffman (1959), for example, uses the theatre as an analogy for how people identify and present themselves to others. He suggests that whilst we may follow a pre-determined script (societal norms/expectations or the playwright's text) we can choose how we interpret and represent that script. The corollary to this metaphor of performance is that the authenticity of the role is ultimately interpreted and evaluated by the audience (Woodward 2004). Mishler's (2010) research into the work identities and motivations of craftpersons revealed a similar discernible division between a structural identity located within:

social and cultural contexts that define alternatives and limit choices among culturally available types of work. (p.298)

and a personal identity by which they made their actual choices. Wetherell's (1996) research implies a multiplicity of identities according to a person's different relationships:

> there is no one essence to the person, one identity, one enduring unification, or just one story to be told. Rather, there a multiplicity of angles on personality, fitting a multiplicity of relationships. People move variably in and out of narratives of identity. (p.307)

The common thread throughout these examples is that the duality or multiplicity is complementary rather than dichotomous, which indicates a strong sociological influence on the concept of identity.

Professional identity: Research into professional identity in education builds upon and reflects the general thinking about identity just summarised. For example, there are echoes of Goffman's 'performance' ideas in Busher's (2005) description of secondary school middle leaders:

> donning the mantles of their respective ascribed roles to play their part in the theatre of school politics (p.148)

and Garrety's (2007) assertion that *'a person as a whole is constituted by narratives and performances'* (p.9). Whilst there is limited research into features of identity of senior women leaders in FE, it is possible to draw upon studies of middle leaders' identity, and identity in relation to organizational and leadership theory, in other educational sectors to explore salient aspects (Leathwood 2000; Busher 2005). There is a consensus that investigations into work-related identities show that they are equally as complex as general identity enquiries and that there is no one discernible professional identity ascribable to any one person within an organization (Busher 2005; Briggs 2007; Sinclair 2010). Garrety (2007) sums up this view with the statement that *'Multiplicity is a normal and natural aspect of selfhood'* (p.4) with the recognition that 'multiplicity' often includes conflicting identities. Again there are attempts to tease out and categorise aspects of identity such as what is *'real'*, *'core'*, *'false* or *'authentic'* (Garrety 2007; Sinclair 2010). At times, this feels to be a matter of semantics, at others a helpful lexicon to help us recognize *'the fleeting images'* (Sinclair 2007 p.452) of professional identity. At the same time, it could indicate that

individuals have a choice about their identity and, perhaps, their resulting associated behaviour.

Briggs (2007) characterizes educational professional identity as:

> both a product and an agent of the systems and structures within which the individual's working life is located. (p.473)

This perception indicates that the external working environment will impact upon people's identity both in shaping it, for example as a result of their own academic and teaching discipline (Busher 2005; Briggs 2007), and also in causing it to change in response to, for example, government pressures on the education system.   One discussion of this is in the research of the impact in the last ten years of government policy and legislation on FE managers and leaders (Busher 2005; Briggs 2007; Smith 2007). Political and economic factors which have the potential to affect identity may lead to conflicts and clashes within a person's concept of their identity due to *'constraining ideologies'* (Sinclair 2010 p.452) between teacher and manager/leader identities (Leathwood 2000; Busher 2005; Briggs 2007). Despite such internal conflicts and potential clashes for people with dissimilar roles, research into educational identities suggests that there is a particular value which is shared amongst those working in education - that of the importance of focusing on the needs of the learners. It is this *'unity of purpose'* (Briggs 2007 p.478) that workers recognize in each other and enables them to work together as they *'locate[d] themselves in their educational* communities' (Busher 2005 p.148). This is notwithstanding their differing academic backgrounds and their differing places within the organizational hierarchy.

Recent research into educational professionals shows a general agreement about how such values are generated. The key stimuli are threefold: from their family backgrounds (with parental attitude being of particular importance plus family life offering an early experience of leadership), from role models within education (whether teachers, colleagues or managers) and from their own educational experiences as a student (Wetherell 1996; Woodward 2004; Busher 2005; Smith 2007; Sinclair 2010). Wetherell (1996) reviews the influence of small groups, especially families, on the development of identities and explains how this evolves:

> Family interactions as they shift together, combining and clashing over time, provide a kaleidoscope of potential patterns. The child and the adult work with these patterns … and from this 'working out' identities coalesce in the form of some characteristic stances or positions in relation to the world and other people. (p.308)

This latter point is further developed by Woodward (2004) who explains how gendered identities are nested within societal cultures where:

> Assumptions about what is appropriate for women and for men can shape and influence our identities and the scope which we have for deciding 'who we are' and 'who we want to be'. (p.22)

Additionally, Bolden's (2015) view is that *'thoughts on leadership are formed by the age of 4'.*

In view of this genesis of professional values, the argument by Mclean and Pasupathi (2012) for using a narrative method to investigate people's identities, with their suggestion that such an approach is:

> ecologically valid, conceptually rich … [it] emphasizes the sorting through of past experiences to better understand one's current state. (p.11)

is endorsed and it also echoes the views of Garrety (2007) and Briggs (2007).

Furthermore, Busher (2005) concludes, shared values and purpose afford a bedrock for the cultivation of a distributed leadership model in education. However, such a model may remain at a 'cultivated' stage only, relying upon coaching and mentoring from senior leaders. In relation to this, Smith (2007) offers a view, supported by Busher (2005), from his research into the effects of the marketization of FE on managers and leaders:

> a key finding of my study was that teacherly values are deeply ingrained and stubbornly persist despite the exigencies of the most hostile and managerialised of environments. (p.45)

On the other hand, Garrety (2007) postulates that workers may have to *'compromise'* as:

> organizational pressures that require employees to routinely produce selves that are markedly at odds with their perceived 'real' selves can generate discomfort. (p.19)

Thus they may 'compromise' to find an acceptable way of being and behaving in response to difficult demands, but they may also feel 'compromised' by the high cost of denying or betraying their values. In either case, this could lead to a feeling of disaffection with their organization. What is illustrated here are practical examples of how 'structure' and 'agency' inform a person's identity and behaviour. An understanding of the meaning of 'structure' and 'agency' is helped by Woodward's (2004) outline:

> structures, the forces beyond our control which shape our identities, and agency, the degree of control which we ourselves can exert over who we are. (p.6)

Closing Observations

My review of the leadership literature confirms the initial premise that there is a mass of leadership theories, which lack coherence and cohesiveness (Hay and Hodgkinson 2006). As Clegg *et al* (2011) suggest:

> leadership as a domain of interest has become an unnecessarily complex, confusing, and contradictory concept. (p.125)

The strong debate about leadership theories has been charted to provide background for, and contribution to, a coherent response to my first research question on 'To what extent do the experiences of senior women leaders in FE reflect gendered leadership theory?' which will determine the response to the second research question 'What leadership theory predominates?' The examination of the chronology of leadership theory has created a context for current leadership theory, an approach endorsed by Gronn (2008), for:

> conceptual genealogies are enlightening. Not only do they set the record straight about antecedents, but they also reinforce the importance of continuities. (p.145)

However, I appreciate Sinclair's (2007) urging of an awareness of the extent to which critiques of leadership theories and suggested reformulations might be a *façade* (albeit a sincere one):

> We should remain alert to the cannibalising canon of leadership studies, which has shown itself to be adept at reinvention while not seriously available for overall. (p.32)

There is, perhaps, a debate to be had about whether or not leadership is even needed - for example, Sinclair (2007) asks *'what is leadership for?'* (p.33). I have made an implicit assumption throughout my review of leadership theory that it is. Interestingly, despite my own experiences as a lecturer/trainer and practitioner of leadership, I have never considered the need; rather I have looked to see how practices might be improved in order to ensure that they were humane and focused on achieving organizational goals. I reviewed a significant number of academic research papers and articles on general and educational leadership and Collinson and Collinson (2009) were the only writers to address the need, or otherwise, for a leader. Reassuringly, their research into UK FE college staff views about leadership showed that, for these staff at least, leadership was important:

> interviewees consistently viewed leadership as a vital ingredient and as one of, if not the most important aspect of college governance. Respondents' views about the vital importance of leadership were remarkably consistent. … our respondents emphasized the vital strategic, financial, organizational and motivational importance of effective leadership. (Collinson and Collinson 2009 p.369)

This is comforting, as much research would be negated if the response were to be 'no - leadership is not needed'.

I offer my own definition of a leader, drawn from my readings, my observations and my own experiences as a leader. A leader is a person to whom power, authority, and responsibility have been gifted by peers, followers and those with more power. Their success in a leadership role is dependent upon their traits which influence their style of leadership and which is, in turn, determined by the context in which they find themselves.

This review has not explored how a successful leader might be identified; I believe that the achievement of women in a senior leadership role is a success in itself. My key argument is that my review reveals the lack of research into the experiences of women leaders in FE and so offers a justification for the purpose of my research, which is to contribute to the discourse of the experiences of senior women leaders in FE.

Identity might be difficult to cleanly define as its *'parameters are relentlessly mobile'* (Perreault 1998 p.192) but my overall perception of identity is one of dynamism which is subject to change for the individual, according to circumstances, and which can also be a force for change through challenging preconceptions. The writing of auto/biographies and its impact on identity has been referred to in this section – the influence of memory on such actions is relevant, as concluded by King (2000):

> The work of 'memory' also involves a complex process of negotiation between remembering and forgetting, between the destruction and creation of the self. Individual memories of personal histories are constantly reworked and retranslated in the present. (p.180)

Sinclair (2007) implies that we have a choice, albeit a restricted one, in forming a particular identity, constrained by:

> Societal conditions, power relations and our own desires [which] collude to encourage our identities to be compliant extensions of the scripts offered to us. It is hard for us to stand back from the self offered to us – there may seem to be no other. (p.141)

Finally, although I have taken a critical approach to my review of literature relevant to my research aim, this has not been a neutral stance. Cresswell's (2013) observation, in relation to autobiographical method, on:

> how individuals' culture, gender, history and experiences shape all aspects of the qualitative project … In some way … individuals position themselves in the qualitative study. (p.55)

is pertinent to the selection and interpretation of literature I have reviewed. Accordingly, I acknowledge that my exploration will be nuanced not only by my own experiences of teaching leadership theory to undergraduate and postgraduate students but also by my own practice as a leader.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Opening Comments

This Chapter deliberates upon the nature of my qualitative enquiry, justifying the methodological approach on the grounds of the optimum accommodation of my epistemological belief, and the research questions in the light of the literature review. The whole is underpinned by my wish to give a voice to senior FE women leaders.

Epistemologically, the readings from the literature indicate a conflation and clash of ideologies within the microcosm of the FE sector as it reflects the macrocosm of government attempts from the 1980s to reform the public sector. The key effects of these attempts have been workers within FE having to work longer hours for decreased financial incentives, being held to be more accountable within increasingly stringent quality control inspections and being more bound by rules and regulations. At the same time, whilst economic changes have resulted in the feminisation of the workplace, equality of opportunity for women has not improved and women are trying to establish an identity within a managerial culture. This is the maelstrom in which women leaders have to evolve a workable leadership style to meet the demands of changing government diktats.

With respect to this, an interpretivist approach, and its alignment with narrative enquiry, is argued for. Debates around issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research are reviewed and ways of managing the identified challenges are suggested. The method of carrying out the research, and thus the generation of data, is explored with key aspects of the interviewing process presented. Following from this the literature on narrative and thematic analysis is reviewed and the approach to data analysis is justified. The final section of this chapter identifies the key concern of ensuring that the ethics of qualitative research are duly observed.

Outline of the Method of Enquiry

In order to draw out the richness of experience of women leaders, the approach is that of an interpretivist paradigm which allows for a flexible inference from the findings in relation to the context, albeit one which needs to be explained and justified. Such an approach lies comfortably with my long held belief that a constructivist practice, summarised by Nash (2008) *'that students construct meaning*

for themselves' (p.18), is the most respectful and humane way of being an educator and engaging learners so that they are *'actively constructing rather than passively receiving the outside world'* (Nash 2008 p.18).

Blair (2009) explains such an interpretivist paradigm as:

> where truths are not fixed and where each might find their own answer … using this approach allows for research inside such a space to be fluid and to take into account any inherent differences in culture and context. (p.99)

Wisker (2001) adds how the paradigm is relevant to a gender perspective in exploring:

> ways in which gender, race, sexuality, and so on are repressively inscribed in everyday life and everyday representations. (p.124)

It is a means whereby a 'given' is viewed differently and challenged in order to reconstruct another meaning. This aligns with a post-modern perspective described by Burns and Walker (2005) as '*many versions of social reality, all of which are equally valid'* (p.67). Within this interpretivist paradigm the nature of the research will be exploratory and explanatory, and therefore qualitative, as it attempts to establish and understand the relationship between women leaders and their environment (Wisker 2001). In the light of the complexities of the milieu in which the research is to take place, and in view of the wish to understand how women experience and deal with these complexities, a narrative method is adopted. In this context, narratives are used as an adjunct to life histories. A social constructionist paradigm was initially considered with its:

> focus on the multiple and plural nature of the individual (we don't have one true essence but are a mix of voices and accounts which are closely related to our social and cultural contexts. (Wetherell 1996 p.300)

as it offers a similar mutability to an interpretivist one. However, whilst being persuaded by such a model, I rejected it in its pure form. Although a social constructionist would focus on 'language and discourse', which is what I have done with the narratives, I felt that, while the context was important, my research was only tangentially grounded in this.

Research using narratives falls within the area of qualitative research, which is described by Edson (2005) as *'a subjective process of understanding and assessing*

… phenomena' (p.42).   He, amongst others (Whittemore *et al* 2001; Winter 2002; Polkinghorne 2007; Lapan *et al* 2011; Geiger and Schreyögg 2012), examines the features of such research and also considers those aspects which are found to be troubling.

Considerable claims are made for the power of different aspects of qualitative research; for example, Edson (2005), in his writings on the nature of historical research, claims that its importance lies in:

> assisting us in raising new questions, by leading us to question assumptions, by cultivating an appreciation for complexity and, finally, by expanding our frames of reference. (p.43)

Polkinghorne's (2007) view, focusing on narrative research, is that:

> Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves. (p.6)

Furthermore, Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) suggest, as a result of their case 'vignette' of the use of internal narratives within a section of Shell, the oil company, that narratives make a significant contribution to knowledge creation:

> narratives are seen as providing workable know-how and the relevant "thick descriptions" of contexts, thereby enabling actors to get a richer understanding of the complex nature of problem situations and even the competence to cope with them. (p.100)

By 'thick descriptions', they recognize the work of Geertz (1973) who searched for meaning in cultures by explaining human behaviour within a defined context. Whilst they are referring to narratives internal to an organization, it is possible to suggest a similar contribution being made by similarly positioned people across a range of similar organizations, that is, women leaders in FE colleges. Thus findings from the way in which narratives can diminish complexity and help resolve problems offer an opportunity for others to learn from such experiences, so providing organizational or professional knowledge.

At this point, it might be useful to note that 'narrative' and 'story' are often used in research to mean the same thing, although it is possible to tease out a slight variance in meaning. Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) suggest that *'all stories are*

narratives but not all narratives are stories' (p.99) which does not appear to clarify the matter. However, seeing narrative as giving the overarching view within which stories appear, might clarify. It is, I believe, the anecdotes within the narratives which give the story and Polkinghorne (2007) offers confirmation of this:

> Narrative research is the study of stories … stories are … told by people about themselves and about others as part of their everyday conversations. (p.1)

In this study, the narratives provide stories of people's lives located in an external context, so that it is possible to reveal how they are socially constructed within a complex world. This can lead to a more general appreciation of actions and perceptions in certain circumstances, that is, the linking of the 'personal' to the 'public' (Goodson and Sikes 2001; Shacklock and Thorp 2005; Bathmaker and Harnett 2010).

One way of thinking about the conjunction of filtered, past memories with perceptions of our present day selves, all experienced within our cultural environment, is offered by Kirk and Wall (2010), in their work with retired school teachers. They use the term 'composure' (to mean composing the self) as a descriptor of the *'process of remembering'* (p.631) involved in researching people's stories of their lives. They explain how 'composure' represents a *'hegemonic dialogic encounter'* (p.640) and point out how the researcher will rarely discover a neatly packaged story which fits comfortably within a clearly defined context; instead the researcher *'will always come across tension, contradiction, blockage'* (p.632).

Indeed, it is recognized that narratives can be problematic, with debates such as: the extent to which it is necessary to establish the truth of what is said; the credibility of the validity of the approach; the relationship between the researcher and the researched; and the distancing effect of the re-presentation of people's stories (Dhunpath 2000; Goodson and Sikes 2001; Shacklock and Thorp 2005; Cole 2009). These are legitimate concerns and there are no easy 'answers'; in fact, such disquiet is to be welcomed as an essential aspect of the process which can compel the researcher to adopt a 'duty of care' in their approach and handling of the method of research. Such 'care' would be evidenced by the researcher engaging in reflexive

practice, focusing on authenticity and relying upon professional judgement (Shacklock and Thorp 2005).

The chosen method of enquiry will highlight the *'locations and perspectives of* [all] *women'* (Burns and Walker 2005 p.69) by making the *'noise'* called for by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001), as cited by Bathmaker and Harnett (2010) and it will *'provide guidance for the future'* by looking at the past (Bathmaker and Harnett 2010 p.168).

Reliability and Validity

A key feature of qualitative research is generally agreed to be that the activity is firmly grounded in a context, as it is held that insights will be optimized if there is knowledge of how internal and external factors shape events. Other features include: natural settings, an understanding of the relationship between, and impact of, the past, present, and the identification of the significance of what has been found (Whittemore *et al* 2001; Edson 2005).

Qualitative research is a means whereby assumptions are tested and complexity welcomed in order to gain new insights. There is a consensus that the quality of research cannot be assumed and that attention to quality assurance in the form of reliability and validity throughout the process of qualitative research is essential to its legitimacy in the research arena (Whittemore *et al* 2001; Morse *et al* 2002; Winter 2002: Polkinghorne 2007; Geiger and Schreyögg 2012).

However, there are problems regarding the rigour of this type of research particularly in relation to the reliability, by which is meant *'the stability of the findings'* (Whittemore *et al* 2001 p.523) and validity, meaning the credibility or the 'truth' of the claim to knowledge (Silverman 2000; Polkinghorne 2007). Or as Lichtman (2014) straightforwardly states:

> How can I know that this research is any good, or how can I believe it, or how can I trust it? (p.18).

Whittemore *et al* (2001), Morse *et al* (2002) and Polkinghorne (2007) offer a historical perspective which can help in understanding the arguments and concerns resulting, at times, in an *'epistemological quagmire'* (Whittemore *et al* 2001 p.523), which underpin some of today's thinking. They outline how some researchers argued for the rejection of reliability and validity in qualitative research during the

1980s and the 1990s - such notions of rigour being seen only relevant to quantitative research - and proposed instead new concepts such as truth, transferability, authenticity and dependability.   This is loosely identified as the 'reform agenda'. Morse *et al* (2002) also raise cultural, in addition to chronological, perspectives; for example European researchers are now likely to use the terms 'reliable' and 'valid', whereas North Americans are not. They now see a legacy of:

> criteria and standards for evaluation of the overall significance, relevance, impact and utility of completed research. (p.14)

This, they feel, focuses on the outcomes of the research, rather than the process itself, which is no guarantee of success; as they say: *'strategies … to evaluate, rigor* (sic) *… do not in themselves ensure rigor'* (p.17). Similarly, Whittemore *et al* (2001) talk of how procedures alone will not assure sound data or conclusions. Even a claim to knowledge does not in itself assure validity, rather *'validity is a function of intersubjective judgment'* (Polkingthorne 2007 p.4). The troubling aspect of such a summative approach is that it reduces the opportunity to improve upon and remedy any poor practices at the formative stage of research.

Whittemore *et al* (2001) depict the challenge of ascertaining validity in qualitative research as trying to combine two disparate elements, that of *'rigour and subjectivity'* (p.522), and my investigation showed that there is a range of areas wherein inherent problems for assuring rigour in the research might lie. Such problems might arise during the process of gathering information or during the analysis and interpretation of the information and may relate to the researcher, the narrator or to the narration. These may only be perceived problems, for as Lichtman (2014) suggests:

> Qualitative researchers do not strive to eliminate subjectivity - they acknowledge it and move with it. (p.36)

The researcher might be seen as a problem; as Campbell (2005 p.47) states how *'the bias and interference of the observer'* can be seen as a *'stumbling block'.* This may lead to an unintended complexity in the narrative itself, as the narrative evolves as a result of an interaction between the researcher and research participant. However, it is rarely an interaction of 'equals' as the researcher, in many ways, is leading the process and so needs to *'guard against simply producing the texts they had expected'* (Polkinghorne 2007 p.12); by 'text', Polkinghorne means the story.

This is clearly a potential danger when interviews are used to produce data. Winter (2002) writes of this danger as a:

> political problem of the textual authority of researchers in relation to the supposedly 'authentic' voices of those whose lives they describe. (p.151)

However, Yardley (2008), whilst acknowledging how a researcher may be a challenge to the validity of the study, recognizes that this is inevitable and to be embraced in order to:

> Retain the benefits of qualitative research, such as disclosure of subjective experiences in an in-depth interview, or insightful analysis of the hidden or oppressed meanings in talk. (p.237)

This is assured, she suggests, by the use of open ended questions - thus giving research participants the opportunity to *'influence the topic and data'* (p.237).

Validity issues might be with the narrator: for example Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) note how, perhaps inevitably:

> narratives evolve dynamically and are imprinted by their tellers … with their cognitions, values and emotions. (p.99)

Polkinghorne (2007) takes this a step further by pointing out that narrators might not have the linguistic ability, or sufficient reflective skills, to replicate adequately their experiences, describing it as:

> The disjunction between a person's actual experienced meaning and his or her storied description. (p.10)

Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) refer to a further dimension – that of the actual language used which may be specific to the context of the particular narrative. Such terminology may interfere with the researcher's full grasp of the circumstances and/or meaning of the narrative:

> narratives refer to historical events, documents, symbols, crises etc which are only to the members of a specific community and are part of the shared history and memory of the respective community. (p.100)

There is certainly a point to this perspective as the alienating aspects of the use of jargon are well documented (Roter 2000; Hirst 2003). However, this does not necessarily weaken any insights from narrative analysis and an imperfect knowledge of the terminology used might reduce any constrictions on interpretation.

An additional threat to the validity of narrative research is with the sense-making of differing narratives. Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) identify the challenge of making sense of *'competing and conflicting narratives'* (p.107) militates against the assumption, deduced by them, based on their readings of other theorists, that:

> narratives … distribute effectively un-codified ("tacit") knowledge and practical problem-solving competences. (p.100)

This can be a problem both within and across organizations.

What is needed is an approach to validity and reliability that holds rigour whatever the narrative.

There is a range of ideas about how to manage the challenge of ensuring validity and reliability during the research process and whilst considering these, it can be useful to bear in mind Polkingthorne's (2007) conclusion that there may be degrees of validity somewhere on a continuum between being valid or not valid.

For example, Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) recommend developing an epistemological understanding of the use of narrative, namely that:

> the narrative mode of communication represents the natural way of sense making in the everyday life world … actors rely unconsciously on the narrative mode of communication thereby taking the narrative validity claims for granted … narratives represent a specific form of knowledge, the so-called narrative knowledge. (p.105)

This seems to partly represent an interpretivist stance although it could also be seen to be a slightly dogmatic stance of 'it is because it is'. However, it presents a conundrum by suggesting that validity in narrative research is assured through the development of 'narrative knowledge'; in other words, validity is anchored within the narrative itself through the telling, and retelling, of the stories. As Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) point out, this is irrespective of the truth of the story (assuming that there are irrevocable truths underpinning any story) because the 'truth' is implied through the narration. Although it might be felt that the truth is an important factor in stories and although there might be antipathy to the idea of this 'self-legitimization' aspect of narratives, it might be possible to deem 'truth' an irrelevance if one of the rationales for qualitative research is '*understanding and assessing … phenomena'* (Edson 2005 p.43). This view counters that of a realist epistemology, pinpointed by

Polkinghorne (2007) as an underpinning attitude to qualitative research in North America, and that of a positivistic perspective (Whittemore *et al* 2001).

Another approach advised by Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) is that of 'surfacing' by which they mean *'explicate the implicitly carried validity claims'* (p.107). This is carried out through a process of reflection and investigation on, and into, pre-agreed areas relating to, for example, profitability and feasibility. This parallels, in part, the conclusions of Morse *et al* (2002) and the *'cogent argument'* of Polkingthorne (2007 p.14). On the whole, such 'surfacing' seems to relate to any problem resolution 'outcome' as a result of the narrative research.

Whittemore *et al* (2001) emphasise the importance of establishing tailored approaches according to the differing claims to knowledge - different *'qualitative methods espouse different evaluative criteria'* (p.522). Whilst Polkingthorne (2007) agrees with this approach, each party has different recommendations on how to achieve such tailoring. In their *'reconceptualization of the concept of validity in qualitative research'* Whittemore *et al* (2001 p.529) distinguish between 'primary' and 'secondary' criteria, the former (for example: credibility, authenticity) being fundamental and essential to any qualitative research and the latter (for example: congruence, sensitivity) used to accommodate the particular qualitative research. This could be advantageous in that it offers robust and anchored tenets to the research whilst offering a means of appropriate modification. However, there are possible shortcomings to this approach. For example: there could be a debate about the choice of key criteria and their placement within the two criteria categories. There could, indeed, be further disputes over the semantics of the criteria. Winter (2002) offers a review of the word 'authenticity' which includes its etymologies as well as its sociological, historical and political meanings - all of them slightly nuanced. Meanwhile, Polkingthorne (2007) suggests relying upon the judgement of the reader(s) of the research to decide upon the extent of the validity which seems possibly too flexible and accommodating. However, Morse *et al* (2002) argue strongly against this type of *'post hoc evaluation'* (p.16) and they emphasize that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure rigour in the research.

Claims (Boyatzis 1998; Attride-Stirling 2001) are made that thematic analysis (TA) can contribute to rigour in the research. For Boyatzis reliability is seen to be critical

to, and possible with, TA and is achieved through *'consistency of observation, labelling, or interpretation'* (Boyatzis 1998 p.144). Although this is not the same as verification, which he sees as a positivistic notion, his methods for ensuring 'consistency' - making judgements with others and using mathematical formulae - resonate with the ideas around verification. Silverman (2000) and Attride-Stirling (2001) do not disagree with this viewpoint. They conclude the way rigour and robustness of research can be ensured is through a transparent and logical methodology.

Underlying all of this is recognition of the critical role the researcher plays in assuring an acceptable degree of rigour; Boyatzis (1998) concludes with his criteria for the effective researcher of *'openness and flexibility … to perceive the patterns'* (p.8). To which Pope *et al* (2000) add:

> At its heart, good qualitative analysis relies on the skill, vision and integrity of the researcher doing that analysis. (p.116)

In appreciation of the preceding discussion about some of the troubling issues with reliability and validity in qualitative research, and in recognition of some of the suggested ways of resolving these issues, the ways I have managed my approach to reliability and validity are now considered. My three key tenets are of reflexivity, researcher behaviour and triangulation.

The first tenet is my belief in the necessity of the researcher being a reflective practitioner. My role of reflective practitioner is evidenced by my researcher awareness, for example, of the impact of the external environment or my own experiences on the research. This awareness is highlighted by my commentary, at two levels. Firstly, at a macro level where I design the shape and content of the study. Secondly, at a micro level to monitor progress and my researcher behaviour against the aims of the study. This is the equivalent of a stage actor metaphorically stepping out of a play and engaging with the audience - usually to comment on an aspect of the proceedings. It interrupts the flow of the thesis (or play) to draw the attention of the reader (or audience) to an important point. In relation to this, I have no doubt that my insider role (as previously discussed in my personal context in Chapter 1) has impacted on the shape, process and conclusions of my research;

such a role has both benefitted and disadvantaged my research. Yardley (2008) considers reflexivity to be:

> The term used for explicit consideration of specific ways in which it is likely that the study was influenced by the researcher. (p.250)

I have embraced a reflexive approach to my research to help me identify and understand how I have affected my research study. Such identifications and understandings are commented upon, where appropriate, in my thesis.

I feel that a main concern, and challenge, with my qualitative research lay with retaining the authenticity of the narratives whilst analysing them, which might mean avoiding cleaning them up over much. The degree of authenticity of the narratives could, I believe, be affected by my behaviour during the elicitation of data from the interviews. I was guided by Polkinghorne's (2007) four step model to avoid:

> The validity threats [that] arise in narrative research because the languaged descriptions given by participants of their experienced meaning is not a mirrored reflection of this meaning. The validity issue about the evidence of assembled texts is about how well they are understood to express the actual meaning experienced by the participants. (p.480)

The disconnect between experience and story has its foundation in four areas. The first is the general paucity of language to reflect experience. To counteract this possible limitation of language I asked open questions which gave room for participants to take control of the exploration of their experiences. I prepared subsidiary questions in anticipation of a response not being clear to me, which encouraged the use of metaphor and simile. On the whole, I found my participants' responses to be articulate and naturally including figurative language; I rarely had to seek further clarification.

Secondly, initial responses to questions may be strengthened by allowing time during the interview for participants to think further and more deeply about their experiences. I have learned to be comfortable with silence when questioning people and I felt that this gave my participants space to develop their thoughts and to arrive at new perspectives on their experiences.

The third element of Polkinghorne's (2007) model is an approach to counteracting the often natural tendency of participants to present themselves in as good as light

as possible - self-regulating the presentation of themselves in their stories. Polkinghorne advocates interviewing the same participants several times in order to establish a trust between researcher and participant. I felt that I had already established a trusting relationship with my research participants as either I already knew them or we had been recommended to each other. However, the use of a second interview with three of my participants proved to be useful, as I felt that two of the women were even more open with me than they had been before.

The final step was to recognize that as a researcher I was setting the agenda, not only through my questions and research focus but also through my appearance, use of language and body language in asking questions and my reactions to their responses. As a result my participants could have skewed their related experiences to what they thought/observed I was looking for. Although I was aware of the need to be neutral and non-judgemental I felt that on several occasions my neutrality ebbed as several times I was asked if their responses were 'helpful' or 'what I was looking for'. Overall, I was looking at approaches to ensure that the participants' stories were as congruent as possible with their experiences.

My third tenet is that of triangulation; Polkinghorne (2005) and Yardley (2008) suggest that the use of triangulation contributes to strengthening the validity of the research - not in the way of establishing the consistency in a research finding, but rather through developing a thorough understanding of the research issues from several perspectives.   Researching the experiences of seven women, through ten individual interviews, gives a broader view of the issues to be explored and thus allows for a triangulation of the research findings. Polkinghorne (2005) explains:

> Multiple participants serve as a kind of triangulation on the experience, locating its core meaning by approaching it through different accounts. Triangulation does not serve to verify a particular account but to allow the researcher to move beyond a single view of the experience. (p.140)

Method of Data Gathering

The planned method of capturing the thoughts, feelings and experiences of women leaders in FE was through semi structured interviews; this approach offered a range of insiders' observations and judgements in relation to the research questions. Semi structured interviews allowed for a balance between matching up interviewee

responses - by asking the same few questions of each - and encouraging the potential for a *'rich and rewarding … conversation'* (Wisker 2001 p.168). Four phases were considered when undertaking interviews, namely: choosing the interviewees, preparing for the interview, conducting the interview and then reflecting upon the process. However, as Alvesson (2011) points out, the process can be enriched by seeing it not in a linear fashion but in an iterative way, for:

> It is far better if planning and the carrying out of a study is informed by awareness of the complexity of the interview situation and if practical work guided by on-going considerations of interpretation. (no page)

Research theorists (Silverman 1993; Wisker 2001; Alvesson 2011) offer useful guidelines for both practical and theoretical factors in interviewing; examples of how this guidance was drawn upon is now considered.

Choice and number of interviewees: '*representativeness in one or another sense'* is highlighted by Alvesson (2011 no page) as an important aim, to reflect a span and variance of experience. Additionally, Polkinghorne (2005) affirms that including a number of participants will afford a range of perceptions to enrich the thematic analyses. He thus concludes:

> By comparing and contrasting these perspectives, researchers are able to notice the essential aspects that appear across the sources and to recognize variations in how the experience appears. (p.140)

As I felt unsure of my skill and persona as a research interviewer, my pilot interviewee was chosen on the basis of someone whom I knew reasonably well and someone with whom I felt I had established a relationship of mutual respect. Similarly, my lack of confidence as an early researcher impacted upon my choice of my other participants. I had originally anticipated interviewing ten to fifteen senior women in FE and the names of a number possible candidates were passed to me by friends and colleagues. However, being uncertain about how women who did not know me would respond to a request to be involved in my research, I decided to focus on women with whom I had had some contact. This approach helped my confidence in my research as I felt the women I did contact would be amenable and interested in my research, as they respected me. In retrospect, having been quite overwhelmed by the generosity and enthusiasm of my chosen participants, I now

feel that had I approached unknown, to me, senior women in FE, that they would have been equally bighearted. I found relatively little research on the optimum number of participants for qualitative interviews. What I did find indicated that 'it all depends' upon a range of factors such as epistemological and methodological approaches and practical issues of time and resources (Baker and Edwards 2012). Having been surprised by the abundance of data generated by my pilot interview I made a judgement that fewer participants than originally planned would generate sufficient breadth and depth of data for my qualitative analysis. I decided to concentrate on working with women holding leadership positions in the top three tiers of FE institutions across the country. These were women with whom I felt most confident and who, I felt, had confidence in me. In addition, they represented a range of age, ethnicity, experience, place in career path and class (although this latter aspect only surfaced after the interviews) - a table of participants can be found in Chapter 4. This achieved, I believe, what Psathas (1995) refers to as a *'uniquely adequate'* number of participants. Seven women in senior leadership roles in the FE sector were approached using two sample frames. I was looking to work with a homogenous group; all seven were known to me either personally or by reputation. Five I knew as previous colleagues whom I had identified using a purposive, or judgemental, (Cohen and Manion 1995; Silverman 2000) sample because they were characterized by being senior women leaders. Two participants were known by other previous colleagues; they had a 'gatekeeper role' which could affect some aspects of dependability in my research. This is a form of a snowball sample: whilst I was not asking the five participants I already knew to recommend other women in similar positions, I was asking relatively senior women working in FE for referrals (Cohen and Manion 1995; Henn *et al* 2009). I realized that the 'convenience' of obtaining a sample using these two methods needed to be balanced by diligent management and meticulous rationalisation of the process to reduce bias (Henn *et al* 2009). Whilst I was aware that I shared similar experiences with many of my participants, it was reasonable to believe that they in turn would recognize this. Smith (2012) observes the advantage of this state, where participants and researcher are:

> able to assume certain shared experiences and understandings conducive to fostering an empathetic relationship. (p.489)

The seven participants represented a reasonable range of ages - given that they needed considerable experience to get to a senior post - and were at different stages of their careers, with one recently retired. In addition, each had a variety of professional backgrounds, lived in a different part of the country, and led colleges with differing profiles. I was confident that my sample consisted of, as insisted upon by Alvesson (2011):

> highly qualified people with the 'right' experiences and an ability and willingness to communicate these. (no page)

However, the fact remains that the seven participants were known to me - for pragmatic purposes and for ease of access.

Polkinghorne (2005) suggests:

> In order to obtain interview data of sufficient quality to produce worthwhile findings, researchers need to engage with participants in more than a one-shot, 1-hr session; they need to attend to establishing a trusting, open relationship with the participants and to focus on the meaning of the participant's life experiences that on the accuracy of his or her recall. (p.142)

I felt that an advantage of insider position was that I already had established a trusting relationship with my participants; however, urged by my supervisors I decided that follow up interviews would be worthwhile to confirm some of my early findings and to explore further the unexpected aspects of these findings.

Focus on open questions was maintained to educe as rich and varied responses as possible – whilst understanding that such responses can be challenging to make sense of in an overall evaluation of the data. A list of open questions was drawn up (shown in Appendix i) and then piloted. Follow-up questions, when necessary depending upon the responses elicited, were also used. This ensured that the key themes in relation to the research questions were addressed whilst allowing other themes to surface. Questions used in the second interviews are shown in Appendix ii.

Protocols of dress and behaviour, such as open body language, active listening, and outlining ethical issues were noted and adhered to.

Recording of information: with the agreement of the participants, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Denscombe (2003) states the importance of the

transcription process as it *'brings the talk to life again'* (p.183). He also recognizes how time consuming the transcription process can be and, because of my time constraints, a third party, recommended as a discreet and efficient transcriber, undertook the transcriptions. An additional factor underlying my decision is my difficulty in processing aural information - finding written information far more accessible. The completed written transcriptions were then checked alongside the tapes. Notes were taken during the meetings and field notes also kept.

<u>Pilot interview</u>: From the start of my research process I was clear that it was important for me to undertake a pilot study for, whilst I was experienced in conducting job and appraisal interviews, I did not have recent experience in carrying out qualitative research interviews when I started my research. I decided that a pilot interview with Eloise (a pseudonym) would provide an opportunity to test out my questions, review the research procedures and reflect upon my researcher behaviour whilst providing me with data to include in my analyses (Cresswell 2013). I was encouraged in this by Polkinghorne's (2005) assertion that:

> Attaining sufficient skill in research interviewing requires practice and instruction. Sufficient research interviewing skill needs to be practiced and mastered before beginning a qualitative study. (p.143)

As Eloise had a busy work schedule, the interview took place during her lunch break and, due to lack of private rooms in her organization, we held it in an open space. I felt that neither of these arrangements was ideal but they were, however, expedient and, as I was so grateful that she had agreed to be interviewed, I felt that I could not make any stipulations. She agreed that the interview would be recorded using a digital recorder which enabled me to focus on the process rather than to be over-engaged in making notes.

The pilot interview highlighted three learning points for me which I embedded in my subsequent nine interviews.

- the place and time of the interview will impact on the research process. Interviewing in a public place made for a noisy and slightly inhibiting experience for both us. With it taking place during a lunch period made for a squeezed and rather awkward encounter. Expedience is not always helpful; a more assertive researcher manner is.

- however, despite my reservations about the place and time, I felt that it was remarkable that a high degree of intimacy of experience could be felt in a limited time and that such a rich story could emerge. I felt that my questions were appropriate in content and structure and that my insider role engendered Eloise's trust in me.   The richness presented came not only from the personal story but the way in which it reflected the broader societal and educational contexts; as Goodson and Sikes (2001) in their discussion on the power of narratives comment:

    > What we capture is a mediation between the personal voice and wider cultural imperatives. (p.77)

- I was surprised at the extent of my personal involvement with Eloise's story; three times I felt very emotional, my eyes filled with tears and I could barely speak. Smith (2012), in her exploration of the life histories of women teachers, notes how, despite her own thorough interview preparation, she was unexpectedly shaken by aspects of their lives. As a result, she concludes:

    > any claim to remain detached from the narratives of the participants, whose sometimes very poignant stories closely matched my own experiences, would be pointless. (p.489)

    Smith's similar experiences helped me to accept that I would feel emotional at times. However, I resolved to try and show my emotions less as I felt that showing them could shift the focus from my participants' experiences to mine. Additionally, I did not want my participants to feel a responsibility for the way in which I responded to their stories.

After the interview I did wonder: whose story was it - Eloise's or mine?   I sensed that it was a shared story in that I observed reality as best I could, combining those observations with my own experiences and models of knowledge and insight. The result of this combination led me to ask questions of myself and of Eloise; her and my reflections affected the authenticity of my own models of reality. Perhaps this is the essence of a learning model.

Post the first interviews: after the preliminary face-to-face interviews with the seven candidates, and when I had completed the narrative analysis for each, a second

episode of interviews was undertaken with three of the original participants. My rationale for second interviews was guided by Polkinghorne (2005) who urges:

> The research process is an iterative one, moving from collection of data to analysis and back until the description is comprehensive. (p.140)

My choice of participant for the second interview was influenced by two factors. Firstly, that their journey to a leader position fairly reflected those of the other participants. Secondly, as two of the three had experienced professional challenges, I was interested to see if their view of their experiences had changed. Further questions were devised (shown in Appendix ii). These questions were constructed to confirm or clarify early findings from the research, as Hopf (2004) suggests:

> The cautious testing of assumptions that have shown up in the interviewees' narrative, but which they themselves cannot clarify. (p.206)

The questions also included one on identity; this was a new area to be explored and one which emerged from my narrative analyses of the first interviews. Each participant was offered the opportunity to read through their interview transcript but none accepted the offer (although several expressed interest in seeing my final thesis). Yardley (2008) confirms that 'respondent validation' can be beneficial in ensuring that their views are recorded accurately. However, she also recognizes that it might not happen because:

> It is not always either feasible or appropriate. Offering participants an opportunity to express their viewpoint is often an important aim of qualitative research, but most analyses go beyond this. Analyses may highlight, for example, different and contradictions between participants' perspectives, or the suppressed meanings. (p.242)

Before the second interviews took place, I emailed the questions for discussion to each of the participants. This was in response to a comment from my first round of questions when I asked if there was any feedback they would like to give me. I started each of the second interviews with an outline of the developing themes from my first interviews and gave examples from their own narratives to illustrate these. I introduced the two new areas of identity and consequences - new in that I had not directly discussed these with them before. Having invited any questions from them, I then checked that they were happy to continue with the interview.

Narrative and Thematic Analysis: an *'elusive* step' (Attride-Stirling 2001 p.403)

Any analysis of interview data will, by its very nature, be firstly, an identification of patterns and, secondly, a decision as to what fits in with the identified patterns - as well as what does not fit. What is then sought, as concluded by Lapan *et al* (2012) is an individual's *'unique reality'*, which counters an interpretivist perspective, for '*individuals cannot be aggregated or averaged to explain phenomena'* (p.8).

Analysis of raw qualitative data to provide something that might have meaning can be challenging and Attride-Stirling (2001) talks of the *'most elusive step in the research process - analysis*' (p.403).   Rapley (2011) agrees and describes the *'quandary'* for the researcher when faced with large amounts of data. Nevertheless, there are a range of approaches to the analysis of qualitatively generated data which relate to a range of corresponding epistemologies, although it is not always easy to disaggregate them. The range includes grounded theory, content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis and thematic analysis. There are certainly similarities between these approaches but it is also possible to distinguish nuanced differences. Each, however, counters criticisms, often made, of a lack of transparency in how qualitative research outcomes are achieved and each offers an opportunity to develop *'a qualitative analytic attitude'* (Rapley 2001 p.274). The two methods I adopted for analysing the data generated from the interviews are those of narrative analysis (NA) and thematic analysis (TA); these approaches are now considered in more detail.

<u>Narrative Analysis: a *'framework for comprehension'*</u> (Sikes and Gale 2006 p.24)

The methodological approach to my research is one of narrative enquiry and my understanding of, and justification for, this is explained in the earlier part of this Chapter. My narrative enquiry was a way of gathering data, which could have been through several media, for example, interviews, observations or pictures. However, the use of one-to-one interviews was made, which were then transcribed. The text of the transcriptions in themselves did not serve as a story - the accumulated data needed to be analysed; as Cresswell (2013) states:

> The data collected in a narrative study needs to be analysed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding evens, and turning points or epiphanies. (p.189)

The means by which I present their stories, that is, how I interpreted, made sense of, and shaped the gathered text is through NA. Sikes and Gale (2006) conclude that NA provides *'a framework for comprehension'* (p.24) - a comprehension necessary, I believe, by the researcher and for the reader.

Key theorists, for example, Polkinghorne (2005), Sikes and Gale (2006) and Cresswell (2013), review the differing forms and structures possible for NA. A structure represents a 'plot' for the story, allowing for a clear sequence of events to be portrayed, with a defined beginning and end to the story (Sikes and Gale 2006; Cresswell 2013; Labov 2013). The key point to a plot is to keep it simple and manageable. As Sikes and Gale (2006) maintain:

> A plot determines what gets included in any particular narrative, and there can be sub-plots, telling associated stories that add further depth and interest. Too many offshoots though, and the main plot can be lost! (p.25)

Whilst a number of structures are theorized about, including fictionalized accounts, the incorporation of literary devices, folded constructions, I discuss the two that have influenced my NA.   In the first structure the data is analysed chronologically, starting with birth and then charting key life events. The experiences of interviewees, in relation to the theoretical underpinning of the research study, are logged against the life events with note taken of how such events impacted on these experiences; for example, the time demands of having children leading to a change in employment status. It could be that their experiences also impacted upon, or caused, the life events; for example, the stresses of a high level job leading to divorce. In order to maintain my ethic of respect I chose not to adopt this approach. I knew, from my personal knowledge of my participants, that for some, there was indeed a correlation between their experiences as leaders and key life events and I was reluctant to explore these in a research context. To do so would, I felt, have transgressed the boundaries of my relationship with them.

The second structure uses 'structural analysis' to build a story from interview transcripts. A number of designs for the structure, by which to analyse the data, are posited; however, the original idea is developed by Labov (1982). He offers a six stage model, starting with a statement of the purpose of the narrative, establishing

the context and focus of the narrative, exploring particular relevant aspects and ending with a discussion of the meaning and implications of the story.

Neither of these NA approaches stand independently; key principles overlap or overlay each other. Each does, however, offer a particular focus for engaging with the stories, thus avoiding the random inclusion of information in the stories. I have adapted Labov's design as a guide to the analysis of my interview transcripts; however, and perhaps inevitably, there is a sense of chronology in the structure of the stories I present as I show my participants' journey to leadership positions. Gale (2007) criticizes Labov's structured model, challenging:

> Its prescriptive influences and the way in which it seems to fix and congeal multiplicities of self within the constraints of objectivist terms of reference. (p.728)

Using such a model, Gale (2007) concludes, is indicative of a positivistic epistemological approach to the development of knowledge.   Labov's work, he states:

> Seems to express a kind of naïve realism that there is a world out there full of essential characteristics and noumenal qualities just waiting to be discovered through his form of structural analysis. (p.735)

I am aware that my belief in, and possible reliance on, a structure could conflict with my averred post-modernist stance; adhering to a pre-set structure could reduce the potential for a rich and multi-layered story. However, I do not agreed with Gale's view. A structured approach, I believe, allows for a respectful, coherent and credible presentation of my participants' stories which are anchored by my research questions.   A structure only provides a scaffolding for the story. It is the flexible process of induction and iteration between the transcripts, the theory and the research questions which will accommodate:

> The twists and turns, the layers and dimensions that complex narrative texts can sometimes take. (Sikes and Gale 2006 p.27)

In addition to different typologies of structure for NA, Cresswell (2013) also considers the various forms of interacting with the scripts, for example, through linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, dialogic analysis and TA. This implies that narrative analysis can be by structure or by form; however, I will be using both structure and

form. NA, using structure, allows for the presentation of my participants' stories in relation to their individual experiences of leadership; the form of TA highlights key elements of their stories to establish patterns of meaning across the experiences of my participants.

Thematic Analysis: '*celebrate anomaly*' (Silverman 2000 p.248)

The seminal work on TA is that of Boyatzis (1998). Whether writers are agreeing with his work (Joffe and Yardley 2004; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) or challenging his ideas (Braun and Clarke 2006) or building upon his model (Attride-Stirling 2001), they all, in one way or another, refer to Boyatzis. Although the notion of TA existed some time before Boyatzis - as explained by Aronson (1994) in her practical guide to carrying out a TA - I see his work as pivotal to the philosophical underpinnings and workable applications of the method. In addition, his academic role and research in organizational behaviour and leadership provide a personal link to my own research into leadership.

Boyatzis (1998) acknowledges previous work of qualitative researchers who have employed TA and suggests that he is now '*articulating the specific techniques*' (p.vi) which was lacking before. His 'articulation' of TA is not, however, seen to be sufficiently clear by others. For example: Attride-Stirling (2001 p.386) attacks the '*lamentable*' and '*regrettable*' hole she perceives in qualitative analysis and then describes a model of thematic networks - drawing heavily upon the development work of Boyatzis - for use in TA. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) rely on the work of Boyatzis in their study of the impact of feedback on nurses in performance appraisals; however they look back further in history for the basis of the philosophical underpinning of their work

Place of TA The 'place' of TA is subject to differing viewpoints. Boyatzis (1998) sees TA as a tool in the quest of insight, so as an underpinning and integral approach rather than as a separate method, whereas Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that it stands alone as a method along with, for example, grounded theory. Interpretations of what is meant by 'grounded theory' vary slightly. For Pope *et al* (2000) it is:

> used to describe the inductive process of identifying analytical categories as they emerge from the data,developing hypotheses from the ground or research field upwards rather defining them *a priori*. (p.114)

Silverman (2000) sees some merit in the use of grounded theory, when compared with an alternative empiricist approach such as the use of statistics, in that it:

> offers an approximation of the creative activity of theory building found in good observational work. (p.236)

Pope *et al* (2000) identify TA as part of a hierarchy, as a subset of content analysis whereby *'textual data are explored …* (it) *does not seek to quantify data'* (p.114).

Wherever, or however, TA is placed there is general agreement with Boyatzis's (1998) assertion that '*TA is a process for encoding qualitative information'* (p.vi). It is hard to envisage how any qualitative analysis might take place without some degree of TA.

What TA is Boyatzis (1998) suggests that the 'encoding' in TA starts with the researcher sensing or seeing a theme:

> that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon. (p.4)

 through reading or observation of people. This capability will, he argues:

> help them understand how sensing themes is the first step in using a systematic, disciplined way of analysing (ie encoding) information, whether the informal is verbal, behavioural, documented, or live. (p.viii)

The sensing of a theme involves discerning a pattern (used interchangeably with 'theme') not seen by others, in apparently random information. What exactly is meant by 'random' in this context is not clear and I question the extent to which data generated by research can be entirely random. At its simplest, Boyatzis's (1998) model starts with pattern/theme sensing which can then be classified, which in turn helps interpret the pattern(s). Although he does not specify that this is the case, this is an iterative process whereby interpretation of patterns helps us become aware of the possibility of further patterns, which we then encode and interpret through interrelationships with other patterns.

A theme may be detected either at a 'manifest' or a 'latent' level by which he means *'directly observable in the information'* and *'underlying the phenomenon'* (Boyatzis (1998 p.4) respectively. By this I understand that one can see and/or infer themes;for example I would be able to count up (see) the number of times an

interviewee used the word 'just' but I would also need to decide (infer) how the word was used, for instance, as an indication of fairness or exactitude or immediacy. Boyatzis (1998) suggests that vigilance is needed in these two areas as too much focus on the 'manifest' (because it is easy and gives a *'sense of control'*) could lead to the finer aspects of the data being missed. On the other hand, too much emphasis on the 'latent' could lead to confusion and loss of focus. Secondly, themes can be engendered either *'inductively from the raw information or … deductively from theory and prior research'* (p.4). He illustrates the inductive approach using life stories; the deductive approach is exemplified by using an existing thematic code to analyse a critical incident interview.

Pope *et al* (2000) assert that the inductive approach is associated with grounded theory whilst the deductive is linked to framework theory. They outline a five stage TA framework which starts with 'familiarisation' to 'mapping and interpretation' via 'indexing', which are comparable steps to those discussed by Boyatzis (1998). Henn *et al* (2009) pose the question *'should alternative research perspectives be seen as inherently dichotomous?'* (p.22) and conclude that both inductive and deductive methods of data will be used. This may be done intentionally, for example, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) pull together these two elements into their *'hybrid'* model for TA of using *'data-driven'* codes which are integrated with *'theory driven'* ones. On the other hand, the use of both approaches may be less overt but will perhaps be inevitable and this is where I see my own research to be situated. My intention is to assemble a theory about women leaders drawing upon their perceptions of, and experiences in, such a role, yet I will not be working in an academic vacuum and my previous research into leadership theories will pertain and may surface as hunches – which have a certain legitimacy (Rapley 2011).

However, as Boyatzis (1998) states: *'It all begins with capturing the codable moment'* (p.4) that is, when it starts to be possible to construe 'answers' to the questions asked of the data. His ideas and others, as discussed above, are captured in a model (shown in Appendix iii).

Attride-Stirling (2001), in a bid to fill her perceived gap in the availability of a

> robust and highly sensitive tool for the systematisation and presentation of qualitative analyses' (p.385)

draws upon acknowledged existing 'hermeneutic' practices, as a part of interpretative processes, to create 'thematic networks' as a tool for analysing the results of qualitative research. Similarly to Boyatzis (1998), although his work is not explicitly referred to, her model (shown in Appendix iv) includes the three key elements of identification of themes, coding of the themes and interpreting the resultant patterns. In addition, she has drawn upon the logic underpinning Toulmin's (1958) 'argumentation theory' to suggest three levels of themes – basic, organizing, global – which range in complexity and degree of abstractness. The interrelationship of these is shown as a network which will, Attride-Stirling (2001) states:

> remove any notion of hierarchy, giving fluidity to the themes and emphasizing the interconnectivity throughout the network. (p.389)

It also avoids a linear route.

Once 'interconnectivity' is recognized, interpretation of the text will be made possible by taking:

> the key conceptual findings in the summaries of each thematic network and pool them together into a cohesive story by relating them back to the original questions and the theoretical grounding of the research. (Attride-Stirling 2001 p.402)

Her model appears to be accessible and adds a further dimension to my initial model.

<u>Advantages of TA</u> Significant claims are made about the advantages of deploying TA - the crucial one for me is that it can enhance communication between quantitative and qualitative researchers and communication amongst qualitative analysts as well as enriching the data processing for quantitative research (Boyatzis 1998). This is all achieved through the establishing of a common framework and language to support such analysis. However, this is not unique to TA and such premises will apply to other key approaches to qualitative analysis. As well as acting as a language bridge between quantitative and qualitative research, Boyatzis (1998 p.xiii) also sees TA as a possible conceptual bridge between positivist and interpretivist paradigms. He suggests that this is a two way process whereby the *'social*

construction of meaning' (p.xiii) can be parcelled and presented to provide categories of observations to satisfy the positivist's demands for reliability and consistency. At the same time, the interpretivist will have the conceptual framework to grasp the positivist's *'special and distinctive qualities of observations'* (p.xiii). It is not absolutely convincing that such bridges will meet the expectations of varied viewpoints and paradigms, although recognition of these bridges offers the opportunity for reconciliation of diverging philosophies. Attride-Stirling's (2001) claim is more straightforward as a manageable, open method of analysis at all stages:

> a methodical systematization of textual data, facilitates the disclosure of each step in the analytic process, aids the organization of an analysis and its presentation, and allows a sensitive, insightful and rich exploration of a text's overt structures and underlying patterns. (p.386)

Whilst the highly visual nature of her model and opportunity for identification of levels of themes certainly aid transparency and organization, there is, of course, no guarantee that it will, *per se*, allow for sensitivity and insight. Meanwhile, Silverman (2000) calls upon researchers to *'celebrate anomaly'* that may result through an exploration of *'relations between apparently diverse models, theories and methodologies'* (p.248).

Critique of NA and TA

Whilst the general criticisms of qualitative research will equally apply to my chosen analytical approaches, there are critiques specific to NA and TA. These are discussed by Boyatzis (1998). For example, problems caused by 'projection' in the Freudian sense (although without the associated negativity) whereby the researcher ascribes aspects of their own experiences and feelings to other people. Another aspect he raises is of the researcher's reigning *'mood and style'* (p.15) whilst undertaking the data gathering and analysis. Illustratively: impatience could reduce the ability to *'sense themes and develop codes, as well as to apply the codes consistently'* (p.15); tiredness could impair the quality of data gathered. The third key area where Boyatzis (1998) highlights possible problems is sampling:

> Before assessing consistency of judgement, sensing themes, and developing a code, before validating your observations in whatever form is appropriate to your design, there is the problem of sampling. (p.14)

He warns in particular about the dangers of developing skewed themes derived from *'convenience sampling'* that is, *'a particular sample with embedded characteristics'* (p.14). This is a salient warning and one which needs to be taken into account for my research, which uses convenience sampling.

<u>Use of Software</u>

The use of the software package NVivo to analyse my data was considered as it is discussed positively by a number of researchers, for example Pope *et al* (2000) and Kelle (2004). Pope *et al* (2001) see its employment as a way of ascertaining rigour in the research, presumably by obviating human error, whilst Denscombe (2003) suggests that the main benefit is the *'superb abilities of computers to manage the data'* (p.275). However, Pope *et al* (2001) warn how the researcher needs to avoid the temptation of increasing the amount of data to be analysed just because a software package makes it less time consuming to manipulate the information as:

> qualitative studies are not designed to be representative in terms of statistical generalisability, and they may gain little from an expanded sample size except a more cumbersome database. (p.115)

Additionally, Denscombe (2003) identifies a more general concern about how researchers might become deskilled, with the use of software:

> killing off the intuitive art of analysis … leaves little scope for interpretive leaps and inspirational flashes of enlightment … reduces analysis to a mechanical chore. (p.276)

It was my original intention to use the NVivo software to analyse my transcripts; however, I realized that the amount of data I had, from ten interviews, was manageable without it for both my narrative and thematic analysis. (I did use the software for word searches towards the end of my analyses as a final check that I had not overlooked any significant aspect or pertinent quote to uphold my research conclusions.)

Ethical Considerations

Wisker (2001) stresses how essential it is for the ethical dimension of any research to be fully considered. Following guidelines such as BERA (2011) or Barnardo's (2011) will ensure that due thought is given to the care and responsibility to be taken with regard to all involved with the research process.

The tenets of the BERA (2011) guidelines were engaged with and were constantly reviewed. This is demonstrated by my attention to the following key factors.

<u>Anonymity and privacy</u>: acknowledging and building upon our relationship as former colleagues, or friends of colleagues whilst assuring interviewees of the confidentiality of information gathered was potentially tricky and I relied upon the participants' confidence and trust in me. On the one hand, I felt that if they did not have such confidence and trust then they would not have agreed to take part. On the other hand, I felt that it was important to maintain an awareness of what Duncombe and Jessop (2002) refer to as *'doing rapport'* (p.108). This term describes the tension between the researcher's sincere intention of developing and maintaining a relationship with research participants, whilst using them for their own end:

> at the heart of our outwardly friendly interviews, lay the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research. (Duncombe and Jessop 2002 p.108)

They also discuss the disparity between recommended professional interviewing behaviour and dress and actual friendship behaviour and I aimed for an acceptable balance, for me and for my participants. BERA (2011) guidelines state that privacy is *'considered to be the norm'* (p.7) when personal information is being gathered and every effort was made to preserve anonymity and confidentiality unless the participants wished otherwise (Atkinson and Delamont 2006). Anonymity was preserved by giving pseudonyms to the participants; the colleges in which they worked were described generally in terms of size and location but not linked to any of the participants (Theoharis 2007). I recognized that in such a small sample as mine, and given that there is a relatively small number of women in their position, that I could give no guarantee of privacy; this was discussed with the participants (Henn *et al* 2009; Farrimond 2013). One participant, in particular, was difficult to anonymise. I discussed this difficulty with her and she was still happy to take part in the research; however, I subsequently decided not to include her story in my narratives although I did draw upon her storied experiences of leadership. Apart from their names, no other details of my participants were falsified as I felt confident, after lengthy discussions with my supervisors, that it was unlikely that they could be identified. It was important to me to retain the integrity of their experiences in order

to maintain my ethic of respect towards them. At the same time, I was aware of the danger that my careful selection of detail and quotations, to ensure anonymity, could lead to the stories being anodyne.

Consent: in accord with BERA (2011) guidelines I undertook the following actions to ensure that I and the participants could be confident that they gave genuine voluntary informed consent:

- the first contact was by email giving a brief outline of the research proposed and asking if they would be interested in taking part
- if the response was positive (as it was in each case), I sent more details about the interviewing process, explaining how the information gathered would be used, to what purpose and for what audience
- a follow up face to face meeting or telephone call was offered for further explanation, clarification and questions
- once it was clear that both the participants and I were confident that there was a sound understanding of the nature of the research, a written consent form was devised (shown in Appendix v) and participants were asked to complete and sign it – on the understanding that such consent did not bind them in any way to continue with the research and that they could withdraw from the process at any time

Atkinson and Delamont (2006) identify an additional dimension for consideration, that:

> consent to participate will be influenced by participants' understanding of the research. (p.296)

I knew that each of the seven proposed participants had studied at master's level and that two had doctorates and so felt certain that they would be familiar with this process and understand the necessity for it. Nevertheless, whilst I ensured that I carried out the process in a thorough, reflective and professional manner, Duncombe and Jessop (2002) point out the impossibility for participants to give a '*fully informed consent at the outset of an essentially exploratory … interview*' (p.112) as the development and disclosures from the interview cannot be fully anticipated. Miller and Boulton (2007) further challenge the capability of, in their view, prescriptive and

bureaucratic form filling approaches to cater for the experiences and outcomes of *'unique research encounters'* (p.2204). Instead, they suggest that establishing an empathetic bond between researcher and participant can lead to a level of trust whereby the researcher is entrusted *'in representing their lives in a way which would not undermine the[ir] interests'* (p.2205). Consent was sought at the outset of the first interviews and confirmed for the second interviews and was additionally implied by the evident belief my participants had in me.

Confidentiality: there was a possibility that mutual colleagues might have asked me for information about the participants and I planned that, if this happened, I would assert professional confidentiality. There was also the issue of 'boundaries' - which, whilst it is important to be clear about them, are not always easy to observe (Duncombe and Jessop 2002). I either knew the participants or my previous colleagues did and this had the potential to cause conflict in the issue of confidentiality. This could have been awkward and there was a risk that the participants would not be quite as free with me in potential disclosures and I may have faced a dilemma if they revealed risky or illegal involvements. I discussed this issue of boundaries with my participants and made it clear what aspects would not be held to be anonymous.

Withdrawal: BERA (2011) guidelines state that:

> Researchers must recognize the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time. (p.6)

I honoured this by:

- ensuring they did not withdraw due to any lack of organization, information or professionalism on my part throughout the process
- making it clear, in a neutral way, that they had the right to withdraw at any time
- reinforcing this 'right' by arranging for staged 'check points' during the process whereby I sought confirmation that they were willing to continue with the research

- if they decided to withdraw - establishing the reason(s) for their decision and encouraging them to continue without using force or intimidation; however, if they were determined to withdraw I would have respected their decision.

Schaefer and Wertheimer (2010) investigate the concept of the right to withdraw and suggest that this right *'can act as a failsafe'* (p.337) where it has not been possible to make absolutely clear to what participants are consenting or where risks have not been fully anticipated. They also assert that:

> the right to withdraw will not provide complete protection against the worries it helps to mitigate. (p.341)

As a researcher, it is clearly important to understand the nature of such worries. Once the analysis and synthesis of the information from the participants had been undertaken, I claimed intellectual ownership (Institute for Employment Studies, no date, section 2.2, no page) and the participants, in effect, would not have been able to withdraw. However, this could potentially be a delicate and problematic issue and one that is not necessarily possible to easily resolve, best managed in a sensitive and professional manner.

Avoidance of harm and possible risks: the avoidance and management of any social or personal harm to participants is paramount, explained by Theoharis (2007), in his research with American School Principals, due to the *'potential sensitivity'* (p.227) of interviews.   Every effort was made in the design and 'delivery' of the research to ensure that this was observed. However, there will always be risks in this type of research when interviewing; those which were anticipated and planned for, include:

- a participant may have become distressed and/or cried - in which case I would have stopped the recording, given them time to recover, assured them that this would not be included in the transcript and then relied upon my intuition in deciding whether or not to suggest continuing with, or ending, the interview. If the interview was then brought to a halt the possibility/merit of continuing with it at another time would be considered and possibly discussed with the participant. I would have been as supportive as possible in such a case.

- it may be that a participant became so distressed that it was clear that they needed professional help - if this had happened I would have immediately stopped the interview and offered details about who, or what organization, would be able to help them. I would have had to make it clear that I had a researcher role in this matter and that I was not in a position to take on the role of counsellor (Duncombe and Jessop 2002; Farrimond 2013).

- a participant may have become very angry about the perceived inequalities between women and men leaders in FE - if this had occurred I would have responded, keeping calm and focused whilst, if appropriate, acknowledging their feelings (using assertiveness and transactional analysis techniques - the latter to ensure I maintain an adult to adult communication model which would help me to remain professional).

- a participant may have refused to answer a question because they felt uncomfortable about it (this may have been reinforced by, or only evident through, their body language) - if this had happened I would have tried to rephrase the question and if it was clear that, for some reason, they were unwilling to respond, I would have left it and moved to the next area for discussion.

- a participant may have asked directly for help and support in a particular matter - in such a case, I would have reiterated my researcher role, not get involved and referred them to professional support.

- it is possible that a participant got carried away and divulged an aspect of themselves that undermined their (and my) notion of professionalism - in these circumstances I would have remained as neutral as possible as my position was not to judge.

- there was a potential danger, discussed by Duncombe and Jessop (2002) that where a close relationship is established between interviewer and interviewee, participants may be encouraged to disclose rather more than they wish. If a risky or illegal activity was revealed I believe that there is a moral imperative to say something but not get involved and would have referred it to the relevant legal services (Farrimond 2013).

- it was a possibility that there were risks to the participants as a consequence of them having taken part in the interviews and reflecting upon aspects of their lives. Such reflections may have led to them making changes in their lives - if this was the case, it would have been their responsibility

<u>Ethic of respect</u>: participants were giving up their valuable time to help with my research, so I travelled to meet them wherever, and whenever, was convenient for them. Of the first interviews, two were in the participants' home (one being retired and the other working in a smallish college where a visitor would be noticed). I felt relaxed about this but it could possibly have been awkward to maintain a professional manner whilst having a cup of tea and biscuit in someone else's personal territory - on the other hand it could quite relax the participants. Four interviews took place in the workplace which could have been problematic as we could have been interrupted by urgent college business - nevertheless, three of the four had their own office and a secretarial gatekeeper so this was manageable. The final interview took place at the headquarters of a professional society as my interviewee was a member and felt comfortable meeting there.

<u>Data access, storage and security</u>: all data was, and is, stored in secure rooms and password protected computer environments. Only the researcher and her supervisory team had access to any data. After the thesis writing up period, and after submission, the data will continue to be held securely in order to a) optimise it as a potential future resource and b) to use as a reference point for possible further research.

Closing Observations

With regard to issues of reliability and validity, none of the arguments is entirely convincing and one needs to trust the professionalism of the researcher to ensure, so far as is possible, the research is valid and reliable. On the other hand, Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) intimate that, in any case, the pursuit of validity in narrative research might well dilute its potency to illuminate hitherto shadowy understanding of aspects of human interaction and so reduce its allure:

> By reflecting and discussing narrative validity claims the narrative is likely to lose its magic appeal, its specific charm and its invaluable richness. (p.108)

In other words, it is a *Catch-22* situation whereby any action which attempts to achieve a certain legitimacy on the part of the researcher could result in a diminution of the worth of the eventual findings of the research. Still, we need to be aware of the danger, and possible pull, of:

> the investigator's conjuring up concepts and theories that do not authentically represent the phenomenon of concern. (Whittemore *et al* 2001 p.526)

and aim to achieve a degree of '*credible qualitative research'* as urged by Silverman (1993 p.219).

I draw two key conclusions from my review of research on TA. Firstly, that there is an underlying homogeneity to the methods of analysis - despite some slight divergences. Secondly, all agree on the need for ensuring that the method is 'robust' and that the extent of the 'robustness' is reliant upon the skill of the researcher. As an aside: the majority of the published research seems to be based within the medical profession (from the UK, the USA and Australasia) which may be as a result of greater funding resources in that profession. A number of the research areas are those which can be seen to have parallels with education, for example performance reviews (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006) and interventions to change behaviours (Braun and Clarke 2006; Thomas and Harden 2008) and others (such as DeSantis and Ugarriza 2000) are presented as having relevance to any area of qualitative research. It was thus decided that, given the seeming paucity of examples of TA in educational research, that it would be useful to draw upon other germane studies.

In terms of the ethics of my research, Piper and Simons (2005) urge researchers to look beyond the seemingly simple (albeit useful), rational assurance of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent to the issue of *'situated ethics'* which they say '*acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of each situation'* (p.58) - a view reinforced by Kuntz (2010) who recommends *'a shift from procedural ethics to ethics of the everyday'* (p.430). The point is that the research process can be volatile and circumstances can change during the research period so, accordingly, ethical aspects must be constantly monitored and *'renegotiated'* (p.56). Sikes (2006) reinforces this view; she puts the 'ethical' spotlight on how researchers can be affected by their research - both in terms of their career and integrity - and notes that *'research is neither neutral nor innocent practice'* (p.105). The notion of doing *'good'*

and carrying out research that '*benefits participants in positive ways'* advocated by Piper and Simons (2005 p.56) seems to offer a sound principle by which to be guided.

The process of research for this thesis has been influenced by aspects of post-modernism thinking, and Gewirtz (1998) raises the *'ethical paradox of postmodernity'* (p.475). That is, the dilemma of how one is to operate according to a generally accepted code within the paradigm of post-modernity, which suggests that there is no common code; instead, there are emerging patterns and processes which may be ascertained. During the course of the research process there could have been 'emergent' ethical issues, and I continued to develop my reflective practice as a researcher to ensure that any such issues were managed sensitively to develop my *'ethical sense'* (Farrimond 2013).

Moran (2012) observes that:

> every life, even the most comfortable and uneventful, is a uniquely rich, endlessly surprising and quietly heroic thing. (p.38)

A richness of research data was generated not only from the personal stories but also from the way in which they reflected broader societal and educational contexts. Goodson and Sikes (2001) in their discussion on the power of life stories state:

> What we capture is a mediation between the personal voice and wider cultural imperatives. (p.77)

CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Opening Comments

My rationale for using narrative analysis (NA) as an approach to organizing my participants' experiences of leadership, using a variant of Labov's (1982) structural analysis, is given in Chapter 3.   Using his model, the statement of purpose, context and focus of the analysis is given in Chapter 1; in particular, the historical and political milieu of FE show where the experiences of my participants are situated. This NA Chapter focuses on the stories of three of my participants – which reflect the 'relevant aspects', which I call clusters, of Labov's model. I have used the term 'clusters' since each is characterized by a collection of related features. The evaluation of meaning and the implications of the narratives are included in my closing observations to this chapter and also in Chapter 6. This is summarized in the model below:

Overview of Study
(based on Labov's 1982 structural framework)
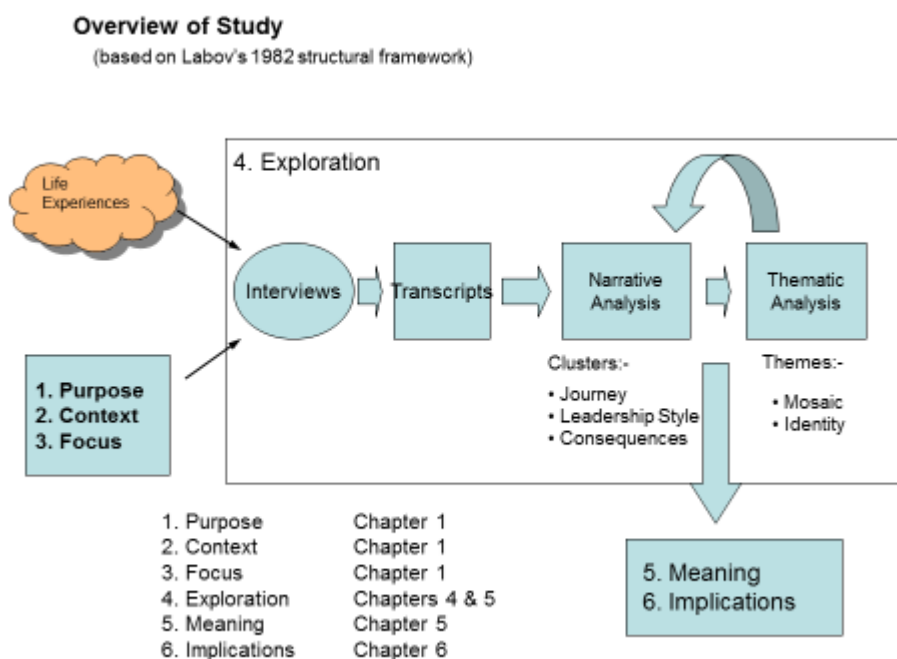
The shape of each narrative was developed from reading and re-reading the transcribed interview scripts, whilst bearing in mind the research questions. From these readings there were early indications of high level commonalities and potential areas for theorizing. However, the main intention, at this stage, was to present their

stories, following Chesswell's (2013) stricture of what is involved in assembling and presenting the complex and multi-layered lives of others:

> Active collaboration with the participant is necessary, and researchers need to discuss the participants' stories as well as be reflective about their own personal and political background which shapes how they "restory" the account. (p.76)

I initially assumed that the shape of the narratives would relate closely to the first interview questions which were informed by the research questions and the second interview questions which were again informed by the research questions as well as the initial readings and analyses of the first interview transcripts. To some extent they did and I was able to organize their responses into three clusters; these are shown diagrammatically in the above framework and expanded below.

Cluster 1: path to leadership which included elements of: courage, self-awareness, influence of parents, acceptability of failure, recognition of 'good' management/leadership, lack of a 'game plan', recognition of role models, vocational background, driven by belief/value system.

Cluster 2: leadership style which included, for example, the importance of reflection, communication and team work.

Cluster 3: the consequences of their leader role which reflected in a positive and a negative way the impact of 'life events', work/life balance, managing work challenges and job satisfaction. This third grouping that emerged was not related directly to my interview questions. What I had expected to emerge were the challenges that FE was facing.

The first two emergent clusters are discussed and analysed in relation to leadership theory - both classic and current; however, the third area raises interesting aspects of the participants' personal lives (and perhaps triggered my personal prurience). Overall, there appears to be a high degree of commonality of experience and approach amongst the participants with a leaning towards the transformational and practical aspects of leadership.

As discussed in my Ethics section in Chapter 3, I was not sure how comfortable I would be in carrying out a second round of interviews with some participants, feeling,

perhaps, that I had exploited our personal and/or professional relationships in terms of their time and kindness in agreeing to the first interviews. However, I realized that it was important to validate my research to do so. I was reassured when the three participants I contacted were all very positive about the initial interviews and happy to be involved further. The follow-up interviews took place eighteen months after the initial ones and two out of the three participants had experienced stark professional challenges in the intervening period. Whilst I still focused on leadership in FE, I also wanted to explore two key areas that had arisen from my narrative analysis of the first interviews. These were those of identity and personal consequences of leadership. My discussion of issues around personal and professional identity can be found in my Literature Review in Chapter 2, whilst my reluctance and dilemma about raising personal issues with those in quasi friendship roles is explored in the Ethics section in Chapter 3.

As a result of the narrative analytic process, I have written each of their stories - based entirely on my interviews with them - strongly aware of the need to focus on the evidence from the interviews and to ignore other information I knew about them through friendship and professional groups. Participants' quotes are included to illustrate or introduce pertinent points of their narratives and to help the reader make their own judgements. I have been guided by Polkinghorne's (2005) rationale for selecting quotes:

> Selection of exemplars differs from random selection in that exemplars are chosen for the promise to contribute to the clarification of the topic being examined. (p.140)

Throughout this process of NA I have been mindful of issues of interpretation and the dangers of bias. Each story is structured around the three clusters identified above which in, turn, partly reflect my initial interview questions. Information from the three follow up interviews is given as a commentary to the initial interview, correlating where possible with leadership style and introducing aspects of identity and consequences. Spoken excerpts from the interviews are shown in italics and are not individually referenced. An NA was produced for each of my seven participants; however, I have only included the three (Dorothy, Iris and Isobel) I interviewed a second time to include in my thesis as I felt that their narratives closely represented

those of the other four participants. Additionally, I was concerned that three (Daphne, Elizabeth and Ivy) of the other four might have been more easily identifiable than the other participants despite my best efforts to anonymize the narratives. Eloise was my pilot interviewee and the richness of her narrative lies in the learning opportunity to improve the interview process. The stories of all my seven participants are drawn upon in my presentation of the three following narratives to demonstrate where there is congruence, or not. The data gathered from my second interview with Dorothy was remarkably consistent with that from the first. As a result the analysis for her second interview is not as detailed as for her first interview, or the other two second interviews.

The following table offers sufficiently specific details about the participants without compromising their anonymity. Although there was a mix of ethnicity among participants, particular ethnicity is not identified to ensure anonymity. Participant self-identified class location is included as, despite class not being initially considered as an aspect in my selection of interviewees, their backgrounds informed their identities and their paths into FE. The table also indicates the interviews undertaken and the narratives included in this thesis:

Participant	Role	Age range	Class Self-identified	Children	Pilot int	1st int	2nd int	NA included
Daphne	Principal (retired)	55-65	Middle	Not specified	-	Yes	-	-
Dorothy	Vice-Principal	40-50	Working	No	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elizabeth	Principal	55-65	Working	Yes	-	Yes	-	-
Eloise	Assistant Principal	40-50	Working	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
Iris	Assistant Principal	50-60	Working	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
Isobel	Principal	55-65	Middle	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ivy	Principal	50-60	Working	Not specified	-	Yes	-	-

Berger (1971) talks about the potency of activities such as the analysis of narratives:

> the excitement of finding the familiar becoming transformed in its meaning … a transformation of consciousness. (p.32)

I can identify with this experience, it was certainly powerful.

Iris's story: *'vertical chess'*

Path to leadership

Iris came into teaching because of her love of sport. A successful sportswoman at school, she went to university to pursue a sporting career and she saw teaching as an ideal opportunity to be fully immersed with her passion:

> *I came into education because I like running round a field hitting a hockey ball, and the thought that I could actually do that as a job was manna from heaven.*

In a similar way to Dorothy, Daphne and Ivy she had no burning wish to teach – rather it was a means to an end. However, once she started teaching, Iris *'became passionate about education'* and this passion was fuelled by her experiences of working in several challenging comprehensive schools where, although she taught young people who came from a similar background to hers - as she said *'I was from a very poor family'* - she felt they did not have the same parental support that she had experienced, wanting *'to give something back'*. Interestingly, all participants gave recognition and tribute to the encouragement and help they received from their parents – an aspect that I also share with them. In Iris's case this was from her mother:

> *my mum worked her socks off to get me to university, took in extra dressmaking, anything she could do to give me that chance.*

Like me, Iris was the first person from her family to go to university. We both benefited from the expansion of the HE sector and the increase in the number of university places offered.

Iris asserted that she had *'no game plan'* regarding her career in FE, rather that it was a question of *'falling into something else'*. Iris did not aspire to a senior role, deciding that:

>   *I didn't want to be in management because I didn't want to be* [sic] *the extra commitment because I had a young family.*

However, it was clear that when opportunities did arise (identified either by herself or by others) her strong self-assurance underpinned her belief that she would be able to carry out the responsibilities of the role effectively through *'developing my own self confidence to be comfortable in that position'*. Iris moved from teaching in secondary schools to lecturing in an FE college, eventually moving to a new college for a promotion. She was a section head in the middle management tier of the organization – joining the increasing number of women in middle management role, as analysed by Wetherell (1996) and Simmons (2008). She moved rapidly through the college's hierarchy via four promotions to a senior leader role. By this stage she was happy to give up her teaching, clarifying:

>   *I didn't feel as if I had anything more to give students in a classroom, but I've got lots to give students holistically, and I've got lots to give staff in a classroom.*

During her fast track promotions, Iris experienced two major changes. One was a move away from responsibility for the development and delivery of the curriculum (which in itself moved from a narrow to a broad focus) to being in charge of the whole learner experience. This latter duty accorded with her assertion that she was *'passionate about working with youngsters'* and she still had informal interactions with students. The other change was a more personal one that Iris identified when asked why she had been invited to apply for her current role. Her response was that she thought that it was due to her composure:

>   *people recognize me as being a steady hand, that nothing really fazes me. I mean I may be doing the swan and my legs are going like mad under the water, but actually, what I try and bring to the table is stability and "let's talk this through and let's work it out together without sort of pressing the panic button". And I think people respect me for that.*

The establishment of *'stability'* within her team was an important element to her, being mentioned several times during the interview. She acknowledged that she was a *'hothead'* when she was younger and recognized that she was not naturally a calm person, declaring *'It's something I've had to work hard and developing'*. This challenges Chell's (1993) analysis of the immutability of traits. What helped her develop her *'professional persona'* was taking up mountaineering and rock climbing

(which she undertook when injuries put a stop to her other sports). She described this as *'vertical chess'* (an analogy which occurred several times during our conversation) which signified a responsible, methodological approach in consciously developing herself professionally:

> *when you are rock climbing, you're the person that's put yourself in that position and nobody else is going to get you out of it. You've got to think of the way out of that. So it's a bit like vertical chess … you've got to look at where your next moves are.*

Leadership style

Having looked briefly at the background to Iris's move into education and then into her current senior leadership position, the rock climbing analogy offers an insight into her leadership style. This insight is supported by her identification of her practical planning and task-finisher skills that characterize her leadership approach. Such practicality echoes the outcomes of the research into pragmatic leadership identified by Mumford and Van Doorn (2001) and Mumford *et al* (2008) and also reflects similar skills shown by my other research participants.   In addition to attributes rooted in her sports background, including competitiveness, it became clear during the interview that Iris was also very much focused on people - initially on her students and, later, on her staff. Her strong beliefs about how to treat people was often evidenced, like Elizabeth, by a range of *'soundbites'* that she used with staff, as Iris illustrated:

> *"you can be friendly but you're not their friends" when you're talking to new teachers … I also have a saying which is "treat others as you wish to be treated yourself" and I think I bring that ethos to the table very, very strongly.*

This second dictum was supported by an example she gave of *'leading from the front'* by being prepared to be hands on with difficult issues, challenge where necessary, at the same time as coaching her staff towards a manageable autonomy. Iris focused, in the main, on her leadership skills working with her current team. She described the team as initially fragmented and *'disparate'* and she was tasked to bring them together to work coherently within a newly formed department. She had two main concerns about this responsibility. Firstly, that she would be seen by team members as a *'big personality'* (similar perhaps to the early 'great man' theories reviewed by Robbins 1993; Rowley 1997; Clegg *et al* 2011; Daft 2012) who might

'intimidate' them because of her sporting experience of being competitive and wanting to win. Secondly, as she was moving away from her area of curriculum expertise to the general area of student support, that she would be lacking in sufficient knowledge about the area. However, Iris was confident about building an effective team through a *'light touch leadership'* approach, through mentoring and developing her team and by recognizing that she did not need to '*know it all'* and that she could rely upon her staff to have and to share the required knowledge, reflecting a transformational leadership approach (Gill 2011). This was a lengthy process as she took time to get to know her staff and understand their expectations and concerns, reflect upon them and then take the necessary action. She approached the task in a disciplined, methodical way (modelled on her sporting career) with a clearly defined path to achieving a goal, again aligning with transformational leadership theory, stating *'I'm not very good when I can't see that route'*. She relied upon her intuition to assess each individual and each situation; as she said:

> *It's not for my team to manage me and my personality, it's for me to manage them as individuals.*

Iris felt that her work with the team was successful and *'now they're recognized as being the outstanding team in the college.'*

Additional factors that Iris considered important to her leadership role were the high standards she set of herself and her realisation that she had to manage her expectations of others when they did not share these same standards. However, like the other research participants, she felt that it was important that she, and members of her team, were 'allowed' to fail and helped to learn from such failures. The opportunity to learn from 'failures' was augmented by professional support she received from a coach (paid for, but external to, the college) and encouragement from role models.

Consequences

The third strand to emerge from my series of interviews with my participants, was that of the positive and negative consequences of their leadership development and roles. These consequences were mixed for Iris. On the one hand, she reflected the conclusions of Bush (2010) and Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) in her belief that

reflexivity was an important component of leadership and this was the chief positive aspect:

> *I've learnt reflection. I don't think that it was something that was in my skill set in my early career. And I do look at my behaviour and I try and think of the implication of what I'm saying to somebody before I actually say it.*

She also felt that she had the ability to keep the job and its demands in perspective – as a job - unlike, she felt, several of her colleagues for whom, she believed, the job became their whole life. However, on the other hand, Iris was not always as calm and relaxed about the job as she would like to be. She admitted that she got *'agitated'* when she felt thwarted in meeting her targets; she sometimes felt that she was *'spread very thinly'*; she talked of keeping the *'plates'* in the air. Finally, she acknowledged that this busyness obscured the fact that the students were at the heart of the organization – something that she often felt that her senior colleagues had forgotten.

Second interview commentary: '*repacking the tool box'*

On being asked to describe herself, Iris responded as *'somebody who suffered one awful professional shock'* when she was suddenly made redundant from her job. She spent a year out of work feeling *'adrift'*, finding the experience *'painful beyond belief'*. This was a difficult year and she was concerned that, when she sent her CV for job applications, organizations were *'obviously frightened at the size of it'* and so she felt compelled to:

> *'dumb the CV down, you dumb it down, you dumb it down until in the end it's not saying anything'.*

and thus not reflecting the breadth and depth of her senior leader experience. She eventually found a position as an interim middle manager in another college where the difficulties she encountered with her new *'dysfunctional'* team, combined with her insights while on a college management development programme offered her catharsis. In the early days as an interim manager she was concerned that she was *'too big for this college'* in terms of her personality and experience, reiterating her first interview comment of being seen as a '*big personality'*. Realizing that she needed to '*step back'* and be more *'considerate'* if she wanted to continue with her job, she explained:

> *I'm having to learn a whole new set of skills all over, you know, thought I had the package, thought I had the toolbox, the toolbox didn't fit the organization I'm in at the moment so I've had to repack the toolbox. It's been interesting.*

She decided to become less *'controlled and controlling'* and to allow her *'playful side out'.* Her job was subsequently made permanent.

Iris's leadership approach in her new role was still defined by her focus on the learners, observed by her current Principal as *'your passion for the job, your passion for getting it right for the students.'* However, she did find it difficult to adjust from being a senior leader to a middle manager, believing that it was a process that had *'brought problems for me'.* One example she gave was, whereas previously she would have the vision, set the objectives and motivate her team to achieve a task, she now had to be involved in at an operational level to complete a task set by others, getting her *'hands so dirty'* in the process. Generally she was finding her middle manager role *'quite a tricky place to be in'* but as part of her learning as she re-established herself in a job, she appreciated how she had developed from an early inclination to be *'dictatorial'*, in the way of a transactional leader, to be '*empathetic'*, in the way of a transformational leader. She focused on training her team and was proud of the way they were responding positively to internal organizational pressures.

Iris was very clear that the key challenge to the FE sector in general, and colleges in particular, was funding – both in terms of methodology and cuts. She predicted big changes as efficiencies would have to be made to save millions of pounds. She accepted that her job might have to be sacrificed as a part of possible changes and felt sanguine about this from her recent experience, explaining that she was:

> *accepting that I may not be part of that, that I may not have a job because it may not be needed in the new FE as it looks at the moment. So I've learnt from being made redundant.*

She was however, determined to stay with her team as long as she was able (particularly in the light of the previous high turnover of staff in her job).

Observations

It was clear that Iris displayed a range of leadership characteristics that are shared with my other research participants. These can also be analysed and explored by

reference to the literature on leadership theory, in particular ideas around transformational leadership and social justice leadership. In addition, there is evidence of the gendered paradigm within which Iris locates herself. For example, she speaks positively about her nurturing role, towards both students and her team, as a leader. However, she appears concerned about how others might perceive her when she describes herself as *'competitive'* and *'a big personality'*. Nurturing and competitiveness are aspects of gendered leadership associated with women and men respectively (Deem *et al* 2000; Reay and Ball 2000). Although Iris demonstrates leadership dimensions associated with both men and women, she appears to recognize, and thus reinforce, that the nurturing aspect is considered by others to be more acceptable behaviour for a woman. Whilst she did not expect to be in a management or leadership role at the outset of her career, when she did take the first step to such a role she progressed very quickly, assisted by her self-confidence and competitiveness. Many of the personal consequences of being a leader focused on Iris's experience of being made redundant. She felt her previous line manager, whom she considered to be a friend, *'betrayed'* that friendship by telling her, without any consultation or discussion, that she was to be made redundant.   Accordingly, she was reluctant to develop friendships with her peers or subordinates at her new college, and she had not *'allowed myself to get involved with people there',* believing her adage that *'you can be friendly but they're not your friends'.*   Although Iris trusted no one outside of her family, she was learning to loosen the *'reins'* at work, explaining:

> *You learn to keep your mouth shut and just think 'it's not the way I'd have done it, but actually the job's done do what's wrong with that then' … but that's something I've had to learn.*

Even so, she did admit that *'I can't stop being the boss'*!

A positive outcome of her redundancy, was that after her feelings of *'shock'* and *'shame'* at losing her job, Iris recognized the truth of a member of her family's observation that *'you've got to give this job up, it's making you ill'* and she did concede that ultimately it had been *'a blessed relief not to go to work'*.

Iris showed a high degree of resilience in regaining her confidence and sense of self after being made redundant. Her work was important to her; she had faced

adversity, fought back and kept her sense of humour. She was proud of her new team and was energized by them; she had maintained her passion for the well-being of her students.

Dorothy's story: *'yes we can'*

<u>Path to leadership</u>

Dorothy left school and joined a traineeship scheme in the aerospace industry as going to university was not '*financially viable'* at the time. It was when she had completed her training and was working as a programmer that she thought she would like to try teaching, for altruistic reasons:

> *because I quite like helping people I think, and I saw that as a way that I could help other people. And I think I'd like to be helpful.*

In a similar way to Eloise and Ivy, Dorothy sought part time lecturing work in her local college of FE. She was gradually offered more work teaching programming and she then decided to take a chance and gave up her full-time permanent job to take on three temporary lecturing roles:

> *nobody wanted to teach, because you could earn so much more money actually programming. And I thought "no actually, there's an opportunity here". So I thought "right that's it".*

Dorothy started teaching without any initial training - *'a very untraditional route'* as she observed - and found her first experience quite daunting:

> *I'll never forget the first day teaching, and I walked into … I was completely unprepared, and I went in and I thought "oh gosh I can't go back tomorrow, it's terrible". But I did go back tomorrow.*

In many ways, these two aspects, firstly of identifying opportunities and secondly of fortitude, have characterized her career in FE although she did not *'necessarily* [have] *the big plan. It just kind of evolved'*; this is a view and experience that certainly chimes with those of Iris, Eloise and Daphne. Dorothy's instincts about teaching prospects were correct and she was soon offered a full-time permanent post in a college, which led to a number of rapid promotions. Another feature of her working life was being prepared to work well beyond an average working week, evidenced by her working full-time in the aerospace industry and teaching three evenings a week, through to when she had her first full time teaching job and was

studying for her teaching qualifications in the evenings. This combination of hard work and a preparedness to 'have a go' contributed to Dorothy's modest assertion of the '*evolution – there was no master plan*', echoing that of Iris, of her career:

> *I think, because I've done almost everything in FE, looking back and at times actually I've thought "why do I always get all these difficult things, why do I get the jobs nobody else wants". And that did tend to happen quite a lot at* [name of college]. *I think I suffered a bit from "ask a busy person" syndrome. But actually it helped me hugely in terms of my own career development.*

Whilst Dorothy did not have a clear career plan, she did have the confidence to take advantage of career openings even though she might not have been completely ready for them; as she explained:

> *just opportunities and people giving me chances … certainly when I came into this job, and probably when I've gone into most of them, I've not necessarily felt ready for that post, but I think "well actually I think I could probably do this".*

Although the language of this explanation is highly qualified and hesitant, it clearly belies a fairly steely resolve. Indeed, Dorothy noted that whilst her colleagues might think that she was lacking in confidence as she had a quiet, understated approach to work, she felt quite self-assured, clarifying:

> *I don't ever think that I can't do it. … I don't ever doubt my own ability.*

Having reached an executive director role in her first college, Dorothy gradually became aware of a dissonance between her own strongly felt values, focused on treating people fairly (reminiscent of social justice leadership essentials illustrated by Gewirtz 1998; Bogotch 2000; McCabe and McCarthy 2005) and those of the organization. This discord led her to doubt her abilities and beliefs:

> *I began to not trust my own judgement. Because what I instinctively felt was the right thing to do, didn't seem to quite fit … that got me down a bit.*

These unhappy feelings led Dorothy to review her role in, and relationship to, the college and prompted a move, and promotion, to a second college as a Vice-Principal.

When asked about her values, Dorothy described them as *'core'* springing from her upbringing as:

> *"if a job's worth doing you do it well", you tell the truth, and you just treat others with the respect that they want to be treated with, … and that you would expect to be treated with yourself.*

These family values have been further reinforced by the influence of role models, mainly her line managers that she has encountered during her working life.

<u>Leadership style</u>

As Dorothy's career progressed the key change for her was a reduction in her teaching workload which she found difficult - *'I love teaching'* - and which she also, from her perspective as a manager, saw as a barrier to others going into management roles. Up to, and including, her executive role she continued with a small amount of classroom teaching but had to relinquish that when she became a Vice-Principal. In a way similar to Leathwood's (2000) research findings that:

> many of the women managers … still retained self-identities as women teachers. (p.176)

so did Dorothy. However, she was able to reconcile this loss firstly by realizing that it would not be tenable to be bound by a weekly timetabled teaching session in her current role. Her second insight was that managing and leading staff was similar to teaching, with the potential for a wider impact; as she expressed it:

> *managing staff is a bit like managing a classroom but you can just extend the influence that you can actually have on the learner … I've got the opportunity to have an even bigger influence on even more learners and on their experience.*

This focus on the learner was further highlighted, and aligned with her values, when Dorothy was questioned about her leadership style:

> *the right thing to do is what's the right thing for the learner. It always comes back to that. So when I have discussions with other staff or with colleagues about maybe new things that we're bringing in, or things that we want to change, or of my own views, then I always come back to "what will help the learner the most", because if I can't answer that question then it's probably not the right thing to do.*

Dorothy's clarity about what is 'right' could be interpreted as her having a clear vision about her actions and how they are to be carried out for the benefit of the learners which accords with theorists' perceptions of transformational leaders (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011; Daft 2012).

With the learner at the heart of her professional life, Dorothy characterized her leadership approach as having several elements. The strongest aspect was that, not only did she have a vision of what needed to be achieved, she could also see clearly *'a better way of doing that'*. This clarity was, perhaps, derived from her initial training as a programmer in terms of having a structured approach to leadership issues; as she identified:

> *I'm pretty strong at systems and processes … as a vehicle then for making other things better … if you get that bit right then there will be all sorts of … benefits that we get from that as well.*

A similar ability to streamline systems was evidenced in the narratives of Daphne and Eloise.

Allied to this strength was starting from basic premises and building up from these and her desire to keep things straightforward was evident.

By deconstructing problems, Dorothy felt that she was able to understand the important discrete details which could then be reassembled into a workable solution and she could thus support members of her team to identify optimal solutions. However, she did recognize that this was a time consuming process and that it was not always appropriate to be quite so 'hands on' - with a possible danger of micromanaging - and she felt that at times she *'should stand back'*. On the other hand she did say that by understanding the detail, her confidence in her ability to lead on the bigger issues was sustained. Such a pragmatic step by step approach is analogous to Iris's 'vertical chess' in working your way to a solution to an issue.

Again similar to Iris, an important aspect of Dorothy's leadership style is to lead by example, that is:

> *To not ask somebody to do something I wouldn't be prepared to do myself. … I think it's about visibility probably more than much else.*

This had two-fold benefits: it was about being clear about her expectations of staff as well as of herself and it also helped her empathize with, and support her team in, their roles and responsibilities. It was clear throughout the interview that Dorothy was engaged with her team and other staff at the college and that, as she explained, she was very supportive of them in carrying out their jobs as effectively, and simply,

as possible. She thought it particularly important to speak to them, either face to face or on the phone, rather than email, to keep the channels of communication open. This was all carried out in a quiet, understated manner; Dorothy mentioned several times that:

> *I don't make a lot of noise about what I do … I'll quite quietly challenge … just sort of quietly get on with what you think is the right thing to do.*

However, this 'quiet' approach belied a firm resolve to leadership, based on her beliefs about appropriate conduct, as an example:

> *I don't expect people to ignore me … if you can't do it by the deadline come back and tell me. Ignore me and I'll be on your case, because that's not accepted behaviour.*

This supports Hay and Hodgkinson's (2006) conclusion that the *'quiet leader'* (p.149) is likely to be more effective.

Additionally, there was a strong sense of her tenacity with examples of her initiatives:

> *you just keep on keeping on and you get there in the end, you can't give up … But I thought it is the right thing to do, and so I just kept on and kept on, and in the end we got there.*

Dorothy did concede that such a process was time consuming and could have a negative effect on her; for example, it could be *'quite wearing'* and *'sometimes you have to make yourself a bit unpopular'*. However, her determination to achieve her vision was in no doubt. Overall, her leadership style was about having a very positive attitude to issues, as she articulated:

> *What I do say in some meetings "I don't want to hear the reasons why we can't. I want to hear the ways that we can" … let's first of all think about the ways that we can, because there usually is a way that we can.*

Although, she did recognize that there was time to stop *'swimming round'*, saying:

> *Well you challenge the best that you can, but if you can't change it, actually just move on.*

Her ideas about authenticity chime with Daft's (2012) conclusions about the realness and genuiness of authentic leaders.

Second interview commentary: *'just an ordinary person'*

The data reinforces her profile as a modest, hard-working and team focused leader - one who dealt with the challenges of delivering a high quality educational experiences for learners whilst funding was cut. Ensuring optimal learning opportunities for her students was still at the heart of her work, indeed, her passion. A specific exploration of identity revealed little more than her first interview, as she described herself as *'just an ordinary person just getting on with my life'*. She saw herself as a member of her team rather than as a senior leader in education, which echoes the view of Eloise. Her view of herself was founded in her '*ordinary working class upbringing'* where values of *'work hard, do your best'* were embraced by her family.

Buoyed by her father's philosophy of '*you can do anything you set your mind to',* in moments of self-doubt she considered the success of her career to be due to luck and choice. The luck of, for example, '*being in the right place at the right time'* when job opportunities arose, combined with the luck of people being prepared to give her a chance with a job when she felt that she was not quite ready for it. These lucky breaks coalesced with her conscious choices; as she expressed:

> *this is how I want my life … and I'm going to work at making my life this particular way.*

The choices involved taking up the opportunities as they presented themselves, and deciding to live by her strongly felt values and opting to work in a particular way.

Observations

One of the positives of being in a leadership role for Dorothy was the opportunity to influence and improve the learning experiences for the students in the two colleges in which she had worked. She also felt that she had had tremendous opportunities to learn in terms of knowledge and behaviour from many of the people with whom she has worked. As she stated:

> *You can learn something from most people, even if it's how you don't want to do something … you can sort of opt and learn. So I did try to pick things up from my environment, from people around me.*

At the same time, there have been, and still are, a few challenges associated with the role, one of which has been helped by this learning from others. One of her

challenges is that of feeling confident, which slightly contradicted previous assertions of her belief in her abilities to lead. However, she had learned that although some colleagues appeared to be confident, in fact they were not and were *'acting confident to be confident'*; this is what she had practised in order to feel confident. An additional challenge was a feeling of academic insecurity, certainly something I can empathize with, as she said:

> *I'm not a naturally bright person … I work with other people and I think "oh they're academically so able" and I'm not. I've always had to work really hard. But that's OK. And I also like to know the detail to feel confident, so that does take time and it does take a lot of hard work.*

At the time of her interviews, Dorothy had nearly completed a master's qualification and so clearly was academically able but perhaps she felt this was not the case due to her *'untraditional' entrée* into the teaching profession, as she saw it, via an apprenticeship rather than university. There are shades of 'imposter syndrome' (Avelis 2013) here. Dorothy mentioned *'hard work'* and *'working hard'* a number of times throughout our interviews and identified herself as *'a bit of workaholic … and driven'*. Clearly this has impacted on her home life, as she recognized:

> *Work/life balance has always been quite an issue with me – because I'm not very good at it. But that's nothing to do with the job. I think that's to do with me … If I'm at home I need to be doing and I like to be quite busy.*

Her current line manager suggested that she delegate some of her responsibilities at work. However, she did not do this as she felt that it would not be fair for others to bear her responsibilities. Dorothy's narrative reveals ascribed aspects of gendered leadership behaviour, both feminine, for example, cherishing her students and her team, and masculine, for example, working long hours - seen as an element of the macho managerialism agenda of FE (Ducklin and Ozga 2007; McTavish and Miller 2009).   However, unlike Iris, she does not imply that one type of behaviour is more appropriate to her leadership practice.

Dorothy felt that she had been lucky with the various and varied career opportunities that had presented themselves during her time working in FE and she thought that such variety gave her an experienced and informed overview of the sector which helped her help others:

> *I can empathize because I've done a lot of the jobs. And that works both ways because first I can challenge, when people say "oh no we can't possibly" I say "I think we can". But secondly, I can understand how difficult and why it might be a challenge … because I've been there and I've tried to do it myself, so that helps.*

Isobel's story: *'not socialized to be a leader'*

<u>Path to leadership</u>

Similarly to Elizabeth, Isobel had determined upon a career in education and she followed in her father's footsteps to become a teacher. Working first in secondary schools, with a stint lecturing in HE

whilst raising a family, she then started part-time work as a lecturer in an FE college. Gaining a full time post, and after a few years, being promoted to a section head, Isobel, akin to Iris's experiences, had no particular thoughts or plans about becoming a senior manager; as she stated:

> *I suppose if I ever thought about it I suppose I thought "well I might want to at some point possibly go up to the next level whatever that might be" but I wasn't really too bothered about it at that point.*

In addition, the quality of 'fairness' in terms of both treating others and life experiences in general was important to her, in alignment with ideas about the significance of social justice leadership (Bogotch 2000; McKenzie *et al* 2008).

However, having worked in the same college for a significant number of years, circumstances jolted Isobel into being 'bothered' and into taking action. A new Principal restructured the college and Isobel was unsuccessful in gaining one of the new posts. An external candidate was appointed and this had an immense effect upon her. The depth of her feelings was clear as she described the impact:

> *that was a huge shock to me … it made me think I wasn't appreciated, I wasn't valued. From being perfectly happy in my job I was suddenly desperately unhappy, you know it did something to my sense and my self-worth that was really damaging.*

As well as 'shock', Isobel also felt angry and these feelings acted as a *'catalyst'* for change:

> *And that was a real kind of life changing moment I now realize, because what that then caused me to do was to get out of that place as fast as I could*

> *because I thought there was no future for me here, I'm not valued, I've had enough, I want something different.*

The 'something different' was a middle management post at a new college as a deputy head of a cross-college curriculum team and within a year she had been promoted to head of the department. The stimulus for change was perhaps more explosive than that experienced by Dorothy, nevertheless they both share an emotional response to external circumstances which caused them to leave an organization.

In her new role in a new college, Isobel felt energised and empowered, and she was encouraged, and supported, to attend a nationally recognized leadership course as well to study for a master's qualification:

> *I felt as if I was really flying and that was because I was obviously in the right place to be open to all the opportunities that that college enabled me to have.*

Her managers' affirmation of, and belief in, Isobel's abilities were repaid as she described how she led her department to improve exam grades across the college resulting in the college being given a prestigious national award and an 'outstanding' assessment from Ofsted.

Her years at this second college were what she saw as restorative in terms of her self-confidence to the extent that she turned down two opportunities to apply for a Vice-Principal post - due to a variety of reasons. These included family considerations, a reluctance to apply again for an internal promotion, her perception of limited career progression in the role and also her wish to avoid negative feelings:

> *I didn't want to get stale … because I think what I want to do is keep things fresh and to keep challenges, and I think the worst thing you can possibly do in your working life is to get grumpy because you're cynical.*

Bolstered by a combination of a *'real ground swell of belief in myself and what I could achieve and actually loving doing it'* and a realisation that *'I wanted it to be my vision and not somebody else's'* Isobel decided to look elsewhere for Vice-Principal roles - quickly being appointed to a college in another part of the country. This was a different type of college from her previous experiences and she immediately felt this was right for her. During the next five years Isobel finished her Masters and was then promoted to the role of Principal of the college.

Leadership style

When asked about her leadership style, Isobel was very clear that a distributed leadership approach was necessary in her current role as *'anything other … is not going to do any job at all really'* although what she described was reminiscent of a situational leader (Robbins 1993; Hay and Hodgkinson 2006; Jogulu and Wood 2006; Cole and Kelly 2011; Daft 2012). The key point of this theory is that a leader needs to be able to assess a particular state of affairs and then to be in a position to take appropriate action as a result. In Isobel's case, when she joined her current college, she realised that the hierarchical structure of the organization, combined with the limited allowance of management time for middle managers, resulted in a powerful senior leadership team. This reflected an authoritarian and autocratic leadership style (Robbins 1993).

The senior leaders must also have been overwhelmed by the demands and expectations that they would focus on the micro aspects of running the organization - rather than keeping centred on the wider issues.   As an early intimation of the cultural barriers she was likely to encounter (Theoharis 2007), Isobel realized problems caused from passing decisions up the hierarchy could be addressed by changing the structure of the college, which she felt was the main factor in the apparent autocratic leadership. She tried, unsuccessfully, to effect some changes whilst a Vice-Principal:

> *I realized that for so many years I'd been struggling with somebody else's structure that was way beyond its sell by date and why* [sic] *was I keeping trying to get blood out of stones with it, it was the structure that was wrong. And actually there was some of the people that were wrong too.*

Once she became a Principal, she was able to realize her vision, in true transformational leader mode, of how the college would be structured to operate effectively. This, she saw, as a great and exciting opportunity:

> *that felt brilliant because for the first time I felt as if I wasn't doing it with one hand tied behind my back.*

The restructuring process entailed a tremendous amount of change with the overall number of managers being halved. Isobel was quite clear-sighted about the need to reduce staff numbers for the overall benefit of the college:

> *this sounds like a bit of a maverick Principal kind of thing to say but your college has got to come first, and if there are people that have been there for donkey's years and they are getting the way, they have got to go.*

The outcome of this *'radical'* (as Isobel expressed it) course of action was that, as Isobel explained, she developed a strong management team, because of the new structure in place and because of the abilities and characters of the staff she had chosen to appoint. Isobel's leadership style became evident as she described the various steps and aspects of effecting the restructure. For example, she mentioned several times that she had a very clear vision about what she wanted:

> *what I want is, I want every single young person who comes through my college to go out with the best possible life chances that they can have. And that means partly results … it means that they've done the best possible thing that they possibly could for them.*

Her particular vision was informed by her overview of the post-16 sector, having worked in a variety of post-16 educational establishments, and underpinned by her:

> *belief in education, it's the belief in the power of education to hugely change people's lives.*

These convictions were informed firstly, by what she experienced of her father's passion for the value of education through his role as a head teacher in a secondary school. Secondly, by her observations, as an adolescent, of the *'barriers and difficulties'* her Black and Asian friends experienced during the controversial political and geographical landscape within which they lived at the time. These experiences formed a strong basis for her revealed aspects of social justice leadership.

From the analysis, it is clear that Isobel adopted a transformational leadership approach in introducing and overseeing the organizational change by sharing her vision with staff through establishing clear and effective communication channels. Such an approach typifies a social justice leader, as identified in Theoharis' (2007) research: that is, an egalitarian ethos of involving all staff, as she recognized that *'it's the pulling people along with you or getting people to come with that is so important'*. Isobel acknowledged that her academic studies and teaching in communication skills

gave her an insight into this and also gave an opportunity to *'apply that theory stuff to your practice'.* At the same time, Isobel was prepared to take some challenging decisions - seeing the restructure as an opportunity to make less effective members of staff redundant and to close cost inefficient sections. Confronting the need to, and taking, difficult decisions in an authoritative (that is, telling people what to do) and target-focused (that is, concentrating on results rather than people) manner, demonstrates suggested masculine aspects of transactional leadership (Leathwood 2005; Shanmugam *et al* 2006). Her determination to develop the best possible workforce was evidenced elsewhere as she explained how she was prepared to manage poor performance through support, training and ultimately disciplinary procedures. When the restructure was finalized, Isobel ensured that all her managers were part of a management training programme, hoping to establish a *'culture of aspiration'* which she anticipated would impact upon the students; asking:

> *If we want our students to be aspirational how can they do that unless they see staff that are aspirational?*

Isobel, herself, was inspired, and occasionally dismayed, by the behaviour of senior staff with whom she had worked during her career in education. Despite her bouts of dismay, overall she felt that learned something and she was keen to mentor and coach other staff within her college, citing several examples of how she did this and for whom. In this way, her practice resonates with that of the school Principals of Theoharis' (2007) research study who concentrated on *'enhancing staff capacity'* (p. 235) in their efforts to empower staff to ensure more equitable organizations. Primarily, however, Isobel wanted others to have a chance to experience a similar role to hers - claiming:

> *it's a fabulous job, my job is the best job in the world and I want others to be able to feel that that might be the right for them too. And we can only do that by sharing experiences.*

Second interview commentary: *'an amazing experience … being Principal'*

Data from Isobel's second interview confirmed her as an enthusiastic leader, as she commented: '*what an amazing experience it is, of being Principal of my college'.* She continued to enjoy the sense of being in control and found that it supported her leadership style:

> *I don't have anybody pulling my strings, you know, I'm the one that makes the decisions.*

At the same time, she was still keen to empower her staff; she effected this through coaching, mentoring and training, as she explained:

> *I believe very strongly in empowering other people, rather than being didactic.*

Since our previous meeting, Isobel's college had experienced a severe setback which seriously affected many of her staff and which also tested her leadership skills. As she clarified:

> *Lots of people went into meltdown. I couldn't of course, so in terms of what kind of a leader I am, I'm very much a leader who leads by example. I was the one who, no matter what was going on in my mind, in my head, I had to be the one who was calm and firm and determined and resolute for the sake of all of my staff.*

During this turmoil, Isobel remained true to her passion for supporting her students; reiterating it thus:

> *I deliberately set out to try and make a difference to the lives of young people, and I think that's one of the things that drives me particularly.*

She saw herself as a *'conduit'* for their success in learning and finding employment.

Whilst recognizing that this was a difficult time for her, Isobel explained how she had to make difficult decisions about organizational structure, staff employment and teaching and learning practices. She worked through the difficulties by being *'optimistic but not delusional'* in her belief that matters could be improved for her college to achieve a state of equilibrium. Once she had identified the problems and worked out a way of resolving them, she outlined how her key leadership approach was to support staff to recognize the issues and then encourage them to accept change. According to the circumstances and stages of the change programme, she was didactic as well as participative – showing aspects of a charismatic and transformative leader as well as a transactional one (Sinclair 2007; Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011; Ellis 2014). Isobel felt that the result of the changes was a streamlined organizational structure, with fewer staff (an inevitable consequence of swingeing funding cuts) and a transformation in staff teaching, with a real team ethos across the college.

Thriving on the *'challenge of creative problem solving'*, Isobel saw the set-back as an opportunity to refresh her perspectives on the college's staff and structure. By doing so, she was able to achieve her vision of an empowered and accountable workforce.

Observations

Isobel realized the possibility of a senior leadership role half way through her career, experiencing a catalyst moment in a way similar to that of Dorothy and Elizabeth.

Having determined to apply for Vice-Principal roles, and with her family grown up, Isobel was prepared, within certain criteria, to move to anywhere in the country for the right job. It was not until her third interview, in a very different geographical location from her then job, that she felt positive about the experience, explaining that:

> *this one felt different, this one felt friendlier and people were very welcoming. … And the whole interview experience felt great.*

This initially optimistic outlook has been sustained throughout her time at this college, particularly whilst dealing with the various challenges of the role. For example, only a few months into her new role as Principal, government funding for a range of pastoral support for students was halved, resulting in staff redundancies. Isobel's response to this particular political trial was to discuss the implications with her senior team, formulate a plan and then to discuss and negotiate this with all the staff in the college. Additionally, as well as the structural and cultural challenges, Isobel voiced her concern about the *'huge job'* there was to be carried out as the college was situated in a recognized deprived area with limited options for education and employment. Isobel has also faced personal challenges in a public arena, having to 'stand her ground' and making very clear her values (in how she valued the contribution of all staff), whilst her actions were being criticized.

Notwithstanding her eventual *'ground swell of belief in myself'* as mentioned earlier, Isobel still experienced spells of doubt:

> *When I first got the job I was absolutely sure that I didn't have a clue what I was doing.*

and periods of low self-esteem brought on by high expectations of herself; noting that:

> *other people regard me more highly than I regard myself … I am hypercritical of my own performance.*

Isobel worked with a professional coach keeping a reflective journal to record the challenges she encountered, the actions she took (and could have taken) and the feelings she experienced. Like Dorothy she was focused on the detail and explained how she liked to *'prepare for things assiduously'* as well as adopting a reflexive practice; engagement with these two approaches eventually led to an insight that her leadership was going well:

> *this was a little bit of a kind of catalyst moment, it's when you kind of realise that actually things are fine and you're doing a good job. And then certain things happened that convinced me that actually I did know what I was doing more than I thought.*

Isobel described part of the practical process by which she'd learned to lead as, for example, she learned to temper her impatience in effecting change, recognizing that cultural change can be a slow process as staff learned new skills and developed in confidence. To illustrate:

> *Because the trouble is, if you delegate things down too soon you get inconsistency because you get that person making the decision that actually shouldn't have been theirs to be made, you then have the line manager having to come in and countermand that, and you get confusion.*

In a similar way to Iris, Isobel recognized that she had a natural tendency to be quite directive and autocratic; at times, she had to *'rein'* herself in. This helped her to look at the situation from the staff member's perspective, and so maintain their sense of esteem and confidence. She could then coach them so *'eventually they get to the right place, so that they've learned from it'.*   Above all, Isobel stressed the importance of building a strong team around her with whom she could openly discuss all aspects of the college, without which, she thought *'it can be a very lonely job as a leader'.* Working with her team, Isobel was prepared to take difficult decisions to fulfil her vision. She remained focused on her students and worked hard to achieve a balance between the good of her college and the needs of the people within it. Isobel's narrative shows aspects of gendered leadership behaviour attributed to both female and male conduct. For example, she demonstrates transformational leadership through her focus on a collaborative way of working with

her staff whilst at the same time espousing transactional leadership with her occasional didacticism.

A key point for me from Isobel's narrative is her preparedness to challenge the *status quo* (described by Theoharis (2007 p.239) as *'held attitudes and beliefs that proved to be resistance to their work'*) in order to leave her legacy:

> *when I go eventually I want to leave behind a college that is in a much more sustainable place than it was when I took it over, and that for me means people that can make their own decisions.*

Closing Observations

The use of NA to explore FE women leaders' experiences revealed further layers of information about their leadership experiences. Many aspects proved to be common across all participants; some facets were unanticipated.   Many features of their leadership practices can be mapped against different theories about leadership, both traditional and newer, for example those described as trait and transformational respectively. However, there appears to be a consistency across all participants in their alignment with pragmatic and social justice leadership theories – the latter similar to that found in other educational research (Brown 2004). At the same time, there are instances showing how these two theories can be at variance with each other whilst trying to improve the experience of the student, often at the behest of government policy. Qualities of leadership which align with gendered leadership theory are discernible in the narratives. Key is the fact that Iris, Dorothy and Isobel have succeeded in establishing a leadership role within the masculinized managerialistic milieu of FE. Whilst they may display perceived stereotypical behaviour associated with women, such as consultation and sensitivity (Deem *et al* 2000) they also exhibit that of men, such as being directive and target driven (Madsen and Albrechtsen 2008; Ellis 2014). It may be that their combination of leadership qualities are what is needed in these time of educational flux.   Certainly the feelings and the future of students were at the core of the participants' leadership activities and this focus was developed, in the main, by values learned from their families and by their own love of learning – both voiced and demonstrated. A strong refrain in the narratives is their passion: for their learners, for what they do and for the FE sector. In addition, there is evidence, from my research, to suggest that the

participants reflected, at some stage of their life, the demographic of their students. In this respect, it may be that whilst most were conscious of behaving as a role model for their staff, they have also been modelling career possibilities for their students. This investigation revealed both professional and personal identities (Goffman 1959; Perreault 1998; Leathwood 2000) of the women and offers an insight into the extent to which gender and class have impacted the formation of their identities

The extent of change in the FE sector was not always clearly articulated by my participants, although there was a unanimity of concern about the key current, and future, change - that of funding methodology and funding cuts. However, the impact of such changes was clearly implied through the discussions of the process and effects of organizational restructuring and culture change. Funding cuts are set to continue and a lack of resources was a key barrier, similarly experienced by the Principals investigated in Theoharis' (2007) research, to achieving the same (or increased) social justice goals with fewer staff. Two of my participants had experienced severe professional setbacks between the research interviews. However, all participants had undergone some sort of challenge in their professional lives and these were changes that affected their personal lives, which accords with the research of Theoharis (2007) and Furman (2012).

The work-life balance mentioned directly by Elizabeth and Dorothy and implied by Isobel and Daphne, reflects the ideas of Sinclair (2007) that many leaders:

> feel they are losing themselves to their jobs. Very demanding roles require a single-minded focus on the task and disallow competing identities, such as father or hobbyist. (p.131)

Sinclair (2007) discusses modern conceptions of 'work-life balance' and, in relation to leaders has observed that they unwittingly submit to an unhelpful conception that firstly, work and life should be equally balanced and, secondly, that they are dichotomous. Thus, leaders find that:

> Getting caught up in finding 'balance' allows them to become more passively situated in a game in which someone else is setting the rules … in their preparedness to play by those rules, leaders become complicit in perpetuating them. (Sinclair 2007 p.137)

How to avoid getting up caught up in the net of such complicity is not clear apart from, perhaps, engaging in reflective practice to understand the meaning of the ebb and flow of identity.

What is noticeable is that their journeys to leadership roles were incremental and opportunistic, rather than taking a direct and focused approach. In other words, they took on some different work, grew in confidence and then had the confidence to undertake different/higher level work even if they did not feel fully prepared.

In this chapter I have remained attentive to the task of re-storying, or re-presenting the experiences of my participants, as Sikes and Gale (2006) affirm:

> Only possible to re-present, not recreate experiences, perceptions and emotions. (p.47)

The next chapter will discuss the common themes, which were deeper and wider than expected, identified from my participants' stories.

Drawing upon the stories produced from the narrative analyses, numerous themes to be investigated for the TA in the next chapter were identified. There was a risk that the richness of the data was compromised in the pursuit of such themes (Smith 2012). At times it was difficult to decide what constituted themes and how they contributed to responding to the research questions. Reading and re-reading (numerous times) the narratives, with referencing back at times to the original interview transcripts allowed me to become familiar with my data and I used my analytic model, shown earlier in this chapter, to keep focused and identify key themes.

CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Opening Comments

In the preceding chapter I drew upon transcriptions of the first and second interviews with my research participants to present, or *re-present*, three of their stories structured around three emergent clusters. My writing of the narratives revealed a range of subsidiary themes; that is, commonalities of events, feelings and perspectives experienced by my participants. These commonalities, of social justice, management of change and managerialism, transformational and charismatic leadership and pragmatic leadership, will be further explored in this chapter, with particular reference to the context and literature, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, in order to ascertain their relationship within a theoretical framework.

In this exploration, I address the concerns and criticisms of qualitative research raised in Chapter 3 of this thesis which revolve around researcher bias, researcher subjectivity and research design (Morse *et al* 2002; Campbell 2005; Geiger and Schreyögg 2012). I have embraced the guidance offered to address these critiques in two key ways, briefly reviewed here. Firstly, by recognizing and accepting that there will inevitably be a degree of bias and subjectivity in my discussion of the narratives (Whittemore *et al* 2001). I do not assume that, being an insider to the research, my insights are any more legitimate that those of others (Smith 2012). Secondly, I have aligned my beliefs with Polkingthorne's (2007) counsel to trust the reader's discernment with regard to the rigour and validity of the research design and outcome. As a result, I feel comfortable and confident to present my argument that senior women leaders in FE, whilst demonstrating many characteristics of a range of leadership theories, can be described as emergent leaders motivated by a strong sense of social justice. Finally, I align myself with Polkinghorne's (2007) conclusion that narratives and themes are:

> Creative productions that stem from the researcher's cognitive process for recognizing patterns and similarities in texts. (p.483)

Although the narratives of only three of my research participants are included in the previous chapter, the narratives of all seven participants are drawn upon in this chapter to illustrate, as sensitively as possible, key ideas and experiences.

Theme 1: A Mosaic of Leadership Theories

Introduction

Bolden (2015) alerts us to a paradox of exploring leadership theory:

> in attempting to identify and measure the essence of leadership we may inadvertently lose sight of the very thing we are seeing to capture.

In order to address this 'paradox', I have contextualized the sub-themes which represent different aspects of leadership theory. I use the term 'mosaic' for two reasons. Firstly, because my preconceptions about my research findings have been challenged and splintered, I have consequently had to reshape my theories drawing upon commonalities of experience identified from the narratives. Secondly, because I feel that I have been able to 'reshape' fragments from the theories into a coherent pattern of leadership behaviours.

Social justice and discordant values

Social justice in education remains a key tenet of political policy, as expounded by the main political parties repeatedly for the last fifteen years, including in the election of 2015. In order to maintain and develop the principles of quality and fairness, party manifestos included, for example, upholding spending levels on education and preserving, or increasing, free child care (BBC 2015). The Queen's Speech which introduced the planned policies of the incoming Conservative Government included the statement that:

> Legislation will be brought forward to improve schools and give every child the best start in life. (Parliament 2015)

It is noteworthy that these aspirations are diluted from previous governments' ideologies over the past sixty years and there was no direct mention of the FE sector.

As discussed earlier in this thesis (Chapter 2) this idea has been pervasive and is interpreted as tasking educational leaders to ensure equality of educational

opportunity and experience for all learners (Brown 2004). Gewirtz (1998) specifies the usefulness of this principle as offering:

> A discourse of interdependence, an ethic of otherness, and a politics of recognition … as they provide an ethical and practical basis for relationships marked by a celebration and respect of difference and mutuality. (p.477)

This understanding of social justice is evidenced from the narratives of all seven of the research participants, as they each had a clear focus on maximising learning opportunities for their college students; this was at the heart of their role. This is expressed in a variety of ways according to the participants' differing perspectives. For example, demonstrated by their beliefs, shown by Eloise's clear conviction about the importance of lifelong learning and the role of the FE sector:

> *we … need to be giving the people those skills to be able to do well in their life … I really believe in like showing students that they can have a progression here.* (Eloise).

Additionally, shown by directly articulated beliefs about equality:

> *I'm also passionate about fairness really.* (Ivy)

Further, their beliefs can be deduced from anecdotes which reveal their pleasure at seeing learners achieve - for example a grandmother who gives her thanks for what she has learned through information technology classes.

These strong feelings about fairness are based on participants' values, which, in turn were drawn from family and work role models. The nature of family influence varied in character. In Eloise's case, for example, it was her experience of seeing the restricted work opportunities offered to her mother because of a lack of education. For others it was having a mother who worked hard to earn sufficient money to support their daughters in education: Iris's mother who *'worked her socks off'* and Elizabeth's mother who would be *'working day, then evening and on Saturdays as well'*. Finally, there was the effect of having educationally successful family members, such as Isobel's father who was a head teacher and Daphne's *'very clever'* father and siblings.

This would suggest that credence given to, and belief in, the importance of social justice is an inherent characteristic, as per trait theory (Chell 1993), of these women leaders. It is thus more fundamental than merely a practice which has been

developed and applied at the behest of government. At the same time, several of the narratives include instances of acting against, or outside, participants' value systems, instances which certainly tested the robustness of such a trait. Eloise's narrative included a story about an opportunity offered early in her management career. Her college was experiencing a financial crisis and, recognizing her financial expertise, she was offered a promotion to a senior position so that she could resolve some of their major financial problems. It was apparent that Eloise felt uneasy about being offered a job in a way which circumvented the college's recruitment and selection process and its equal opportunities policy. On the other hand, she could see that there was a problem and was confident that she would be able to resolve it and rationalized it thus:

> *So it is a moral dilemma because obviously I'd like to try because I want things improved and also for my own career progression it's nice.* (Eloise)

This illustrates the quandary of recognizing and managing competing values in the name of social justice, discussed by Gewirtz (1998) and Bogotch (2000) amongst others. This also aligns with Kant's (1783) views on behaviour which acts as a means to an end (which may entail exploiting situations or people in order to achieve a desired outcome) or a means in itself (which appraises an action as having an inherent value and meaning). Eloise ultimately chose to acknowledge the greater need within the bigger picture, thereby compromising her personal principles; it may well be that she was strongly motivated by the opportunity for personal progression. The tension between actions and values was not articulated during the interview, apart from a recognition of a *'moral dilemma'*, although the field notes include a comment on how the atmosphere changed (to be more tense and charged, with both of us crossing our arms) when these events were being described. Or, perhaps it was a case of interviewer's bias which resulted in a judgemental reaction about the unfairness of the occasion, which Eloise might have sensed.

On a different scale, Ivy describes herself as becoming *'a kind of poacher turned gamekeeper'* to depict her move from a college trades union representative, with a brief to defend and protect the employment rights and jobs of college staff, to a Principal of a college who, whilst still cognizant of the rights of her staff, nevertheless made them redundant. There was a sense that as a Principal having to work with

'the grass roots [who] *were sometimes tough to deal with'* Ivy was working with an earlier manifestation of herself when she had *'more voice than sense'*. There is an implication here that in the role of Principal she acquired a certain wisdom. Again, similar to Eloise's experience described in the previous paragraph, there is an element of personal progression in Ivy's example and instances of an implicit value sacrificed to leadership advancement.

A more positive stance on these frictions in values was recognized by Brown (2004), one that suggests values are consolidated by reflecting upon them and challenging them. This is a position in which Dorothy found herself during a period of unhappiness at her first college. Musing upon her *'misery'*, she realised that there was a conflict between her ideas about the appropriate way to treat and work with staff and students, that is *'you just treat others with the respect that they want to be treated with'* (Dorothy) and the beliefs of the organization underlying the actions she was expected to carry out in the cause of efficiency. This clash of ideologies, identified by Theoharis (2007) and Furman (2012) as a barrier to social justice leadership, and the assumption that she would be prepared to compromise her values, was clearly a testing time for Dorothy, as she admitted:

> *I have been in positions where my values conflict with the values of the people either that I work with or the organization in which I work, and that has been very, very miserable.* (Dorothy)

As previously shown in the analysis of Dorothy's narrative, this difficult episode prompted Dorothy to determine to work elsewhere and, in doing so, she considered, and gained, a promotion to a senior leader.

Isobel's slightly differing experience offers a further illustration of experiences of discordant values in the workplace. For Isobel, she experienced a challenge to her values when she first started at a new college as a Vice-Principal. She observed that an authoritative and controlling senior leadership team was in place, which stifled any opportunity for autonomy or creativity for middle managers, resulting in a:

> *culture of "if you don't know the answer to something it goes up", so there was far too much micro-management going on and no responsibility or accountability.* (Isobel)

Such characteristics as these accord with a masculinist leadership approach identified by Ducklin and Ozga (2007) and McTavish and Miller (2009), where there is restricted opportunity for staff to engage with decision making processes and the development of the college. Having identified that the aggressively hierarchical structure of the college was determining and reinforcing the passive and reactive behaviours of staff, Isobel was keen to change the structure of her college, but found that she was unable to do this whilst in the position of Vice-Principal. This she found difficult.

However, as Isobel was new to the organization, unlike in Dorothy's case, she did not feel that she could leave and so managed her compromised values until she was appointed to the principalship role some years later. This enabled her to implement a restructuring of the college to a less hierarchical, flatter model of management and fulfil her personal ambition to make the college a success under her leadership. In doing so, like Ivy, Isobel reduced staff numbers and perhaps displayed autocratic leadership tendencies by being resolute with those staff who did not 'fit' in with her ideas, because:

> *your college has got to come first, and if there are people that have been there for donkey's years and they are getting in the way, they have got to go.* (Isobel)

The eventual outcome of such experiences of turmoil for Ivy, Dorothy and Isobel might well have been positive. However, there does not appear to be a general acknowledgement, in the literature, that the advocated 'reflection and challenge' process (Brown 2004; McKenzie *et al* 2008) can be highly painful. From this, it is possible to infer that whilst a strong sense of social justice can provide a robust guide to leadership behaviour, it can be at deep personal cost in terms of conflicted values. On the other hand, there is evidence from my findings that a measure of ruthlessness and personal ambition is necessary to effect social justice values, for example, Gewirtz's (1998) suggested actions to '*interrupt or subvert*' (p.482) inequalities.

The narratives suggest that strong feelings about social justice were translated into firm feelings of what was *'the right thing to do'* (Ivy and Dorothy) not only in terms of

their own leadership career (as discussed above in the experience of Dorothy) but also in terms of leadership responsibility. As Isobel strongly expressed:

> *in terms of the challenges, it's hanging on to what you truly believe are the right things to do against all the odds.* (Isobel)

How this underpinning principle of leadership praxis might be evidenced is explored in the next section on the management of change.

Management of change and managerialism: empathy and emotions

Shain (1999) dismisses the political talk of social justice, suggesting that these are empty words in the face of changing responsibilities of leaders in FE, with the increased focus being on establishing business models and their associated bureaucracy and target setting in an attempt to increase resource efficiency (Wright 2001; Mercer 2009; Locke and Spender 2011). The changing nature of working in FE was analysed by Elizabeth:

> *when I started in FE it was quite laissez-faire … as a lecturer you were left to your own devices. I think there's a lot more control and we still have targets and we still have objectives, so I think that's quite key. I think we've got a lot more effective and efficient in the way in which we work … we examine ourselves a lot more, we understand a lot more.* (Elizabeth)

The devolution of their budgets to individual colleges was a cornerstone of the incorporation of colleges in 1993 - marketed as an opportunity for colleges to be independent of the local authority, giving them freedom to use the money as they deemed best. Whilst this practice has continued, the funding methodology has become increasing complex. At the same time, not only have FE budget allocations been disproportionately low in relation to other educational sectors; as Kennedy (1997) concluded:

> in the clamour for funds, further educations claims have been sidelined. The education of the nation's children is obviously a foremost consideration. However, serious inequity exists in the financing of post-16 education. (p.9)

but also budgets have decreased year on year with a 17% cut for the 2015-16 academic year (Department for Business, Education & Skills 2015a).

The management of budgets is an example of what has contributed to new managerialist approaches (Jephcote *et al* 2008; Simmons 2008) and was identified

to be the main challenge in FE for the women leaders interviewed. Their concerns are illustrated by:

> *our budgets will be slashed.* (Daphne)
>
> *And it's all about balance of getting finance and student numbers right isn't it?* (Iris)
>
> *It's the tools you've got to do it with, it's the amount of money you've got to play with that changes and that depends on different government priorities I suppose.* (Isobel)
>
> *We have to do more for less each year, and the new allocations are going to hit us hard, targets are quite stringent for us.* (Elizabeth)
>
> *But the biggest challenge is I think obviously around funding and the economic position, efficiency, funding efficiencies that we need to make.* (Dorothy)

Managing within their college budgets meant that all the participants with a Principal's role had to streamline their college staff. For Isobel this meant a radical restructuring of her organization which resulted in staff redundancies - redundancies which did not necessarily accord with her values but which were rationalized as being for the good of the college. Such restructuring entailed the management and leadership of major change programmes for which the leaders followed best practice of clear communication and participative activities advocated by Theoharis (2007), McKenzie *et al* (2008) and Furman (2012). This approach is exemplified by an example given by Daphne to demonstrate the values of honesty and directness:

> *For me it's just always about being honest, saying it absolutely straightforward even when it's devastating news, when someone says "oh this restructuring, God, am I going to lose my job" and saying "well you may do, yes", so being absolutely blunt. Trying to spell out what's happening in the future so people aren't taken by surprize. Trying to show that you value people, spending time with people. I spent a lot of time walking round staff rooms and talking to people, because they will voice their fears then and things that are worrying them, and you can talk about it, even if it's not good news, you can talk about it.* (Daphne)

Clearly it is not always straightforward in practice:

> *structurally I know how to manage change in the sort of, you know, restructure programmes, redundancy, but real change about getting to the hearts and minds of people and helping them, and ensuring that they adopt the whole*

> *ethos of the organization, I really admire Principals that can do that well. I mean I don't think I can really*. (Ivy)

In some cases, the participants felt that they were well placed to support and empathize with their staff during difficult and disruptive times as they themselves had experienced changes and upheaval in their working lives. Elizabeth described how she had approached leading a major change programme in one of the colleges, portraying the emotional distress of herself and her staff whilst recognizing the need for, and maintaining, a realistic and pragmatic stance.

> *And it's standing in front of the staff and saying "I know this is hard". You know, I've nearly been in tears when I've stood, you know, talking to staff saying "I know how it is out there". And I think you have to say some of the obvious things to people, you know, that you know how it is, you can't do it in the abstract you know, against the backdrop of recession, you know it might be hard for people to get other jobs. But actually we can't just keep people in jobs, you know, I can't just manufacture work where there is none. It's not good for them either.* (Elizabeth)

In a comparable way, Dorothy explained her approach to staff experiencing difficulties with organizational and job changes:

> *I can empathise because I've done a lot of the jobs. And that works both ways, because first I can challenge, when people say "oh no we can't possibly" I say "I think we can". But secondly, I can understand … why it might be a challenge and why it might be difficult, because I've been there and I've tried to do it myself, so that helps.* (Dorothy)

These examples reflect the way in which, as leaders, participants responded to government diktats engendering managerialist practices. Despite the challenges, all participants had succeeded in maintaining financially viable colleges in a sector where it is claimed that up to a third of colleges are in financial difficulties (Cooney 2015; *File on 4* 2015).

Transformational/charismatic leadership: communicative and controlled vision

A key characteristic associated with transformational leadership is the ability to create a 'vision' for steering an organization successfully in the choppy waters of economic and political change (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011; Daft 2012). It was noticeable that all research participants were clear, early on in their educational careers, that they had the ability to see the bigger picture of the FE sector, both in terms of activities within their particular organization and also in respect of the impact

of the external environment on their organization. For example, Isobel felt that having developed a wider viewpoint of FE, gained by working in several different types of post-16 organizations, this could be developed into a vision which guided her leadership actions, despite the challenges:

> *But it's having the vision and the conviction and the commitment to stick to it come what may. And you've got to have that no matter what the government does and no matter what people say you should or shouldn't be doing.* (Isobel)

In each case they were able to see the bigger picture by virtue either of their cross-college roles, or of their experiences across a wider range of post-16 educational organizations. Although each had a specific academic discipline, none retained a responsibility for their discipline at a senior management level, for example by becoming a head of an academic department with a focus on a narrow and particular curriculum. Such involvements enabled them to acquire a broader and different understanding of the FE sector, leading them to develop a certain perspective which might not have been possible had their outlooks been restricted by remaining in their curriculum area. As a result of their ability to better appreciate the context within which FE has to operate, every participant was able to establish a vision for the future development and survival of their college which, in addition, they were able to share with their staff.   However, the validation and successful realization of such a vision is, of course, entirely dependent upon the staff of the organization understanding and sharing the vision, as postulated by Daft (2012). The narratives illustrate the various communicative approaches the participants took to disseminating their visions. Elizabeth's approach was to address all her staff with a pared down message; as she recounted:

> *as a Principal … I've got 600 staff, I have to think about "how do I get the message to everybody, what is the lowest common denominator" not necessarily the person who has got the ... it's not about the least important job, but it's like what's the thing you have to say to get people connected to the vision and understand why we're doing certain things. And so I use some very simple messages for staff, you know, having just 10 priorities.* (Elizabeth)

Whereas, Ivy's method was to convince individuals of her vision and then to rely upon them to disseminate it, as she remembered:

> *a previous Principal saying to me that "he'd quickly spotted the people who were key influences in the community", you know, and it was the PA or the Administrator, and so they were brought in … to … be part of that culture change and part of that web of communications, which gets the messages out a lot quicker … So there were ways in which you bring in people who are important. So that kind of tactic really.* (Ivy)

Such tactics are considered to be good practice in effective leadership and, indeed, it was clear that both Elizabeth and Ivy felt that their stances were successful. However, there is also evidence from the narratives that in circumstances where the vision was not shared, participants were not afraid to stand firm and take action. For example, Daphne described a dramatic approach when her vision was challenged (through inaction by her staff):

> *Now you know that people are waiting for a test, and you've got to stand up for it. So in my book, you make it a mega thing, and then they all remember it and they all do it … And all the managers got together you see and worked out how it would be done.* (Daphne)

Theorists generally agree with the proposal that a vision gives a useful focus and guide for the work of an organization (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011). However, Bogotch (2000) urges caution highlighting that leaders:

> often have a singlemindedness to pursue their own vision tenaciously and apart from others who may not share their particular vision. (p.7)

There is, therefore, a danger that any challenge, contribution and debate is stifled in the face of, for example, an unassailable principle that it is 'for the good of the learners'. This in turn gives rise to tension between a seemingly general democratic approach to leadership and an - from perceived necessity - occasionally autocratic one. I see this as reflecting a continuum of leadership practice between transformational and transactional aspects which are seen to reflect female and male leadership approaches which, in turn, relates to elements of situational leadership. It is not quite the dichotomy between, on the one hand, leadership and managerialism on the other; rather it is a matter of choosing the most appropriate 'tools' to achieve a particular end, as explained by Iris when she '*had to repack the toolbox'.*

Yet, whilst the 'end', that is, the focus on learners, may be a principle that is absolutely shared by all members of the organization, as previously discussed, the 'means' to the end are not automatically shared and it is in these circumstances that

unrest and disturbance both within and among individuals becomes manifest. Despite this, Eloise, having explained her understanding of charisma:

> *I think some people can really capture you into what they're saying … when you go somewhere and you watch presentations, some people can be quite charismatic with it, they really.* (Eloise)

did not feel that she exhibited any:

> *Because I think people can be quite charismatic, I think that's quite a natural thing, I don't think I've got that.* (Eloise)

Another way of considering this conundrum is from leadership literature which suggests that transformational leadership is the antithesis of transactional leadership. The former encourages a culture of staff motivation and stimulation and the latter is about curbing, through control mechanisms, motivation and stimulation (Gill 2011). As already demonstrated above, all the narratives revealed mainly transformational leadership characteristics, as indeed this is how the participants described themselves. However, it is also possible to deduce evidence of 'control', often seen as a gendered element in leadership theory, in the narratives in cases when participants felt a particular course of action was necessary. This is demonstrated, in the main, by making staff redundant, usually for two key, although linked, reasons. Firstly, in order to achieve their vision, for example, in the case of Isobel who needed to be confident that she had in place the proper staff capable of contributing to the achievement of an 'outstanding' grade in OFSTED terms. Those who did not meet this criterion were depicted as those *'one of two that need to go still but they're going this summer'* (Isobel).

Secondly, to align with their values, for example Ivy acknowledged that such an alignment for staff could involve many years of cultural change but she was, nonetheless, quite prepared to employ '*a bit of push and shove'* and to instigate structural changes which would result in staff redundancies.

Additionally, and related to both of the above points, participants felt it was important to do the 'right' thing in particular circumstances. As an example, Isobel described how, in the aftermath of a poor OFSTED report (which surprised and shocked all the college staff) she saw, through the way staff responded to the bad news, the bare bones of her staff, averring that '*all of that kind of mask was stripped away and I saw*

people as they really are' (Isobel). In relation to this insight, she related an anecdote about a manager:

> *I remember a meeting where he was banging the table … saying … "persuade me that the management in this college are equipped to get us out of this mess" and "what are you going to do" … and I was looking at him and I was thinking "you are a manager in this college, how dare you say those things". … So he was the one that we had to deal with in the most extreme way.* (Isobel)

Isobel related how she forcefully highlighted his inappropriate behaviour with him which she felt was effective as they could then discuss his concerns calmly and he became a supporter. Although Isobel felt that by this stage she had the structure of her organization set out appropriately, it was important that any attempts to undermine it were dealt with firmly. In this case it was not about supporting and empowering but rather about telling. This leadership behaviour could perhaps be seen as an example of unmasking a leader to a default position of transactional leadership which is associated with male characteristics. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as an example of situational leadership, whereby a person will adapt their leadership behaviour as required by a particular situation (Chell 1993; Robbins 1993; Clegg *et al* 2011; Cole and Kelly 2011; Daft 2012). In other words, there are times when it is appropriate to be authoritarian in making sure that certain activities are carried out. However, there is a danger here, as posited by Ball (1997 p.259) who talks about the *'ethical retooling'* that has taken place in the public sector and cites the '*discourses of excellence, effectiveness and quality'* as evidence of this as the public sector is brought into alignment with the private sector. Thus an autocratic approach to leadership is perceived to be a more efficient way of leading and so becomes the norm. Indeed, Ball (1997) goes further and asserts that:

> the point of theory and intellectual endeavour in the social sciences should be, in Foucault's words 'to sap power', to engage in struggle to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices. (p.269)

However, Eloise's narrative very clearly shows her aversion to a dictatorial approach

> *And if they sort of buy into it they'll happily be part of it, if you just dictate, people won't. … I think sometimes people think to be a manager you have to be quite ruthless ... I don't think that's always the way … I think there's a time and a place, and I appreciate if somebody's underperforming and that's*

> *impacting on the ultimate goal of the learner experience, then yes you need to speak to people. But I don't really believe in that sort of stick approach. I don't think you get the best out of people, you just de-motivate people then, and once people are de-motivated you're not going to turn that around easily.*
> (Eloise)

<u>Pragmatic leadership: academic 'cleverness' and vocational practicality</u>

The narratives of four of the seven participants revealed a fairly fixed, and similar, notion of the requisite set of characteristics which enabled people to achieve a senior leadership role. Key of these characteristics are those of academic cleverness and a vocation to teach. The participants' model can be deduced by how they portrayed themselves as lacking such characteristics, and, as a result they felt that they had taken an unusual path to their senior roles exemplified by Eloise who *'took a very untraditional route'* (Eloise). This view is, for example, reflected in their feelings of themselves as not particularly achieving academically expressed thus:

> *So I find…I'm not a naturally bright person, you know, I work with other people and I think "oh they're academically so able" and I'm not, I've always had to work really hard.* (Dorothy)

> *I'm not an academic per se, but have a love of learning.* (Daphne)

> *I'm not very intellectual, I prefer it in simple terms but I think sometimes you can over complicate things too much.* (Eloise: pilot interview)

> *so even though the first time round I only got 3 O levels, the second time around I got 10.* (Elizabeth)

Although, in each case their statements are negated later by comments in their narratives that all seven research participants had achieved a master's level qualification. There is an implication, perhaps, that they attained such a qualification through their love of learning rather than their academic prowess. From this, there are two inferences. Firstly, they do, in fact, meet the criterion of having a certain level of intellectual ability in order to become a senior leader in education. There is a sense that as their leadership role is located in the education sector, so they should model, or reflect, a certain educational standard. Secondly, that perhaps they are not that unusual if over half of my research sample share a similar perception as well as sharing a comparable post-16 experience of education.

The second feature drawn from the narratives was that, for four of the seven participants, they did not set out to have a career in teaching, engaging instead,

initially, in other vocational areas such as information technology and photography.
Moreover, none had planned or expected to become an academic manager or
leader; as Ivy and Iris explained:

> *I had no particular ambition for a particular career route, and I had no particular ambition about being … a high achiever or successful.* (Ivy)

> *And then if somebody had said to me "you're going to be a senior manager", and you'd say "don't be silly, I don't want that job".* (Iris)

This could perhaps be interpreted as disingenuous and a false modesty, easy to
display when in a position of power; however, at the time of interviews there is no
evidence, from the field notes or the recording, that this was the case. This claim
could be construed as overt subjectivity on the researcher's part as it reflects her
own pattern of behaviour. However, the principles of rigour and subjectivity
discussed by Whittemore *et al* (2001), reviewed earlier in this thesis in Chapter 3,
are acknowledged. Although diffident in their assessment of their lack of academic
achievement and lack of ambition, there is little evidence from the narratives of any
corresponding lack of confidence in their leadership role. An exploration of the
narratives indicates that despite their (self-defined) shaky starts in post-16 education
and despite their lack of ambition, they did achieve considerable success in their
careers and this conceivably offers an insight into possibilities for women becoming
leaders.

In addition, the majority of narratives showed a shared background of vocational and
quasi-vocational experiences, either through study or employment, which
underpinned their subject teaching disciplines. There appears to be a sensitivity
about the use of the term 'vocational', and Tummons (2009) comments how a
vocational curriculum can be *'seen as a complex and fluid entity'* (p.7). However,
there is agreement that a definition emphasises the acquisition of specialist skills
needed for an occupation (Tummons 2009; Avis *et al* 2010; Wallace 2011). Each
narrative, at some stage, describes how the early professional vocational
experiences of the participants affected their leadership style in the way they have
informed and supported their professional leadership style. Key amongst these are
Elizabeth, who described as herself as:

> *quite practical, and I think that comes from being a* [vocational subject area given] *teacher, which is where I started. … I've collected a range of skills and experiences that I've built on … I sort of bring them out and say "how will they be useful". … I don't think I do anything consciously.* (Elizabeth)

Iris credited her background in sports for the skills she found useful as a leader:

> *in all of my years of being with sports people, as an athlete and then as a teacher, and then as a manager of a sports team, there are very few staff/colleagues that I've met who are not highly organized as sports people. … Team playing skills, organization, logistics, I think they're all the things that come with a sports person, and you bring as transferable skills across.* (Iris)

These demonstrate, in the main, their skills of analysis and the application of logic, which is evidenced in their ability to deconstruct problems. This was most clearly demonstrated by Elizabeth in her analogy of approaches to leadership problem solving with the step by step approach required in her particular vocational subject area. It is further exemplified by Dorothy's observation:

> *I'm quite good at keeping things simple, because I like simple, I can do simple. … Strip it back, keep it simple, and then we can make it better I think.* (Dorothy)

In a similar vein, Eloise clarified that her facility with figures:

> *supports the case of what we're trying to do. And so I think that helps, otherwise you can have these beliefs but unless you can put it into something tangible that ticks the boxes for the principles or something like that, then you're kind of on a losing battle anyway. If you can prove that it's going to tick their boxes ... it's a bit of a balance.* (Eloise)

In Isobel's case with her qualifications in a quasi-vocational area, the underpinning principles of effective communication skills were drawn upon and applied; congruent with Brigg's (2007) assertion that

> Professional location lies both in the subject knowledge itself and in how it is applied in an educational context. (p.479)

Likewise, for others, such as Ivy, their down to earth approach to problems was gained from acquiring different and broader perspectives, that is, she was a trades unionist. These skills align strongly with a pragmatic approach characterized by Mumford *et al* (2008) as:

>These leaders will prefer logical argumentation to emotionally evocative arguments. (p.147)

In addition, the evidence from the narratives further substantiates the theoretical claim that pragmatic leaders prefer to pay particular attention to establishing the root of a problem so that they fully understand it and can thus resolve it. However, the evidence contradicts the profile of a pragmatic leader as one who is not focused on a goal, as it has been clearly demonstrated that the majority of the narratives have a clear vision of what is to be achieved.

Research by Busher (2005) into self-perceptions of middle managers in FE reveals a reluctance by many of those questioned to see themselves as managers. Indeed, they preferred not to use the term 'manager' or 'leader', seeing such an expression in a pejorative light associating it with the New Public Managerialism (Stoten 2011). Perhaps there is also an unwillingness to have their sense of identity as a teacher of students replaced by manager identity. Although there is no strong evidence that this is the case for my research participants, elements of this experience can be inferred from the above comments.

Overall, the hands-on approach to leadership discussed in this section, as typified by Elizabeth:

>*Yes I think I am very pragmatic and practical about it all.* (Elizabeth)

echoes, to a certain extent, the debate between perceptions of management and leadership.

Distributed leadership: teamwork, mentoring and delegation

In writing about the model of distributed leadership, Hartley (2007) points out:

>its conceptual elasticity is considerable. And this very lack of conceptual clarity does not allow for a clear operationalisation of the concept in empirical research (p.202)

Despite such a model being considered to be important by policy makers (as previously discussed in Chapter 2) my research in this area corresponds with Hartley's (2007) view that it is hard to find firm and robust evidence of this style of leadership. Yet it is possible to extrapolate glimmers from the narratives, such as examples of team working, supporting, encouraging, and mentoring. Team working

was seen as a crucial aspect to their leadership role for many of the participants.
For example, Isobel, in discussing an aspect of team work that she had found helpful
in her leadership role:

> *And another thing that has helped enormously is that I have, since I've been*
> *Principal, I have built a team around me that we actually work as a team. …*
> *and I think it can be a very lonely job as a leader if you don't do that.* (Isobel)

Or Dorothy when explaining how she felt it was essential to support her team:

> *I like to be able to support my team, and that's important to me, to be able to*
> *sometimes when they're struggling I can say "right, tell me what the problem*
> *is, I'll help you". And they know that they can come and talk things through,*
> *even if I don't understand up front, then I'll put the work….and I will help them*
> *as best I can.* (Dorothy)

For Iris, the central tenet of her leadership approach was about developing her team
to accept responsibility rather than expecting her to take on all the responsibilities
(aka 'monkeys') - a good example of working towards distributed leadership:

> *But that's all about developing your team isn't it? Because people respond to*
> *that approach … they know that if I've got to say, or have had to say that to*
> *them, then there's something awry … I used to take people's monkeys all the*
> *time. "I'll have that monkey, I'll sort it out", and before you know it you've got*
> *fifteen monkeys on your back.* (Iris)

Elizabeth felt that her coaching of colleagues was a way of developing them
professionally with the implied outcome of sharing the responsibilities:

> *I do quite a lot of mentoring and coaching as well because I think it's*
> *important to bring people on. It's like there's this mystique about stuff, and I*
> *think as women we need to share what it is actually like. And I'll say, you*
> *know, "I have to get a work life balance" I can't do it 24/7 although that's what*
> *the job requires, sometimes I have to step off.* (Elizabeth)

These activities are what I would expect as standard good practice in leadership and
is supported by theorists; for example, Briggs (2007) affirms:

> Responsibilities of senior managers may include coaching middle managers
> to understand this role and to accept their 'right to manage'. (p.476)

There is no evidence from the narratives that participants adopted such practices as
a result of government educational policy nor to what extent they might have worked
in practice. The only direct evidence of an intervention is Dorothy's response to

encouragement from her Principal to delegate (in order to achieve a more work/life balance)

> *So yes, I could delegate, but I don't think it's the right thing to do.* (Dorothy)

This corroborates a view of implicit rather than explicit distributed leadership practice. As opposed to Isobel's explicitly stated:

> *I think anything other than distributed leadership is not going to do any job at all really. I mean, what I saw when I first started at my college was, you know I said that the middle managers were teachers with 2 hours of admin, and we had this situation where anything at all, the questions they'd got, went up and up and up.* (Isobel)

The emphasis from the participants on the importance of team work, in its various forms, is, in a sense, at odds with their clear vision and strong beliefs in what is proper. It is worth noting that a recent report (OECD 2015) suggests that the Swedish educational system and experience is failing, which indicates that the model of distributed leadership advocated by the previous UK coalition Government is not necessarily a panacea for challenges in educational leadership.

Concluding Thoughts for Theme 1

My key research question asks 'to what extent do the experiences of senior women leaders in FE reflect gendered leadership theory?'

In my review of the key leadership theories, it is not surprising to note that no one theory espouses the leadership styles explored through the senior women leaders' narratives. Nor do the narratives clearly contribute to new understandings of leadership theories. However, my analyses do show leadership behaviours which are posited to be gendered, particularly in relation to transformational and transactional leadership theories and it is possible to say something coherent which contributes to a general understanding of women leaders in FE.

My research has shown that there are a combination of factors (such as vocational background of studies or career, teaching experience) to support an understanding, or even an expectation, of women leaders as pragmatic leaders whilst at the same time it can be seen that there are aspects of charismatic and trait leadership theories.

There is little evidence of formal distributed leadership in response to government direction from policy, that is, what they recommend; rather, aspects that have evolved as part of their leadership journey. This implies a reformulation of the theory of distributed leadership is needed which includes a strong moral awareness of what is fair and just. Gewirtz (1998) refers to this as the *'distributive justice'* (p.472) aspect of her two part model for social justice and I believe that the term 'distributive leadership' better reflects my findings, thus giving a focus on thinking:

> carefully and systematically about what treating each other with respect and conferring on dignity on others actually means in different contexts. (Gewirtz 1998 p.472)

The point of labelling and identifying leadership styles is debateable. However, I believe that such an activity aids understanding and perhaps points to helpful aspects of leadership practice. In addition, it helps to appreciate the dilemmas being faced and how they might be resolved. However, underlying it all is the basic personality and a willingness to take opportunities, honed by training, experiences, mentoring, training, networks and reflection. Moreover, understanding leadership styles helps others value, and possibly empathize with the demands of, the considerable challenges in managing management changes to funding (which is the focal point of economic and political imperatives). The evidence of a shared concern about the impact of reducing budgets signals a connection with Gewirtz's (1998) *'relational dimension'* (p.470) of social justice which suggests a way of looking at the way power is used in the light of:

> a sense of macro social and economic relations which are mediated by institutions such as the state and the market. (p.471)

In this case, the research participants have been tasked with meeting the demands of government with an ever decreasing budget whilst ensuring a respectful parity of experience for both their students and staff.

Gewirtz (1998) raises an ethical quandary that, I believe, particularly applies to senior leaders. She suggests that:

> A politics of recognition or an ethics of otherness involves not only a commitment to respond to others and otherness but also a commitment to avoiding practising the power of surveillance, control and discipline upon others. (p.476)

I interpret this quandary as one of a conflict between responsibility and accountability for senior leaders for, as has been discussed, the research participants all shared strong elements of social justice leadership shown by their spoken values and implicit sense of fairness. However, they were also accountable for the actions of their staff and so had a responsibility to supervise, regulate and direct, when necessary, their actions and, as such, possessed the power to do so. Distributive leadership, if practised in an authentic manner, to include mutual respect and communication, could possibly ameliorate this imbalance in power but would not fully redress it.

Bogotch (2000) contrasts social justice leadership with that of *'quasi-heroic … strong leaders with vision'* (p.1) which implies the two approaches cannot co-exist whereas my research study demonstrates that they can harmonize, with the bond being strengthened by an underpinning distributive leadership approach. That is, the vision is developed as a result of multiple contributions from other staff in order to achieve an optimum *'pluralistic perspective'* to realize social justice (Bogotch 2000 p.1) and thus avoid the *'individualistic perspectives'* warned against by Bogotch (2000 p.7). However, this view implies a disconnect between the requisite heterogeneous leadership outlook with the necessity to focus on an individual's needs and place in society. I suggest that due recognition needs to be given to the leader as an individual, without, necessarily, reflecting how *'we steadfastly long for romantic heroes'* (Bogotch 2000 p.7), and I agree with Bolden's (2015) claim of the *'necessity of heroic leadership at times'.*

All my participants demonstrated a strong underpinning belief in, and passion about, the importance and value of education. This belief was evidenced by their firm, and common, conviction that their students were core to their activities. I was left with two questions. Firstly, the extent to which being a leader in FE requires an extra leap of faith because there is a widespread understanding of the role of schools and universities - FE is always having to justify itself. Secondly, do commonalities of experience lead to similar leadership styles, or is it that particular leadership styles are evidenced in the main by the accretion of similar experiences?

What is clear is that their journeys to leadership positions were gradual. This demonstrates a narrative of a career path somewhere between the two typologies

identified by Smith (2012) from her research into women teachers. Her first typology was that of a planned progression to leadership, guided by principles and values. The second typology was where her participants expressed their careers in terms of limitations for progress. None of my participants fitted either of these typologies; instead they reflect aspects of both. To illustrate this, none had planned their career yet all were guided by their values. All had experienced some constraints yet all had progressed in their career.

Theme 2: The Iterative Nature of the Personal and the Professional

<u>Introduction</u>

> Narrative accounts are not unreal accounts in the sense of being unrelated to reality. They are framed accounts, and with proper attention to those frames and the rules of transformation, we can begin to reconstitute their relations to the wider frames outside of the narrative context. (Labov 1982 p.221)

This section will examine the influences on the developing identities of the research participants - in particular, the ways in which family values have contributed to their leadership roles and, once in such a role, the ways in which they have informed their leadership behaviour. Leary and Tangney (2012) emphasize the importance of 'self-reflection' as key to understanding the mutability of identity, by which I understand that a measure of self-awareness is required to articulate recognition of identity and how this impacts upon one's path in life. The narratives in themselves, I believe, demonstrate my participants' ability to contemplate their lives and this is supported by the comments on their own reflections. The most powerful verbalization of this was by Iris, who recognized that a reflective habit was developed later in her life, facilitated by '*some very effective management training'* (Iris).

Similarly, Elizabeth felt that she was '*incredibly reflective'* and this skill was supported and developed by a leadership coach who challenged her actions in her role.

The strength of their reflective powers offers a self-validation of my participants' knowledge about themselves thus enabling them to 'go forward' in their leadership roles, an idea posited by Sinclair (2007).

<u>Family influences: or a question of confidence</u>?

Smith (2007) and Sinclair (2010) explain, from their research into professional educational identities, how parental attitudes about the value of education correlate closely with their children's view of the importance and value of education. There are comments in all my research participants' narratives that resonate, to a greater or lesser degree, with Wetherell's (1996) assessment of how parent and child collaborate to make sense of a *'kaleidoscope of potential patterns'* (p.308) in order to establish one or more identities. Mothers, and mothering (Leathwood 2000), play an

important part in establishing the significance of being educated. For example, Elizabeth recognized her mother's unspoken belief in education through her mother's actions:

> *I think that my mother had a huge influence on me in terms of thinking that education was important, so even though the first time round I only got 3 O levels, the second time around I got 10, she allowed me to stay on, even though she was a single parent with two of us to bring up and all of that.* (Elizabeth)

In a similar way, Iris's mother ensured that she had access to educational experiences and Iris acknowledged her mother's influence as she compared her leadership role with that of a mothering role:

> *we were poor but my mum wanted me to have the chance.* (Iris)

Iris was keen to emulate her mother's role, as she saw her opportunity to give her students the same chances she had had to develop through support and sport, giving an example of one of her students who had played hockey at an international level as a result of her support. Iris was acting in *loco parentis* with her encouragement of her students. This role mirrors that of Eloise looking after her younger siblings from a young age although she did not have any particular support from her parents in her education.

A father's role is mentioned in three cases: firstly Isobel, who considered her father to have had a positive influence on her educational and leadership path by his example, himself having been a senior leader in an educational establishment. Secondly, Dorothy's father who encouraged her self-belief. Thirdly, Daphne mentioned her father's, '*a very clever man*', possibly pragmatic, possibly less than encouraging, advice:

> *you know, my father said to me "well you should be a secretary because you'll always be employable".* (Daphne)

The implicit assumptions about 'gendered identities' (Woodward 2004), in her father's comment seemingly spurred Daphne on to achieve, both academically and professionally, as she said: '*So you have something to prove to yourself that you can do it'* (Daphne).

My research participants' mutual agreement on the worth of education, whether evidenced directly from their narratives or from their shared focus on the importance of the learner to their work, very much reflects the 'unity of purpose' discovered by Briggs (2007) in her study of FE staff. Their focus on the needs of the students disputes Randle and Brady's (1997) assertion, perhaps fear, that New Public Management practices would subvert that focus to targets and markets. It is the case that external scrutiny is focused on measures of these two aspects, however, the *force majeure* persists with the learners. Many of my participants felt that they had shaky starts to their post-16 educational studies. Individual examples of this include Elizabeth's three O levels and Ivy's *'very boring 2:2 … nothing exceptional'* degree. The general perception of their early, indifferent attainments led some of the participants to feel that, despite their subsequent educational attainments (all had a first degree and a master's degree, and two a doctorate), that they were still not clever, as previously noted - particularly strongly felt by Eloise and Dorothy. Nonetheless, regardless of their early experiences and feelings about education, it seems as if, at some stage, they all developed a love of learning, in some cases implied by their academic achievements and in other, explicitly stated:

> *I really do believe in lifelong learning, like people being able to re-train for a career.* (Eloise)

> *I quite enjoy learning, I enjoy new things, so I enjoy the intellectual endeavour in itself.* (Ivy)

and Daphne who expressed her *'love of learning'*. This appreciation of learning was something that they were keen to share with their students.

Again, notwithstanding the importance given by their families to education, the majority self-identified as taking unusual routes to firstly, working in education and secondly, to later leadership roles. As to what would constitute a 'normal' route, this can be deduced from being the opposite of how my research participants explained their own routes, that is, a planned, clear-sighted and well-thought out career path from university to teaching to management and leadership. Apart from Isobel and Elizabeth, the participants spent time working in various vocational areas before they started lecturing in FE. The reasons for this varied from a natural progression from their degree (for example, for Iris and Ivy) to finding work that they were interested in

after leaving school (for example, Eloise and Dorothy). Although the women in the study felt that they had taken an atypical route into FE work, there is no evidence from the literature to suggest whether or not this might be the case, although the similarities of the career trajectories within my small sample indicates that their routes were, in fact, not atypical overall. Nevertheless, it is clear that they did, in one way or another, feel themselves to be different from other leaders and I interpret this as giving tacit credence to the *'quasi-heroic'* leader identified by Bogotch (2000) who has the route to leadership all planned out. What is not clear is whether they felt different from other staff in the sector or different from other FE leaders, or different from the male leaders. Some of the serendipitous comments about men that occur in three of the narratives suggest that it might be the latter. For example, Dorothy describes her observations of the different approaches of men and women at her mixed gender senior leadership team meetings:

> *it might just be chance that me and my female colleagues are similar in that we do like to be prepared. And I come to these meetings and I know that other* [male] *people, they've not even thought about it up to this point and yet they've managed to get their way through it. And I'm quite envious because I think 'I like to know the facts just in case….' and this is about confidence I think, if somebody asks me a question would I know the answer. And often they don't ask the question. I've more than done my homework. But it's about confidence I think and I need to have done that and think 'right I do know about this' if somebody asks me a question say at board meetings for example.* (Dorothy)

For Dorothy it is a matter of feeling certain of herself and her knowledge through thorough groundwork in contrast to her male colleagues' apparent self-assurance and reliance on improvisation, as she observed:

> *I watch my male colleagues and they are most often outwardly very confident, quite opinionated, quite direct, and even when they're probably not feeling those things they look and sound those things.* (Dorothy)

Dorothy's vignette contrasts the responsive behaviour of the women with the reactive behaviour of the men which in turn reflects transformational and transactional leadership styles (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011). This indicates that effective transformational leadership is reliant upon hard work.

Isobel had a similar opinion about an apparent natural confidence shown by men:

> *I've seen men in my career who have got to positions that I would never - OK now I'm in one of them - but I would never have thought that could be me. And I've just seen them get there seemingly effortlessly and without any kind of lack of confidence in themselves whatsoever. And I've thought 'why haven't I got that kind of effortless, seeming lack of un-confidence'... and it may well be that I have appeared to be totally confident and actually I'm like a jelly inside, and I just wonder whether that's a female thing. ... I just wonder how many, I just wonder if there's something that you can say to women about women in leadership roles is, it's about 'this is a very common female thing' and that perhaps goes back to the fact that we are not socialised to be leaders, because we're not are we really? Or certainly we weren't, our sort of generation. Is it different now? I don't know that it is particularly.* (Isobel)

In a comparable manner, while Ivy recognized that she had achieved much in her career, and felt a corresponding self-confidence as a result of her attainments, her self-confidence was at times tenuous when she was working with male colleagues. This was a feeling exacerbated in recent years by a feeling of being discriminated against because she saw men being '*given more gravitas and respect in certain situations'*. She spoke in general terms of the professional and attitudinal differences between men and women whereby women would blame themselves if they perceived they failed and then look to see how they could improve themselves. Men, on the other hand, would blame external factors, such as other people or the situation, for their failures. Ivy describes how her confidence shrank when in a meeting with men present:

> *I don't profess to have any insight into other women, but I think it seems to be one of the big barriers to anyone, but probably particularly women, is the confidence levels that they have, particularly in mixed environments. And I still feel that. I still feel if I am in a mixed environment which is predominantly men, I still feel slightly less confident than perhaps another male colleague, even after all these years of experience, it's quite strange. And I think that must possibly be the case for other women.* (Ivy)

An investigation into the experiences of male senior leaders was not included as part of this research thesis, so it is not possible to verify these putative feelings of confidence in the participants' male colleagues. Notwithstanding this, such perceptions are not culture free and I suggest that a self-assured male archetype is in place here. In one way or another, Dorothy, Isobel and Ivy experienced a feeling of being an *'organizational other'* as discussed by Morley (2013 p.124). Additionally Cole's (2000) female research participants reported similar experiences of men

dominating meetings. Sinclair (2007) stresses the importance of supporting women leaders to understand the way in which their leadership attributes are characterized:

> It is also necessary to assist them to see gendered workplace norms where it is often attributed to hard work, while men's is attributed to ability. (p.66)

This depiction of women and men is reinforced by the early male dominated leadership theories, which in turn are implicated in Woodward's (2004) gendered identities.

<u>Professional role models</u>

A number of leadership theorists (Busher 2005; Smith 2007; Sinclair 2010) consider the place of role models in the development of leaders. Their place can be seen in two ways; firstly, in a veiled way, whereby the person may admire another and therefore emulate their behaviour, values and attitudes. Secondly, in an overt way by means of coaching and mentoring undertaken by someone acknowledged to be an exemplar of the role. Bolden (2015) believes that the *'most productive influence'* on leadership development comes from others rather than skill development. Evidence of this, in both these aspects of role models, can be drawn from the participants' narratives, of both positive and negative experiences, from their line managers, colleagues and teams within their organizations. For example, Dorothy thought her leadership approach had benefited greatly from her opportunity to learn from others; in the main from line managers:

> *I've been fortunate in having some really good line managers. But also I think you can learn something from most people, even if it's how you don't want to do something isn't it, you can sort of opt and learn. So I did try to pick things up from my environment, from people around me.* (Dorothy)

Eloise was able to identify effective and ineffective aspects of leadership practice within her work:

> *I've worked for managers, some have been good, some I've really enjoyed working for, some I haven't, some I've perhaps not enjoyed working for but I've learnt a lot from them - perhaps how I wouldn't want to do things.* (Eloise)

However, Elizabeth did not find any positive role models within her organizations; nevertheless she was still able to learn from them:

> *I don't think I had anybody that I would have considered to be the role model I wanted to be from my organizations, so I learnt by other's mistakes. There were good things about them but they were not what I thought excellence in leadership and management was about. … I really learnt from them what I didn't want to do, rather than what I wanted to do. I think I learnt from people not in my organization as leaders probably, in various ways.* (Elizabeth)

as well as learning from those outside her organization.

Values, skills and knowledge that were considered important to their professional practice were gained from these role models; for example, in a positive way:

> *but a lot of it's also working for good people who taught me and took the time to teach me, you know, in a development way, so I've always been very fortunate to have good managers. ...when I first started teaching I had a lovely manager… When I went to* [name omitted] *College I had a superb manager … slightly protectionist but still a developer, you know, spotted talent, stuck her neck out to give me that job, and that was really important. … I was fortunate to work for someone who had a real passion about education, and taught me a lot about teacher training.* (Ivy)

> *I've also had the benefit of working with very good role models …* (Iris)

And also in a negative way:

> *But he* [the Principal] *never went out and said anything to the staff. And I just think now, that was so strange. And then the next one who I won't mention, went out, but if he spoke….he'd do several sort of road shows and say different things to different staff, and I'd be going behind him saying "no, no" making sure that the messages were … consistent.* (Elizabeth)

Learning from these role models helped shape participants' professional practice and identity as both educators and as leaders. In addition, the wisdom gained from others helped them move from reflection to action. For example, in the case of Dorothy when she was unhappy in her workplace, feeling that her values and those of the organizations were at variance, she left - refusing, in this case, to compromise as Garrety (2007) observes many staff in FE do.   On the other hand, Eloise did decide to compromise by accepting a role in which she could effect positive change for her college and was thus prepared to experience the 'discomfort' of competing identities (Garrety 2007). As well as role models, and in line with their stated love of learning, the narratives reveal a willingness to seek formal professional advice and guidance once they were in leadership roles. Examples of this include Isobel, Iris and Dorothy who took part in leadership development programmes and Elizabeth

and Ivy who joined leaders' networks and who also had one-to-one professional coaching. The mentoring and coaching of women leaders in FE is an area which the literature does not seem to have addressed at the present time. The closest consideration to this is Durbin's (2011) research into the opportunities for women of knowledge formation and sharing via membership of formal and informal networks. Her findings showed that '*a key focus'* for senior women to join a formal network was '*the acquisition of knowledge and the sharing of experiences'* (p.94).

In their turn, the participants were keen to nurture confidence in, and understanding of, key aspects of taking responsibility, and being accountable, for their own actions in distributive leadership roles. All alluded to this; Iris, Daphne and Isobel turned around their teams so that they were more self-directed and Dorothy, Eloise and Ivy offered direct support to staff in terms of coaching and mentoring.

Teacher v leader identity

The narratives confirm that all the women had taught in FE and, with this background in education practice and then becoming leaders, they do not necessarily conform to the New Public Management model discussed and critiqued by Stoten (2011), which includes generalist leaders who are able to lead any organization irrespective of their subject specialism. Whilst my participants are flourishing as leaders, three shared a seeming diffidence about their teaching role, as expressed:

> *but your aspiration was to, if you taught something you didn't like was to get as little teaching as possible. And I taught something I didn't particularly like and enjoy, so I took on all sorts of responsibilities in order to minimise my teaching.* (Ivy)

> *When I came into management I stopped teaching about 5 years ago now, I wasn't sorry, I don't miss teaching at all.* (Iris)

> *I enjoyed the teaching and I enjoyed the contact with the learners but I never felt that I was hugely confident with it. I think you need to be quite a confident person to stand in front of large groups. And whilst I was reasonable, I wouldn't say I was an outstanding teacher.* (Eloise)

It is doubtful whether they would have been promoted if they were not highly competent lecturers. However, they were not unhappy to give up the teaching, recognizing that their strengths lay in other areas. Only one, Dorothy, seemed to miss her teaching and although she had tried hard to maintain at least one session a

week, had accepted that it was not feasible to maintain a teaching role alongside her senior leadership role:

> *In education, the difficulty I think is that I love teaching and I think that's often a barrier for lots of people, because if you move into management then you end up not teaching. … When I was at* [College name] *I still taught for an hour a week, although I don't think my manager was most impressed with that, but I still managed….and that was quite important to me. … But that's been one of the difficulties.* (Dorothy)

Dorothy was able to redirect her love of teaching, and the corresponding job satisfaction that she gained from it, through her leadership role.

This provides a stark example of how one, by necessity, has to move away from those you value most, that is, the learners, in order to progress within an institution. Coffield (2008) makes a strong case for senior staff in FE to teach, outlining:

> If SMTs want, however, to exemplify in their own behaviour how important they believe T & L [teaching and learning] to be, then they themselves should teach. Nothing is more likely to convince staff and learners of the centrality of T & L than seeing principals and deputy principals struggling, as we all do, with the demanding job of re-engaging in learning young people and adults with a history of educational failure. (p.18)

He further points out that senior leaders are primarily educational leaders rather than business leaders. However, I believe that a combination of both aspects is needed rather than a dichotomy between, or sequencing of, educational leader and business leader.

Busher (2005) and Smith (2007) accentuate the importance and tenaciousness of teacherly values for teaching staff and Dorothy's experience and attitude mirror this. However, her narrative shows that she had a reluctance to call herself a leader and she placed herself very firmly within her team, reinforcing the fact that she had not moved too far away from the learners. As she explained:

> *I don't really see myself as a senior leader in education, which is interesting isn't it? I just, you know, am a part of a team and whichever team I'm with, whether it's my team, whether it's colleagues, the CMT team, … everybody's got something to offer, everybody's got something different, and it's important that we are all different as well because we all bring different things to the table as a team. … I'm just an ordinary person doing ordinary things and just getting on with things as part of a team.* (Dorothy)

This attitude aligns strongly with the research of Busher 2005 who found that middle leaders *'did not refer to themselves as managers'* (p.148). Whatever their feelings about the change from their teaching role, each narrative refers to how they have drawn upon their academic discipline and expertise to develop their leader identity. To illustrate this: Elizabeth's, Dorothy's and Eloise's ability to deconstruct problems into more manageable parts, Iris's self-reliance from her involvement in dangerous sports and Isobel's understanding of effective communication. Even where the teaching was not particularly enjoyed there were positive outcomes. For example, with Ivy who looked outside her teaching commitment to take on '*all sorts of responsibilities'* which included becoming a trades union activist and helped her develop different perspectives and '*shift the skill around'*.

Ivy was able to resolve the potential discord of Sinclair's (2010) 'constraining ideologies', in this case, that between the roles of manager and trades unionist, by identifying how the same skill set might be deployed for different purposes.

Concluding Thoughts for Theme 2

The evidence from my thematic analysis demonstrates the robustness of identity of the participants as they were able to communicate clearly their reflections on selected facets of their lives whilst making it clear how important moral values (that is, their integrity) underpinned their the way in which they lived their lives. These principles for living informed their leadership styles which were predominantly pragmatic and transformational, underpinned by a strong social justice understanding. Their moral values were modelled by their families and further reinforced by role models they encountered in their careers. Their practice of reflection, encouraged by mentors and coaches, further strengthened their confidence in doing the right thing.

What is not clear from my analyses is the extent to which identity supports a behavioural understanding of leadership; that is, flexing leadership behaviours according to what is needed in varying situations. What is clear, however, is that they are able to adapt in challenging circumstances, as demonstrated by the way participants responded to difficulties and disappointments in their careers. In addition, all participants were generalists, that is, none was a head of an academic

department. The various cross college roles they undertook in their journey to a leader role gave them a broader picture of the organization and the sector and thus they were better positioned to be aware of opportunities.

Closing Observations

In this chapter I have drawn upon the narratives of my participants and identified two main themes. The first theme, of a 'mosaic of leadership theories' identifies the main leadership theories with which participants' experiences resonate. Key amongst these is that of social justice leadership which seems entirely appropriate as FE represents a social justice model, expressed by one of my research participants thus:

> *Which is what FE is about I think, that people suddenly find there's a world of learning there that they can do well in, that they succeed, and suddenly there's a whole new life*. (Daphne)

In order to effect social justice, participants deployed a number of other leadership behaviours such as developing and sharing a strong vision of the direction of the colleges. To support the realization of their vision they used their practical skills of organization, communication, teambuilding and deconstruction of problems whilst working within ever increasing funding restraints. At times, they showed authoritative and directive behaviours in order to achieve targets. They thus showed a certain agility and resilience in their leadership style whilst also reflecting what leadership theory considers to be gendered leadership practices.

The second theme is focused on the issue of identity and 'the iterative nature of the personal and the professional'. Gleeson and James (2007) reflect upon the impact of the shifting sands of FE upon professional identity and affirm that their research suggests:

> that professional knowledge and practice in FE is not fixed but situated in a recurring set of unstable conditions. From this perspective it is the ambiguities and tensions, the disruption and contradictions of lived professional experience, that create a multiplicity of identities and responses to external pressures. (p.459)

The sub-themes discussed show how the development of participant identities, from the personal to the professional, have enabled the participants to cope with the demands of the external environment. All have developed a resilience derived either

from their working class experiences and/or role models in dealing with change such as redundancy, restructuring and culture change.

TA alone is not adequate to show the interrelatedness of the participant stories and in the following chapter I show how, in Kuntz's (2010) words '*participant voices joined together to create new meaning and insight'* (p.426). From this, I draw implications for professional policy and practice.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Opening Comments

The process of reflection is seen to be crucial by a number of theorists. For example, Bush (2010) stresses the importance and usefulness of reflexivity in leadership research, to demystify the theory and to aid practical application; Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) promote a process of reflection to 'surface' important issues. Following their counsel, this chapter focuses on my reflections on the process and outcomes of my research. The purpose of this chapter is to draw together, and comment upon, the key strands of this thesis. In doing so, I will be discussing the extent to which I have addressed the research questions, critiquing the suitability of the research methodology and design and making recommendations for future policy, practice and research. In doing so, I will be 'surfacing' my 'claim to knowledge' whilst respecting the caveat, endorsed by Silverman (2000), Polkinghorne (2007) and Lichtman (2014), of the legitimacy of such a claim.

Research Question 1: To what extent do the experiences of senior women leaders in FE reflect gendered leadership theory?

The myth of gendered leadership?

This was my main research question, drawn from my desire to explore prevailing western leadership theories, examine the extent to which they applied to women leaders in FE in the UK and, in doing so, stimulate a discourse on the nature of female leadership in this particular educational sector.

My examination of leadership theories revealed them, as previously suspected from my own learning of, and teaching about, leadership, to be male-dominated in terms of theorists and focus. Thus key earlier theories were posited by male researchers, from Aristotle (no date) to Boyatzis (1982) with the focus on a heroic great man or country club man. Such a gendered view was due to the culture of the first half of the twentieth century where women were not recognized as leaders (Jogulu and Wood 2006) and, indeed, opportunities for them to take up such roles were limited. Early theories seem to endure, despite critical evaluations which generated new ideas about leadership, resulting in a web of connected and re-worked ideas about the nature and practice of leaders (Chell 1993; Hay and Hodgkinson 2006; Hartley

2009; Gill 2011). With the concentration on men, and the concomitant ignoring of women, the theories have inevitably been understood by many to relate to men only which has given rise to a lexicon, and, I suggest, a myth, of separate male and female characteristics of leaders. For example, trait theory suggests that men are characterized by confidence, logic and integrity (Boyatzis 1982; Robbins 1993) while attributes of women focus on caring and listening (Evans 2010).

The purpose of my research was not to compare and contrast male and female leadership experiences in FE and so there is no data to draw upon with regard to men leaders. However, my findings show that there is not a strong dissonance between early leadership discourse (focused on men) and the experiences of my sample leaders. Just because women were excluded does not necessarily mean that the early theories do not apply to them. As an illustration, Elizabeth, Daphne and Dorothy demonstrated a logical approach to problem solving and, despite some self-disclaimers to the contrary, all showed tremendous confidence in taking on senior, often challenging, roles. Similarly, later leadership theories, which certainly had their roots in the early theories, have been shown to be pertinent to my sample. For instance, all of my participants had a vision of what they wanted to achieve with and within their organizations, congruent with the theory on charismatic and transformational leadership (Clegg *et al* 2011; Gill 2011).

The key difference that my research demonstrates is not that women leaders cannot be resolute, make tough decisions, be focused on a goal or be charismatic; rather, it is that they perceive themselves as having to work harder, and to be less confident, than men. This is exemplified in the cases of Dorothy, Isobel and Ivy. 'Imposter syndrome', by which I mean feelings of career or role insecurity (Avelis 2013), is a little researched area and yet seems to accurately reflect the experiences of some of my sample women. However, despite these articulated feelings of diffidence when working with some male colleagues, the women were not deterred from continuing in their leadership roles. Thus I suggest that there may be a mythology around male and female leadership styles, that they may not, in fact, be gendered. Sinclair (2007) put forward this view and cautions against such a gendered approach:

> The view that women bring a different teaching or leadership style is also risky because it plays into stereotypes of women as nurturers, better suited to the subordination of their own power. (p.50)

This resonates with Heilman's (2012) alert to avoid *'prescriptive gender stereotyping'* (p.114) and urging to judge how people are rather than how we expect them to be. One of the key points arising from this research question is not that male dominated theories of leadership could be said to apply to women's leadership behaviour, rather it is an assumption that they only apply to men and so women feel excluded and therefore do not consider themselves as leadership material. The theories do not take into account a person's journey to leadership.

Research Question 2: What leadership theory predominates?

The place of social justice - an underpinning morality but not the whole story?

McKenzie *et al* (2008) and Furman (2012) explain how social justice leadership espouses a set of values and encourages certain types of behaviour and my findings demonstrate how many of these aspects are analogous with the leadership of senior women in FE. All the participants were clear about the focus of their work and their values which underpinned this focus. This can be seen most clearly by my research sample who revealed their focus and values through their affirmations and reported actions. This unanimity of principle, namely the importance of the learner and their learning opportunities to develop, shows a congruence between the values of women leaders and the purpose of the FE sector as a '*vehicle for local, economic and social regeneration'* (Stoten 2011 p.155) which additionally, as Jephcote *et al* (2008 p.164) suggest, encourages '*social cohesion and social justice*'. Social justice leadership is an approach which is endorsed by leading educational writers, for example Ball (1997), and which, for me, ratifies unassailable principles about the purpose of education in general, and FE in particular. Notwithstanding this, and given that social justice predominated but did not exclude other facets of leadership, and given that I have a difficulty with the term (apart from the instability of the grammar) I believe that it would be more appropriate to call it leadership *for* social justice. I submit that such a renaming allows for a reformulation and a recalibration of understanding about leadership theory; that is, 'leadership *for* social justice' emphasizes the purpose of educational leadership (that is, the 'what' of leadership) as well as embracing its realization (that is, the 'how' of leadership). The 'how' of

leadership allows for the incorporation of other leadership theories to understand, and thus articulate, the experiences and practices of leaders.

Thus my research findings show a mosaic of leadership theories which reflect the experiences of senior women leaders in FE. Whilst the mosaic is not identical for each leader, there is sufficient commonality of experience to piece slightly different pieces together to create a recognizable leadership *for* social justice pattern. This also suggests an adaptive approach to leadership, whether conscious or not, which draws upon a range of behaviours according to the situation and/or the needs of and at the time. This model validates, and at the same time challenges, the legitimacy of various leadership theories whilst '*embracing the complexity'* of leadership theories as advocated by Bolden (2015). In addition, such a model contributes to the debate on whether leaders are 'born' or 'made' (Chell 1993; Rowley 1997; Clegg *et al* 2011; Daft 2012) in that it accounts for embedded principles or values. As an illustration: Eloise's belief in '*lifelong learning'* (Eloise) and Daphne's realization that she could make a difference to young people's lives, which underpin and inform all their leadership activities. These values chime with the leaders' identities, which will be considered in more detail in the next section.

My research revealed an unexpected social justice perspective on organizational restructuring – offering a new understanding as to how new structures might offer an opportunity to rebalance organizational imbalances by reallocating resources more fairly (McCabe and McCarthy 2005; Theoharis 2007; McKenzie *et al* 2008). At the same time, restructuring was also seen by some of my research participants as an opportunity to restructure, out of the organization, those members of staff with dissonant views.

Research Question 3: How does identity inform leadership style?

A legacy

Consideration of identity issues in relation to my research participants was only apparent after the initial analysis of the pilot interview. On reflection, it now seems to be an obvious area for research. My findings show that the influence of the participants' families, especially their parents', view of the importance of education was critical in developing their identity as educationalists. This concurs with the

findings of writers such as Busher (2005), Smith (2007) and Sinclair (2010), on the importance of family for identity formulation. However, my participants' sense of themselves as leaders was also drawn from colleagues as role models and then supported and developed by mentors and coaches - *'the most productive influence'* claimed by Bolden (2015). All had taught at some stage of their career. This, combined with their own experiences of management and leadership training and development, led to recognizable aspects of pragmatic, transformational and social justice leadership. The findings also show that the participants were keen to coach and mentor others in their turn which would perpetuate their values and behaviours for leadership *for* social justice - a form of legacy. Elements of distributed leadership were perceived; however, I believe that full realization of distributed leadership may not be possible for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, due to the varied hierarchical positions of the distributed leaders, where role responsibility and accountability are unequal, that is, as Busher (2005) describes it, where '*asymmetrical power relationships'* (p.149) exist. Secondly, although there may be a core, shared value of a focus on the learner, other, discrete values and distinct identities will be evident amongst the defined distributed leaders; such disconnections will lead to distinct choices and mixed responses to external influences.

Review of Research Methodology and Design: Truth and Influences

My research approach has of necessity been one of an interpretivist as, while it may be possible, and indeed comforting, to imagine that there are unessayable truths and models which exist, the very act of recognizing them and interpreting them on an individual basis means that any seeming integrity has been compromised. That is, any discourse about them will be through the lens of different people who bring different perspectives to their sharing of knowledge about the veracity of the model.

Theoharis (2007) acknowledges the theories which have influenced his research and in a similar way, whilst I am confident that an interpretivist framework most accurately represents my ontological and epistemological beliefs, as argued in Chapter 3, I am aware that I, too, have been influenced by other ideas, for example Nash's (2004) advocacy of constructivism. So, whilst not a purist interpretivist approach, it is possibly another mosaic of viewpoints about how we understand the world and acquire knowledge. The two significant ideas which surfaced during the

course of this research are that of post-modernism and grounded theory. The former because of my understanding that nothing can exist *per se*, existence is only apparent in relation to other phenomena, as Stanley (1992) identifies *'everything is referential'* (p.15). The latter because of the necessarily reiterative nature of this qualitative study, for example, the pilot interview established a strong sense of identity developed from family and role model influences. However, it was only through analysis of the subsequent interviews that the commonality of this particular theme of identity was recognized and thus further explored in the second interviews.

In terms of the 'what and how' of this research project, Giddens' (1991) analysis of feelings, which can be *'both robust and fragile'* (p.55) about ontological security offer a helpful framework. As he explains:

> Fragile, because the biography the individual reflexively holds in mind is only one 'story' among many other potential stories that could be told …; robust, because a sense of self identity is often securely enough held to weather major tensions or transitions in the social environments within which the person moves. (p.55)

I was aware throughout this research of the potential for 'fragility' which to me formed an initial barrier to my work. This was especially felt at two key stages in my research. Firstly, during the semi-structured interviews with women I either knew well or knew of, I was grateful for their time and sharing and was aware of the ethical hazard of *'doing rapport'*, as warned by Duncombe and Jessop (2002). However, once the interviews started I felt comfortable in a professional role, drawing upon my previous managerial and leadership capabilities as well as my researcher experience, which reflects the duality of my role as an 'insider' and 'outsider' (Clough 2002; Sikes and Potts 2008). Such a role can be problematic; I believe that it was helpful in quickly establishing trust and empathy between me and my participants which encouraged open and authentic accounts of their experiences. The second point at which 'fragility' was evident, and due, I believe, to my insider role, was during my subsequent analysis and re-presentation of the stories of my participants; at times this seemed a barrier in my attempt to re-present as accurately as possible. I did have a concern that I could have made more of an effort to attain a degree of 'respondent validation', as explained by Yardley (2008), and I recognize that I was constrained in this by my own reluctance to exploit my relationship with my

participants by asking for more of their time. However, my confidence in my ability to carry out this task was reinforced by the trust in me that my participants had shown and their willingness to take part in the research. This confidence was boosted by the keenness of the three participants who took part in second interviews, which gave me the opportunity to verbally confirm with them the key points from the earlier interview. My confidence was further endorsed by the premise of Sturrock (1993) and Denzin (2014) that, in effect, the interpretation and understanding of narrative research is a shared responsibility between the researcher and the reader. That is, not only am I taking an interpretivist view of my research but I am also encouraging my readers to take a similar approach; as Labov (1982) observes:

> The complexity of the many-layered relationship between reality and reported reality cannot be overestimated. (p.220)

However, I certainly experienced a tension between my methodological approach and the ethics of my research.

Recommendations: Policy and Practice

The main purpose of my research was to give a 'voice' to women working in senior leadership positions in FE for their experiences of the path to such roles and their leadership styles. This research is justified on the basis that firstly, this is an under-researched area and secondly, whilst women predominate in middle management in FE (61%), they are still in a minority, 41%, at a senior level (Women's Leadership Network 2013). My research study draws upon the narratives of seven women who are senior leaders in FE and, with this small sample, is intended to be illustrative of their experiences only, rather than proposing generalizable theories. However, I believe that my findings show a sufficient congruence of leadership style and identity with ample commonalities of experience so as to confidently (re)conceptualize ideas of senior women leaders' praxis and thus suggest ways of developing understanding and engagement.

Sikes and Gale (2006) in their discussion of NA, conclude that:

> In terms of their substantive content, storylines can provide people with templates or scripts for shaping or making sense of their lives in that they show how others have dealt with particular events, problems and experiences. (p.29)

The 'thick descriptions' identified by Geertz (1973) and built upon by Geiger and Schreyögg (2012) resonate with the contextualized commonalities across the stories of my participants. These are sufficient to model how others might learn from their experiences and to provide opportunities to learn a range of possible behaviours, based on the experiences of others.

<u>Policy: encouragement of more women into FE senior roles through mentors and networks</u>

A recommendation to increase the number of women in senior roles could appear to be predicated on an assumption that this is, *per se*, a desirable state of affairs. My research did not explore the desirability or otherwise of this. From my own experiences of managing teams, I have observed that women with supervisory or middle management roles deliberately choose not to seek further promotions. Their choices have most often been influenced by perceptions of the overwhelming demands on the time of a leader. The consequences of high workloads, as experienced by my participants, are discussed in my narrative analysis. Additionally, Smith (2012) found that her sample of women working in schools felt that leadership culture was in conflict with their values and they were not prepared to compromise on their values. Informed decisions to retain a career *status quo* I absolutely respect. My concern is twofold. Firstly to broaden the opportunities for women to think about themselves as potential leaders; secondly to develop a legitimacy about the way women come into leadership positions. Role models have been demonstrated to be important as exemplars of good leadership practice but these will not necessarily be women for two reasons. Firstly, there is a dearth of them at the moment which therefore presents a vicious circle. Secondly, my research shows that my participants valued male role models as well as female ones; the benefit of a mentor lay in their qualities rather than their gender. Given these caveats, formal or informal, introduction or continuation of, mentoring by senior women leaders - as demonstrated by the research participants - is seen to be beneficial to inspire and embolden women to seek senior roles when they might feel diffident about themselves in such a role.

However, my findings show that, as well as none of them considering or planning that they might be a senior leader when first starting work in FE, the research

participants came into leadership positions in one of two ways. They either experienced a setback (such as being passed over for promotion or a conflict over values which compelled them to move to another college), or a leadership opportunity arose and they thought (or were encouraged by others) to apply. Their paths to leadership positions were incremental and opportunistic, and it may be that this reflects a different route and mind set from men. Recognition of the value of, and support for, culturally perceived atypical paths to leadership necessitates different kinds of approaches; ones which celebrate types of behaviour rather than seeing them as weaknesses. An example of this would be the hard work and attention to detail evident in Dorothy's narrative. Encouragement to participate in, and help perpetuate, women's leadership networks would be a valuable activity (Durbin 2011). Such networks provide a chance to account for and capture the learning from other women's experiences - for example, by discussing how disappointments were turned into opportunities and by demonstrating the merits of being prepared to take chances. Again, I believe that such networks offer a legitimacy to women's approach to leadership and a way to reduce instances of imposter syndrome in a way that leadership programmes might not. In addition, networks signal that a professional sector recognizes the capabilities of women. However, Holloway (1997) writes of her experiences of feeling excluded from certain women only networks suggesting that:

> women … often operate unconscious gatekeeping processes which keep out women who 'are not like them'. Networks operate that I, and others, do not have easy access to. (p.198)

Networks would need to be inclusive and open.

Professional practice: leadership for social justice and organizational structure

In relation to the implications of my research for professional practice, my findings show that the shared, and main, focus of the participants was on leadership *for* social justice. This was an aspect that emerged from the narratives, unlike Theoharis' (2007) participants who self-identified as social justice leaders. In whatever way the concept of social justice is recognized, I judge it to be an important element of professional practice for two vital reasons. In the first instance, at a micro level, to encourage and assess the extent to which educational leaders know and

ensure that teachers have the *'skills and strategies … to become socially just in their practices'* (McKenzie *et al* 2008 p.25).

In the second instance, to ensure, on a macro level, that there is recognition of the importance of getting the organizational structure 'right' and thus optimized for effective social justice; rationalized thus:

> The purpose for being deliberate about organizational structure and for creating proactive systems of support and attention is to significantly diminish the vulnerability of teachers and students for failure. (McKenzie *et al* 2008 p.126)

McCabe and McCarthy (2005) go further in urging educational leaders to be creative in their restructuring:

> to think very differently about organizational structures and leadership roles. Instead of continuing with incremental reforms that simply add more layers to existing structures it is imperative to reconstruct roles and relationships … around a vibrant core purpose focused on social justice and directed at improving student learning. (p.215)

Such structures, whether flatter, rounder or more of a hetarchy than prevalent hierarchical ones, need to show the learner at the heart of all organizational activities supported by an equitable distribution of available resources. Restructuring in such a way is not necessarily straightforward or a panacea for inequities. For example, Leathwood (2000) warns of the danger of insidious management practices persisting despite restructures. Additionally, there is a risk that, by flattening structures, opportunities for women to take on middle management roles are curtailed. However, establishing an understanding of social justice issues can lead to action to challenge the *status quo* in order to improve the learning experience for students.

Recommendations: Further Research

Areas for further research have been identified during the course of the research, either where problems have been revealed with the research design or from reflecting on the process and findings. There is a danger that this is a 'wish list' of activities I wish I had undertaken. To, in part, obviate this danger, I briefly consider the reasons for the proposed research and what form such research should take.

Recommendation for further research drawn from my research design

I have not looked at the effectiveness or consistency of my participants' leadership, just their success in reaching such positions. My sample frame could have included not only the criterion of senior women leaders in FE, but also that of how their leadership has been rated in recent OFSTED inspections. To offer more insight, and to firm up validity, my research data could have been supplemented by observing/shadowing my participants twice a year over two years to note their leadership behaviours in changing educational landscapes. Such an approach would indicate any correlation between their leadership style and an external assessment of their style in relation to their organization. This could result in proposals for how leadership style could be adapted according to particular circumstances.

Recommendations for further research drawn from my reflections on my research process and findings

Path to leadership My focus has been on women who are already in senior leadership positions. As a result of this research, I believe that it would be useful to understand more about a woman's journey to a leadership role. Working with women middle managers in FE, the Bourdieuian concepts of 'habitus' and 'field' could provide a frame for analysis. Vocational habitus accounts for the wider internal and external context of the person and is described by Colley *et al* (2003) as:

> a set of dispositions derived from both idealised and realised identities, and informed by the notions and guiding ideologies of the vocational culture. (p.493)

This would help in understanding aspirations in their roles and give insights to actual and potential leadership behaviours. My participants' leadership skills were developed as they travelled through the middle management tiers of their organizations. For example, resilience was a noticeable feature of my participants, demonstrated in the way they dealt with disappointments and failures they experienced as their careers developed. Habitus is acquired through a conflation of experiences and this opens up the possibility of examining how the political and cultural aspects of managers and the organizations within which they work impact upon one another. Any behaviours or actions occur within what Bourdieu (1998) termed a 'field' - a structured social space which he describes as:

a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure. (p.32)

This implies that there is an inherent, possibly changing, inequality in such social structures which gives them a certain volatility. Bourdieu suggests that an individual's position in the 'field' is determined by the power accorded to capital which can be cultural, economic, social or symbolic (Lingard *et al* 2005). This might commonly be termed a 'power struggle' with dominance acceded to those recognized as having the most capital *de jour*. As well as academic and intellectual properties, cultural capital could include ascribed gender characteristics. Consideration of field and capital in Bourdieuian terms could be used in analysing the complexities of management and leadership and could be helpful in disaggregating their meanings and practice.

The place of leadership theory In my research I have foregrounded leadership theory and given a consideration to the context. As a result of using this approach, I now feel that, given that we live in a rapidly changing, globally challenging, environment, research with a focus on the context within which women lead would give a deeper understanding of the experiences of women leaders. In addition, an exploration of the way women experience leadership, without reference to any leadership theory would offer a purer post-modernist methodological approach. The outcome of this type of research would contribute to an understanding of why there are still, disproportionately, fewer women leaders, despite more women going to university, more women achieving, more women in middle management and more women in government shadow/cabinet positions. The criticality of the bearing of context would need to be observed, as noted by Sinclair (2007):

> To enable such [potential leaders] women to move forward, it is necessary to support them to unpack the origins of their dutifulness and their historic patterns of succeeding. Deconstructing their own socialisation in this supported and contained way allows them to question assumptions and stereotypes about leadership, and helps them to find new ways to validate their own strengths and capacities for leadership … can only be explained fully when it is seen as part of a social and cultural context. (p.66)

<u>The influence of a working-class background</u> Five of my seven participants stated that they were from a working-class background. This was noted during the interviews but not directly explored further. Indirectly, information about their backgrounds and their families was drawn upon to explore issues of identity. An exploration of the intersections of class, gender and leadership would be challenging. Reay (1997) describes how her research looked at:

> the ways in which the influences of the past and the present are interwoven but also the myriad ways in which they clash and collide. (p.18)

and there would be potential for collisions between these three aspects of class, gender and leadership. However, such research would present an opportunity to explore the extent to which FE leaders reflect the demographic of their students. In addition, it could show the correlations between class and gender and senior leadership roles. I believe that examining and understanding women's experiences of class and leadership will contribute to disassembling the invisible barriers that class and gender pose to women's progress. Additionally, such research, in giving recognition to the key issues would challenge imposter syndrome and help increase women's confidence in themselves thus diluting their possible *'hidden injuries of class'* (Morley 1997 p.114).

Final Observations

At the start of my research I now realize that I had an unconscious hypothesis that male dominance in the development and focus of leadership theory, which did not recognize women leaders, must therefore have resulted in theory not reflecting women leadership styles. This implies that there was a unique way of women leading, that is a view of gendered leadership. This may, of course, only have been my perspective as I am a woman. However, it is hard to avoid a conclusion that leadership theory has a key purpose of establishing and maintaining a certain *status quo* dominated by culturally based male perspectives and practices. One of the reasons why there are not more women in positions of leadership is due to family circumstances and demands - this is well researched elsewhere. However, my research shows that whilst my participants were all strong confident women, their confidence wavered when working with men. I believe that their own perspectives on, and comparison with, the leadership behaviours of men undermine women's

confidence and this is what is reinforced by gendered leadership theory. Sinclair (2007 p.32) concludes from her reflections on a range of descriptions and critiques of leadership theories how enduring the *'mainstream'* theories are and that *'We seem unable to unshackle ourselves from conventional and seductive accounts of leadership'*, asking *'how can we understand the tenacity of these leadership views?'* Her view is that there is a reluctance to truly challenge basic assumptions about the *'power and privilege'* accorded to leaders and if this is the case no matter the extent to which earlier leadership theories are critiqued and new theories proposed, the norm prevails.

There is a danger that I look back on my time in FE with nostalgia and rose-tinted spectacles and there is no doubt that the changing demands of economics and politics are reflected in the changing nature and profile of FE. This has resulted in an increase in New Public Management and managerialism approaches with a focus on targets and efficiency. However, there are now far more opportunities for women to become middle managers, although numbers of senior women leaders are low. My research shows that women leaders are meeting the demands of the managerialism agenda and are bringing very real pragmatic skills along with firm vision to their roles whilst keeping a strong grip on social justice principles. None, however, is immune to the pitfalls and time demands of such roles.

A key concern I have is that, although it is possible to articulate **what** makes a senior leader in FE, there is not necessarily the corollary to indicate **how** to create a leader (if this is even possible). Given that my research shows that senior leadership roles for women are gained incrementally as a series of opportunities and chances taken, there are then significant implications for training, coaching and mentoring programmes designed to increase the number of women in senior roles. A more radical approach would be the introduction of quotas for senior women. At the start of my research I had a philosophical aversion to the notion of positive discrimination in the form of quotas for women, believing that a liberal approach of taking positive action would be sufficient to improve opportunities for women moving into senior leadership roles. However, since completing my research, I have performed a *volte face* and now believe that quotas are necessary to ensure a fair representation of women in senior roles – revolution rather than evolution!

Despite the relatively unchanging statistics of low numbers of women in leadership roles across the country and professions, recent researchers are providing ripples of optimism that matters may improve due to changes in how the leadership role is viewed and how women in such roles are seen, that is, a *'reconceptualization'* (Heilman 2012 p.130).

My thesis adds to these 'ripples' by making a clear contribution to the academic research areas of business and management and to that of education, specifically FE, in three key areas. Firstly, by demonstrating the prevalence of the myth of male gendered leadership not only in theory but also in practice. This myth has been generated by early male dominated leadership theories and propagated by the managerialist culture within which FE is now expected to operate. Secondly, my research challenges the myth of gendered leadership in terms of existing stereotypical characteristics and behaviour of women leaders and yet reveals the extent to which women leaders are affected, that is, socially conditioned, by the male hegemony within which they work. Thirdly, I believe this study contributes to our understanding of the powerful drive of senior women leaders in FE for leadership for social justice as a fitting, for women and for FE, leadership theory which survives and thrives despite the demands of managerialistic practices.

We live in a world where more men called John than women head FTSE companies (Rankin 2015) and where a majority of women head teachers in my home city makes the national news (Tickle 2015). Yet, despite the widely recognized disparities of women represented in other senior leadership positions, there is optimism because of the recognition that there are issues about women's roles. There is hope; as Sikes and Gale (2006) conclude:

<blockquote>Stories can change the world. (p.37)</blockquote>

Appendices

Appendix i

Initial interview questions [looking back?]

1. How did you get to this point in your career?

2. What have been the challenges?

3. What have been the enablers?

4. How would you capture/describe your leadership style?

5. What are the key challenges in the FE sector?

6. What, if anything, would you like to add?

7. Have you any feedback for me about this interview?

Appendix ii

Second interview questions /areas for investigation [looking forward?]

1. Reflecting back on some of the commonalities from my initial research [social justice, identity], to what extent do these chime with you?

2. What is your understanding of the nature of leadership and the role of a leader?

3. What is happening in the sector at the moment?

4. What sort of leader is needed in the FE sector at the moment?

5. How do you feel that you meet/fulfil this identified 'need'?

6. What actions do you undertake to meet/fulfil this 'need'?

7. What are the consequences for you both professionally and personally of taking certain courses of action?

Appendix iii

Summary of key concepts of Thematic Analysis
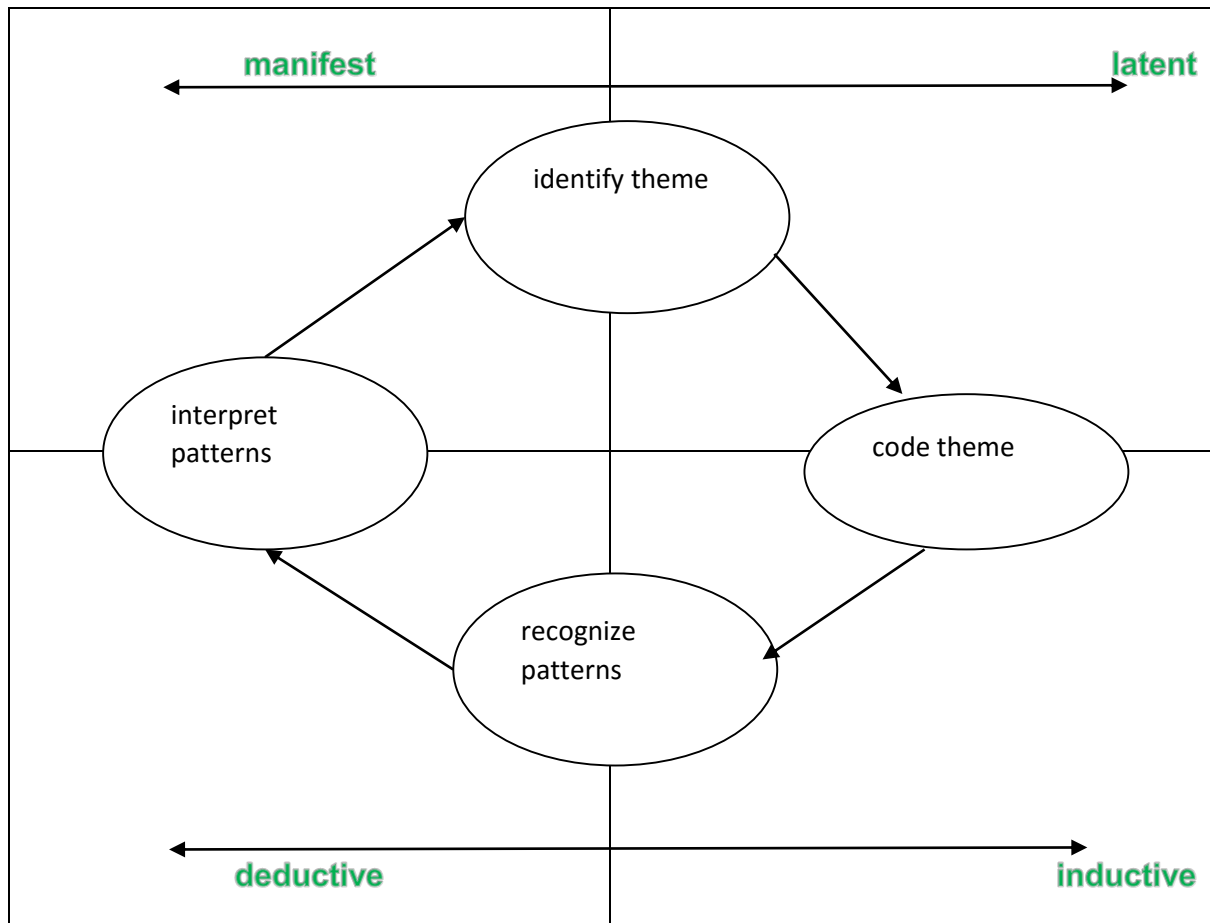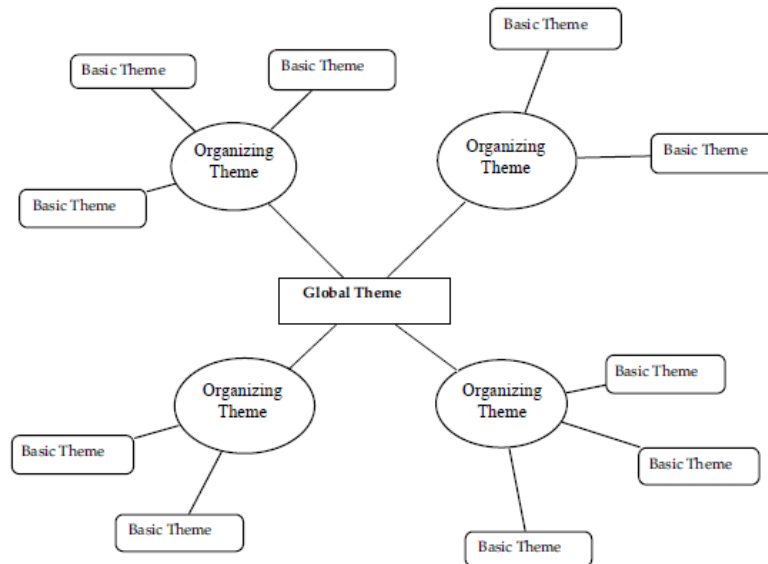
Appendix iv

Thematic Analysis model

FIGURE 1. *Structure of a thematic network.*

from Attride-Stirling (2001 p. 388)

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Appendix v

Consent form

CONFIDENTIAL

Informed consent form for: …………………………………………

This informed consent form is for women who have, or who have had, a senior leadership role in UK colleges of FE; they have been invited to take part in a research project: *Passion, pragmatism and politics: narratives of women leaders in FE*.

The research is being undertaken by Joanne Weston as part of her EdD studies; she can be contacted at: The University of the West of England, ACE, Coldharbour Lane, Frenchay, Bristol BS16 1QY or by email: Joanne.Weston@UWE.ac.uk.

This informed consent form has two parts:

1   an information sheet which gives details about the research
2   a formal consent agreement form which asks for your signature to confirm that you are agreeable to taking part in the research [should you decide to participate].

Part 1: information sheet

The purpose of the research is to explore what can be learned about the changing nature of FE when viewed through the lens of current and past senior women leaders in the leaders. Historical perspectives of FE, leadership theories and current political imperatives will be investigated and synthesized.

Involvement in participating will initially be a one hour face to face interview with Joanne Weston at location convenient to you; this interview will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed – you will be given an opportunity to read through the transcription should you so wish. There will be a follow up interview of approximately one hour either by phone or face to face.

Benefits: there are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research study apart from providing an opportunity to reflect upon your 'journey' to a senior leadership role in education.

Risks: whilst every care will be taken by the researcher to anticipate and minimize risks to you in participating in the study it may be the case that you share personal and/or sensitive and/or confidential information which may cause you some emotional discomfort. If this happens, you do not have to answer any questions, the interview can be stopped and the recording switched off. Although all personal data will be anonymised, there is a risk that, as there a relatively small number of women in your position in the sector, it may be possible to deduce your identity.

Right to withdraw: your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice and without providing a reason. The researcher will regularly seek confirmation from you that you wish to continue to participate. However, once the research is completed and written up it might not be possible to disentangle your contribution.

Confidentiality: any information about you and any information that you share will be kept confidential and known only to the researcher and her supervisory team. Unless you wish otherwise, your name will be anonymized through the use of a pseudonym and your place of work described in general terms and not linked to you. However, because of the scale and nature of the study, your privacy cannot be guaranteed.

Data storage: all gathered data, written and electronic, will be password protected and kept in a locked drawer. Only the researcher and her supervisory team will have access to this. The final write up of the findings will be publicly available.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the University of the West of England's Faculty Research Ethics Committee and the Faculty Research Degrees Committee.

Part 2: informed consent agreement

CONFIDENTIAL

I have been invited to take part in the following research study: Women surviving [but not thriving] in twenty first century FE; life histories of women leaders in FE and:

1   I confirm that I have read the information sheet [Part 1] dated April 2010   for the above study and that I have had to the opportunity to ask   questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to   withdraw consent at any time without giving a reason.

3   I understand that data collected may be looked at by responsible   supervisors from the University of the West of England for the purposes   of monitoring to ensure that the study is being conducted properly.

4   I agree to take part in this research study.

Signature: ……………………………………………………..

Date: …………………………………………………………

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