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**An exploration of  
how newly established secondary school headteachers  
engage with coaching and mentoring  
in their first year in post.**

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## **Abstract**

Mentoring for secondary school headteachers in their first year in post was first proposed as a systematic strategy in the 1980s following research into the first years of headship (Weindling and Earley, 1987). Coaching and mentoring were introduced as part of a response to the concern that new headteachers were not sufficiently prepared before taking up the post. Coaching and mentoring are now incorporated into all National College for School Leadership (NCSL: currently the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services) leadership programmes. However, there is a dearth of current research exploring how secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. Systematic reviews show that previous research has generally focused on improving coaching and mentoring schemes and thus is mainly evaluative.

In contrast, this study focuses on the headteacher perspective. The study works within a social constructivist paradigm, taking a grounded theory approach because of the dearth of available theory. Data were collected from six newly appointed secondary school headteachers. Each was interviewed three times during their first year in post. After transcription each interview was analysed and coded and the results informed subsequent interviews. NVivo was used to manage the data and to develop codes. Preliminary findings were discussed with practising coaches and their comments contribute to the discussion.

The study finds that new headteachers exercise significant agency in their coaching and mentoring engagements, including the choice of coach mentor, and the coach mentoring agenda. It finds that new headteachers seek coaching and mentoring beyond the assumed formal dyadic arrangements. Contributions to knowledge include the Confidence Loop model; three new models of coaching and mentoring; and a deeper questioning of the place the theory and practice of performativity should have in the coach mentoring relationship.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the study**

Mentoring to support newly appointed secondary school headteachers was proposed in the late 1980s (Weindling and Earley, 1987, Daresh, 1986) following exploratory research into the experience of the first year in post. This identified the key challenges as role clarification, expertise, and socialisation. By the late 1990s, coaching was identified within the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) as a key management style for successful headteachers (Watkin, 2000). There is considerable endorsement of coaching as a management and development strategy, and coaching and mentoring in education is now 'an idea with its place in the sun' (CUREE, 2005).

However, there is no current research exploring in depth how secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. This research fills that gap by following six new secondary school headteachers in their first year, seeking to understand how they use coaching and mentoring. I do not imply that coaching and mentoring are the only forces bearing upon the personal and professional development of the headteacher. The literature tends to neglect the way the staff socialises the leader (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006) and so I explore the interaction of three elements in this crucial first phase of headship: the headteacher, the context, and the support and challenge strategies.

## **1.2 Coaching and mentoring**

The mentor is a consistently reported element of the 'hero's journey' (Campbell, 1949) in the modern myth-making surrounding artistic or business success: for example, JS Bach mentored Mozart, and Freddie Laker mentored Richard Branson. The classical myth which serves as a model for modern mentoring is the story of Telemachus, which is frequently interpreted as a situation where a wiser, older, and more experienced person sponsors a rising young leader. However, Greek myths are frequently ambiguous. It is interesting to note that the original



Mentor had the authority of wisdom rather than any formal seniority; and that key advice to Telemachus was sometimes delivered by Athene disguised as Mentor rather than by Mentor himself. Cox *et al.* (2010) suggest that the concept of the coach as instructor derives from nineteenth century university slang for a tutor 'transporting' a student through examinations. Later the term came to refer to those helping athletes improve their performance, and is now used to describe support offered to new junior employees (Whitmore, 2002).

The professional literature and policy documents relating to this kind of support for headteachers and others in schools consistently use the phrase 'coaching and mentoring' as an undifferentiated portmanteau term. Indeed, CUREE (2005) takes an analytical approach, drawing attention to common skills within three strategies: mentoring, specialist coaching, and collaborative co-coaching.

In line with these interpretations I used a simple and broad definition of coaching and mentoring: 'a sustained, one-to-one process in which (the headteacher's) particular and individual experience (is) the basis of the agenda' (Bolam *et al.*, 1995; Havelock, 1973). I used both words in discussions with headteachers, accepting their individual preference for terminology, examining the meaning they assigned to their choice. This definition was consistent with a grounded theory approach which foregrounds the data as the source of concept and theory. The definition was also consistent with the research question which prioritised the headteacher as agent in the coach mentoring relationship.

Although key public bodies support coaching and mentoring as an important contributory component of school improvement, they conceptualise it in a range of conflicting ways. The General Teaching Council proposes a professional development model based on 'sustained access to coaching and mentoring, for getting support with knowledge and/or skills' (GTC, 2007, p. 6). In contrast, the Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, n.d.) include the expectation that teachers will 'act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring' (p. 8). This conceptualises the teacher as a recipient required to

change, rather than as an active participant in the process of coaching and mentoring.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) places 'coaching and mentoring' along with continuous professional development (CPD) as part of a 'logical chain' within the standards agenda, and sees it as usefully integrated into professional development programmes from initial teacher training (ITT) to headship preparation (Ofsted, 2006). It uses the phrase 'expert coaching', seeing this as most effective when 'a teacher with a clearly identified need is paired with a colleague with expertise in that area' (p. 14), and expects the process to include classroom observation. Ofsted identifies problems in evaluating coaching and mentoring where the model is based on confidential peer support, and links its preferred model to performance management. Thus Ofsted sees coaching and mentoring as a systemic process based in accountability, and in classroom skills and performance management. However, National College for School Leadership (NCSL: currently the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services) places coaching and mentoring in the context of learning relationships: coaching is seen as a management style affecting culture rather than hard outcomes (Creasey and Paterson, 2005).

Thus there are conflicting messages from key public bodies about the intention of a coach/mentoring process, the status of participants, and how to judge the success of a coach/mentoring programme. This research illuminates some of these conflicting messages about coaching and mentoring in schools by analysing the direct experience of six new secondary headteachers and how they used coaching and mentoring during the early phase of their headship. The outcomes of this research shed light on the range of stated claims and implied values which underpin the widespread endorsement of coaching and mentoring in schools.

### **1.3 Perspectives on Headship**

The educational landscape in which headteachers operate has undergone significant change since Weindling and Earley's research (1987), including the

place of education in governmental priorities. When Margaret Thatcher entered the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Education in 1970, she privately complained that she had been sent to a backwater. In 1997 the new Prime Minister Tony Blair stated his key priorities as 'Education, education, education'.

The foregrounding of education as a key economic driver and therefore a central ministry began with the Great Debate launched by the Labour government in 1976. The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) under a Conservative government granted 451 new powers to the Secretary of State for Education. In particular it reversed previous arrangements by giving schools responsibility for the management of resources while transferring power over the content and assessment of the curriculum to central government (Strain and Simkins, 2008).

Twenty years later Whitty (2008) saw:

*a strong continuity in education policy across Conservative and New Labour governments since the late 1970s. This has established a clear trend towards the decentralization of services within a framework of increasingly detailed target-setting and monitoring by central government (p. 178).*

However, since 1997 there have been tensions within the overall policy direction. Supporters of the marketisation of education initially argued that good schools would expand, and poor ones close. Whitty (2008) notes that the majority of schools in 'special measures' or facing closure are located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (p. 174). The new Labour government retained the market model of choice and diversity as aims, whilst adding social justice and inclusion to the agenda and claiming to focus on standards, not structures. These concepts have proved difficult to reconcile. For example, initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (EiC) and London Challenge have had some impact on the attainment gaps because:

*(they) recognize the importance of structural and cultural influences on educational performance to a greater extent than the dominant market model (Whitty, 2008, p. 173).*

Whilst the previous Conservative government introduced competition between schools as a driver for improvement,

*the introduction of initiatives like threshold payments and performance related pay continued previous Conservative policy of driving competition down past the level of the institution to that of the individual (Bottery, 2007).*

Nor is this merely an English phenomenon. The marketisation and centralisation of education which began in the 1980s has developed and been replicated so that:

*choice and competition, devolution and performativity, and centralisation and prescription now represent global trends in education policy (Whitty, 2008, p. 170).*

In the literature review I consider the policy context of education with reference to the theory of performativity.

The foregrounding of the role of the headteacher as critical to the success of a school began alongside the marketisation agenda. University courses in headship, including Master's degrees, were developed from the 1960s, with MBAs and Professional Doctorates appearing in the 1990s (Brundrett, 2001). However, until 1997 the main route to headship in the UK was through experience as a deputy head teacher. The increasing complexity and technical demands of the role made more formal preparation essential. Circular 3/83 introduced One Term Training Opportunities (OTTO courses) and 20-day programmes for aspiring school managers. In 1994 the then Teacher Training Agency (now the Training and Development Agency for Schools or TDA) introduced the Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (HEADLAMP) which offered financial and programme support for new headteachers in their first two years. A changed approach to headteacher development was signalled:

*Not least in importance regarding the HEADLAMP scheme was that it prefigured the NPQH programme, in that it was a centrally controlled initiative which was based on a set of generic standards that defined the required leadership and management capabilities of school leaders (Brundrett et al., 2006).*

Both the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), and the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) built on the lessons of HEADLAMP, which was seen as lacking coherence and failing to deliver consistent quality within a market-driven approach (Brundrett, 2001).

These programmes were taken over by NCSL which was founded in 2000 with an annual budget in excess of £100 million. NCSL subsequently developed programmes covering leadership at all levels in schools. NCSL is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) and its agenda is determined by the Secretary of State's annual remit letter. Thus programmes for Directors of Children's Services are currently offered. Whitty (2008) argues that:

*In contrast to the post-war emphasis on partnership (albeit an unequal one) between central government, local government and the teaching profession, these organizations now represent an important means through which central government can exert a greater influence over the education system (p. 169).*

The vulnerability of NDPBs was highlighted by the coalition government elected in 2010, which portrayed them as both a waste of public money and a way of avoiding ministerial accountability. As rhetoric changes with a change of government, school leaders need to learn to 'balance micro-political tensions in schools resulting from macro-political, cultural and structural changes' (Blackmore, 2004, p. 439).

Against this background of change there is consistency over time in how new secondary headteachers report their main concerns. These include loneliness, time management, the legacy of their predecessor, the school budget, and ineffective staff (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). Perhaps the first of these, the sense of professional isolation, is of a different order from the rest because it is the context within which the other issues are experienced. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) offer an international perspective:

*It is important to note that the problems were largely similar in different countries and to some extent consistent over time, although contemporary government initiatives might bring with them particular problems. The fact that most new heads and principals experience these problems can be explained by the process of socialisation which affects all new leaders (in school and in business), as they try to understand their new role and take charge of an organisation (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006, p. 338).*

Thus it appears that support at this stage of socialisation into role will continue to be vital.

The 'shock' of becoming the head is a commonly reported issue (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006, Weindling and Earley, 1987, Daresh, 1986, Daresh and Male, 2000). New headteachers have an initial difficulty in understanding the nature of the role (Daresh, 1986) and report that they underestimated the levels of resilience required (Daresh and Male, 2000). Additionally their personal values, their sense of who they are, and their perspective on educational debates come under scrutiny as never before (Daresh, 2004). An acute sense of a change in the perceptions of others, and an awareness of how the role affects relationships and behaviour, is perhaps even stronger for those appointed to the post from within the school:

*The thing that I still find hard to understand is how you seem to lose a sense of identity . . . I used to be [name], and because I was an assistant here for so long, probably a few other names that can't be written down, but now I feel as if I am some sort of character simply known as 'The Principal'... You get treated differently and treat people differently. There is a natural unease in every teacher in relation to their head, regardless of how good, bad, or indifferent they are. People are cautious with you, and in turn, you can't behave in the way that maybe you would like to with them (Daresh and Male, 2000, p. 96).*

This applies beyond the school gate and the school day:

*Away from school, people in the outside world have a perception of you which for some reason, changes when you are a headteacher (ibid).*

Thus the early phase of headship has consistently been reported as challenging, and coaching and mentoring have been promoted as an important source of support.

Three recent papers summarise research into coaching and mentoring with headteachers (Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Ehrich *et al.*, 2004; Daresh, 2004). These criticise the evidence base as small and based on limited research methodology. The research design used was generally the descriptive survey, with evidence gathered through questionnaire. Other concerns include lack of clarity in the research question, single-point data collection, and lack of an external perspective. Additionally the studies referenced in these papers have generally applied an evaluative model rather than seeking to develop or test theory. The lack of rigour in research design reflects on the perceived rigour of coaching and mentoring as practices, and it is timely to conduct a rigorous study which looks beyond scheme improvement to seek a theory of how new headteachers use coaching and mentoring during their first year in post.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

Coaching and mentoring new secondary school headteachers is an area where there is a range of practice built upon assumed theory. Grounded Theory was the chosen methodology for this research because it was concerned with the generation of theory rather than verification (Glaser, 1992). I used the approach to develop middle range substantive theory relevant to newly appointed headteachers and those who work with them, rather than a formal or grand theory. I expect the theory to have relevance in other situations where role transition is an issue.

Having explored the debates around grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Clarke, 2005; Goulding, 2009), my method has reflected that of Charmaz both in the approach to data collection and in the terminology of generating rather than discovering theory. This fits with the social constructivist stance of this study.

I did not work as a coach with any of the headteacher research participants. My status as a headteacher colleague indicated a shared understanding of the nature of headship, and this may have made it easier to recruit research participants.

While I could perhaps arrive more quickly at critical points for exploration, shared meanings might have been more fully interrogated by a less acculturated researcher. Since I have not practised as a headteacher since 2000 there was also a sense of unfamiliarity. In my current role as a professional coach I have a curiosity about the lifeworlds of other professionals which helps make strange the apparently familiar, and which supports effective questioning. Thus all three elements of my professional background influenced my interaction with the research participants, and I was constantly aware of seeking to use all three roles to deepen the study.

The first account of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) advised interrogating the literature during the analysis phase of the research. Pragmatism indicated that this was not the most useful approach for a researching professional because knowledge of the field was already both a benefit and a handicap. A review of research literature before collecting data helped make explicit some of my professional assumptions. I was frequently aware of working at the cusp of insider-outsider roles, for example when asking questions of research participants, and so conscious of the need for accessible and rigorous method (Robson, 2002).

I recruited the six participant headteachers using advertisements for headships placed in the Times Educational Supplement. Additionally I recruited four coach mentor research participants using a modified snowball technique. Their role was to comment on the preliminary findings. Data were generated through three semi-structured interviews with each of the six headteacher participants.

Transcripts were coded after each interview and so influenced subsequent interviews. This achieved an element of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). After interviewing and detailed coding I used NVivo to manage the data, using diagramming to begin making sense of patterns within the analysis. This enabled me to structure the central chapters of my thesis effectively.



## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

The provision of coaching and mentoring has been widely endorsed as an essential aspect of support for secondary school headteachers in their first year in post. There are, however, very divergent views about the intention and the potential outcomes of this process. Therefore there are questions about what use new headteachers make of opportunities for coaching and mentoring; when and why they choose to use it; what issues they focus on; how it works with other development opportunities and within particular contexts; how headteachers perceive the impact of coaching and mentoring on themselves and their role; and thus how they understand its value.

This study investigated these questions by looking closely at the experience of six new secondary headteachers over a period of one year, exploring the interaction of the individual, their context and the support strategies they chose, with a focus on coaching and mentoring. Analysis of the data has led to useful grounded theory, and to issues for further research.

The literature discussed in Chapter Two includes that written by and for practitioners of coaching and mentoring, research literature, policy-led education literature, and literature from within and beyond education which illuminates aspects of coaching and mentoring, and of the experience of leadership with a focus on headship.

The research methodology and method is discussed in Chapter Three. My approach is qualitative because my focus was the six individual headteachers' personal interpretation of how they had used coaching and mentoring and other support strategies.

The data and analysis are presented in a series of chapters which are narrative and thematic, incorporating concepts developed through data analysis.

Through this process I have developed theory enabling new headteachers to illuminate their own practice and thus put themselves into practice more effectively

(Collins, 1991) in their challenging new role. The study provides concepts and tools for coach/mentors and headteachers to use as they work together. These concepts and tools may also be useful in understanding other experiences of transition into leadership roles at other levels or in other kinds of organisation.

## **1.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have noted the growth of coaching and mentoring as a leadership development strategy for new headteachers, and reported a gap in previous research relating to how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. This gap relates to the place of headteachers as agents in the coach/mentoring process, and to how coach/mentoring relates to other support strategies. Having identified some conflicting understandings of coaching and mentoring currently in use in the field of education, I have offered a brief overview of perspectives on headship. This is followed by a summary of the methodology used in the study and a brief overview of the thesis. I now turn to a more detailed review of relevant literature.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Since this study seeks to understand how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post, this review draws on literature from the fields both of education, including educational leadership development, and of coaching and mentoring. I consider the contested definitions of coaching and mentoring from the practitioner literature within and beyond education and explore the nature of executive coaching. A four-level model is developed from the coaching and mentoring literature, which indicates why definitions of coaching and mentoring remain contested. I review academic research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers, including an exploration of the problematic issue of determining return on investment (ROI) for stakeholders beyond the client headteacher. A discussion of issues from the literature of socialisation leads to a discussion of the contested nature of the role of headteacher. Following an outline of changing provision for leadership development I note the use of the theory of performativity (Lyotard, 1984; Ball, 2001) as an interpretive tool in the field of education.

### **2.2 Practitioner literature**

Mentoring and coaching both have roots in business in the United States and in improvement for elite sportspeople, and so frequently focus on performance and on the corporate world. More recently seen as a branch of adult learning (Daloz, 1999) they are perceived to have a wider application, and indeed Clutterbuck argues that 'everyone needs a mentor' (2004). While mentoring has a longer history, coaching as an emerging field of practice is now developing its own literature. Coaches have consistently used a range of sources in developing their practice. Passmore (2006) notes that:

*Coaching draws its influences from and stands on the shoulders of a wide range of disciplines, including counselling, management consultancy, personal development and psychology (p. 20).*

Indeed Fairley and Stout (2004) found that business coaching, incorporating executive coaching, combines:

*Industrial and organisational psychology, management consulting, organisational development, sports psychology, and business consulting (p. 21).*

While drawing from a range of other disciplines, coaches have sought to differentiate coaching from these alternative approaches. In describing the generic role of the coach, Rogers (2004) offers:

*The coach works with clients to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their lives and careers through focused learning. The coach's sole aim is to work with the client to achieve the client's potential – as defined by the client (p. 7).*

Thus distinctive features include being forward focused, coachee led, and concerned with improving performance (Passmore 2006). Intended outcomes include long-term excellent performance, self-correction and self generation (Flaherty, 2005).

There have been many attempts to develop definitions offering a clear distinction between coaching and mentoring, frequently based on the length of engagement and the level of directiveness from the coach/mentor. Typically, Clutterbuck and Megginson initially argued that mentoring is more holistic and 'concentrates on helping the executive gain his or her own insights' (1999, p. 13). Some such distinctions can be very fine, such as:

*A mentor is a person who helps another to think things through... a coach is a person who helps me to think through how to get from where I am to where I need or want to be (Pask and Joy 2007, p. 10-11).*

Other definitions offer a clear contrast: that 'coaching is the act of teaching someone how to do something correctly', while mentoring is 'an interactive relationship which allows you to examine issues and challenges in the search for possible solutions' (Male, 2006, p. 34). Male positions coaching as directive and linked to skills development, with mentoring as interactive, focused on problem

solving. From an organisational development perspective, Mullins (2007) draws from the wider literature three summative distinctions between the activities of coaching and of mentoring. The first focuses on expertise: the coach need not be an expert in the professional field of the coachee, while the mentor must have subject expertise which is respected by the mentee. The second distinction derives from the first: mentoring uses both deductive and inductive techniques, while coaching uses only the deductive. The third distinction compares continuity of engagement: mentoring sessions may occur on an *ad hoc* basis over a long period, while coaching sessions are planned over a limited time-span. These definitions are more comprehensive but still based on contrast. However mentoring is sometimes defined as generic, encompassing coaching, counselling, and advising (Bolam *et al.*, 1993), thus incorporating specialist skills depending on context and need. In a more detailed approach the CUREE offers a framework identifying three strategies:

*Mentoring: relevant to career transitions;*

*Specialist coaching: relevant to a specific aspect of practice;*

*Collaborative co-coaching: two or more working together to embed new knowledge and skills into everyday practice (CUREE, 2005, p. 3).*

This framework draws attention to common activities such as 'listening' and 'asking good questions' (p. 4): the distinction drawn between coaching and mentoring is based on the purpose of the interaction, with coach/mentoring skills deployed as required. Thus there is an emphasis on adaptability in the coach/mentor rather than a formulaic adherence to limited practice prescribed by definition.

While Cox *et al.* (2010) acknowledge that 'creating a unique identity of coaching is still an unresolved problem' (p. 3), Megginson *et al.* (2006, p. 5) retrospectively regard the debate as 'largely sterile' since:

*Certain types of both coaching and mentoring are short-term interventions, involving one-way learning, and a relatively high degree of directiveness and certain types are longer-*

*term, facilitative relationships of future learning (and Clutterbuck and Megginson 2005, p. 14).*

Indeed Garvey (2010, p. 343) argues that 'definition seeks to simplify and reduce... and attempts to polarise', while Zeus and Skiffington (2002) report that in practice organisations of all types may use the terms coaching and mentoring interchangeably. The importance of negotiating a pragmatic definition-in-practice for each coach/mentoring relationship is noted by Clutterbuck and Megginson:

*clarity of expectations about the role makes a significant difference to the quality of the outcomes (1999, p. 13).*

Such clarity can be negotiated in the contracting phase of a coach/mentoring engagement where the two parties agree on purpose and protocols, including the place of advice-giving (Rogers, 2004; Flaherty, 2005). Indeed, such contracting can take place at the beginning of each coach/mentoring session (Hawkins and Smith, 2006). Therefore the definition of coaching and mentoring used in this study needs to be inclusive of a wide range of practice.

These protocols and the subsequent coach/mentoring practice they legitimate can be understood in five dimensions proposed by Garvey (2006). The relationship may be open or closed (whether the discussion can incorporate any topic or some are off-limits); public or private (whether others in the organisation know that the relationship exists); formal or informal (whether the relationship is formalised with established ground rules, or is managed more casually): active or passive (either whether at least one party takes action, or whether contact is regular) and stable or unstable (whether both feel secure and their consistent behaviour indicates commitment). Other dimensions helpful to describing the nature of the interaction include: whether the coach/mentor is paid or a volunteer; whether they are the line manager or off-line; whether they are internal to the organisation or external; whether their primary expertise is in coach/mentoring or in the area of work of the coachee (Clutterbuck, 1998). Developing a shared interpretation of a coach/mentoring engagement along dimensions such as these can help participants to characterise the engagement and how it will be enacted. It is

appropriate therefore to include a sub-question about the understandings of the concepts 'coaching' and 'mentoring' brought by the new headteachers.

Focusing on the role of mentor, Clutterbuck (1998) also proposes a 'behavioural matrix' (p. 10) comparing the roles of Coach, Guardian, Network Contact and Counsellor as constituent parts of the mentor role. The Coach can operate as Goal-Setter, as Critical Friend, as Challenger or as Collaborator; the Guardian as Protector, Guide or Role model; the Counsellor as Sounding-Board or Listener; and the Network Contact as Catalyst or Bridge. He suggests that where the mentor in the Coach role begins to set goals, or where the Guardian begins to act as Protector, they have stepped beyond the remit of mentor. This analysis indicates the flexibility required of the coach/mentor, and indeed Male (2006) observes that from the perspective of a new headteacher as coachee/mentee:

*It is vital to note that mentoring does not need to be supplied by just one person and, although you may chose an official mentor or have one appointed to you, you are likely to turn to a number of sources to make sense of your new reality (p. 35).*

It is appropriate therefore to include in this study a sub-question about the sources of support beyond the formally allocated coach/mentor used by the headteacher research participants, and how these have contributed to development over the year. This reflects the positioning of the new headteacher as agent in the research question.

Since coach/mentoring draws on a range of disciplines for practice, and since it requires a flexibility of roles within an engagement, a need has been perceived to delineate a clear field of practice in the context of related professions. Clutterbuck (1998) places the role of the coach and the mentor separately on a continuum of learning situations, between the teacher and the tutor on one side and the counsellor on the other. In this analysis Clutterbuck sees the coach as transferring skill and some knowledge through mainly explicit routes, while the mentor transfers wisdom mainly implicitly. The counsellor, by contrast, transfers self-awareness and insight, making the implicit explicit. While the counsellor is trained

to offer minimum personal involvement, the coach/mentor offers a moderate to high personal link. Coach/mentors are distinguished from teacher/tutors most clearly by the low power distance of the coach/mentors. Similarly, Rogers (2004) discusses coaching as distinct from three related fields of practice: psychiatry, where the client is a patient and the doctor has the power to cure; psychotherapy, which looks to the past to explain the present, and focuses on the question 'why?'; and counselling, a short term engagement in response to a crisis but with no commitment to resulting action. However Zeus and Skiffington (2002), in comparing coaching to consulting and therapy, find that particular coaching engagements may be very close either to consulting, or to the solution-focused model of therapy.

Such analyses indicate the range of practice possible within a coach/mentoring engagement, and there has been a corresponding proliferation of distinctive coaching offers. Cox *et al.* (2010) allocate a chapter to each of 13 theoretical approaches including the Gestalt and the transpersonal, and 11 genres and contexts of coaching including executive and leadership coaching alongside team coaching and cross-cultural coaching. Thus, within the generic descriptions and definitions of coach/mentoring, the range of practice means that negotiating a shared understanding at the start of a coach/mentoring engagement is critical.

Much practitioner literature in the fields of both coaching and mentoring and of education is embedded in the context of organisational culture, and thus relates to those working within the organisation rather than to the overall leader. For example, Coleman and Earley (2005) draw on the Joyce and Showers (1995) analysis that coaching is an important ingredient of a staff development strategy which should also include theory, demonstration, and practice with feedback. In this approach:

*Coaching is where people (trainers) work alongside teachers, often demonstrating desired practices and approaches in the classroom or workplace rather than in the training centre or workshop (p. 239).*



This approach employs a traditional, directive interpretation of coaching where the most significant expertise of the coach/mentor resides in their knowledge of the task. Here development focuses on skills at the lowest level of coaching in the four-level model developed in section 2.4. Further, the phrase 'demonstrating desired practices' indicates that agency is with the coach/trainer rather than with the learner. Cox *et al.* (2010) identify that, as a developing field of practice, coaching now emphasises non-directive approaches, where the expertise of the coach resides in their knowledge of coaching processes and so the engagement supports capacity development rather than skills acquisition.

A potential confusion in the definition of coaching arises from the use of the term in the education practitioner literature (Tolhurst, 2006; Pask and Joy, 2007) to describe one of the four most effective leadership styles. Research by HayMcBer (Goleman, 2000) into the work of a random sample of nearly 4,000 executives from an international database of more than 20,000 found that coaching was one of the six most common leadership styles, and one of four consistently leading to increased performance in employees. The other styles leading to increased performance were the authoritative, the affiliative, and the democratic. Successful leaders used more than one style, including the remaining two (coercive and pacesetter) where required, suiting their style to circumstance. This use of a range of styles suggests a contingency model of leadership. Characteristics of the coaching style include: focusing on personal development rather than work-related tasks; helping employees to identify their strengths, weaknesses and development goals linked to career aspirations; delegating challenging responsibilities while accepting short-term failure as part of the learning process; and offering performance feedback which motivates (Goleman, 2000). Goleman concedes that '(coaching) works best with employees who want to be coached' (2000, p. 87) thus foregrounding the contribution of the coachee. A distinctive and potentially challenging aspect of coaching as a leadership style (Goleman, 2000; Goleman *et al.*, 2002; Tolhurst, 2006; Parsloe and Leedham, 2009) is that it takes place within

an organisational hierarchy. Therefore aspects of power distance (Clutterbuck, 1998) prevent the relationship from being one of professional equality.

### **2.3 Executive coaching**

Practitioners of coaching and mentoring identify two models of coaching provision for executives. These are independent of sector or organisation. The first is considered within normal organisational management: coaching is part of succession planning (Bluckert, 2006). This potentially egalitarian approach seeks to develop all employees. The other focuses on senior leaders, especially those recently promoted, an elitist approach identified as 'executive coaching'. Positive change at senior levels is expected to improve the whole organisation (Peltier, 2001) although this appears to be an aspiration rather than an established outcome. The provision of coaches and mentors to newly appointed secondary school headteachers derives from this elitist model. The expectation of impact on the whole organisation may explain why some researchers (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006) highlight the lack of evidence for whole-school impact. However, the coaching and mentoring provided for newly appointed headteachers is of limited duration and focused on the first year in post, and thus is exceptional and temporally constrained. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, in the Headteacher Standards (DCSF, 2007) documentation, elitism is mainly rejected in favour of the requirement to 'build [a longer term] collaborative learning culture within the school' (p. 8). Creasey and Paterson (2005) argue that this implies the continuous development of a coaching culture. The education version of executive coaching and mentoring is therefore a third model in which there are expectations that the headteacher will enable coaching and mentoring within the organisation, but where the leader receives coach/mentoring only in the first year in post.

While non-directive models prioritise coach/mentoring skills over sector experience, Rogers (2004) notes that:

*Executive coaches work with the most senior clients in large or medium sized organisations and are expected to work with all aspects of the challenge of such organisations, and so direct experience is expected (p. 12).*

Further, Zeus and Skiffington (2002) report that 'operational mastery' (p. 16) is essential for executive coaches. In contrast, Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999) see executive mentoring as based on an assumption of need for improvement in a specific area, tending to have a strong element of judgement by the coach through feedback on observation. They find that the most common manifestations as executive mentor are: executive coach, a short term engagement focusing on clearly defined skills or behavioural issues; elder statesperson, someone with direct successful experience who will withhold advice until required; and reflective mentors, whose role is more intensive and holistic. While this range of roles is less complex than those in Clutterbuck's matrix (1998), it nevertheless indicates a need to negotiate protocols meeting the client's specific requirements, and for flexibility on the part of the coach/mentor. The third role also indicates an agenda beyond clearly defined skills.

While earlier definitions of executive coaching were usually wholly work-focused, (Zeus and Skiffington 2002; Passmore 2006), Bluckert proposes:

*coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction. It invariably involves growth and change, whether this is in perspective, attitude or behaviour (2006, p. 3).*

He notes that personal satisfaction has only recently been included in the mix and in response to an understanding of the contribution of personal satisfaction to performance. More radically, Stokes and Jolly (2010) suggest that executive coaching distinctively focuses on 'emotions rather than facts ... people and relationships rather than tasks' and moves 'from a mindset of controlling events to a mindset of enabling others' (p. 246), implying that executive coaching supports the development of new perspectives and involves work with the self as well as with the organisation.

Proposing a version of executive co-coaching appropriate for headteachers, Robertson (2008) suggests:

*A special, sometimes reciprocal, relationship between (at least) two people who work together to set professional goals and achieve them. The term depicts a learning relationship, where participants are open to new learning, engage together as professionals equally committed to facilitating each other's leadership learning development and wellbeing (both cognitive and affective) and gain a greater understanding of professionalism and the work of professionals (p. 4).*

While this interpretation distinctively incorporates the affective as a legitimate territory for coach/mentoring, it additionally indicates a place for meta-learning. Such an interpretation sees coach/mentoring working well beyond the skills agenda, and these higher levels of coach/mentoring are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

## 2.4 Models of coaching and mentoring

Coaching and mentoring literature identifies a wider range of purposes and intentions for coaching and mentoring than is found in the policy-led or academic education literature. Four main levels of coaching are consistently proposed (Parsloe and Leedham, 2009; Peltier, 2001; Hawkins and Smith, 2006).

### *The four-level model of coaching*

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<b>Peltier (2001)</b>	Coaching for skills: Brief and circumscribed	Coaching for effect: Specific organisational goals	Coaching for development: Preparing skills for the future, perhaps including unlearning	Coaching for the executive's agenda: Ongoing coaching with ambitious and ambiguous goals. Most closely related to leadership function.
<b>Parsloe and Leedham (2009)</b>	Coaching for skills: Short term, with concrete objectives; directive style	Coaching for performance: Medium term, around role and competencies; style is context-driven	Coaching for potential: Medium term, around role and competencies; style is context-driven	Coaching for the personal: Longer term, with evolving agenda; non-directive style.
<b>Hawkins and Smith (2006)</b>	Coaching for skills: Specific skills perhaps offered through training courses	Coaching for performance: Focus on outputs and outcomes in the current role	Coaching for development: Longer term; includes development of whole person and learning capacity.	Coaching for transformation: Enables move to higher level of functioning.

These levels are hierarchical and become more complex at each stage. The lower two levels are more concerned with the coachee or mentee's current role, while

the higher two look beyond that immediate role to the personal or professional future. At the first of these four levels coaching is usually short-term, skills-based and directive. The second level concerns impact: the coachee uses developing skills to perform a role effectively. The third level is seen as more developmental, considering potential and the future. The fourth and highest level is the most complex: the coachee's agenda is likely to evolve rather than be fixed and the coach/mentoring engagement is likely to be of longer term than at the lower levels.

Research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers (for example, Hobson, 2003) indicates that the agenda is predominantly skills-based and therefore arguably at the lowest of the four levels identified in the coaching and mentoring literature. However, it is also argued that during the first year in post the newly appointed headteacher is moving to a higher level of functioning (Bluckert, 2006) and this would place the coaching at the higher levels. From the perspective of education research, Hansford and Ehrich (2006) are critical of research which omits to examine the impact of coaching on pupil performance which would be one measure of effectiveness at the second level of coaching. In summary, critique centres on a lack of clarity about the possible range of purposes and techniques of coaching and mentoring and their impact. Above all, there are concerns about the relative absence of a theoretical framework from which such activities might be understood, and judgements made.

The four-level model of coaching and mentoring reveals a number of issues. Moving through the four levels, there is an understanding that for the coachee there will be an increasing sense of independence and autonomy. The first two levels focus on skills and performance and thus are consistent with a performative culture and its non-negotiable understanding of performance (Lyotard, 1984). The two higher levels appear to move away from organisational issues into the more personal; and the link between these personal issues and the organisation is not clear. The lower two levels are apparently normative, while the upper two have more potential to be boundary-breaking (Robertson, 2008). This raises questions

about the nature of the challenges experienced by headteachers and whether they are primarily survivalist, developmental, or even critical (Kirkham, 1995; Southworth, 1995). Additionally these challenges occur while new headteachers seek to balance increased autonomy against increased accountability. Thus new headteachers need to take account both of their new role and the expectations of others.

## **2.5 Research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers**

Systematic reviews of research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers (Daresh, 1995; Hansford and Ehrich, 2006; Hobson and Sharp, 2005) make two key points: that the evidence base is small, and that its research methodology is limited. In an early review of mentoring provision based on data gathered while leading training events for more than 175 prospective mentors, Southworth (1995), challenged previous research, arguing that it was based on self-reports unsupported by observation or third-party analysis. In an integrative review of dissertations and published articles from 1984 to 1994, Daresh (1995) found that most research was carried out in doctoral dissertations and was focused on solving problems rather than developing or testing theory. The most frequent research design was the descriptive survey, with data collected through questionnaires. Ten years later Hansford and Ehrich (2006) reported a structured review of 40 research-based articles on coaching programmes for new headteachers, finding only five from the UK. They echoed earlier comments about limited research methodology and further challenged the rigour of the research:

*Lack of clarity in the research question, a single point data collection, small one-off studies and lack of data suitable for triangulation (p. 42).*

Hobson and Sharp (2005) reported that even the most detailed evidence suffered from a lack of external perspective.

These literature reviews (Daresh, 1995; Hansford and Ehrich, 2006; Hobson and Sharp, 2005) demonstrate that research has generally applied an evaluative model (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005) designed to improve practice in the provision of

coaching and mentoring for new headteachers, focusing on those providing the coach/mentoring at scheme or practitioner level question: whose or what practice? (Bolam *et al.*, 1995; Bush and Coleman, 1995; Bush and Glover, 2005), and has accepted provision as scheme-based and dyadic. Consistent reports of lack of rigour in research create an impression of lack of rigour and effectiveness in the provision of coaching and mentoring for new headteachers.

Researchers report a paucity of outcome measures. Proposals for outcomes to be measured include the relative effectiveness of headteachers who have or have not been mentored and whether there is any impact on educational outcomes for students (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006). In a further refinement Hobson and Sharp (2005) suggest that research:

*should also seek to differentiate between benefits and costs of specific mentoring functions rather than those of mentoring in general which can take a variety of forms (p. 39).*

Such research into the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring would require: a large sample; a contribution from stakeholders to reduce subjectivity; and a control group (West and Milan, 2001). Using a quasi-experimental design, Grant *et al.* (2010) found that self-ratings for teachers as coaching and mentoring participants indicated improved self-perceptions after coaching but no change in multi-rater scores, and suggests this may result from using different raters for the two reports. Alternatively 'reputation drag' (Clutterbuck and Whitaker, 2008) may prevent others from noticing behavioural change. The problem of determining return on investment (ROI) is an issue not just for coaching and mentoring research, but for leadership development programmes across the private and public sectors (Hayward and Voller, 2010).

While the question of the impact of coaching and mentoring on stakeholders such as pupils and pupil outcomes is a fascinating topic, it is beyond the scope of this exploratory study. The research design would need to accommodate measurement and an investigation of causality both of which fall within a

quantitative paradigm. Additionally a longitudinal study would be required beyond the scope of a study covering a single year. While it would be interesting to capture comparative perspectives from headteachers beginning their headships across a wider time band this is not possible within the constraints of a professional doctorate focused on the agency of the headteacher in their first year in post.

In an attempt to quantify the overall impact of a successful headteacher, Barker (2007) found that:

*An effectiveness framework that assigns disproportionate value to examination results seems to have created a leadership paradox, where heads reported to be transformational produce only limited gains in performance (p. 21).*

This indicates that a wider view of pupil performance may also be required to understand quantifiable headteacher impact. A methodology which would define the quantifiable impact of a single aspect of headteacher development such as coach/mentoring is beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis in our current state of knowledge.

Research into coaching and mentoring in professional contexts consistently reports benefits, including support for career advancement and psycho-social benefits (Kram 1983, 1985). Research focused specifically on the mentoring of headteachers additionally reports that feedback is beneficial to the mentee (Bush and Coleman, 1995). Other identified benefits include: help with problems; reflecting on what it means to be a headteacher; reducing the isolation of headship; obtaining another perspective; improving self-confidence; and as a 'confirmatory nudge' endorsing the judgement of the new headteacher (Bolam *et al.*, 1995, p. 37). Daresh (2004) suggests that there are five potential benefits for novice headteachers: feeling more confident about professional competence, seeing the translation of theory into practice, improving communication skills, understanding the 'tricks of the trade', and a feeling of belonging. Thus potential benefits span both practice and identity. Several research reports from the UK and



the USA flag reported benefits to both participants in the coach/mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985; Bush and Coleman, 1995; Pocklington and Weindling, 1996) including personal growth, professional development, and improved skills (Bolam *et al.*, 1995). Benefits to the coach/mentor are beyond the scope of this study. However it is recognised that new headteachers may become coach/mentors, and may use a coaching leadership style within their repertoire.

The research also reports various problems in coach/mentoring for new headteachers. In the context of intensifying educational demands, early concerns tended to focus upon the effective preparation of new headteachers for a changing future (Kirkham, 1995). Southworth considered the approach to be survivalist and not supportive of the development of 'critically reflective school leaders' (1995, p. 27). Daresh suggested that coaching and mentoring would promote 'cloning, not growth' unless they supported new headteachers to:

*gain insights into trends, issues, and social realities that go beyond existing practices (2004, p. 215).*

This implies that the organisational socialisation of new headteachers needs to take into account a wider context than that of the individual school or even of the local authority. Robertson (2008) suggests that this wider perspective enables headteachers to understand the nature of the problems they confront, realising that some are contextual rather than the result of their own lack of competence. Propositional knowledge supporting such analysis may not be provided by the skills-based approach of competency models such as NPQH (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005).

It should be noted that these concerns about coaching and mentoring for new headteachers are expressed by researchers, and criticism of provision by participants is rare in the literature. Southworth (1995) suggested that this may be the result of self-selection for participation. Certainly where the research literature reports negative effects, they tend to be organisational issues:

*difficulties with sustaining focus, availability of resources to enable continuing program development, restriction of*

*programs to limited populations, inadequate preparation of mentors and those who are mentored, and perhaps most significantly, a tendency among administrators to lose sight of mentoring as an important support system (Daresh, 2004, p. 507).*

The education research literature also highlights an impact issue, that the coaching and mentoring relationship might promote dependence rather than growth (Daresh, 2004). While Southworth and Daresh offer a critical perspective on coaching and mentoring as a strategy, other researchers focus on efficient process, such as the availability of time and the importance of matching and training mentors (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006). A formal review of research literature on coaching and mentoring across education, business and medical contexts (Ehrich *et al.*, 2004) found similar concerns about implementation across the professions.

However, the research does not examine how participants enact their coaching and mentoring relationship, and whether there is an 'implementation gap' (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005, p. 61) between what policymakers envisage and what leaders and managers do. Therefore the research question for this study takes the perspective of headteacher as agent and thus includes practice beyond the formally constituted coach/mentoring dyad.

While negative comments on coaching and mentoring concentrate mainly on operational matters rather than ideological issues, many positive comments focused on the skills of the coach/mentor. Newly appointed headteachers placed most value on: listening skills; open, warm, enthusiastic behaviour; headship experience; useful feedback; being non-judgemental; and having counselling skills (Bolam *et al.*, 1995). These are listed in rank order in Bolam's work: for newly appointed headteachers the most significant professional expertise is viewed as residing in current or recent headteachers. This might place the expressed needs of headteachers within the frame of mentoring, because the expertise lies within the main professional framework rather than in the skills coach/mentoring *per se* (Mullins, 2007). However the list also foregrounds mentoring and coaching skills,

including skilled listening, and suggests that headteachers do recognise distinctive levels of coaching and mentoring expertise. The list of valued behaviours suggests that new headteachers value affective as well as technical expertise on the part of the mentor.

## **2.6 The socialisation of new headteachers**

Although the term 'socialisation' is frequently used in published literature it has been subject to reinterpretation over the years. It was first applied to new headteachers by Daresh (1986) in research based on interviews with 12 high school principals in the USA. He characterised socialisation to headship as 'how people learn how to act in their new position' (p. 170). Early accounts (Daresh, 1986; Daresh and Playko, 1994) focus on how new secondary school headteachers learn to operate within the school district (the equivalent of the English local authority). Principals who were new to an area 'felt vulnerable to the effects of a social and political system they did not fully comprehend' (Daresh, 1986, p. 170): they thought they would not be respected unless they understood local systems. In contrast, more recent research in England, examining the first year of headship for four primary school headteachers, foregrounds concerns about socialisation – in this case, to the school context (Crow, 2007). These accounts indicate an interesting issue; whether new headteachers perceive that they need to be socialised to their school or to a wider community.

Daresh (1986) offered an example of socialisation: a new headteacher discovering that procedures for ordering equipment in the district policy manual should be ignored in favour of local practice. This echoes Schein's account (2004) of socialisation, where veterans pass on shared cultural assumptions to new group members through feedback. It implies that the new headteacher's task is to learn and adapt to an existing culture rather than to innovate (Southworth, 1995). It also locates the socialisation of new headteachers as occurring *after* they take up their post. However, the wider literature on socialisation (Schein, 1968; Van Maanen, 1978; Baker and Feldman, 1991) offers a more complex analysis, some aspects of

which have been incorporated into research on coaching and mentoring for new headteachers.

Recent researchers (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006; Crow, 2007) draw on the work of Merton (1963) and Schein (1968) and differentiate between professional and organisational socialisation:

*(1) professional socialisation (...) involves learning what it is to be a headteacher, prior to taking up the role, from personal experience of schooling and teaching and from formal courses; and*

*(2) organisational socialisation, (...) involves learning the knowledge, values, and behaviours required to perform a specific role within a particular organisation (...) after appointment (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006, p. 334).*

Thus socialisation to headship takes place both before and after appointment. While formal courses such as the NPQH contribute to professional socialisation, Weindling and Dimmock's work refers to a wider range of experiences by headteachers, taken from their earlier personal and professional lives. Recent case study research (Crow, 2007) indicates that the strongest influence on professional socialisation for new headteachers is their previous career experience, including relationships with headteachers with whom they had worked. In Crow's study four new primary school headteachers voiced both admiration and criticism of their previous headteachers. Most of the negative comments concerned their lack of focus on teaching and learning. Thus aspiring headteachers can exercise discrimination in respect of their socialisation, achieving 'creative individualism' (Schein, 1968, p. 10) in accepting some values and rejecting others.

Organisational socialisation involves learning to perform a role as required in a specific context and Schein (1968) found that it occurred each time the individual moved to a new organisation or a new role. It follows that it would be impossible to prepare fully for a new role. If this is the case, concerns about headteachers feeling under-prepared may be misplaced. Schein (1968) further suggests that on

entering a new organisation the novice needs to achieve a redefinition of the self linked to the values and expectations of that new context; this process can involve a temporary sense of 'worthlessness' (p. 3). Thus the 'shock' reported by new headteachers may be a necessary aspect of growth into their new role. Processual learning is therefore embedded in socialisation.

Drawing on the work of Van Maanen (1978), Baker and Feldman (1991) suggest six paired strategies for the organisational socialisation of newcomers. Although these pairs are posited as alternatives, Crow (2007) suggests that organisational socialisation for new headteachers involves both investiture and divestiture. Investiture occurs as aspiring headteachers emphasise their role in improving student learning and draw on an established identity as a teacher; while divestiture occurs as headteachers distance themselves from other teachers as they adopt the role of leader and manager. Crow further identifies a form of serial socialisation: custodial socialisation (Schein, 1971) emphasising stability. Where innovation is required in school reform contexts, custodial socialisation for new headteachers would be counterproductive.

The new headteacher may benefit from local authority socialisation strategies, such as the collective, sequential and fixed. However, the position of new headteachers is unusual because they manage their own socialisation to the role within the individual school context. Further, the headteacher's purpose may include challenging received norms. The new headteacher's mentor, even when chosen from within the local authority, cannot understand the context of the new headteacher as a line manager might understand that of a new recruit. Nor does the headteacher's mentor carry a direct organisational responsibility for the new headteacher. The organisational socialisation of new headteachers is therefore distinctive in that it is significantly self-managed, and may incorporate a change agenda. Thus the current model of organisational socialisation needs to be modified to account for the experience of new headteachers.

The professional socialisation of new headteachers has been a sustained focus of government policy, and in its first corporate plan the then NCSL aimed to put in place the largest educational leadership development programme in the world (NCSL, 2001). According to research predating widespread participation in NPQH, in the late 1990s the proportion of headteachers who considered that they were very prepared for headship before taking up post remained at about one in six, falling to one in eight on taking up post (Earley *et al.*, 2002). Despite enhanced preparation for headship, the journey which was seen as *ad hoc* and solitary in the 1990s (Southworth, 1995) was still experienced as 'an individual effort' by headteachers taking up post in 2000, whether or not they had taken the NPQH (Crow, 2007).

The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is now followed by the Head Start programme, which includes a 'Professional Partner' who supports the headteacher for 20-30 hours during their first two years. This role includes providing 'coherent leadership development support for new headteachers' and enabling 'the support of headteachers by headteachers in a process of purposeful peer collaboration' (NCSL, undated, p. 1). Thus it strengthens the tradition of prioritising headship experience, insisting the mentor be a current headteacher. 'Some knowledge, understanding and experience of coaching and/or mentoring' (p. 1) are required, alongside a willingness to develop these skills.

The different approaches of NPQH and Head Start correspond closely with those of Bush and Glover (2003): while practising leaders should use their own context for leadership learning, aspiring leaders are usually not aware of the context in which they will operate and therefore need programmes rich in content and skills. Once in post, the development needs of the headteacher can be subject to constant change as new challenges arise in their schools (Gunraj and Rutherford, 1999). The two phases of NPQH and Head Start also correspond to two phases of socialisation: the professional or preparatory phase and the organisational phase once in post (Schein, 1988). While organisational socialisation can imply the

acculturation of the newcomer to local norms, for new headteachers the process needs to be reciprocal if he or she is to encourage the development of new norms leading to improved outcomes for students (Crow, 2007).

The challenges and the context of headteachers' roles have changed very significantly since mentoring was first proposed in the 1980s. The history of leadership development illustrates attempts to respond to these changes by providing better professional socialisation to the role.

## **2.7 Understanding leadership development for new headteachers**

From the 1960s, new demands on school leaders arose from the development of comprehensive schools, leading to a phase of '*ad hoc*' leadership development (Bolam, 2004, p. 252). This reflected a decentralised education system, with Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) universities and local authorities drawing on their distinctive professional expertise. Leadership development programmes increased during the 1980s and 1990s, but remained largely uncoordinated and mainly focused on the induction stage (Bush, 1998). However, there was increasing central direction and a move away from the involvement of universities. From the mid-1990s the strategic direction and management of leadership development programmes were placed with the then Teacher Training Agency. The latter offered preparation, induction and in-service training to headteachers through the NPQH, Headlamp, and LPSH programmes respectively. Such programmes were innovative in that they were centrally controlled through government agencies and based on a competency framework setting out the standards required of headteachers (Brundrett *et al*, 2006). From 1999 these programmes fell within the remit of NCSL. To provide a context to this account of the history of leadership development I now apply the interpretive lens of performativity, which takes account of the impact of economic, social and cultural change.

Lyotard (1984) identified the 1960s as the period of reopening world markets, and subsequently the resumption of economic 'world war' (p. 12). In doing this he linked the concepts of opportunity and pressure. He argued that governments

began to pass the pressure on them to the education sector, which was seen as both the cause of and the solution to economic problems. With the growth of multinational companies transcending state boundaries, it is also arguable that education was one of a diminishing number of areas where the state could feel itself in control (Bottery, 2007). This may also explain the continuity of education policy over the last 30 years despite changes of party political control (Whitty, 2008). Following the work of Lyotard, I suggest that the rhetoric of central political engagement with education from the Great Debate onwards is substantially performative. For example, the purpose of education has been clearly defined as extrinsic: to support economic development. In addition, the previous decentralised responsibility for education was overturned: the then Department for Education and Science assumed the authority to define education and to promulgate this definition to others. This provides an early example of the use of performative language with its two elements: first, that the addressee is not expected or indeed allowed to give or withhold assent; and second, that the referent is changed by the utterance, for example at the formal opening of a new building (Lyotard, 1984). A more recent instance occurred when a change of government in 2010 was accompanied by a 'widespread change in terminology within Whitehall departments' (National Literacy Trust, 2010) including the name of the Department for Children, Families and Schools reverting to the 'Department for Education'. These changes of emphasis signalled a change in direction for aspects of education policy and demonstrated the performative use of language and terminology as a powerful means of control. Additionally, Ball (2001) described performativity as employing:

*Judgements, comparisons, and displays as a means of control, attrition and change. The performances... stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth of the individual or organisation within a field of judgement (p. 210).*

Ball (2001) describes how performativity gives rise to 'rituals' such as inspections and 'routines' (p. 212) such as comprehensive record-keeping. He also describes 'fabrications' (p. 213) through which those involved seek to appear to have



discharged requirements placed on them. He identifies the production of fabrications as a response or resistance to the requirements of performativity, and as second-order activities which can consume the effort which would be more productively given to first-order activities of the role. Indeed performativity is seen to have affected not only the context in which headteachers work but how they are prepared for the post, a concrete example being the development of a competency framework for headteacher development. According to Crow (2007) competency frameworks are limited in that they tend to focus on management for the present rather than on leadership for the future and for change. He further argues that global trends such as the move to a post-industrial society make the current headteacher's role more complex than previously, and that this is exacerbated by contexts of school reform which focus on visibility and public scrutiny.

While this is a compelling account, it is not the focus of the study. Nevertheless the data will be examined to see whether the research participants are aware of tensions in their role, for example between first- and second-order activities, which might match this interpretation. An initial tension is detectable in the wider literature around school leadership which, as described below, sees the headteacher both as hero leader, and as mere vehicle for the delivery of externally constituted demands.

## **2.8 The role of the headteacher**

There are conflicting views about the role of the headteacher. Despite the difficulty in detecting direct effects of school leadership on pupil performance (Bush *et al.*, 2006; Barker, 2007) there is:

*a widespread belief that (the headteacher's) role is critical to achieving and sustaining high-quality education for children and students (Bush et al., 2006, p. 185).*

This perception is supported by a substantial research literature (Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Leithwood, 2008) and by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2002; 2003). These accounts might be taken to imply significant autonomy and

independence for headteachers. However, an alternative interpretation of the role of the headteacher is that:

*heads, principals and other leaders are expected to absorb and accept the burgeoning agenda for change, and to succeed in ways which satisfy learners, parents, governors, teachers and other staff, and, above all, to comply with the rapacious demands of government (Bush et al., 2006, p. 185).*

These different analyses draw attention to three distinctive factors about the context of school leadership.

Firstly, schools operate within a political context of accountability which can neglect wider perspectives in favour of target-based outcomes which emphasise competition (Bottery, 2006) By contrast, collaboration is emphasised in the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004). This indicates a potential conflict requiring resolution between behaviours supporting competition and collaboration. Secondly, the National Standards for Headteachers suggest that headteachers are expected to work with a range of organisations and structures, not just their own school. This extends the need for socialisation. Thirdly, the chosen leadership style of a school leader affects not only employees but also students and their families. Further complications include the political aspects of public sector leadership (Agyemang and Broadbent, 2005) and the burgeoning range of stakeholders. Significant change in the boundaries of the role requires complex networking, and the headteacher works within a complex context of need, perception and expectation. The model of the hero headteacher requires pacesetting and coercive leadership styles (Goleman, 2000) which appear to be at odds both with the National Standards for Headteachers and with the development of a collaborative culture.

These perspectives indicate that even established headteachers may experience headship as pressured and conflicted and that the role will make considerable demands on new post-holders. There is a substantial literature on the 'shock' of becoming the headteacher (Quong, 2006, Crow, 2007) and the number of

headteachers who report that they feel well prepared in advance tends to fall once they take up the post (Earley *et al.*, 2002). New headteachers report a consistent pattern of issues (Hobson *et al.*, 2003) apparently related to technical competence. It appears that people continually fail to anticipate the complexity and challenge of headship. This may indicate that the wrong candidates are appointed to manage complex pressures; alternatively the role, or the support and socialisation processes, may need adjustment (Crow, 2007), not least in climates of intense change (Gleeson and Husbands, 2001; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Crow, 2007).

Crow (2007) groups the challenges of the first year into two categories. He foregrounds 'crises' (p. 56) with which the new heads felt they were not equipped to deal. These include major fires and forceful parental reactions. His second category includes technical issues such as budget, finance and personnel, but also the need for softer skills such as information-gathering. The final item in this group is 'self-learning' (p. 56) which includes: learning to appear more decisive than the headteachers felt; and taking criticism without it affecting relationships. This indicates learning self-presentation in role (Goffman, 1959). Additionally, the headteachers in Crow's study talked about needing to develop the self-confidence to believe they had made the right decision. It may be, however, that this turbulent time for new headteachers is essential to their socialisation and the creation of their new professional identity (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006).

Indeed Bolam *et al.* (1995) drew attention to research carried out in the 1980s which suggested that new headteachers move through a series of stages in development. Subsequent research indicates that the first year of headship is a distinct stage, variously categorised as 'immersion' or 'learning the ropes' (O'Mahony and Matthews, 2003) or as two linked sections, 'encounter' followed by 'taking hold' (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). Although stage theories imply common learning needs, demands on headteachers in different contexts require nuanced responses. Day *et al.* (2008) suggest that the headteachers' leadership activity will vary over time, and is likely to be stronger in the early years of

headship; and that it will vary by school context – tending to be greater in range and intensity in contexts of disadvantage and in secondary schools contexts – and by school sector. Krüger *et al.* (2007) subjected data collected for another study to secondary analysis and found a reciprocal relationship between student commitment and strategic leadership. Further, the time-scales attached to stages are approximate (Earley and Weindling, 2007). Stage theory appears to underpin the NCSL model of leadership development, with programmes supporting development from middle leadership through headship to system leadership.

The perspective of stage theory indicates a number of gaps in the conception of leadership development found in the four-level model of coaching discussed above. The four-level model appears predicated on professional growth within a single organisation and does not take account of the complex needs of a senior leader moving to a new organisation. Coaching and mentoring for arrival and ‘encounter’ are absent from the analysis, perhaps because it was developed in a corporate culture and at a time when movement between organisations was rare. Also the position of a newly appointed headteacher, simultaneously novice and figurehead, requires a more complex response. The four-level model apparently takes the view that learning to perform a role effectively is a matter of acquiring skills which can be taught. This is a limited view which separates learning skills from personal development, learning to do from learning to be. Additionally the new headteacher is expected to ‘take hold’ and lead the school. The four-level theory seems to discuss performance as relating to those who contribute to the organisation, rather than the leader working at its boundary. Nevertheless, critics of stage theory emphasise the impact of context on the work of the headteacher.

In this chapter I have identified influences on the development of coaching and mentoring, and examined definitions in use to identify a number of conflicts and contradictions. The four-level model developed from the literature indicates why definitions may frequently be conflicted. It appears that a mutual understanding of dimensions of a specific coach/mentoring engagement is essential, and more

significant than seeking to define it as either purely coaching or purely mentoring. The range of coach/mentoring practice identified in the education literature is significantly narrower than in the practitioner and academic literature of coaching and mentoring. Additionally the education literature tends to identify headteachers as providers rather than recipients, engaging with coaching and mentoring as a leadership style rather than for their own development. The definition chosen for this research is therefore: 'a sustained, one-to-one process in which (the headteacher's) particular and individual experience (is) the basis of the agenda' (Bolam *et al.*, 1995,). This definition prioritises the agency of the headteacher, who may therefore negotiate the terms of the engagement either generally or for a specific issue. Previous research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers has been considered, finding that it has generally been a version of scheme evaluation rather than pure research. The chapter has also discussed the contested area of research into the impact of coaching and mentoring on participants and their schools. The changing configuration of support for new headteachers, including their professional and organisational socialisation, has been viewed through the lens of performativity. Conflicting interpretations of the role of headteacher have been discussed, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of stage theory and its implications for the four level model of coaching and mentoring. Specifically the literature review indicates the relative absence of research prioritising the perspective and agency of the headteacher in accessing coach/mentoring and other support in their first year in post.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider the research question, with particular relation to my epistemological perspective, and include a rationale for my choice of paradigm. I discuss the selection of grounded theory as a methodological approach, including discussion of possible alternative approaches and why, for the purposes of this study, they were rejected. I explain how research participants were recruited and how data were collected. I describe how data were analysed and presented, then summarise issues of validity, reflexivity, and ethics in the context of the research.

### 3.2 The research question

The questions and sub-questions for this study are as follows.

Main question:

*An exploration of how newly established secondary school headteachers engage with coaching and mentoring in their first year in post.*

Sub-questions:

*i. What are the conceptual and developmental issues, including those in the areas of role clarification, expertise and socialisation, currently identified by new secondary school headteachers during their first year in post?*

*ii. How does coaching and mentoring influence the approach of headteachers to the identified issues, and which understandings do they bring to either or both terms?*

*iii. How do headteachers understand and account for their own increased expertise after a year in post?*

The above arise from my professional experiences and interests and, therefore, reflect my worldview and the epistemology and ontology that underpin my research approach. At the generative stage (Levinson, 1978), I want to offer value to subsequent generations, not only through personal coaching, but also influencing how coaching develops within the education sector.

### **3.3 The research approach**

This research is therefore predicated upon engagement with the practitioner community and is intended to produce knowledge for action (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). Further, the research question is not an investigation of specific models of coaching or mentoring but an exploration of practice without assumptions about what that practice ought to be. Therefore it is research rather than assessment or evaluation (Jones *et al.*, 2006), concerned with developing theory that might subsequently be considered in relation to application, rather than with programme outcomes.

The literature review indicates that there is a paucity of research-based theory about how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. Therefore this is an exploratory research study and a qualitative paradigm is appropriate (Creswell, 2006) which accepts 'a social, personal and relational world that is complex, layered and can be viewed from different perspectives' (McLeod, 2001, p. 2).

The research question explores how people, in this case newly appointed secondary school headteachers, seek to make sense of their world and use coaching or mentoring during their first year in post. The approach implies that knowledge is constructed between people through interaction (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2006), indicating a social constructivist paradigm which seeks 'to understand human activity from the perspective of those that experience it' (Jones *et al.*, 2006). The research approach, consistent with this view, places the reported experience of headteachers at its centre, collecting data through interviews. For each of the headteachers, mentoring and coaching support was available: my research task was to consider how this was manifested in the context of the first year in post and of other forms of support. Coaching and mentoring practices are based on enabling individuals to reach decisions about action through talking, listening and questioning. The research approach needed to be consistent with the implied value set. This suggested that the symbolic interactionist approach implicit

in grounded theory would be appropriate, with the perspective that 'society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction and thus rely on language and communication' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7). Thus the researcher held the role of interpreter, with an individual perspective to be acknowledged and accounted for within the research.

### **3.4 Data**

Data for this research were collected from six newly appointed secondary school headteachers who took up their first headship at either Easter or September 2008. The headteacher research participants were recruited by following up advertisements for headship posts placed in the Times Educational Supplement (TES) in the autumn of 2007. The headteachers were interviewed three times during their first year in post. Data from each interview were coded and analysed to inform subsequent interviews. Once all interviews were complete the computer programme NVivo was used to file data under open nodes, developing tree nodes as appropriate. During the research a decision was made to extend the dataset by recruiting four coaches as research participants using a modified version of the snowball method. The coaches were interviewed after an initial analysis and development of findings from the data provided by the headteachers. This further developed theoretical sampling and increased validity. The findings are presented in three analytical chapters (4-6), followed by a chapter of discussion (7).

### **3.5 The selection of methodology**

An approach centred upon grounded theory was considered appropriate for this study because of its applicability to situations where current theory is incomplete or inadequate (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Creswell, 2006). A social constructivist version of grounded theory was used for this question, which focuses on:

*efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634).*



In early literature (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the term 'grounded theory' was used to indicate theory that derives from data, but is now sometimes used to refer to the process of data analysis. However the social constructivist version of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) used in this research emphasises the significance of data collection (McLeod, 2001). In their initial account of grounded theory Glaser and Strauss (1967) were offering an account of their practice, and predicted further methodological developments by future researchers. Indeed, by developing very different positions on data analysis over time (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1992), they and other authors have validated the development of alternative methods. Thus I worked with grounded theory as a set of guidelines rather than as a recipe to be slavishly followed (Charmaz, 2006). While critics of grounded theory see development of method as a point of weakness (Thomas and James, 2006), this is a position stemming from the positivist tradition which prioritises standardisation. A positivist approach did not fit with the epistemology and ontology deriving from the research question. Correspondingly, I prefer the concept of 'theory generation' to the original terminology of 'discovery', which would imply a positivist orientation. This research seeks to '(insert) new discourses within old systems of meaning' (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992, p. 102).

A positivist approach was considered but found to be incompatible with the implied social constructivism of the research question. Also, the research to date does not provide testable concepts or theories sufficient in number or strength. A case study approach was considered, especially since most previous researchers in the field have thought it appropriate (Daresh, 1995; Bolam *et al.*, 1995; Bush and Coleman, 1995; Bush and Glover, 2005; Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Hansford and Ehrich, 2006). Cases selected for a study could have been individual new headteachers, but this could limit the likely transferability of findings. Alternatively the cases could have been one or more coach/mentoring schemes, but the study would then have been an assessment or scheme evaluation, rather than research

aimed at constructing new knowledge (Jones *et al*, 2006). This study positioned the headteacher as agent rather than as scheme participant.

Additionally, the literature review demonstrated that case study research into coaching and mentoring for new headteachers is generally based on one or more of three unexamined hypotheses: that new headteachers work with a single coach or mentor; in a dyadic relationship; and within an established scheme (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Hansford and Ehrich, 2006). The focus on headteacher agency enabled the researcher to step behind these hypotheses to explore 'what is, not what should be' (Glaser, 1978). The study was intended to produce theory to inform and support practice, potentially transferable to other contexts.

An ethnographic approach to the research was also considered. However, the presence of the researcher as observer of headteacher interactions would be likely to have distorted them and thus affect the reliability and validity of the data. An ethnographic approach would have required the negotiation of extended access to the school and to the headteacher, and this was problematic in the time scale available.

### **3.6 The place of the literature review**

Early practitioners of grounded theory suggested that the literature review be conducted after the collection of data so that the researcher enters the field without preconceptions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is no longer considered essential (Charmaz, 2008; Goulding, 2009) and as a researcher I found a preliminary literature review essential to identify gaps in previous research (Suddaby, 2006) and provide a provisional but systematic framework for the empirical research which followed.

As a researching practitioner in both professional areas of the study I brought considerable tacit as well as overt professional knowledge to the study. Thus there was the potential to see the research problem from the perspective of a professional insider, whether headteacher or executive coach, rather than a

researcher. The qualitative research tradition accepts that complete separation between the knower and the known is not possible and that the researcher is always present in the research (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Suddaby, 2006). The literature review enabled me to discover and examine some of my preconceptions, and thus understand them as a potential source of bias (Glaser, 2002; Neal, 2009a).

One of the most significant pieces of reading in the literature review was Lyotard (1984) on performativity. The theory of performativity gave me a lens through which to see both my history and the current experience of headteachers in education. So reading some of the literature became a way of bracketing and interacting at an intellectual level with lived experience.

### **3.7 The 'theory' of grounded theory**

For Glaser and Strauss (1967), the grounded theory approach was expected to facilitate the development of middle-range substantive theories which were empirical, grounded, and concerned with a specific area of human interaction. They expected more conceptual and broadly-based formal theories to develop from these substantive theories. For the kind of theory produced by grounded research there are a number of proposed tests. Charmaz (2006, p.6) suggests that the characteristics of a grounded theory are 'a close fit with data, usefulness, conceptual density, durability over time, modifiability, and explanatory power.' According to Glaser and Strauss, a theory is what makes the research relevant, and the test of a theory is that it 'provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications' (1967, p. 1). This emphasis on applicability is important for the researching practitioner because of the potential to develop knowledge for understanding, linked to knowledge for action to inform policy makers; and knowledge for reflexive action, to improve personal practice (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005).

I next consider aspects of data collection, beginning with the recruitment of research participants.

### 3.8 Collecting Data

Grounded theory is sometimes interpreted as an analytical process which ignores issues of data collection (McLeod, 2001). Willig (2001, p. 38) refers to this as the 'abbreviated version' of grounded theory where:

*'the researcher does not have the opportunity to leave the confines of the original dataset to broaden and refine the analysis.'*

However, in their initial exposition of grounded theory Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasised the interplay between data collection and analysis as an essential difference from the 'traditional linear one-way model' of research (Robson, 2002, p. 193). Social constructivist grounded theorists 'actively construct their data with study participants' (Charmaz, 2008). Thus attention must be paid to the relationship between researcher and research participant, since:

*the quality of the contact between researcher and empirical site and the quality of the research produced have a direct relationship (Suddaby, 2006).*

This research is an exploratory study of how newly appointed secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. Since confidentiality is central to the coaching and mentoring relationship, only direct participants have the experience to contribute to the dataset in an informed way. Thus the apparent population for data collection interviews was newly appointed secondary school headteachers and their individual, named coach/mentor. A study collecting data in this way could contribute to the existing body of research about how headteachers and mentors work together (Hobson and Sharp, 2005). However, this exploratory study focused on an identified gap in the research: the agency of the headteacher in working with coach/mentors. Thus the initial population was the newly appointed secondary school headteachers. Later in the research the population was extended to include coach/mentors.

A decision to interview dyadic pairs would imply a pre-existing theory about how headteachers and coaches work together, obviating a grounded theory approach. Further, it has not been established that all new headteachers use dyads. Since a

research approach based on dyads would discount other possible models and data from any headteachers using them, it would not satisfy the requirements of an exploratory study.

Consistent with grounded theory methodology, contributors to this research were recruited as a selection rather than a sample, and so there was no expectation of either representativeness or randomness. In recruiting headteachers as research participants I sought to reduce any external influence – including researcher influence – over the selection.

The new headteachers contributing to this research were recruited using information from advertisements in the Times Educational Supplement (TES) in autumn 2007. During a three-month period, 99 advertisements were placed for headship in the secondary sector. A tighter definition of secondary school headship removed advertisements relating to academies and special schools. Before writing directly to headteachers I made two further checks. First I eliminated schools whose website indicated no appointment had been made. I then telephoned the schools to find out the name of the new headteacher, to confirm that they had taken up post at Easter or September 2008; and that this was their first headship. I then wrote to two groups of ten headteachers under personal and confidential cover (see section 3.13). Each potential headteacher research participant received a personally addressed copy of the invitation letter (Appendix 1) enclosing the participant information sheet (Appendix 2). From each group of ten, two headteachers responded directly, one saying this was not their first headship, and one wishing to take part in the research. From the first group of ten I attempted to contact the remaining eight headteachers by telephone and two of these agreed to participate. I used a similar process for the second group, until the planned six participants were recruited.

Two of the coach participants were formally recruited, and the two others through a miniature version of the snowball method. For the latter, the two coaches were suggested by professional colleagues. For the former, one was coach to a

headteacher research participant and was recruited through him; the other was recruited through NCSL and contributes to their coaching programmes for new headteachers. Three of these coaches worked with newly appointed headteachers, and the fourth with senior leaders in another context<sup>1</sup>. All were sent a personalised version of the coach/mentor recruitment letter (Appendix 3) along with the coach/mentor participant information sheet (Appendix 4). They were invited to comment on six main findings from the research (Appendix 10), from their perspective as practising coaches working with newly appointed senior leaders. At the start of their interview participants had an opportunity to ask questions, and each signed the participant consent form (Appendix 5).

The research participants and their schools are reported here in terms of range, rather than as six individuals, for two reasons. In a grounded theory study, an understanding of participants as individual cases is not part of the methodology. Also participants were offered confidentiality within the limits of current legislation: in such a small population, detailing individual circumstances would render such an offer untenable. Each participant was allocated a pseudonym, abbreviated to a single initial within this thesis.

The schools whose headteachers participated in this research were located in county, borough and unitary authority contexts, and in rural, town and city settings. They catered for between 600 and 1500 pupils and were variously organised as co-educational or single-sex schools with either comprehensive or selective intakes. They included schools with community, foundation, voluntary aided, and trust school status, and also a faith school and a split-site school. Most held specialist school status. Pupils were mainly in the age ranges 11-16 or 11-19, although one school also offered nursery provision. Pupil populations ranged from predominantly white British to 75% ethnic minority. Ofsted reports indicate the proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) ranged from none to a high proportion.

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<sup>1</sup> One coach participant became a coaching client after data collection was complete.

Before their appointment to headship four of the research participants had held substantive or seconded roles working across more than one school. These included leading a joint sixth form, a local authority role, a secondment to a national body and work as an additional inspector for Ofsted. One participant had also held the role of teacher governor. One participant had experience as an Associate Headteacher for two terms, working with an Executive Headteacher, in a different school from the substantive headship. Two participants had had time as headteacher designate before the substantive role. One participant was appointed internally to headship.

The dataset was coded and analysed after each interview, and questions and areas of interest were then modified. Thus data collection and coding informed each other throughout the data collection phase of the research. The flexibility of the method was used creatively when a decision was made to extend the dataset by inviting four further research participants – namely coach/mentors – to contribute to the research. This decision was made to strengthen theoretical saturation. It also provided an informed perspective on the findings, additional to that of the researcher, and thus increased validity. Further, it began the engagement with the wider professional community in the research findings. This helped the researcher think about how to position findings as neither ‘too obvious’ nor ‘too radical’ (McLeod, 2001).

For this research I interviewed six newly appointed headteachers three times each over the course of a year. An element of modified longitudinal research was necessary because the research sought to develop a theory about how new headteachers use coaching and mentoring throughout their first year in post. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended developing concepts from an initial participant group, and then moving to a new group to achieve theoretical saturation, which occurs when no new concepts arise. Theoretical saturation for this research has come both through further and ongoing exploration and reflection

with the original participants and through interviews with practising coaches who commented on the findings.

Because this was a modified longitudinal study, specific attention was paid to the creation of rapport within the initial interviews, and this was essential for subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2006). The next section explains the interview processes.

### **3.9 Interviewing**

Qualitative research interviews were used as the main source of data for this research. King (1994) suggests five circumstances where qualitative research interviews are most appropriate and this research clearly meets two: it is an initial exploratory study in that it seeks to fill a gap in previous research; and it focuses on the meaning of phenomena as understood by the research participants, who are secondary school headteachers in their first year in post. Each worked with someone they would describe as a coach or mentor. Individual accounts include explorations about their individual journeys to headship.

For the headteacher participants the interviews were semi-structured, initially conceived as lifeworld interviews which seek to understand 'the themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). However, in constructing the interview it became clear that this immediacy would provide insufficient data and a life history approach was needed, where 'the respondent recalls events from the past and reflects on them' (Bryman, 2001, p. 110). Life history interviews typically include a focus on an experience or event (Bryman, 2001) and are therefore appropriate to this study. Their strengths include 'unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life' (p. 316). However, such interviews have been seen as eliciting perspective more successfully than fact, with the perspective potentially affected by the interviewer as audience (Bryman, 2001). In response, the social constructivist interviewer accepts that 'interviews are interventions' (Patton, 2002, p. 405), acknowledging the researcher's place in



the research and seeking to account for it. Social constructivism also accepts For the coaches, qualitative exploratory interviews were used with the agenda drawn from the research findings with the headteacher participants.

Fully structured interviews (Robson, 2002) were inappropriate to this study because of their tendency to predefine categories and concepts. Semi-structured interviews make the best use of available time (Robson 2002), providing a common framework. Recalling Glaser's (2002) concern about potential 'forcing' through the use of detailed interview guides, this research followed Charmaz's advice to use the smallest possible number of questions (2006). Interview schedules consisted of five questions to facilitate a guided conversation. The final question offered the research participant the opportunity to introduce an additional area. The use of a relatively small number of main questions enabled the researcher to explore issues from research participants' responses, and thus was consistent with the constructivist approach and the grounded theory methodology. The interview schedules are in appendix 6.

This discussion of the role of research participants in the research interview draws attention to issues of power in the research relationship (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Practical strategies were used to minimise asymmetry. The interviewer identified herself as a research student, and so new to her professional role, rather as the headteachers were new to theirs. While contact was initiated by the researcher and the topic of the research was chosen by her, participants indicated that the topic of the research was an important factor in their decision to participate. Participants were invited to choose the location of their interviews and were provided with the five framework questions for the interview in advance. In approaching potential participants the researcher also identified herself as a former secondary school headteacher in order, in part, to call on the collegiality of headship. She further identified herself as a current executive coach, placing herself as someone with an additional perspective on issues of senior leadership and, indeed, coaching and mentoring.

This identity 'mix' may have facilitated access to research participants in offering the opportunity to talk to a colleague who would understand the nature of the role, and the subject matter of the research. The researcher's role facilitated collegial understanding, especially in first interviews, so the research participants may have been more open about the challenges of the role. However, this collegiality may also have left some potential issues unspoken or implicit, because of implied shared understandings.

The power relationship in the research was complex and potentially ambiguous. For example, during their first interviews most of the headteacher research participants confirmed with me that I was a former headteacher. Since it can be expected that headteachers adapt their style to the audience, they might have responded differently to a researcher without a headteacher background. This is a social constructivist position, as Charmaz suggests: 'an interview is contextual and negotiated' and 'the result is a construction – or reconstruction' because 'interview stories do not produce prior realities' but instead 'provide particular accounts from particular points of view that serve particular purposes' (2006, p. 47). The dataset was subjected to coding and analysis after each interview, and the questions and areas of interest were modified in the light of previous interviews.

### **3.10 The interviews**

A schedule of four questions was piloted with a research participant who had recently completed his first year as a secondary school headteacher and who had used coaching or mentoring during that time. To avoid researcher bias in the selection of the research participant, he was recruited through NCSL. The experience of the pilot interview indicated that the planned questions were fit for purpose, but should be extended by a final question allowing the participant to add anything they felt had been omitted. This question allowed the research participants to determine when the interview was complete. The interview schedules for all three rounds of interview are in appendix 6.

Each round of interviews addressed a different time period. On the first round I asked participants to reflect on their preparation for headship until the date of the interview. In the second I focused on their experience as a headteacher to date. In the third interview participants were asked to frame and reflect upon their experience of support in their first year of headship and to consider their support needs for the future.

As previously indicated, participants were aware of the questions before each interview and could call relevant issues to mind without excessive preparation. When asked in the interview, the questions were reframed to fit the tone and tenor of the conversation at that time. Using planned questions helped frame the structure of the interview, and enabled the researcher to move the conversation on quite overtly when necessary. The final open-ended question was usually answered 'No' but the participant would still talk further about an area of interest. As interviews progressed and transcripts were read and coded, the researcher became sensitised to themes raised by research participants and incorporated them into supplementary or probing questions. A sample page from the transcript of an interview with a headteacher research participant is provided in Appendix 7. Coach participants were given a summary of research findings in advance of the meeting, and were asked where they would like to start the conversation.

In the first round of interviews I asked five questions:

- 1. How did you become a headteacher?*
- 2. During your first year in post, did you find any surprises in what it means to be or to become a headteacher?*
- 3. During your first year in post, where did you look to find support?*
- 4. What were the most significant kinds of support you found?*
- 5. When you were thinking about this meeting you probably had some thoughts about the areas we might talk about, and I'm wondering if there is anything you thought about before we met that somehow hasn't come up for whatever reason.*

In the first question I focused on the journey to headship and influences during that journey. In the second I asked them to reflect on their early experience of headship in context and the extent to which it had met their expectations. For the third question I placed them as agent, asking where they had looked for support and, by implication, where they had or had not found it. With this question I asked generally about support rather than about specific kinds of support because I wanted to understand the range they used and how any coaching or mentoring fitted with broader provision. In the fourth question I asked participants to focus on the support they received in terms of its significance, leaving open the interpretation of 'significance'. Like the other three, this question was framed to allow research participants to talk about their lifeworld (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) within a structured framework while allowing wide scope for their own interpretation. This was intended to minimise the influence of the researcher on the data.

Working with the transcripts from the first round of interviews resulted in a list of areas of interest for the second round. These were grouped under four broader questions which retained the focus on headteacher agency, and maintained consistency of approach with research participants:

- 1. How would you describe your journey so far into headship?*
- 2. What issues, or kinds of issues, have you looked for support on since we last met?*
- 3. What is it that makes it possible for you to ask some people for support but not others?*
- 4. Thinking of the kinds of support you have been offered or have found for yourself, would you identify any of them as coaching, or as mentoring, or as something else?*
- 5. Anything else you would like to include.*

The first question took forward the lifeworld focus. Then I asked about support from a general perspective, before asking the first formal question about coaching and mentoring. I reread the participant's previous interview shortly beforehand and

noted any specific points to be followed up at the end of the interview should they not arise naturally.

It was possible to interview only five of the six research participants during the second round of interviews, as the sixth postponed our second meeting. Therefore my second and final interview with this participant was conducted using the schedule prepared for the third round of interviews. This had the advantage of maintaining consistency of data. However, it meant that I held less data from this participant. Additionally, this participant answered the third set of questions without being exposed to those from the second schedule, which may have affected her responses.

For the third interview schedule I coded and re-read all interview transcripts, noting emerging themes. As part of the Oxford Brookes Business School Summer School in September 2009 I led a workshop on questioning, drawing on my real and draft interview schedules. I asked the workshop how I could ask research participants to consider emerging themes without inadvertently prejudicing their response. The conclusion was to present the themes on a set of shuffled cards and ask participants to talk about the ones most important to them. I adopted this approach. Themes on the cards, listed here alphabetically, were: Accountability; Hierarchy of tricky issues; Knowing the answers/asking questions; Loneliness; Networks; Supportive frameworks; Trust; Vision versus realism; and Working with a range of audiences. Based on experience of the first two interviews, in this round I added an additional theme, that of Reassurance.

The questions for the third round of interviews were:

*1. My research is about coaching and mentoring. In this context can you look at the issues on these cards (to be provided) and choose about four that are important to you and talk about them.*

*2. If you were given a free hand, what kind of coaching and mentoring support would you offer for newly appointed secondary school headteachers?*

*3. How could a coach or mentor most usefully have worked with you during your first year in post that would have made a difference?*

*4. Looking forward to the next phase of your headship, what kind of challenge and support do you now need or look for?*

*5. Thinking back on your experience of headship so far as if it were a journey: what have been the key points on that journey? What remains to travel?*

In the first question I asked participants to talk in some depth about a small number of themes and this gave useful data about the validity of emerging themes. With the second and third questions I explored participants' reflections on their experience of coaching and mentoring, both from a personal and a system perspective. In the final question I asked the participants to consider their future needs for challenge or support.

Coach/mentor participants in the research were sent an abbreviated list of the preliminary research findings the day before the interview (Appendix10). At the interview they were invited to decide which of the findings to discuss first, and the interview then moved through the remaining findings.

### **3.11 Working with the data**

In analysing data I used the approach of Glaser (1978), coding after each interview to inform subsequent interviews, and working from open coding to selective coding and then to concepts. I held three interviews with each participant, completing all the first interviews with all participants before proceeding to the next round of interviews. This meant that each stage of interviewing was discrete and each stage could inform the next stage. If I had scheduled a second round interview before completing all the first round interviews, this would have had two impacts on the integrity of the data. The second round interviews in question would not have been informed by all possible data from the first round and therefore would potentially not have been fully grounded. Additionally, the first round interviews in question would have been

informed by data from the second round, and therefore could have been distorted by that data.

An inductive approach to coding was used, employing *in vivo* codes where possible and maintaining the data as central. Coding paradigms, conditional matrices and axial coding were not used because of the need to maintain flexibility and to respond to the data without importing concepts and frameworks from elsewhere (Willig, 2001). In particular the use of axial codes was not appropriate because social constructivist grounded theory does not assume a single core phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) but rather, complex interrelationships (Creswell, 2006). The constant comparative method was then used to allow for 'abduction': the creation of new ideas or hypotheses. These were then checked against the data as a whole to ensure 'fit' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Appendix 8 provides the list of tree nodes developed within NVivo, while appendix 9 shows the expansion of one of these tree nodes.

I undertook open coding on an incident-by-incident basis (Charmaz, 2008), frequently coding sentence by sentence within incidents. Initially I coded on paper, returning to re-examine the data and extend or modify coding in the light of subsequent interviews. After the second round of interviews selective codes were beginning to emerge and I used the third round of interviews to seek saturation of data in confirming which of these emerging codes were seen by research participants as the most significant for their experience of coaching and mentoring. I continued to modify coding of interviews throughout this process. Following the seventeenth and final interview I used NVivo to file data under the full range of open codes, grouping these under tree nodes as categories began to emerge. This use of NVivo enabled me to keep an overview of the pattern of data, and to code in a range of ways simultaneously thus remaining open about interpretation. This has facilitated the use of the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1992; 2001) Category labels were developed in three ways. In order of preference these were: using the language of research participants (*in vivo* codes); as constructs

created by the researcher; and using technical terms from the theoretical or research literature (McLeod, 2001).

Once data collection was complete and as I filed it under codes in NVivo, I wrote a short account of the first year as headteacher as described by the six research participants. This enabled me to draw out key points within an overall narrative. Then I outlined seven possible chapters from this account, incorporating key concepts as they began to emerge in data analysis. These presented the data in a narrative framework. From this initial structure I produced a framework of three chapters giving the clearest and most analytical account. Data from the coach research participants are presented in a fourth chapter. These four chapters are:

Chapter 4	The first year of headship
Chapter 5	The new headteacher's experience of coaching and mentoring
Chapter 6	The view from the coach

Data are presented simultaneously in narrative and paradigmatic form so that the reader sees evidence alongside analysis (McLeod, 2001). Constant comparison has been used to ensure valid representation of the participants' lifeworld (Stronach and MacLure, 1997).

In this and previous chapters I have addressed issues of reflexivity as they arose, and return to this theme in the discussion chapter when considering potential conflicts between the role of the coach and of the researcher. I now turn to issues of validity and of ethics.

### **3.12 Validity**

The validity or trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of qualitative research is established using specific criteria, focusing on dependability and authenticity (Patton, 2002). The dependability of a study depends on the extent to which a systematic process has been systematically followed. Its authenticity depends on the reflexivity of the researcher, their appreciation of the perspectives of others,



and fairness in the presentation and interpretation of data. In qualitative enquiry, the researcher is present in the research and, indeed, 'is the instrument' (Patton, 2002, p. 14) and thus must be accounted for in terms of impact on the study.

In terms of dependability, section 3.3 explains the consistency of approach across the study's epistemology, research question, and research methodology (Willig, 2001). Sections 3.4 – 3.11 describe the systematic research processes used in this study. The methods for collecting and analysing data are explained, along with issues arising. Data are presented in three chapters (4-6) in both narrative and paradigmatic form, thus offering insight into both evidence and analysis. Therefore the dependability of this study is based on its consistency of approach from epistemology to analysis; on the evidence that method has been followed systematically; and also on its presentation of data alongside analysis.

In terms of authenticity, the researcher has consistently considered her own perspective and how this might affect the study. While developing the literature review, she was able to identify previously unexamined assumptions and make them available for critique. Equally, she was frequently aware of working at the cusp of being an insider and outsider researcher, both as a coach and as a former secondary school headteacher. This made her very conscious of the need for careful judgement in questioning research participants. Some implications of this are discussed in chapter 7. The researcher also investigated and acknowledged the impact of participation in this study on the headteachers, and this contributes to findings and discussion.

Understanding and appreciating the perspectives of others was central to the research question of this study. One strategy to achieve such appreciation was to use a very broad definition of coaching and mentoring when recruiting research participants, in order to draw on a wide range of experience and interpretation. Additionally the semi-structured interviews were based on a small number of broad questions, with additional questions developed from the responses of the individual. Thus participants' responses could implicitly challenge the researcher's

assumptions (Willig, 2001). Fairness of depiction was supported in two ways, both using a version of member checks (McLeod, 2001). In the final interview the researcher asked the participants to comment on emerging themes presented on cards. This process identified a further important theme, and thus participants were able directly to affect the findings. Also experienced coaches commented on preliminary findings, and this gave additional perspectives, endorsing, extending and challenging those of the headteachers.

The coaches' responses to the preliminary findings indicated that theory developed from this dataset would be transferable to other contexts, including the private sector. Additionally, the theory will be available to researchers for further study, to headteachers and the coach/mentors working with them, and to policymakers planning future developments in coaching and mentoring for new headteachers and other senior leaders.

While Crotty (1998) questions whether a social constructivist research approach is sufficiently critical, this study has exposed a challenging dilemma for coaches about how they work with those leading within a performative system.

### **3.13 Ethics**

Ethics approval for this research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Oxford Brookes University. Potential participants were sent a letter inviting them to contribute to the research (Appendices 1 and 3), together with an information sheet giving more information about the research and its context (Appendices 2 and 4). They were invited to ask any questions at the point of agreeing to contribute, and also just before their first interview. All participants signed a consent form (Appendix 5) before their first interview. This included information about confidentiality and its limits under current legislation. Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. The researcher was also mindful that the description and discussion of challenging experiences might involve unpleasant memories or difficult emotions. The researcher used her skills as a coach to determine an appropriate response to

any apparently rising issue, including providing a break in the recording of one interview. All participants were sent a transcript of each of their interviews and were encouraged to contact the researcher if they had concerns or questions arising from participation. They were also advised that data generated during the research would be retained in accordance with the University's policy and kept securely for five years after completion of the study.

Following ethics approval, I began collecting and analysing data as described in this chapter and the findings are described in the three chapters that follow.

### **3.14 Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the research question for this study in relation to my epistemology and choice of paradigm. Grounded theory has been explored as the methodological approach, alongside other possible approaches considered and rejected for this study. I have explained the recruitment of research participants and how data were collected, analysed and presented. I have also considered issues of validity, reflexivity and ethics. I now present the data from the study in three chapters.

## Chapter 4: The first year of headship

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores three aspects of the headteacher's first year in post. These are as follows:

1. Surprises (4.2)
2. Building confidence (4.3)
3. Managing accountability (4.4)

After a brief account of the journey to headship, the chapter considers the surprises of headship as reported by research participants: the visibility of the role, the place of feedback, and experiences of dissociation from the self. It then discusses the development of confidence and the difference between the internal experience and external enactment, including the place of self-questioning. It goes on to explore accountability for headteachers alongside aspects particular to new headteachers. It considers the place of formative accountability and the nature of accountability to governing bodies.

The research participants reported a number of common features on their journey to headship. They contributed to their anticipatory socialisation through observation of school leaders and reflection on practice, both accepting and rejecting observed features in constructing a leadership model for their future headship. Distinctive aspects beyond those previously reported in the literature were their valuing both the general visibility of their headteacher in role and an element of direct personal relationship with them. The aspirant headteachers had also accrued leadership experience although they later acknowledged that this took place in a sheltered environment when compared to that of headship. The main formal route for professional socialisation was the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), although even participants who had most valued this experience still felt that 'no programme could be bespoke enough'

(Headteacher F) to meet the unpredictable challenges of their first year. Thus the need for organisational socialisation was evident.

Through the process of making applications for headships research participants reported making a sequence of comparisons between themselves and others, drawing confidence from comparisons with peers and competitors for individual posts. Appointment interviews required them to enact the role of headteacher for the first time, and a successful appointment process had a transformational element which needed to impact on self-belief in role. Once appointed to headship, the point of self-comparison became the scale of the role in context, with the risk of being 'just consumed by the sense of challenge of the whole thing' (Headteacher B). Strategies to prepare for taking up their specific post included work with a coach/mentor and with other trusted contacts, but also using published sources of advice. While planning and preparation were valuable, no doubt one of the research participants spoke for many within and beyond this research when he reported his feelings on his first day in post:

*I remember driving in on that morning, and thinking 'Oh God, I have to actually do it now' (Headteacher B).*

## **4.2 Surprises**

While research participants were building their personal leadership model, they valued the approachability and availability of headteachers for whom they had worked. Once in post they were quickly faced with the resulting challenges: they needed to learn to 'be the headteacher' for different audiences, each with particular expectations. Although intellectually aware that as headteachers they would be public figures, the research participants were nevertheless surprised by early experiences of increased visibility which extended beyond the school gates:

*I hadn't quite appreciated how much of a figurehead you are, for the school and the community; and in the faith school you are also a figure in the parish (Headteacher B).*

The research participants found this a surprising experience at the start of their headship, but by the end of their first year they all accepted it as a normal aspect of their role and a skill of headship.

While the term 'figurehead' might imply stasis, all research participants talked about the unremitting pressures of the role. One, committed to personal availability, found that:

*The door never stops, everybody wants a piece of you, and unless you have been Head you've got no idea (Headteacher G).*

Thus the observed ideal of accessibility was challenging in practice, requiring engagement with a range of audiences and a volume of interactions.

Research participants talked about the tensions between three main foci: being the 'presence for staff' (Headteacher F); managing 'the tyranny of the day to day' (Headteacher R); and strategic leadership. At a functional level they attempted to resolve this through channelling availability with their Personal Assistant (PA). A more strategic approach was restructuring their senior team to manage the dilemma of being 'more visible but less available' (Headteacher L).

However one of the biggest surprises for research participants was the level of interest in their life beyond their professional role:

*I am surprised at how interested people are in you and not just what job you do or represent but your personal life and where you have come from (Headteacher L).*

As the new headteachers chose to step away from personal relationships, their personal life became more interesting to others. The surprise of this may be experienced as anxiety:

*A girl here came up to me and said, 'Oh hello Sir, I know where you get your dry cleaning done,' and I was a little bit worried about what else might have been seen. So I feel a bit buttoned up I suppose (Headteacher B).*

The pupil may have found it normalising to see the headteacher engaged in everyday domestic transactions. However her comment made him feel insecure because he was unknowingly being observed as the headteacher, but at a time when he believed he was outside the role.

Thus the possibility of being observed in unguarded moments can impact on the headteacher's self-awareness both within and beyond school, and ultimately affect their behaviour beyond the school premises and hours. While the headteacher may feel a clear separation between the self and the role, for members of the school and wider community there is no such distinction.

The research participants quickly learnt that behaviour was both observed and sometimes misinterpreted. However accurate interpretation could also reveal what the headteacher sought to conceal. One research participant explored the resulting complexity of self-management and leadership after being questioned by a colleague about his reaction to a complex and successful piece of planning by staff:

*I thought I was being very upbeat about it. There was just something in my response that wasn't quite enthusiastic enough and (later) a colleague said, 'You looked disappointed.' I was taken aback by that level of perception because disappointment was the wrong word. I was proud and very pleased with what they'd achieved that day but I could see that there was a connection there that hadn't been seen. I was devastated to think that I'd given that impression and I thought I hadn't (Headteacher L).*

The tensions for the headteacher included: wanting to contribute to an event, but judging it appropriate to leave; wanting to endorse the outcomes of the event, but noticing an opportunity missed; wanting to allow others to develop and learn through a sheltered leadership opportunity, but also wanting the outcome to be perfect. These internal tensions between the intellectual and the emotional, between his aspiration and the achievement, led to an emotionally conflicted response which failed to convince all of his audience.

This account indicates a need for headteachers to learn to use public emotion authentically or 'fake in good faith' (Crawford, 2009), and to manage this in a way that minimises internal conflicts for the headteacher (Rhodes and Greenway, 2010). In this case the participant's reflection on the event is thick with the vocabulary of unresolved feelings, adding a layer of complexity to the original incident.

Where public emotion requires performance, there is the question of how and where headteachers can safely express real complex emotions and have that expression acknowledged as valid. On arrival in post the new headteachers had carefully crafted their public statements and activities to convey their style of leadership, giving them a sense of control. However moments such as the above made the new headteachers understand that they could not control impressions made on others.

Away from the emotion of the event, the same research participant reflected:

*That's leadership: every inflection or gesture or expression, a raise of the eyebrow, or not being quite as enthusiastic as you normally are, is seized upon as evidence of a direction that you're taking or not (Headteacher L).*

The permanent gaze of audiences was a feature of headship that surprised the new headteachers, but which they accepted as a feature of their position. Constant interpretation by others meant that feedback about impact was of great significance to the new headteachers, and I now explore this.

By withdrawing from close relationships with colleagues, headteachers reduced opportunities for informal feedback. Thus research participants reported that feedback became both more precious and more challenging. One research participant talked about the emotional impact of feedback which included negative perception of his behaviour:

*If I ever get above myself I go back and I read it again. I was thinking this is a significant number of people who haven't come along with me this year. There is one side of me saying there is evidence of impact and there is another side*



*feeling quite hurt because I hadn't brought them with me (Headteacher L).*

While this was emotionally challenging for the headteacher, he also found it valuable in revealing interpretations which might have remained hidden. His comment about getting 'above himself' indicates that he noted potential danger in being over-confident, and thus made creative use of expressed dissent.

However, staff feedback could also be unexpectedly endorsing. One research participant who felt constantly challenged by her staff thought they might use an Investors in People reassessment to criticise her. A loss of accreditation for the school would then have very public impact. Instead the assessor told her he was impressed with how the staff spoke of her and her team. This marked a significant moment in her development of confidence as a headteacher.

While changed relationships with others may be an anticipated outcome of appointment to headship, one of the surprises consistently reported was a changed relationship with the self. At first there was a sense of surprise:

*People say 'The Head' and I look around and realise that it is me (Headteacher L).*

For many research participants this initial amusing dislocation between self and role developed into occasional experiences of dissociation from the self:

*I was feeling: am I really 'The Head'? It was a sort of out-of-body experience, as if I'm walking round and doing this job on autopilot. But every now and again I look down at myself and I can't believe it. I walk around and to me, I'm Gillian, and to everybody else, I'm not (Headteacher G).*

The new headteachers recalled moments when they were acutely aware of themselves playing headteacher, and of watching themselves play that role. This experience of dissociation may not be a temporary phenomenon:

*You're not you anymore, are you, you're 'The Head' and that's it. You look in the mirror and think no, I'm me, but you're not. You're not at all. You're 'The Head', and that's how people refer to you all the time. 'The Head.' You're not male and you're not female. And that's quite tough (Headteacher T).*

This description of loss of self, of gender and of identity gives a sense of being trapped reminiscent of a fairy tale or a horror story.

Accepting this experience as a fundamental aspect of headship was seen by one research participant as a key part of the journey:

*There is that transformation, that genuine step up where you are a role, you are a figurehead. That's leadership. You are a piece of property, you are a position (Headteacher L).*

That acceptance was a key rite of passage, with both loss and gain. Certainly headteachers reported the need for another kind of dissociation when taking difficult decisions in school:

*I am finding it increasingly easy to dissociate the personal and the professional so that if I need to say to someone who I actually quite like that they need to do this better, I find it easier (Headteacher B).*

Dissociation was seen as a necessary skill in discharging difficult aspects of the role, especially when personal feelings and professional requirements conflicted. Once the decision was made, dissociation was between self and the activity. Conversely, before a decision was made new headteachers found it hard to leave challenging issues at the school gate:

*I find it very difficult to switch off. We're at the supermarket on a Saturday morning and I'm thinking, 'So what shall I do about this situation?' I like to be involved, but you have to try and take some time out from the cogs whirring in your brain all the time. I hadn't quite appreciated how that would feel (Headteacher B).*

This relentless pressure to solve problems was a feature for all the research participants, in which some were able to involve their coach/mentors.

The next section explores how the new headteachers developed confidence..

### **4.3 Building confidence**

Although the first day in post was seen as stepping into role, the new headteachers understood that their journey was longer:

*I still feel a big fraud about this. I don't know if at some point I'll just feel that I'm old enough and I should be here doing this but I don't think I will. I'll be 75 and feeling like I'm too young (Headteacher B.)*

This research participant was a young appointment to headship and was 'disarmed' by comments on his youth. However he also felt that the role was greater than its incumbent, and this created a sense of unreality, as discussed above. Research participants reported significant self-questioning early in post:

*When you are first in post you worry about everything and whether you are getting it right (Headteacher B).*

The new headteachers experienced an internal dialogue characterised by anxious self-questioning, and frequently talked about strategies and experiences contributing to their developing confidence. These are now explored.

From the first, the new headteachers were aware of the significance of their own apparent confidence to their external audiences. One new headteacher visualised the difference between internal experience and externalised performance in terms of a swan:

*dignified and maintaining a vision above, but yet underneath, paddling like crazy thinking there's only you who has a handle on it (Headteacher F).*

Although the new headteacher felt the need to appear confident, the more significant element was demonstrating her vision for the school in a confident and compelling way, and without revealing the personal effort demanded. This headteacher believed the school required a major cultural change in its approach to pupils. Her light but energetic image of the swan was accompanied by a darker picture of the effort of maintaining the appearance of a confidence so deep that it will change the behaviour of others. The headteacher talked about:

*Those dark moments in the winter months when you think, 'Am I doing the right thing?' You are having to say to people: 'Take this leap of faith with me,' and staff at that point were reluctant to do so (Headteacher F).*

This indicates fundamental confidence in her assessment of the school's need; an understanding that she was asking others to change behaviour without any external evidence of impact; and also, constant self-questioning because of the risks involved. A significant challenge was to sustain the appearance of confidence in the context of these three powerful trains of thought. Her coach provided a secure and confidential opportunity to 'offload' confirming that she had chosen the right direction and was having a positive impact.

Another new headteacher facing the challenge of introducing change to a successful school reported using self-talk to regenerate self-confidence leading to confident action:

*You are there for a reason and you can do it; you have been appointed to do that job; you can see a plan: go and do it (Headteacher L).*

However this affirmation of confidence in judgement was matched by the new headteachers' clear understanding that they would not succeed if they acted alone. Indeed, all the new headteachers talked about the need to work through others, especially their senior team, but equally about the difficulty of placing professional trust in others. A frequent focus was the need to develop capacity in team members. However one headteacher noted how his behaviour impacted on his team:

*I'm not trusting them because I think I've made a judgement that they're not up to it. So then I'm doing things that they should be doing, and then I'm feeling negative towards them because they're not using enough initiative, they are just reacting to the day to day all the time, and then the whole thing goes round. And I hadn't quite appreciated how much I was implicated in until last week's conversation (Headteacher B).*

A conversation with his coach enabled the new headteacher to understand that his negative assessment led to behaviour which reduced his team's effectiveness. The coach enabled him to stand back and critically observe himself. Thus the coach supported the headteacher in self-management as well as management of others.

Another challenging aspect of self-management was learning to allow the team to approach significant issues in their own way. One research participant reflected on her anxiety about preparation for re-assessment of Investors in People:

*I was worried about the person who ran it because it was very last minute; but because it wasn't done in a way where everybody reads from a script and learns it, I was impressed with the way it was handled (Headteacher G).*

Thus both portrayal of personal confidence and demonstration of confidence in others could require new headteachers to behave at variance with their assessment of a situation. The coach/mentor could support an exploration of managing such contradictions. Both portrayal of self-confidence and demonstration of confidence in others were required for new headteachers to begin being effective, and this is discussed next.

The new headteachers noted the impact of their appearance of confidence:

*It all had a knock-on effect: if you trust your own judgement a little bit more you appear more confident to other people and they feel more confident in what they are doing (Headteacher R).*

For this research participant a key factor was learning to trust his own judgement, which had a beneficial effect both on his apparent confidence in the eyes of others, and on the self-confidence of others. This appearance of confidence was frequently the result of a specific decision about portraying confidence despite internal misgivings. Another research participant talked about such decisions to be confident in the context of formal appeals against a headteacher's action:

*You have got to go through appeals procedures and have your case pulled apart and it can be difficult. I think you have just got to be confident about what you are doing (Headteacher B).*

He asked headteacher colleagues for their mentoring advice when taking his first decision to exclude a pupil, but then indicates that the specific commitment to have confidence in his own decision was a separate element. Thus confidence did not appear to be only the result of successful deployment of technical skills, but

was also determined by how the new headteachers assessed their deployment of those skills, and how they decided to portray the outcome to others.

When the new headteachers behaved as if they felt confident and thus appeared confident to others, this had beneficial effects. While many such interactions were with individuals or small groups, sometimes there was occasion for very public demonstrations of the new headteacher's confidence:

*We do a speech very early in the year and that was my baptism of fire. There was a sigh of relief that I got away with it the first time and therefore it was going to be alright (Headteacher R).*

The new headteacher reported a very modest assessment of 'getting away with it'. Simultaneously he understood that his success was a significant moment for his audience and for himself. His chair of governors had previously proposed a weekly meeting. However after the new headteacher's confident, and presumably confidence-inspiring, performance the suggestion was not pursued. The new headteacher saw both the speech itself, and the chair of governors' response, as confirmation of his ability to convey the confidence of headship.

A similar experience concerned an unplanned challenge: an Ofsted inspection in the first term in post. Although the headteacher identified potential issues with his coach, he found that the inspection made new demands on his personal confidence. He also later discovered the impact of his approach on the governing body:

*I remember the Chair of Governors saying to me ..., 'That's when I knew we had made the right decision to appoint you because you did that well and you kept everybody together.' (Headteacher B.)*

This indicates endorsement of both social and technical skills. Thus the confident behaviour of the new headteacher had positive impact not only on the findings of the Ofsted inspection but also on the governing body's perceptions.

These accounts indicate the beneficial impact of portrayal of confidence, prioritising the new headteachers' actions. However the research participants also talked about how presumptive confidence had affected them. One talked about holding the confidence of governors in terms of implied support:

*I am new and untested but by my appointment I am sure I have their confidence. In that sense support is there but it is also quite aloof (Headteacher L)<sup>2</sup>.*

Alongside such detached expressions of confidence, the headteachers also welcomed engaged versions. One headteacher received this from her coach/mentor:

*He has shown a huge amount of confidence in me; he challenges me appropriately as well (Headteacher F).*

For this new headteacher, part of the value of this expression of confidence came from the credibility of a coach/mentor with experience of leading an extremely challenging school. The coach/mentor's role was particularly significant because the new headteacher found little support from the local authority or local headteachers. Her words clearly indicate that a significant aspect of her coach/mentor's confidence in her was demonstrated by his willingness to challenge her.

The research participants also reported the effect of time on how others behaved towards them. One commented in the context of staff:

*It becomes easier the more you are established in the school. The staff understand where you are coming from and what you are about (Headteacher B).*

This, however, implies that the headteacher has demonstrated a consistent approach, building a sense of reliability and confidence. Another research participant noted that the pupils' reaction changed with time:

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<sup>2</sup> While the framework of a supportive governing body was enjoyed by all the research participants, they were aware of colleague headteachers whose governing bodies were not supportive and of how this added orders of magnitude to the challenge of the post.

*The children were different towards me because by then I'd been here for six months, so that was a very different time for me (Headteacher G).*

Equally, taking significant decisions changed attitudes, as one new headteacher found when she suspended a member of staff:

*As soon as I suspended him, people started to take me more seriously. It gave me a lot more power with the rest of the staff in school in terms of saying, 'You're not doing your job,' or 'I'm really impressed with that.' (Headteacher G).*

Thus her decisive, high-profile action improved both her personal confidence and the attitude of staff, including their willingness to accept her judgements. For the new headteachers the demonstration of confidence from others began to be supported by growing internal confidence, and this experience is discussed next.

Growing confidence as a new headteacher was reported by one research participant as a physical sensation:

*I suppose that in a sense, I feel taller (Headteacher R).*

This comment indicates that the growth of mental confidence leads to inhabiting the role of headteacher with greater physical ease. Another research participant reported improved confidence differently:

*The challenge of what you say 'no' to is as important as what you say 'yes' to. I think that comes with confidence (Headteacher F).*

The new headteacher had decided to suspend the National Curriculum for a group of pupils: her increasing confidence enabled her to take greater risks in the interest of her pupils.

Completing the first year in post was a moment when the new headteachers noted increased confidence. They had completed a full cycle of the school year, and could plan for the future with greater understanding. Additionally most of the research participants could report improved examination results and other indicators:



*We're online for getting (significantly improved) A\* to C grades overall, so I just feel a little more confident now that we're going in the right direction (Headteacher G).*

This endorsement of the new headteacher's strategies led her to increased personal confidence, although she reported this as a slight rather than a major increase in confidence. In terms of enacted confidence, however, she reported a significant change:

*I feel really confident now in being able to say to everybody 'this is what we're doing and this is the direction we're going in' (Headteacher G).*

Thus there remained an intriguing difference between this headteacher's internal experience of confidence and her outward expression of it. The next section focuses on the internal experience of self-questioning.

At the end of their first year in post the new headteachers reported increased confidence:

*I have grown in confidence and there are more things that I don't feel a need to agonise over. I am more comfortable now with using my instinct (Headteacher R).*

The anxious self-doubt of the first weeks was replaced by more intuitive responses. However, another headteacher saw a place for self-doubt in headteachers working as change agents:

*I think it's important that you do always doubt yourself, because if you have a very clear vision and you are intent on driving it forward, sometimes getting staff on board with that can be quite difficult because it's a huge change in philosophy (Headteacher F).*

Thus with more experience this headteacher understood self-questioning as an important element in leading change. Self-doubt was no longer anxious but became a useful tool of creative self-questioning. As junior teachers the research participants had appreciated being asked their opinion by more senior staff: perhaps they were unknowingly offering support in such periods of creative self-questioning.

These accounts indicate that confidence is an important issue for new headteachers; and that the development of confidence is an interactive and iterative process which includes learning to see self-questioning as creative.

#### **4.4 Managing accountability**

Research participants talked about their accountability in two ways referred to here as formative and summative accountability. The two concepts draw on the model of formative and summative assessment, terms usually employed in respect of pupil progress and achievement. Formative accountability referred to their strategies to become a better leader by finding ways of holding themselves to account about their plans and actions. Summative accountability included 'rituals' (Ball, 2001 p. 212) such as Ofsted inspections and the reporting of examination results in league tables. Thus they reported an experience of accountability very different from that of being deputy headteacher. They reflected on the challenge of being the final decision-maker with full accountability for the school and how this aspect of the role significantly affected behaviour and relationships:

*I accept that I am accountable and I cannot chat with people as I used to when I was a deputy (Headteacher T).*

Thus accountability impacts on every aspect of a headteacher's daily life and how far they can share issues in order to find feedback, support and challenge.

While this interpretation of accountability is widely drawn, the headteacher's public accountability is sometimes very tightly defined:

*Often it simply comes down to examination results and Ofsted reports (Headteacher B).*

These narrow measures of accountability provide only a snapshot of an outcome or a single moment. Despite the new headteacher's apparent regret at the limited view of accountability, when questioned about how they defined success all headteacher research participants referred to measurable factors such as examination results and attendance rates.

However the new headteachers also discussed the limits of their personal impact on accountability measures, especially in their first year in post:

*This year we got the best results ever but with a better than average cohort. The next cohort is below average for us. If I had a set of results that had gone down then I think I would have felt much more pressured (Headteacher B).*

Thus from a restricted range of measures, wide-ranging conclusions were drawn about headteacher effectiveness. Therefore the new headteachers quickly became involved not just in accountability itself but in the management of accountability:

*I think all of us feel burdened by the pressures of accountability. How much time do we spend managing the accountability framework and going to meetings and talking about how to deal with Ofsted? There is an entire industry about that (Headteacher B).*

This comment indicates a need to manage the portrayal of performance, a process referred to by Ball as 'fabrication' (2001, p. 213). The new headteachers reported feeling frustrated that the need to manage accountability was a distraction from their main role, and also a potential impediment to change (Blackmore, 2004).

One research participant saw the probable timing of the next Ofsted inspection as a consideration in her decision to restructure her leadership team:

*It was that leap of faith because I'm about to reshape in a year when I know Ofsted will be coming in. We will have to suffer the dip initially and then go forwards (Headteacher F).*

This supports research findings (Blackmore, 2004; Bottery, 2007) identifying the dilemma that innovation in the medium- and long-term interests of the school and its pupils has an initial cost in reduced performance, which may impact adversely on Ofsted judgements. The issue became more complex when:

*We are working on improving pupils' capacity to study independently but we are hamstrung all the time thinking: how adventurous can we be? What have we got to do to push them through the exam machine? (Headteacher R).*

The stark imagery of 'the exam machine' exposes a dilemma for the new headteachers when they perceived a gap between what they believed to be worthwhile and what they felt was necessary to meet the accountability measures (Lyotard, 1984; Ball, 2001, 2003; Blackmore, 2004).

While improving or deteriorating examination results triggered praise or blame for headteachers, there were other implications for their professional lives:

*Fortunately we did very well with our results and that tends to keep people away from the door. If you are in a school that is struggling, the pressures must become quite intense (Headteacher B).*

Thus improving examination results allowed the headteacher to lead the school without unwelcome intervention. The perception was that such attention would not be experienced as supportive:

*The issue is how much support is given compared to how much is a threat, that you need to sort this out but in some unspecified way (Headteacher B).*

Another research participant reported a stronger version of this sense of threat:

*There is a very strong blame culture within the authority. I have only been here four terms and four Heads have gone and they have all been pushed. They were held totally responsible for the standards in the school, often after an Ofsted inspection. The irony is that in two of them last summer results absolutely rocketed. That wasn't the interim Head turning it around in one term. It was a longer-term push and drive on standards (Headteacher F).*

This indicates a conflict between external expectations and the headteachers' understanding of how best to secure sustainable change.

The research participants from high-performing schools also felt pressure of accountability through examination results and Ofsted inspections, needing to maintain their school's position 'on the crest of the wave' (Headteacher R). They were aware of the identification of headteacher effectiveness with the most recent examination or Ofsted grades.

Although felt particularly acutely by those new to post, these aspects of accountability are common to all headteachers. However some aspects of accountability are specific to new headteachers, concerning accountability without history.

The new headteachers found that they immediately took full responsibility for the school's past. The new headteacher appointed from within the school commented:

*I already know (the GCSE and A Level results) are going to dip, but that will be on my watch so I'll take the blame (Headteacher R).*

The vocabulary of 'blame' he uses echoes and endorses the comments about threat and blame discussed above, indicating a common perception by headteachers across local authorities and with very different governing bodies.

The research participants talked about the impact of the timing of their first Ofsted inspection relative to their time in post:

*At the end of my third week, Ofsted rang. It was great actually in the sense that I found it not very stressful because I thought 'None of it relates to me.' It was actually much better that they came after three weeks than after three months (Headteacher B).*

This indicates that headteachers believed an inspection team would expect to find rapid identifiable impact of the headteacher. One research participant argued that:

*The agendas don't tie up: Hargreaves<sup>3</sup> talks about the deep learning, deep support, deep leadership and deep experience and yet OFSTED talks about rapid turnaround (Headteacher F).*

This was a powerful tension in schools where new headteachers believed that a radical change of culture was required.

Finally, the research participants talked about the role of the headteacher during an Ofsted inspection. For one research participant this was a first experience of

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3. In *A New Shape for Schooling?* (Hargreaves, 2006) David Hargreaves proposed four 'deep' elements linked to personalised learning which could be used to reshape schools of the future.

inspection in a school where judgements were not clear-cut. He found this made unexpected demands:

*I hadn't understood the extent to which it was a negotiation; I had to really fight to put the case (Headteacher B).*

Thus an objective Ofsted judgment could sometimes be influenced by effective deployment of information. Conversely a headteacher working in a very deprived area anticipated little flexibility from inspectors because the low attainment level of her pupils meant:

*Leadership and management can never be better than satisfactory under the new framework. Therefore once every 12 months I will have a monitoring visit: I cannot avoid it (Headteacher F).*

As noted above, a low grade for the school would lead to loss of headteacher autonomy.

A common theme amongst research participants in discussing accountability was that they craved the opportunity to discuss current concerns in a safe environment where they could test and extend their thinking. One of the research participants suggested that in the absence of more formal challenge he would welcome a process of accountability, including reflective review.

*It would be nice to have somebody stop and say, so how do you think you did then? Within the context of a Trust; with the local authority at arm's length; a SIP who is comfortable with things as they are at the moment; a governing body who are very willing, I haven't yet felt the challenge, or the need to justify myself (Headteacher R).*

His comments indicate a paradox in leading a very high-achieving school. While his role includes maintaining high levels of challenge to staff and students, he felt no creative challenge for himself. His comments indicate a wish reflectively to articulate his decision-making process, while another research participant suggested a more robust version:

*I would have liked, ironically, to be held more accountable than I have been, and to have had a more robust discussion about some of the things I have been doing. It's that outside*

*pair of eyes coming into a school, looking at systems and structure; somebody saying 'Well, why are you taking that decision?' That would have helped me to rationalise and clarify my own thinking about how to move the school forward (Headteacher F).*

These two research participants indicated that a retrospective alongside a proactive element in discussing accountability would be appropriate. This approach emphasises formative and developmental versions of accountability, instead of one fixated on current outcomes. Such a model would enable headteachers to improve their own performance by clarifying their thinking.

One research participant described feeling that she was accountable to an 'amorphous mist'. She used her coach/mentor to 'put it into harsh reality for (her)': to translate high-level accountabilities into personal practice.

As an example of this process in action, the new headteacher talked about her first experience of dealing with under-performance. Like other research participants she found managing her first formal HR procedure a challenging time. Her reported point of reference was not the potential for improved external measures, but of accountability based in her professional values and affecting individual pupils in her school. However, a performative analysis would see the headteacher, under pressure to demonstrate improved examination results, passing pressure to an underperforming middle manager. Further, a lack of decisive action would leave the headteacher vulnerable during an Ofsted inspection. Alongside more formal skills coaching from HR specialists, the headteacher used her coach to prepare her to begin the process, to support her through it, and sometimes to support her in meetings, modelling professional behaviour.

By contrast, another research participant reported being told by a local authority officer that she 'needed to deal with' (Headteacher G) a member of staff who was behaving inappropriately within the school. However the officer offered no insight into what 'dealing' might entail. This approach left the new headteacher feeling inadequate because it implied that she did not know how to do her job properly. Further, it also made her wary of asking advice as she thought others too would

simply say she was not doing her job. The research participants indicated the environment that they inhabited as headteacher was, in terms used by Headteacher F, focused on problems rather than solutions. This contrasted sharply with their leadership values and their approach to their staff.

According to the Ofsted Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2009) a key function of the governing body is to hold the headteacher to account. All research participants discussed their chair of governors and governing body in the context of their accountability. While some research participants valued individual support and challenge from their chair of governors, the consensus was that their governing bodies had insufficient knowledge of education leadership to support headteachers by offering challenge. Their comments indicated that the relationship between new headteachers and their governing bodies is a fruitful area for further research.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter has considered three aspects of the new headteachers' experience in their first year in post: the surprises they encountered, how they developed self-confidence, and their experience of managing accountability. This has included discussion of the impact of increased public visibility, of dissociation from the self, and of positive and negative feedback. It has explored the complex process of achieving self-confidence in role, including the value of continued self-questioning. Finally it has discussed the nature of accountability for headteachers, including issues specifically related to new headteachers. In this context, the next chapter takes as its focus the way in which research participants worked with their coach/mentors in their first year in post.



## **Chapter 5: The new headteacher's experience of coaching and mentoring**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I indicate the experience of the new headteachers in respect of their formally allocated coach/mentor. Then I suggest a categorisation of the three ways in which coach/mentor pairings are achieved. I then consider the coach/mentor in the local authority context, including issues of confidentiality. I explore the possibility of the hero coach/mentor, and then discuss the issues of time and trust in the coach/mentoring process. Moving beyond formal dyadic pairings, I reflect on how new headteachers use networks for coach/mentoring, and the implications of their own orientation as a coachee. I discuss coach/mentoring arrangements for the second year in post, concluding with a summary of the definitions of coaching and mentoring used in practice by new secondary school headteachers.

The expectation is that newly appointed headteachers will receive coach/mentoring from a more experienced colleague, and that this will be an important route to organisational socialisation. However the experience of the six headteachers participating in this research was that the initial allocation of a coach/mentor was either inoperative or ineffective. Specifically, the local authorities in which headteachers T and F worked did not allocate a coach/mentor; the coach/mentor for headteacher B arranged no meetings; headteachers G and L were respectively allocated a local headteacher and a local authority officer, and each headteacher reported feeling that there was a conflict of interest but also that their coach/mentor lacked experience of the challenges they were facing; headteacher R was allocated a local headteacher whose leadership approach was contrary to that of the new headteacher. Thus all the new headteachers in the study needed to exercise agency to find the necessary coaching, mentoring and other development support and four specifically sought out an alternative identified coach/mentor. Therefore an important strength of this research approach has been to incorporate data from headteachers where the initial dyadic approach to

coach/mentoring does not work. Male (2006) suggests, however, that all new headteachers need to look beyond their allocated coach/mentor for their support needs, and the development of a wide support network was also a strategy recommended by coach research participants.

## **5.2 Linking with the coach/mentor**

Weindling and Earley (1987) recommended that new headteachers be allocated a mentor by the local authority and suggested that mentor should be a more experienced headteacher. All the headteacher participants in this research had at least one formally identified coach/mentor. As two of the participants each experienced two coach/mentors, there were eight coach/mentors in all. Seven of the coach/mentors were practising headteachers and one was a local authority officer. The research participants identified the main professional role of most coach/mentors as experienced headteachers, and no research participant prioritised experience or training as a coach or mentor.

Headteacher interviewees identified three methods by which pairing with a coach/mentor was arranged; these can be characterised as allocation, matching and self-selection. 'Allocation' indicates that the new headteacher was not involved in the choice of mentor in any way. Five of the research participants worked with allocated mentors. Of these five the local authority provided two, and NCSL, the local diocese, and the local headteachers' group provided one each. Thus the selection of coach/mentor was sometimes made by organisations other than the local authority. Also, as some research participants were able to influence the choice of coach/mentor, a process other than simple allocation was used.

Where the headteacher was able to influence the choice of coach/mentor, the term 'matched' is used. Two of the research participants had matched coach/mentors, and two mentors were in this category. Both headteachers who were able to influence their choice of their coach/mentor did so through participation in City

Challenge programmes<sup>4</sup>. Both coach/mentors were experienced headteachers from outside the local authority of the new headteacher. Each matched coach/mentor brought a defined period of support and an additional resource into the school in terms of time or money.

Where the headteacher identified and recruited a coach/mentor independently and without an intermediary, the term 'self-selected' is used. The self-selected coach/mentor did not bring a resource to the school in terms of additional time or money, and was a cost to the school budget. However, the new headteacher negotiated arrangements, and she also negotiated a flexible approach.

Allocated mentors were reported as working only within formal dyadic arrangements. By contrast, the three new headteachers working with matched or self-selected mentors worked beyond confidential personal support and challenge. One coach/mentor facilitated an away weekend for the senior leadership team, allowing the headteacher to contribute to the programme without the distraction of leading it. Another research participant found that, at a critical point in team development, members of the senior leadership team articulated their concerns about the performance of a senior colleague in a more forceful way to the coach/mentor than to her. This indicates that even senior leaders moderated the expression of their opinions when speaking directly to the headteacher. These opportunities were made possible by the additional resource the matched coach/mentors brought to the school, and the flexibility of arrangements possible with a self-selected coach/mentor.

This research shows that practices recommended by Weindling and Earley (1987) have subsequently developed further, with some coach/mentors being provided by organisations beyond the local authority and with new headteachers contributing to the choice of coach/mentor. Further, the new headteachers sought out additional coach/meriting support where they identified the initial allocation as

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<sup>4</sup> City Challenge is a highly targeted drive to crack the cycle of under-achievement among disadvantaged children in primary and secondary schools in three urban regions: London, The Black Country and Greater Manchester. - <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/citychallenge/>, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011.

inoperative or ineffective. Experience as a headteacher was strongly prioritised over that of coaching or mentoring, both by the headteachers and by providers of coach/mentors.

### **5.3 Working with the local authority**

A key role of the coach/mentor as originally discussed (Weindling and Earley, 1987; Daresh, 1986) was supporting the socialisation of new headteachers mainly within the local authority. The importance of a knowledgeable point of contact was articulated strongly by research participants new to their authority:

*It is very important that somebody comes and meets you regularly to talk you through the procedures of the local authority and what the protocols are. It is a must that the local authority provides a support service for new headteachers (Headteacher T).*

This research participant was frustrated to find that the local authority did not provide a mentor, but also provided no induction and refused even to provide a point of contact for orientation. Thus she was prevented from understanding the authority's annual cycle and, as an organised strategic thinker, found it annoying and emotionally draining to receive demands for overdue documents of which she had been told nothing.

Thus the new headteachers identified an immediate need for clear information about how the local authority operates. Where such basic support was not available, the new headteachers felt insecure. They experienced an emotional response not only at the initial realisation of lack of provision, but at each recurrence. This supports the finding of Daresh (2004) that feelings of belonging and credibility for new headteachers require a good working relationship with the local authority.

Where the local authority provided an officer as coach/mentor or link adviser, the new headteachers sought more than mere information:

*My Link Officer is leaving soon, and he is the third person I have had since I have been here. So there is no consistency and you feel you are just beginning to share, just beginning*

*to get to know people and then they move on (Headteacher F).*

Thus continuity was important to the new headteachers: they looked beyond the provision of information to a developing relationship as their first step toward finding a place within local networks. The local authority was perceived as not simply a set of functions but a web of relationships. The research participants talked about wanting to work with their local authority, and brought a mental model of effectiveness including proactive engagement with schools. However they frequently found that in practice this engagement was not available:

*I had rapidly realised that there wasn't much support in the local authority. I did recognise that in National Challenge you get between 5 and 20 days additional time from a School Improvement Partner (Headteacher F<sup>5</sup>).*

Thus the new headteachers made judgements very quickly about the level and quality of support available from the local authority, and set about finding alternative sources of support where necessary.

Where the new headteachers judged support from the local authority to be below need, they reported increased need for support from a coach/mentor and discussed their proactive efforts to find such support. One research participant who identified the lack of potential local support chose to include her school in the City Challenge programme for the benefits it would bring. Another maintained and extended networks from local authorities in which she had previously worked. This shows new headteachers being proactive in seeking out effective coach/mentoring.

Weindling and Earley (1987) suggested that the local headteacher as coach/mentor would offer valuable insights about working effectively with the local authority. Subsequent to their study, the framework for relationships between schools and local authorities has become much more complex; the nature of local

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<sup>5</sup> SIP: 'A school improvement partner provides professional challenge and support to the school, helping its leadership to evaluate its performance, identify priorities for improvement, and plan effective change. The school improvement partner acts for the local authority and is the main (but not the only) channel for local authority communication about school improvement with the school' - DCSF (2007).

authority engagement with, and responsibility for, even neighbouring schools can be very different. The experience of one research participant who was head of a foundation school reflected this change:

*My mentor is very much institutionalised and has been a head in the authority for nearly 20 years. He only sees one way of doing it, so that's not a helpful source. In terms of asking for advice, people who will only do what they're told are not the sort of people I'd want to be listening to (Headteacher R).*

This experience apparently supports Southworth's (1995) suggestion that mentoring risks replicating the past rather than creating new solutions. However it also indicates the strength of the new headteachers in this research: they chose how far to accept the perspective of the coach/mentor, and were active, selective participants in the coach/mentoring relationship. Where research participants found the coach/mentoring relationship was not useful, they withdrew, reducing the frequency of meetings or limiting their agenda.

Problems experienced by new headteachers in securing effective interaction with their local authority may have stemmed in part from attitudes and actions of their predecessors. Research participants reported negative comments from their predecessors about engagement with the local authority or with local headteacher groups. Frequently, the predecessor had a policy of not attending local meetings unless there was direct benefit to the school. Research participants found this negatively affected attitudes of local headteachers towards the new headteachers' schools and themselves. For most research participants, achieving a successful working relationship with the local authority and headteacher groups was an important commitment. It is not clear whether this difference in attitude between the new and former headteachers was a generational difference, or whether it derived from the predecessor headteachers' experiences of seeking to engage, or was because through experience, headteachers develop tighter time management practices.

However new headteachers spoke positively about potential benefits of working successfully with the local authority and headteacher groups. They deliberately invested time in building relationships, attending meetings even if the agenda had no obvious relevance to their school. Three of the six headteacher research participants reported receiving unexpected public support from their headteacher group as a result. Thus new headteachers brought internalised values of collaboration and collegiality (Feldman, 1976, quoted in Crow, 2007, p. 52) to their new post. This may explain why Crow (2007) found no evidence of new headteachers being socialised to these values. Rather, they socialised other headteachers to understand the new headteachers' values, demonstrating their approach to be different from their predecessors'.

Where the allocated mentor was a local authority officer the headteachers found it useful as an opportunity to talk:

*It is always nice when someone comes in to enable you to articulate what you are doing with the school and where you are going and I use it for that purpose (Headteacher L).*

While this account describes a key function of coach/mentoring as providing a non-judgemental environment, this coach/mentoring relationship was compromised in two significant ways. The word 'nice' suggests an emphasis on support rather than challenge from the coach/mentor; thus this relationship might be construed as a weak form of coach/mentoring. This may indicate a lack of skills in the coach/mentor, or alternatively might have derived from local policy about how officers ought to work as coach or mentor with new headteachers.

Further, the effectiveness of provision was weakened by the research participant's choice to restrict the issues for discussion:

*If you feel there is any potential of the things you are saying being used in a different context or being part of an agenda then you don't say it. So while I admire the intent, I question the validity and the efficacy of it (Headteacher L).*

This concern expressed by the headteacher touches on the issue of confidentiality within the coach/mentoring relationship. However, his concern is not simply that confidentiality might be breached in terms of content. He realised that the competing roles of the local authority officer as coach/mentor might lead to unintended misuse of privileged information. This reservation was also shared by research participants whose coach/mentor was a headteacher in the same local authority. They expressed an awareness of complex competing agendas within the local authority which, as new arrivals, they only partly understood and which made them reticent.

Thus issues of confidentiality within the coach/mentoring relationship were heightened for new headteachers, and the relationship with their coach/mentor was adversely affected where they suspected confidentiality would not be possible. The coach/mentoring relationship needed to be prioritised, exclusive and free of any links with accountability structures. The new headteachers made clear decisions about how much to reveal in their coach/mentoring conversations, those decisions being based on their assessment of the level of confidentiality and how far their agenda was the sole agenda of the coach/mentor.

One research participant remarked on her local coach/mentor's willingness to share her own issues as they arose:

*She said, 'A head of department has just done this, and I've got this letter, and on the last day of term. This is awful!' Looking back now, I used that experience quite regularly because I think: 'Oh, she got that letter, that's okay then.'*  
(Headteacher G).

In being prepared to be open about problems in her own school and her emotional reaction to them, this coach/mentor offered a privileged insight into the real world of the headteacher which was very different from the customary assured public face (Goffman, 1959). Research participants valued their colleague headteachers' openness about challenges and their emotional reactions.



Although research participants had gained insight into the role as aspirant headteachers, conversations were much more open once they were in post. The new headteacher was granted admission to the 'headteachers' club' where discussions could be more personally revealing. In this case the more experienced enabled the new headteacher to realise that encountering and dealing with disconcerting problems is completely normal in headship, and not a measure of inexperience. Equally, recognising the emotional reaction of the more experienced headteacher is an aspect of socialisation to the role.

Alongside socialisation to local authority norms and to the emotional landscape of headship, the research participants also reported needing more specific support:

*Although I get on very well with her, she hadn't really dealt with some of the issues I'm dealing with here (Headteacher G).*

The context and issues of even neighbouring schools in the same local authority can be very different because of demographics or history. While the new headteachers looked for support from their coach/mentor on socialisation to the local authority and to the role, they also sought informed insight and support on issues within their own school.

Before taking up post all research participants formulated a strong sense of the main challenges. This came partly from contact with governors and local authority representatives during the appointment process. Much more basic data about schools is publicly available than in the 1980s and research participants talked about deriving their analysis most significantly from Ofsted reports and examination results. Based on this, they arrived in post with a perspective on the likely challenges of the school. This informed their agenda with the coach/mentor, with some using it in the matching process. For example, one research participant who led a faith school said:

*I have got enough faith voices, so let's have somebody who is different. I want somebody in an 11 to 18 school, like this one. This school is part of Building Schools for the Future (BSF), so I want someone who is going through BSF, from a*

*co-educational school in an urban, challenging context  
(Headteacher B).*

His prioritising of BSF supports the finding of Hobson (2003) that the mentoring needs of new headteachers vary with new government legislation, but challenges Southworth's view (1995) that coaching and mentoring are not future-oriented.

This research participant's analysis also shows headteachers prioritising experience in leadership and management over that of coaching and mentoring. The new headteachers wanted their coach/mentors to be able to support them in filling identified gaps in their professional knowledge. Sometimes these gaps were generic areas not forming part of their portfolios as aspirant headteachers. Often they were areas where expertise was limited, and a new headteacher needed 'just in time' learning. Thus coach/mentors were sometimes working with new headteachers not just on socialisation but on fundamental areas of knowledge and expertise. While this could be interpreted as skills coaching, there was also a significant element of learning how to negotiate an unfamiliar situation.

Another research participant created the opportunity for a matched coach/mentor by volunteering her school to be part of City Challenge despite her school's achievement measures exceeding participation criteria. Opting into City Challenge was a risk, as identification of a school with a category can adversely affect its local reputation and therefore its intake. The head chose this path because of her concern about the lack of support from within the local authority. Her coach/mentor from City Challenge was the experienced leader of a very challenging school, so she was:

*...talking to somebody who has been there and done it and made a difference. He knows what the challenges are, he knows what the information is (Headteacher F).*

Thus the new headteacher valued the niche knowledge of her coach/mentor because he brought first-hand experience from a headship with similar challenges. In her analysis there is also a hint of the need for survival skills identified by new primary headteachers (Crow, 2007).

## 5.4 Working with the coach/mentor

The research participant who chose her own self-selected coach/mentor also prioritised the value of experience and achievement as a headteacher:

*What she has done with that school is fantastic. She is regularly achieving 50 or 60 per cent with a client base that, on predictions, would be achieving 15 or 20 per cent.<sup>6</sup> So I aspire to be like her and I want my school to aspire to be like hers (Headteacher G).*

Thus the new headteacher reported the credibility of her coach/mentor primarily in terms of examination results, although her language hints at a wider view of success. The experienced headteacher is seen as someone to be emulated and her school as providing an aspirational vision.

For this new headteacher working in a challenging school, the first contact with her self-selected coach/mentor was very powerful:

*I sat in my old office and she spoke for about an hour with me and I just wrote down everything she said. She took me back to her first year, the things she was saying about what she dealt with and how she dealt with it made this place look like Eton (Headteacher G).*

Thus the self-selected coach/mentor was more experienced in areas of particular interest to the new headteacher, but also able to take into account the perspective of a new headteacher by drawing on her memory. For new headteachers whose schools pose a particular challenge, finding a coach/mentor with parallel experiences was critical. By placing the current school in a wider context this coach/mentor enabled the new headteacher to understand the level of challenge she faced and improve her perception of likely success. What had seemed like the ultimate challenge was re-interpreted as of a lower order than the problem a respected colleague had successfully faced. The skill of the coach/mentor in recounting her story was that the new headteacher felt more able to face the challenges of her own school, and the account was enabling. In less skilled hands

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the most commonly used index of school achievement: it is the percentage of the pupil population achieving 5 or more GCSE grades at C or above. Predicted results are based on previous test results collated for the pupils in the year group.

this account might replicate a hero headteacher model, undermining the confidence of the novice headteacher.

This reflective sharing of experience prioritised the coach/mentor role and allowed the new headteacher to interpret her current experience differently. Additionally the sense of an experienced headteacher being on a journey as yet unfinished may have enabled the new headteacher to perceive her work as process rather than event: she would need to work strategically over time rather than seek a solution which would magically transform the context. The coach/mentor, in accepting the new headteacher's emotional reaction as appropriate, had enabled her to refocus on the issues. Thus the new headteacher prioritised the need to work with the coach/mentor from a common understanding of appropriate issues and actions. For challenging headships, an ability to acknowledge and examine emotional dimensions rather than be overwhelmed by them was reported as a key piece of learning.

Socialisation into what is expected of a headteacher assumes a normality about those expectations. The process for new headteachers seems to have an additional stage of normalising the condition of being permanently off-balance, and thus offering a way to regain that balance. While such a role model might appear to be the hero headteacher in another guise, the differentiating factor is the willingness to discuss the journey as problematic and challenging. The coach/mentor's talk about her own journey enabled the new headteacher to take a more considered view of the problem and to see it as external to herself (Robertson 2008). This indicates a complex relationship between the self and the school for the headteacher.

Like the matched mentors, this self-selected mentor worked in the wider school community, with the senior leadership team and the whole staff:

*She came and presented to my staff. I thought I would go down to the hall and introduce her but she was there before me. When I saw my staff and how she engaged them, it made me think, 'This is how I need to be with them.'*

*suppose I was more rigid instead of being a bit more just myself (Headteacher G).*

This example of modelled behaviour radically changed the way the new headteacher thought about working with her staff. The experienced headteacher modelled confidence and positive assumptions. However the new headteacher's interpretation of her own need to be 'a bit more just myself' implies that she had, instead, been enacting an internalised model of headship which distanced her from her staff in specific ways. It also indicates that learning to enact the self in headship is not easy: this new headteacher went through a painful process to learn how to understand and enact the version of the self required in this specific context.

While the new headteachers placed an emphasis on the relationship with their coach/mentor, they found it hard to analyse key aspects of that relationship:

*A lot of it is dependent on that (clicks fingers) kind of connection that you may or may not be able to make with somebody (Headteacher L).*

Reflective candour on the part of the coach/mentor was highly valued. One participant recalled his coach/mentor saying:

*Well, you know, I didn't know anything 10 years ago when I started and I made all kind of mistakes (Headteacher B).*

Therefore the new headteacher felt he could ask 'something that might make you feel stupid' because the coach/mentor had positioned himself as a fellow traveller: mistakes were normal rather than triggers for guilt or anxiety. Moving beyond this initial candour, one participant looked for:

*An unencumbered response, one that doesn't have any agenda, one that I know touches upon their values but they understand where I am coming from (Headteacher L).*

This indicates that new headteachers were looking for something beyond technical issues. They sought a framework deriving both from a shared set of values and also from the sense that the coach/mentor had a perceptive understanding of the context of the new headteacher. It also implies a quality of attention: the

coach/mentor's response needed to be independent while also drawing on a personal value set. One research participant who was head of a selective school reported a coach/mentor relationship which failed on all of these terms because the coach/mentor repeatedly turned the conversation to his disapproval of selection.

The new headteachers consistently reported prioritising headship experience in their choice of coach/mentor. However, their sense of the success of the relationship focused on the ability of the coach/mentor to create a trusting engagement. Mutual understanding and shared values were supported not by heroic leadership but rather by the coach/mentor's overt admission of human fallibility.

The use of time in the coach/mentoring relationship was a key indicator of the value placed on it by both parties, and planned availability of time with the coach/mentor was an important issue. The three research participants with matched or self-selected coach/mentors had access to a defined allocation of days which could be used flexibly by negotiation. Although some allocated mentors also had a defined time commitment, it was less generous or flexible and this affected the success of the relationship. A more significant allocation of time supported by funding gave status to the coach/mentoring engagement.

Successful coach/mentor pairings required a commitment from the new headteacher.

*It has got to be regarded as a really key part of what is going on (Headteacher B).*

Their challenge was to allocate time to the coach/mentor relationship while direct involvement in the school was at its greatest. The images used by headteachers to describe this time, for example that they were 'designing the plane while flying it' (Headteacher L), communicated their sense of dangerous urgency. The new headteachers were experiencing the specific challenges of the first year in post while the events of the school year, both planned and unexpected, unfolded

alongside. Where the coach/mentoring provision was perceived not to add value, the new headteachers minimised their time commitment and meetings became sporadic, or ceased.

All coach/mentoring pairs conducted their main work face-to-face, and research participants reflected on the optimum frequency for such meetings. In one case the headteacher and coach met:

*Once every half term just for an hour. Actually by the time the half term had passed I had to make the decision anyway (Headteacher T).*

This indicates a problem-based approach to coaching and mentoring. The research participant reflected that while meeting weekly for an hour would have supported her decision-making, keeping regular space in the diary would have been problematic. Other research participants working closely with coach/mentors solved this dilemma by making telephone calls between meetings. Another new headteacher found that:

*Ten times a year was probably about the right amount. It was enough to look ahead at my next target and part of coaching and how I was going to get to that (Headteacher F).*

This implies two separate coach/mentoring agendas running in parallel: a target-based approach; and a more formal, content-based, coach/mentoring agenda, perhaps looking at skills. The limited time available in the coach/mentoring relationship was a resource to be managed, and effective coach/mentoring pairs ensured that their agenda included strategy as well as problem-solving.

While research participants prioritised relevant experience as a headteacher, they also acknowledged the value of coach/mentor skills. Certainly the coach/mentor provided a valued opportunity to articulate an issue, but the new headteachers' expectation was of more than mere listening. Coach/mentors needed to:

*...listen with a purpose. They are framing the questions that will take the coachee to the next level, or to a perspective they might not have considered. That is the skill and where you need the training (Headteacher L).*

This indicates that the concept of the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) may be relevant to this study. Certainly it contrasts with the experience of one research participant who sought a reflective rather than directive opportunity, but found his allocated mentor:

*...all too keen to tell me you should be doing this, you shouldn't be doing that, rather than asking why did you choose to do it that way? (Headteacher R).*

Flexibility was valued, including the ability to move between the roles of mentor and coach so that:

*sometimes I don't realise he's doing it until afterwards when I reflect (Headteacher F).*

This adaptability implies a high level of skill and confidence in the coach/mentor, and contrasts with the approach of a less experienced headteacher-mentor who apologised when she thought she had been directive.

The new headteachers worked to establish a wide network of professional colleagues from whom they could seek factual information. However they all drew a sharp distinction between this factual support and a reflective coach/mentoring relationship requiring trust. Confidentiality, as discussed in section 6.3.3, was concerned with not revealing to others the discussions within the coach/mentoring engagement. The need for confidentiality derived from the nature of some discussions:

*I have many conversations that relate to people's lives ... I have to make some difficult decisions and those decisions weigh heavily (Headteacher L).*

All the headteacher research participants prioritised trust as the essential element in a coach/mentoring relationship, whether in a formal dyadic relationship or one arising from the headteacher's network.

The new headteachers reported reaching a decision about trust in a coach/mentoring relationship very quickly, even within an hour of meeting.



Although the relationship was a professional one, the new headteachers talked about the need for trust as a personal connection:

*I know I can make a mistake or I can be a bit uncertain about something. I can ask him questions that I might be embarrassed to ask someone else. Part of that relationship is that I feel I can be very naïve (Headteacher L).*

The concept of trust was more extensive than confidentiality and it allowed the new headteacher not merely to discuss problematic issues in a safe space, but more radically, to step away from the dignity and constraints of office for a time. Where trust developed, the new headteacher was prepared to take risks and show vulnerability not possible in other professional relationships. The new headteachers found that talking about plans at a speculative stage, or about challenging issues, meant that they made explicit their vulnerability. They were concerned that in appearing less than certain they might damage their credibility. Therefore the coach/mentoring relationship needed to accommodate this vulnerability as appropriate, allowing the headteacher to work through speculative and creative alternatives. Only three of the eight coach/mentors were included in the research participants' trusted group, and none of the three was an allocated coach/mentor.

Trust in the coach/mentor was particularly significant in the period before the new headteacher had established trusting relationships with members of the senior team. It was most acute in two schools which offered significant challenge to the new headteacher. In one school a senior colleague was actively opposed to the plans of the new headteacher; in the other, a union representative offered sustained public opposition. Both headteachers valued support from their coach/mentor in helping them maintain self-belief in the face of strong opposition and while their competence and judgement were being publicly challenged. The headteacher needed to receive:

*An unencumbered response, that doesn't have any agenda, that touches upon their values but they understand where I am coming from (Headteacher L).*

Thus the coach/mentor's presumption of the new headteacher's professional competence is central to providing a safe space for vulnerability, speculation and self-questioning.

Where the research participants established trust with more experienced peers, they found increasing value in:

*Just talking things through. How do you do this in your school? What would you do in that situation? (Headteacher B).*

This shows new headteachers not just working intensively on specific issues but seeking to extend their repertoire of options and perspectives through exploratory conversations with peers. Conversely some of the research participants negotiated space for informal coach/mentoring on issues beyond the immediate role and under 'Chatham House rules'<sup>7</sup> (Headteacher F). In seeking such coach/mentoring beyond formal pairings, this need for mutual understanding of context, values and working style was emphasised by research participants. There was general agreement about the conditions for a trusting coach/mentoring relationship, for which the assurance of absolute confidentiality was an essential prerequisite. The new headteacher needed to believe that they were being offered an unencumbered response rooted in no other agenda than the headteacher's own. The coach/mentor needed to have greater experience as a headteacher, and to understand the context of headship in terms of its loneliness and its accountability. Experience matching contextual issues was an essential condition of trust for headteachers in the more overtly challenging schools. New headteachers tended to report this experience in terms of Ofsted grades and the ambition to be judged outstanding, and in terms of statistical indicators – especially examination results and value added scores.

One research participant found that her coach/mentor provided a valuable perspective on the distance travelled:

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<sup>7</sup> There is only one Chatham House rule which states: 'When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed'. The phrase is used by this research participant with its more commonly received meaning of absolute confidentiality, including about the meeting having taken place.

*We're on such a lengthy journey and you almost forget where you started from because you're so involved in it. The coach is the person that makes you stop, look back, and think: those moments of reflection (Headteacher F).*

Thus the coach/mentor could help the new headteacher achieve a sense of perspective on the journey and so keep track of progress. Enabling the headteacher to step back had a restorative effect, which also came from the coach/mentor's occasional provision of a safe space to 'offload' used to create new momentum:

*You really do need to offload, sometimes. Yes, I am strong, but at the same time you need those quiet spaces to step back and say OK, take that deep breath and off we go again (Headteacher F).*

This new headteacher indicated that choosing such support might be interpreted as an indication of weakness. However she used this aspect of coach/mentoring to go beyond mere empathy to a refocusing and restorative experience supporting renewal. This was not the personal quiet space of solitary reflection but an engaged quiet of shared consideration with a purpose.

Sessions needed to include challenge as well as support if they were to be effective: without challenge there was little journeying. One research participant reported dissatisfaction when coaching sessions lacked challenge. She sought greater rigour because 'there's only so much kindness you can have' (Headteacher T), implying limited skills in her allocated coach/mentor. Her observation followed a visit from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) which had reframed her perception of an issue:

*Behaviour is not an issue; attitudes to learning are an issue. I thought, 'I know that,' and I was a bit angry with myself because I was putting it off and I should have known (Headteacher T).*

The HMI visit was, in effect, a piece of high quality targeted consultancy which would not be within the role of the coach/mentor. The concern of the new headteacher was more that she had high expectations of herself and found coach/mentoring sessions were not enabling her to hold herself sufficiently to

account or to gain new perspectives. The HMI comment made her realise that she had tacit knowledge of an issue which she had not been able to make conscious, and she expected her coach/mentor to provide challenge in such areas. This prioritises coaching and mentoring skills over headship experience.

For focused mentoring conversations, the research participants tended to turn to subject specialists such as HR or finance advisers, and to trusted members of the new headteacher's network. Two research participants reported seeking focused conversations as part of their strategic approach to self-development. Each had made a list of areas where they needed to improve knowledge, and they sought relevant experts within and beyond the school. According to CUREE (2005) definitions, this could be seen as specialist coaching.

While such focused one-off conversations were widely reported, the research participants also valued the continuing relationship with the formal coach/mentor. The coach/mentor could then use knowledge of the context, including enabling the headteacher to measure progress. For one research participant in a very challenging and lonely context, the coach/mentor provided essential reassurance. While not saying that she was doing the right thing, his message was:

*Your intentions are right and that you are on the right journey (Headteacher F).*

Research participants talked about the value of reassurance in terms of making tricky decisions, in terms of reflecting on their actions and performance, and in terms of the opportunity to talk through significant plans for the school. This expressed need, which they called reassurance, indicated that the headteachers valued the opportunity to talk about their thinking processes and consider options. The common factor was the need for a trusted environment where new headteachers could show uncertainty. In a context where the model of the hero headteacher is espoused by stakeholders, such conversations are a great risk for the headteacher. They could be experienced or interpreted as indicating either personal vulnerability or weakness in management or leadership.

While the research participants were clear that a headteacher's coach/mentor needed headship experience, two research participants speculated on the potential value of a coach from outside education. One research participant thought such a coach would bring an unencumbered perspective, and so ask questions which might not occur to an acculturated mentor. Another research participant explained the power of such non-practitioner coaching as allowing the new headteacher the opportunity to articulate their thinking. A further research participant reported the power of articulation even in the absence of a coach. At the beginning of his second year in post he found that preparing for the school speech day gave him a personal opportunity to review the year for himself alongside the more formal report of the event. Another reproach participant felt that the coach brought something beyond the opportunity to articulate thinking. However his description of the coach implies an apparent paradox between the agency of the coach and that of the coachee. His experience was that the coach had the ability to move from listening to questioning so that:

*People arrive at a position and they got there themselves and that's marvellous: coaching when it's done well can be quite epiphanous on occasions (Headteacher L).*

The research participants varied in their approach to mentoring and coaching opportunities. One research participant seemed naturally disposed to accepting coaching and to finding it quite informally:

*I deliberately set about getting myself into coaching conversations even if people aren't aware that they are coaching me (Headteacher L).*

Another was 'reticent about asking questions because surely you should know?' (Headteacher B). However, his growing experience as a headteacher meant that he began to find a need to change:

*I tend to just try and answer things that I probably should just say I really don't know at all about this, and then it can become more difficult because I should have asked two years ago (Headteacher B).*

For this new headteacher a key factor was how well he knew the potential coach/mentor, and this affected both his sense of the willingness of others to respond, and more critically, his willingness to make an approach. Thus the agency of the headteacher remains central to successful coaching and mentoring, and the perception of questioning as an indication of strength is central to the engagement.

## **5.5 Building support**

Many of the headteachers sought advice from professional colleagues, and networks from previous roles were very highly valued:

*You have to come into the role knowing that you have people you can go to and count on (Headteacher L).*

These networks reduced the sense of isolation for new headteachers: there was a source of advice they could call upon.

The account the research participants gave of such conversations had some characteristics of coaching or mentoring:

*The business manager from my previous school... we mutually support each other. The fact that we now work in different establishments is helpful, because we can step back and give proper advice and guidance. But we both know the agenda that we are talking about and sharing (Headteacher F).*

This describes a relationship of mutual peer support, with an emphasis on needing a shared understanding underlying the overt conversation. Another research participant had friends at the same career stage who could share issues informally:

*A group of us started teaching together, and we've moved up through the ranks together, so I can think of five people who are new to headship and we do talk an awful lot and run things past each other (Headteacher T).*

The emphasis here was on contemporaries sharing similar experiences, rather than the accepted formal model where the headteacher with greater experience supports the novice. Nevertheless these conversations could offer challenge as

well as support when the headteachers 'are tough, and they say do that and then move on' (Headteacher T). This outside perspective supported the new headteacher by offering clarity about course of action.

While conversations with network members were informal, they could be quite exploratory and far-ranging:

*You start by sharing your experiences over a period of time and you'll be saying, what are your numbers like this year and how are you responding to swine flu and 'rarely cover'. So it's a two-way thing and it's understood that there's more than shop. It's a safe conversation to have and it helps to explore your thinking. The context is different so you take that into account but you might consider doing something in a way that you might not have thought (Headteacher L).*

Professional purpose was acknowledged alongside the apparently social and casual tone, allowing discussion of common issues and possible responses. Thus headteachers could share perspectives and expertise, expanding their own range of options in an informal and economical way. From the articulation and sharing of issues the new headteachers could achieve a better perspective and clarity about their own position.

Although in this case one headteacher was more experienced, the agenda and support were seen as shared and mutual. This reflects the early career experience where the more senior teacher had sought out the perspective of the junior. The elements of trust, shared agenda and purpose were clear, and this more speculative conversation offered the new headteacher a way of stepping back from a public role into something more vulnerable:

*You know I can make a mistake or I can be a bit uncertain about something and ask questions that I might be embarrassed to ask someone else, but what's part of that relationship is that I feel I can be very, very naïve. Sometimes those conversations have given me the moral touchstone that I needed (Headteacher L).*

This indicates the headteacher taking what may feel like a naïve role, but through that role, accessing and understanding something more about the deeper framework of values needed to make a key decision. This account of safely

accessing values and emotions rather than just solving technical issues indicates the new headteachers working with some of the more sophisticated levels of coaching indicated in the four-level model. Only three of the headteacher research participants felt they could work at this level with their coach/mentor, and no headteacher worked in this way with their allocated coach mentor.

Equally, the framework of trust, shared agenda and purpose allowed professional shorthand without compromising either party:

*A friend of mine got a headship a year before I did and it is him that I have always phoned and spoken to, probably because he knows how I am and knows what I am thinking. He also knows not to give me any rubbish, just tell me the answer (Headteacher T).*

The new headteachers deliberately maintained networks from the past to support their early headship. They sought specific rapid advice or information as well as more speculative and exploratory conversations. Adaptability on the part of the person giving the advice was therefore essential. These relationship had many of the characteristics of a coach/mentoring relationships, without the formal trappings. Further, building new networks with new professional colleagues was also a priority.

In developing new networks, local headteacher groups were a focus and every research participant sought links with their local headteacher group. Research participants found that the legacy of a non-collaborative predecessor affected local relationships, and they needed to demonstrate a different approach to collaboration:

*The school hasn't always enjoyed good relationships with some of the schools around us. The two closest schools have also got new Heads and we have got on really well, we have already broken down some barriers (Headteacher R).*

This confirms the value for new headteachers of developing relationships with their immediate contemporaries. However it could take time for new headteachers to feel part of an established headteacher group:



*They would probably think that they were very welcoming and in many ways they are: people say ring me up if you need anything. But they're still quite a tight group (Headteacher B).*

For some headteacher groups the apprenticeship is reportedly a long one: a research participant reported a colleague as saying that it took him 'five years to start to be accepted even though he was a white male' (Headteacher T). This suggests that other ethnic or gender groups would find even greater challenge.

Some research participants encountered fractured headteacher groups:

*Many schools in the LA are now in different categories: foundation schools, trust schools, academies. So there isn't the strong networking of head teachers. So it has been quite difficult to pick up the phone and to ask a fellow head (Headteacher F).*

As a headteacher new to the local authority, this research participant's interpretation was that the lack of collaboration at headteacher level was caused by the number of different categories of school, and that this inhibited her seeking local advice. However homogeneity of school status did not necessarily lead to collaboration: in another local authority the presence of a high proportion of foundation schools meant that:

*The protocol in here is just keep within your own... none of them will actually sit at a table and work out a solution because none of them actually want to say they find it really difficult. You just find the network that you are most comfortable with and work with those schools (Headteacher T).*

This indicates that experienced headteachers could find it difficult to admit the existence of problems and thus of professional vulnerability, maintaining a performance even with colleague headteachers (Goffman, 1959).

While headteacher networks have traditionally been based on locality and on face-to-face contact, new technologies and new forms of school organisation now both permit and support virtual networks. Thus email and virtual communication enable wider and more dispersed networks to function as support groups:

*I have been able to engage in conversations with heads in other Trust schools.... so that has been a very useful source of support. It has the advantage that we are at least 50 miles apart and we are not vying for the same pupils (Headteacher R).*

This highlights the potential for greater collaboration where schools are not in competition. Websites also allow implied communication and benchmarking of some decisions. For example, one research participant reported checking the websites of local schools while deciding whether to close the school in snowy weather:

*As soon as one said they had closed for the duration then another one must have gone, and it was 'Oh, three schools are down so I will do it as well.' If the first school said 'we now are open for business and pressing on', how much difference would that have made to others' decisions? (Headteacher B).*

Thus there is a potential impact of virtual reality on the headteachers' individual decisions. Further, coaches employing a Neuro-Linguistic Programming<sup>8</sup> (NLP) approach might see here a new headteacher using the recommended strategy of finding a respected expert and finding out how they approach a problem.

The new headteachers also valued more traditional opportunities for direct collaboration, including very practical sharing of expertise from more experienced colleagues:

*I rang the Head at a neighbouring school, very different context from mine but her maths results are outstanding every single year, and I bought their scheme of work (Headteacher F).*

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<sup>8</sup> NLP is an approach to personal and organisational change pioneered by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. It seeks to achieve rapid positive benefits for clients by affecting behaviour through using a link between language and neurological processes.

Again the sharing of expertise is not only from the established to the new, or the experienced to the novice. The new heads were quickly seen as sources of expertise because of their prior experience or their early impact:

*A local headteacher became a school improvement partner in another LA and was assigned a faith 11-18 mixed comprehensive, so I did a session for her explaining about what faith schools are all about. Also because we have done so well in our early English exam entries we have contact since then from people (Headteacher B).*

In addition to these pair relationships of mutual support, meetings of headteacher groups were valued by some new headteachers for both their overt and their implied agenda:

*We did a kind of needs analysis of who's got gaps in provision or where we are not that strong so there tends to be a practical element. But also the kind of communal group therapy that you get there is good (Headteacher B).*

This normalising of challenging experience, providing a protective perspective, is one of the functions of a coach/mentor emphasised by coach research participants. However there are also limits on the issues some new headteachers are willing to share with new colleagues:

*I am quite happy calling my colleagues and asking them questions and I do locally but not on the hard stuff. There are very few people I turn to for that (Headteacher L).*

These harder issues were those that related to values, emotion, and judgement: the touchstone issues referred to in section 5.4.

While the focus of this study is the headteachers' first year in post, their perspective at the beginning of their second year provides a useful extension and reinforcement of the findings so far, and to this I now turn.

A year of headship experience had made the new headteachers more self-confident, and they had evidence of impact in the school. However for most of the new headteachers their sense of the challenge of their post had increased after a year. They attributed this partly to their own increased experience:

*In the first year you are probably just happy that you go home every day, wake up and come back again. But as you go on you start to see the flaws in things a bit more. I pick up things more now in the second year (Headteacher B).*

Thus the new headteachers' emphasis became less on personal survival, and more on close observation of the school from the perspective of an established but critical insider. The learning of their first year allowed the new headteachers to reframe their sense of the challenge of their context.

Their attention was not merely to surface features:

*I think we have become more effective but I don't think we have really changed the heart of what it's about (Headteacher B).*

This sense of the need to lead major cultural change was an acknowledged challenge for some of the new headteachers as they began their second year in post. This increased sense of challenge derived from a deeper understanding of the context of the headship. However the challenge could also be seen in terms of potential Ofsted judgements:

*It is not about education and teaching alone, it is about everything else: social services, your community, and the parents. The new (Ofsted) framework is much more explicit: you are going to have everything going all of the time and be fantastic at teaching and learning and still not get grade one (Headteacher T).*

While this account might appear to imply a sense of despondency in the face of excessive expectations, it also reflects the new headteacher's own high standards in that only the top Ofsted grade would satisfy her. This emphasis on performative assessment was balanced by an alternative account which placed the nature of the challenge in a more obviously optimistic context:

*We are dealing with human beings so you never get to the finishing station, and if you do, that is the day I will resign (Headteacher F).*

Thus this new headteacher relished her primary role as working with people, and celebrated her sense of an unending journey. These accounts of headteachers at

the beginning of their second year in post lead on to a consideration of the kind of support they sought as their headship developed.

The new headteachers talked about the kind of support they continued to need in their second year in post. The new headteacher working with the self-selected mentor and one of those with a matched mentor decided to continue the relationship into a second year. The second headteacher who had worked with a matched mentor chose to join a scheme where his school would have a 'partner school' which had worked through some of the issues he faced. Alongside a number of other links between the schools, he negotiated a regular meeting with the headteacher:

*I said, I would value having an opportunity once a term just to come and talk to you for a couple of hours and use you as a sounding board three times a year or so. And we both thought that would be a really useful thing for both of us (Headteacher B).*

He did not identify this mutual support as peer coaching, and it does not exactly fit the models of either CUREE (2005) or Robertson (2008) because the agenda evolved. Nevertheless the negotiated agenda, the shared benefit, and the emphasis on articulation of an issue in the company of a respected and trusted peer identify this arrangement as a form of peer coach/mentoring.

This theme of perceiving a need for a coaching or mentoring relationship beyond the first year in post was strongly endorsed by another research participant:

*I didn't need coaching and mentoring at first. It is now that I know the school like the back of my hand and I want to make some really big changes that I would like to be able to have somebody to say, 'What do you think about this? What do you think about that? Is it too much change in one go? Do you know anyone with examples where I can get more information?' And it is now that it all comes to an end (Headteacher T).*

From these various portrayals of coaching and mentoring as described by the participants it is possible to summarise both the definitions used by participants and their interpretations of the role. Both are considered in the following section.

## 5.6 Definitions of coaching and mentoring

The research participants worked with a range of understandings of coaching and mentoring. The clearest account of the use of a coaching framework came from a research participant working with a matched mentor. The mentor had started the relationship by presenting the new headteacher with a model similar to that proposed by Parsloe and Leedham (2009):

*The relationship was described as mentoring, but in fact part of his theoretical approach was to work on this coaching model. He showed me a chart and said that we might start off being on this side of the page and being very directive, and at the end of the process we'll be at the other side and more about me working out my own solutions to problems. I suppose that is the journey we moved across and so I guess a lot of it wasn't really mentoring - it was more a coaching model (Headteacher B).*

According to Mullins' (2007) definitions of coaching and mentoring, this arrangement would be identified as coaching in that it was a fixed-term arrangement. However, the expertise of the coach/mentor was primarily in headship and both inductive and deductive techniques were to be used, and this would identify it as mentoring. This approach shows the new headteacher not only being supported to resolve rising issues, but developing strategies for solving such problems in the longer term. For this research participant the work with the coach/mentor was therefore a journey alongside the main journey to headship. Thus the coach/mentor planned to support the new headteacher toward greater independence and agency. This model also implies adaptation by the coach/mentor who will adjust to the current needs of the headteacher. This endorses the account of flexibility and of the importance of contracting reported by Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999).

This flexibility of approach was valued by research participants and was identified as a key skill for successful coach/mentors. For example one research participant noted that her matched mentor:

*...moves effortlessly from coach to mentor and back into coach. He is so skilled at it, even sometimes I don't realise he's doing it until afterwards when I reflect (Headteacher F).*

Another research participant suggested that in a coaching conversation the energy is with the coachee rather than with the coach, and that the balance of the conversation would be 80:20 in favour of the coachee. However he reflected the practice and comments of other research participants when he placed the headteacher as agent in the both the coachee and the mentee relationship. He talked about sometimes choosing to seek concrete suggestions or advice from specific people, for example when working with specific HR issues. Certainly, the new headteachers were quite pragmatic in seeking specific information and advice and deciding how to use them:

*If I was going to call somebody I'd be there with my pen and my paper and I'd be writing it down. I'd use that information, or base my thinking on it. I wouldn't have arrived at it necessarily through a process of deep questioning (Headteacher L).*

Thus the new headteacher does not necessarily lose agency within the coach/mentoring relationship by seeking specific advice: when appropriate, this approach can increase their agency by adding to their analysis and options.

Nevertheless most research participants characterised coaching as specifically non-directive. However this stance could be difficult for the coach to maintain, and a research participant reported that:

*This week she did say to me 'why don't you try this and this' and at the end of it, she said 'of course, you don't have to'. I think she felt quite guilty telling me things (Headteacher T).*

The concern of the new headteachers was that they would be able to access appropriate coaching, mentoring and other support to match their perception of need. Correspondingly the skilled coach/mentors were able to adjust their approach.

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter has considered aspects of the new headteacher's experience of coaching and mentoring. Following three methods of creating dyadic coach/mentoring relationships, I have discussed the coach/mentor and the local

authority in the contexts of socialisation and confidentiality. Having explored the possibility of a hero coach/mentor, I have considered the coach/mentor relationship in terms of time and trust. Alternatives to dyadic relationships were then discussed, followed by the concept of the good coachee and support arrangements for the second year of headship. The chapter concludes with a consideration of definitions of coaching and mentoring used by new headteachers.

Having reviewed the experience of new secondary school headteachers in respect of coaching and mentoring, I now turn to the comments of four practising coaches on the preliminary findings of this study.



## **Chapter 6: The view from the coach**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter reports on interviews with four experienced coaches who work with senior leaders including headteachers. The decision to conduct member checks with experienced coaches rather than with the six notional coaches working in dyadic arrangements with the new headteachers was made for three reasons. Most compellingly, since this is a grounded theory study, the member checks were intended to engage at the level of theory rather than with the experience of individual headteachers. It was therefore appropriate to involve coaches with a wide experience of coaching headteachers and to include an experienced coach working in the private sector as an indication of the extent of potential transferability of findings. Additionally this approach to member checks drew on the wide experience of the coaches, enabling them to contribute more than a commentary on a specific coaching engagement, and thus offered a stronger test of the validity and transferability of the preliminary findings. Pragmatically, no initial dyad in this research was sufficient to supply all the headteacher's needs for coaching and mentoring, and Male (2006) suggests that this is a common experience even where the initial allocation functions well. The qualitative orientation of the research was reflected in the approach to member checks. The researcher drew up preliminary findings from interviews with the headteachers, and used these as a way to tap into the wider reflective experience of the coaches. The resulting additional data was then analysed using NVivo.

The four participating coaches are referred to here as coaches rather than coach/mentors because that was how they described their role with clients. However, two of the coach participants who had themselves been headteachers talked of using a mentoring approach when required, drawing on their experience of headship but also acknowledging the limits of their knowledge and expertise. Each participating coach was sent preliminary findings (Appendix 10) from this study before the interview, and was asked to comment on them in the order they

preferred. This chapter considers their responses to each of the five preliminary findings. Responses to the second and fourth finding have been grouped together because of the congruence which emerged.

## 6.2 Responses

The first preliminary finding proposed that:

*in their first year in post the new secondary school headteachers in the study developed ways of 'doing' and 'being' the headteacher both for themselves and for others. This involved modifying their leadership style and learning new ways to lead that took into account the ambiguity of being both the team captain and a team player; of being seen as the figurehead while managing feelings of vulnerability.*

The coaches working with headteachers reflected on the need for clients to make their headship distinct. This included both working in different ways from their style as a deputy headteacher, and also in ways different from their predecessor in the post. A change of personal style might involve using symbols of office; for example a deputy headteacher promoted internally to headship was advised that she should now wear a jacket to signal her change of status.

The coaches noted that achieving the most senior leadership role entailed the experience of 'much greater visibility and exposure, a step-change in the order of magnitude of the challenge' (Coach V). A key element was working with the top team, developing a sense of vision and purpose for the future, agreeing some kind of road map to get there, and communicating it through the whole organisation. The coaches needed to help their clients bring issues to the surface, articulate them in order to understand them, and thus reach a point of being able to work on them. One coach encapsulated this coaching experience as:

*Taking ownership of your issue in a non-judgemental process (Coach S).*

This implies dual agency for headteachers: first understanding an issue, then determining action. The coaches created and maintained the non-judgemental

space which enabled decision-making. Thus a consistent issue brought by the new headteachers for discussion with their coaches was:

*How you make a decision about when and what to do  
(Coach C).*

One coach talked about learning to assess what might be reasonable action:

*She has no sense of her authority, and isn't sure that she is  
being reasonable. Then: let's think what you can do and  
where the levers are, so you can assert authority (Coach Q).*

The new headteacher needed to realise the scope of her authority, how others would perceive her action, and the steps to take. Another coach reported:

*Enabling them to see that they are competent to do it;  
enabling them to feel they have the right support in place;  
and giving them an opportunity to use the coach to talk it  
through or role-play how they are going to handle it (Coach  
S).*

These accounts add to the headteachers' commentary on the complexity of reaching and holding to decisions, indicating the contribution of the coach/mentor. The distinctive issues of the first year of headship, then, are not necessarily technical problems, but learning how to disaggregate issues and prepare to respond. While new headteachers reported these experiences as personally challenging, the coaches offered awareness that they were common to early months in a senior role.

The coach with experience as a headteacher said that coaching support in early headship would have given him confidence to act more quickly on underperformance:

*I needed to be able to talk it through with someone who had  
done something similar before. I would have had the  
confidence to say, 'What's the worst thing that can happen?'  
(Coach C).*

This comment draws out the twin themes of self-management and risk management in developing confidence, which this coach saw as central to the coaching engagement. This example also provides an instance of self-questioning

from an experienced headteacher. Other coaches gave similar examples of generic questions which helped new headteachers explore issues. Thus the coach/mentor provides some of the creative self-questioning reported by the new headteachers at the end of their first year.

The coaches were aware of anxious self-questioning during early headship, as reported by the headteachers in this study. However, one coach emphasised both the value of self-questioning for headteachers, and the risks if this capacity were lost:

*In their first headship they might have really got to the bottom of what the real issue is, whereas in their second headship they might not bother quite so much, and might make assumptions about people (Coach Q).*

Thus behaviour which could be interpreted as lack of confidence can be modified into a leadership strength.

The comments from the coaches on the second and fourth preliminary findings are dealt with together in this chapter because of the synergies which emerged. The second preliminary finding proposed that:

*The headteachers in the study encountered three types of problem;*

*Those which all headteachers could expect to encounter, such as budget issues or the need to respond to new legislation. The need was frequently to develop new knowledge.*

*Those which were context based, such as the decision about whether or not to exclude a student. These tended to arise quickly and need a rapid response in circumstances where the interests of stakeholders are conflicted. The need was usually to make a judgement which would hold in the face of formal challenge. Even more challenging were:*

*Those where there is no local or perhaps even national experience, such as the challenge of first using a piece of legislation. Thus a fine judgement was required in circumstances where there were few sources of guidance.*

The fourth preliminary finding proposed that:

*The headteachers in the study used a wide network to provide coaching or mentoring support on specific issues. They directed their enquiry to the contact they found most appropriate.*

Coach research participants all reported that working with their top team was the most common issue for all new leadership appointments. For the first time the new leader found themselves responsible for a team where members held significant expertise and responsibilities beyond the direct experience of the leader. Coaches working in both the private and public sectors found that their clients were surprised by the amount of their time now dedicated to working with adults and in particular their immediate team. For the new headteachers, managing the budget and learning to work with governors were also reported as consistent issues. Where there were technical issues to be addressed such as those relating to the budget, the coaches consistently advised their clients to work with a technical expert, drawing on the tradition of skills coaching. Where there were more general issues of learning how to analyse issues and developmental needs of adults, or learning how to work with a strategic body such as the school governors, the coaches brought their own expertise to bear.

Context based issues, in the words of one coach 'the stuff that happens' (Coach V), tended to need new leaders to develop skills and confidence across a range of areas, including learning to make judgements and to trust them. A frequent issue in this category was that of dealing with underperformance, including within the immediate senior team. The visibility of the role and the wide range of responsibilities carried by the senior team meant that the new leader could no longer compensate for underperformance, as might have been possible in previous roles. The coaches talked about the number of aspects of a competency procedure which a headteacher needs to manage. These include: taking expert advice from a human resources specialist; understanding the borough policy; analysing the situation to identify that the issue is one of competence; finding a way to confirm their initial judgement; deciding to begin the chosen process; preparing to manage the possible reactions of other staff and of pupils; preparing

for the internal experience and emotional reaction of holding the necessary 'fierce conversations' (Coach S); and holding one's nerve as the process is worked through. These elements involve calling on the expertise of the coach, but also of a range of other experts, to enable the new leader to feel confident in beginning such a process.

While headteachers needed to understand personnel procedures when dealing with underperforming staff, the coaching agenda was deeper:

*What gets in the way of dealing with underperformance is to do with their inner self. I work with them to see what their internal behaviours and traits are, so that they can self-manage more effectively in an emotional situation. I help them find strategies to protect themselves from emotional trauma (Coach S).*

While the new headteacher may find such personnel procedures challenging both professionally and personally, there is nevertheless a range of direct experience to call upon. However the coaches also agreed that there are issues faced by leaders at all stages of their career, including as new leaders, for which there is no previous experience or expertise available. For those experiencing extreme challenge in such a context 'the loneliness in a crisis can be profound' (Coach V). Here coaching conversations became more exploratory for both client and coach, and the sense of not knowing the answer can be fully shared between coach and client because 'you can be in the space with them' while 'being very authentic about your experience and where you have been, without over-claiming' (Coach V).

All the coaches talked of encouraging their clients to develop a network of support for advice and resilience. This was particularly important for new headteachers where there was a limited period of engagement with the coach. A coach working with new headteachers talked of the need for a local headteacher contact to share local issues, a buddy, and networks from the past. The coach working in the private sector talked of clients who characteristically developed a network of four: the coach; the partner; the mentor in similar role and one other. Data from the

headteachers and coaches indicate that new headteachers typically need to call on a range of support when, for example, preparing to lead their first competency procedure. Such support might range across formal HR processes and the standardisation of lesson observation while also exploring how to self-manage during key passages of the process as well as dealing with the reactions of those involved and other members of the school community. Thus headteachers might need to orchestrate a wide range of support including coach/mentoring across the four-level model deriving from the literature on coaching including both skill development and the higher levels of coaching. While some headteacher research participants interpreted their need to develop a wider network as, in part, the result of inadequate initial provision of coach/mentoring, the coaches' alternative view was that the development of a wider network of support as an important function of the early time in post.

The third preliminary finding proposed that:

*The headteachers in the study particularly valued coaches and mentors who were able to flex their approach between coaching and mentoring, and those who worked with the headteacher and the school beyond the formal role of coach or mentor to the headteacher.*

The coaches consistently endorsed distinctions between coaching and mentoring made by the headteachers: a mentor draws on expertise in the work role, is generally more directive, and offers solutions to problems. Additionally they suggested mentoring as operational, while coaching is strategic (Coach C); and coaching as stimulating generative thinking, creating 'time to dream' (Coach S). Coaching allowed time to reflect, and helped avoid a rush to solutions. While coaching and mentoring were seen as having different characteristics, there was also the indication of flexibility across a continuum of practice on the part of the coach in response to the maturity of the client at the start of the relationship, and their development as it progressed (Parsloe and Leedham, 2009). All the coaches discussed the importance of careful contracting at the start of the relationship, for example about the place of advice-giving. The emphasis on contracting

demonstrates the importance of the coaches' adaptation to client need (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 1999), rather than deploying a restricted set of skills according to a purist definition of coaching or mentoring. This adaptability needed to be agreed at the point of contracting, and employed appropriately as the relationship developed and the challenges of the post were identified.

One coach pointed out the implication of a coach/mentoring model which offers support only to those new in post:

*It implies a deficit model, whereas coaching should be available to everyone, helping build on strengths (Coach S).*

The deficit model places agency more with the system and coach/mentor, rather than with the new leader. Indeed one coach reported that secondary headteachers in particular can see coaching as a prescriptive approach characterised by 'tell, push, and pull' (Coach S) where they expect to be told rather than to work towards their own solutions. She suggested that some secondary headteachers can find it difficult to accept coaching because it involves giving up positional power and admitting vulnerability. In such circumstances:

*There is a barrier that you have to get through to help them offload and talk about themselves. We think about them and their particular drivers, and some don't want to talk about it and it takes longer to get through (Coach S).*

This suggests the importance of a trusting relationship in dealing with some early issues, which are likely to include an examination of the self in ways some new leaders may find difficult. In challenging poor performance, a coach reported:

*Some find it extremely difficult because their main drivers are about being liked and when dealing with conflict they feel they are not going to be liked any more. Some feel they have to be very aggressive and deal with it and then deal with the consequences internally afterwards (Coach S).*

These scenarios show new headteachers feeling they need to enact the role in a way which is either uncomfortable or ineffective, and that the experienced coach can help them identify and address fundamental issues of the self. Another coach discussed the condition of 'owning the role' (Reynolds, 2011):



*They seem to get to a point where they feel comfortable standing in the shoes of the role. They have made it their own so it's no longer X **in** the role, it's X **and** the role. The role becomes one's identity (Coach V).*

Thus senior leaders in the private sector also travel the journey described by headteachers in this study: from vulnerability through dissociation to identity with their role.

The fifth preliminary finding proposed that:

*The headteachers in the study found that the most significant element of a coach/mentor relationship is trust. They found it difficult to have trust where the coach/mentor is within the local authority.*

Coaches working with new headteachers emphasised the importance of trust in their relationship with the client:

*It is vital that anybody doing coaching and mentoring is independent of any kind of accountability. Although a local authority officer can provide very good and useful support, often it is focused on the school rather than the individual (Coach Q).*

Indeed this coach was clear that 'my client is the headteacher and I am working with them in their reality'. While new leaders might be prepared to share information, the sharing of emotion and how they are feeling is only shared where there is trust beyond simple confidentiality.

An essential ingredient was:

*Your capacity to convey to them a sense of your understanding where they are at, and what it feels like, and actually what it feels like is not ridiculous, and you are not feeling any different from other people' (Coach V).*

Such understanding and framing of a disconcerting experience was in effect the beginning of taking control.

Thus the coach participants in this study endorsed the preliminary findings and extended them with their own insights drawn from wide experience including that of the private sector.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Coaching and mentoring for new headteachers has been offered for over twenty years, and is generally endorsed by active participants as a significant source of support. However, a review of the literature has revealed conflicting understandings and expectations of coaching and mentoring. Much previous research focused on improving scheme implementation, and so is fundamentally evaluative. Correspondingly, practice has been based on assumed theory, including that of single dyadic arrangements. However the literature indicates that individual headteachers may seek coach/mentoring support in a range of ways and from a range of sources. Further, in relation to the experience of coaching and mentoring, there is a dearth of research from the perspective of the new headteacher.

This study has prioritised the perspective of the new headteacher. Six newly appointed secondary school headteachers were interviewed three times during their first year in post. Resulting data show how the research participants understand and have accessed coaching and mentoring. Four practising coach/mentors commented on the preliminary findings, and data from their interviews provide both an additional perspective on that provided by headteachers and a means of validation. The coaches support the headteachers' reflection on the need to become a good coachee, and shed useful light on the complexity of agency in the coach/mentoring relationship. The most surprising finding, and one which provides an important context for other findings, is that all six headteacher participants reported the initial provision of coach/mentor as inoperative or ineffective. Their resulting strategy of seeking coach/mentoring support from a wide range of sources might be predicted from the practitioner literature (Male, 2006; Clutterbuck, 1998) but has previously been neglected in the research literature relating to coaching and mentoring for new headteachers. The

coach research participants reported recommending all their clients to build such a wide support network for the future.

In this chapter I discuss four major themes from the findings. Within the first theme, headship and the self, I discuss changes to the self during the journey to headship and in the first year in post, commenting on some implications of performativity including the potentially counter-cultural nature of coaching and mentoring. Next, focusing on headteacher agency, I explore how headteachers access coaching and mentoring, and how they work beyond formal dyads. From these findings three additional models of coaching and mentoring support are located. Based on the findings, a conceptual model of the Confidence Loop is articulated in order to demonstrate the iterative and interactive nature of a headteacher journey in which confidence develops alongside an emergent and creative self-questioning. I explore the place of social cognitive learning theory as a way of understanding the learning models of aspirant and new headteachers. I then discuss the significance of articulating issues in a trusting coach/mentoring relationship and the role of reassurance in the coach/mentor relationship. Finally, I question how coach/mentors of public sector leaders currently engage with performativity.

## **7.2 Headship and the self**

In their earlier career, the headteacher research participants had formed a generalised understanding of the role, but in making a formal application for a post the new headteacher became focused on context. In interview the research participants enacted headship for the first time and for a contextual audience. After appointment, the new headteachers' frame of reference became the scale of the role, and thus confidence fell. The management of arrival at the start of their headship was of great concern. They needed to develop new and effective relationships which took account of their new position including its overarching accountability. Consequently the new headteachers became forcefully aware of

their public visibility. Each of these phases required resilience and acclimatisation in the aspirant headteacher, and a changing sense of self.

While preparing for a generic headship role the research participants were concerned with characteristics and behaviours. They observed senior colleagues, accepting and rejecting elements for their own leadership model: their aspirational self as a future headteacher. This version of themselves remained private and unrealised, although senior colleagues offered sheltered situations in which to develop leadership skills and experience. Alongside this individual journey, NPQH allowed them to develop skills and experience, but also a comparative sense of their own preparedness for headship. There came a moment of decision about being ready to apply for headship. Supported by peer comparisons, this was a watershed moment for the research participants. It was linked to making their aspiration public and therefore open to challenge, whether within an interview situation or subsequently in post. At this point the research participants claimed the identity of a headteacher, but also the contextual identity of being *this* headteacher for *this* particular school.

Once appointed to headship the research participants felt that they were expected to provide answers rather than seek advice and found this expectation generated within themselves as well as by others. Thus it became problematic to behave as learners. Instead of comparing themselves to peer aspirational headteachers, the comparison was now to the scale of the contextual task. Thus their focus moved from observation and planning to performance and being observed, from the private to the public. Their sense of nervousness preparing for the first day in post, meant that arrival at the school was carefully planned to make the maximum and most carefully judged impact. At this point the new headteacher arguably holds more control than in subsequent months.

In the early months of headship the research participants reported disorienting experiences of dissociation, where they became both performer and observer of their own performance. While they were acutely aware of the impact of the role on

their sense of self, they felt others were aware only of the role and not of the person. At its most extreme this was reported as a sense of having lost even a gender identity. Although early headship was characterised by anxious self-questioning, this was later replaced by a creative use of self-questioning as research participants began to talk of using instinct in decision-making. This reported use of instinct indicates new headteachers becoming less conscious of a disjunction between self and role.

By the end of their first year in post the research participants responded to questions about their own future development in terms of the development of their school. They had developed a relationship somewhere between symbiosis and identity. The study indicates a number of reasons for this. The rhetoric of government publications and the structure of the Ofsted framework both emphasise the close link between the headteacher and the success of the school. Local authority officers and others interacting with the headteacher focus their concern on the needs and performance of the school and this perspective frames the daily interactions of the headteacher. This perspective is reinforced in a performance context where headteacher and staff deliberately step away from personal relationships. The acknowledgement of the headteacher as separate from the school is, however, central to the role of the coach/mentor, and provides a place for the headteacher to consider both behaviour and identity in an emotionally secure context.

These challenging experiences around dissociation and identity indicate an interesting area for further research on the nature of the journey to established senior leadership. The coach participant who worked with private sector leaders indicated that they experienced similar issues in the early days in post, and this suggests the value of a study across a population including a range of senior leadership roles.

While previous research has generally reported the shock of headship, in this study the research participants explained the experience rather in terms of

disorientation of various kinds during their first months in post. Certainly they found becoming a headteacher a process rather than an event. Indeed one headteacher reported her coach/mentor talking of her own continuing journey. The new headteachers' accounts of the development of confidence provide an insight into the complexity of one part of this journey and this is developed below into the model of the Confidence Loop.

The process of becoming a headteacher was described by research participants as both a public and a private journey and these two aspects were sometimes separate, sometimes linked. In preparing for the post, the internal journey to headship involved reflective comparison with peers, and was distinct from the formal and informal preparation including the NPQH. At interview the public journey of enacting the headship role for the first time was accompanied by a complex internal dialogue. The headteacher's first formal meetings with staff and students could be planned meticulously with the purpose of creating a particular impression. However the headteacher could not control how audiences interpreted and responded to subsequent interactions. Learning to accept and manage complex personal emotions formed part of the internal journey and this was necessary to support an outward appearance of composure. These two strands of the private and the public journey were intensified by the headteacher's experience of constant visibility. Further, the reported experiences of dissociation indicated intense internal observation of the development of a new 'self' as 'the headteacher.'

These various accounts of the journey toward headship draw us back to question whether better training could be provided before taking up post. While an attempt might be made to provide more rigorous scenario planning, the research participants indicated that no training could foresee all the challenges of headship. Further a participant coach confirmed that new senior leaders in the private sector also experience constant visibility as a disturbing and unanticipated challenge, indicating that it is not in headship alone that full preparation for senior roles is

problematic. This, along with the consistent experience reported by all six research participants, supports the suggestion that a period of turbulence is essential to the creation of a new professional identity (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006) and that this new identity needs to be created for the self as well as for others.

This study took a social constructivist perspective on knowledge, where meanings are negotiated. However the literature review indicated that headteachers operate in a context of performativity, where key meanings are unilaterally promulgated and where measurable performance is prioritised (Lyotard, 1984). Thus relationships between teachers and the headteacher, and also between the headteacher and governors, are focused on accountability (Husbands, 2001) and this was most clearly understood by research participants as the emphasis on examination results reported through league tables, and on Ofsted inspections. While participant headteachers were sometimes troubled by tensions arising from this narrow focus, their response in role was acceptance and management. No research participant talked about overtly challenging the performative framework. Some new headteachers were able to find creative responses within the performative framework, by actively negotiating Ofsted inspection judgements, or by negotiating access to funded schemes for which the school was not apparently eligible. This indicates that the new headteachers could negotiate some flexibility within the apparent constraints of a performative framework.

The terminology of Ofsted and statistical performance was consistently used by the headteachers to describe their school and their ambitions for it. The same terminology was used by the coach with a background in headship. While this provided a useful common language to compare performance within and between schools, it marginalised whatever could not be described in such language, and the new headteachers discussed the tensions this created. Further, the headteachers discussed the limits of measures such as examination results, for example in the context of the varying nature of pupil cohorts. Where examination or Ofsted outcomes were likely to decline, headteachers were alert to the need for

self-justification as a step beyond accountability. Additionally, they were aware that worsening results would lead to loss of headteacher autonomy. Thus the management of public accountability was a key concern for the research participants, and this was manifested in their second-order work (Ball, 2001) to manage the process of accountability itself alongside their more apparent role of improving key outcomes.

These accounts emphasise the headteacher's role in managing and influencing a range of audiences, and a significant role of the coach/mentor may be conceptualised as providing a context in which the new headteacher perceives no need for audience management. However coach/mentors indicated that some headteachers find it hard to relinquish this public face and accept that change in the self may be needed. Therefore, while coach/mentoring provides an opportunity to step outside the performance framework, this opportunity may be encountered as a challenge unless the headteacher can develop the skills of a good coachee, accepting the possibility of personal change and vulnerability. Additionally, coach/mentoring for new headteachers conflicts with a performance culture because it has not been shown to contribute directly to improved pupil outcomes (Hansford and Ehrich, 2006; Hobson and Sharp, 2005; West and Milan, 2001). Thus, where coach/mentoring allows the senior leader to step outside a performance framework, it creates the opportunity for a potentially counter-cultural perspective (Neal, 2009b) on what is expected of schools and their headteachers in an era of performativity. Thus the findings from this study indicate that future research could address the implications of performativity for the coach/mentoring of new headteachers. Although there is discussion of performativity in the education literature (Gleeson and Husbands, 2001; Ball, 2001; Blackmore, 2004), the concept has yet to be acknowledged in the practitioner or academic literature of coach/mentoring.



### **7.3 Headteacher agency in coaching and mentoring**

The headteachers in this study exercised agency in respect of coaching and mentoring relationships in four main ways. They assessed the level of support available from the local authority, including the formal provision of coaching and mentoring. Some research participants also contributed to the choice of formal coach/mentor. Further, they moderated their engagement with their formal coach/mentor in technical terms but also in terms of the depth of interaction. Lastly, they sought additional coach/mentoring support as they thought necessary.

All the new headteachers expressed a wish to develop a good working relationship with their local authority. They anticipated an initial proactive and supportive engagement from their local authority, but not all received this. This indicates a common internalised model of how local authorities interact with schools which may prove different from subsequent experience. For most of the research participants the relationship with the local authority became an additional task requiring a performance rather than an opportunity for reflection and growth. Lack of engagement from the local authority became an absence to be regretted, and even this experience of absence required management.

Where the local authority provided a coach/mentor, the new headteachers identified a number of limitations. These included issues of organisation, where the coach/mentor did not arrange an initial meeting to open the relationship; and issues of training, where the coach/mentor offered direction based on his own school instead of helping the new headteacher explore a new and different context. Beyond these individual issues the headteachers identified one overarching limitation in their work with coach/mentors from within their local authority: that of competing claims of accountability for the coach/mentor. They felt the coach/mentoring relationship needed to be prioritised, exclusive, and free of links with accountability structures, an account strongly endorsed by coach research participants.

Thus headteachers' expectations of their coach/mentors are more demanding than those anticipated when mentoring was first proposed. Daresh (1986) and Weindling and Earley (1987) explained mentoring as support for 'learning the ropes', implying the need for fixed rather than generative skills (Bandura, 1997). The headteachers in this research found that they needed support in exploring areas of personal and professional uncertainty. The issues they explored could require a complex exercise of judgement resulting in an effective plan of action which they felt confident to implement. The personal and professional exposure inherent in such discussions was too great a risk where alternative loyalties might affect absolute confidentiality. Therefore they chose to limit the scope of their agenda when working with a local coach/mentor.

Beyond their concern about confidentiality for shared information, the research participants report imagining how they appear to another, and are judged. While there was a sense of embarrassment at perhaps being adversely judged, the greater concern was that the imagined judgement might be shared and thus increase professional vulnerability. This extends the concept of the looking glass self (Cooley, 1964) into a competitive era which prioritises performance and presentation.

The initial literature review indicated that coaching and mentoring support for new headteachers is identified in the education literature as located in a single dyadic relationship, and that this is consistent with coach/mentoring practice more generally. However, the literature mainly takes the organisational perspective of the provider or the coach/mentor. The data from this study reveal that, from the operational perspective of the new headteacher as client, the picture is, as Male (2006) suggests, more complex. Whether discussing coaching or mentoring, the new headteachers consistently sought support from the person they judged most appropriate to the issue in hand. Their criteria for assessing such appropriateness can be understood from three different perspectives: the source of the coaching or mentoring; the nature of the issue; and the kind of interaction.

- With regard to the source of coach/mentoring, the new headteachers used a range of qualified or experienced specialists in addition to their identified coach/mentor. These included human resources (HR) advisers or professional association staff specialising in the challenges of headship. Fellow headteachers were also a frequent resource, whether those for whom the new headteacher had previously worked, former colleagues now promoted to headship, or new colleagues from the current local authority. Advice and information was also sought through virtual networks of similar schools.
- With regard to the nature of the issue, the research participants identified three models of coaching or mentoring support. Where the issue fell within the headteacher's current strategic agenda, much of the coaching and mentoring took place within the conventional pair relationship. Where skills coaching was required the new headteachers identified an expert to brief them on, for example, Special Educational Needs or BSF. Sometimes the new headteachers needed to discuss deeper matters: fundamentals including their values, or their sense of being under a significant threat. In circumstances affecting their sense of security and emotions, they were extremely selective about their choice of working partner, constructing the engagement differently, perhaps invoking the popular understanding of Chatham House rules. It is significant that only three of the coach/mentors, including none of the allocated coach mentors, were identified by the new headteachers as meeting the requirement of trust which permitted this third level of engagement, which had to be sought elsewhere by the other three research participants.
- The third way of categorising coach/mentoring relationships concerns the nature of interaction. Allocated coach/mentors offered a series of meetings over the whole year. Matched or self-selected coach/mentors might extend their work into shadow coaching, observing or supporting the headteacher

at work and offering feedback. They sometimes offered team coaching, working directly with the whole senior team. This indicates that mentors who are matched or self-selected offer greater resource and flexibility, and perhaps a wider skill set. Coaching for technical skills or information tended to take place outside established dyads, often in single meetings. The new headteachers also accessed virtual coaching on specific issues of information through virtual networks.

More radically, this study identifies three versions of coach/mentoring not previously found in the research literature: virtual coaching involving the use of a computer; swift coaching to obtain brief and rapid feedback on specific issues; and social coaching, a more reflective conversation between trusting peers where the role of coach/mentor was shared. While these three versions of coach/mentoring did not obviate the need for a sustained dyadic relationship, they were each chosen by the new headteachers in specific circumstances as the most appropriate way of accessing support.

- For virtual coach/mentoring, the data from this study indicated a small but significant use of virtual sources of support, and in particular the use of virtual networks and the internet, including websites and search engines. One headteacher used a search engine to research a strategy, while another used information from the websites of other local schools in making his decision about a school closure. A third headteacher used email to access virtual networks both local and distributed. When facing a problem involving the interpretation of legislation he sought and received information from his distributed network; on receiving updated information about Ofsted inspections he shared this with his local network. These instances indicate that headteachers use the internet to seek support on factual matters and when facing a specific issue, and this approach links with low level skills coaching from the four-level model. While some virtual support was desk research, interaction with groups of colleagues was also reported. This

interaction depended on common interests and a willingness to share, both of which were reported as contributing to building and reinforcing the networks and developing trust, and thus relates to the co-coaching model proposed by CUREE (2005). The virtual world offers new headteachers access to a wider community of practice, particularly in respect of the lower levels of coaching from the four level model, than was previously available.

- Swift coaching was used when the new headteachers sought a brief conversation focused on a single issue when the need was urgent and specific, and for this they turned to trusted experts such as former colleagues. Sometimes they wanted a second opinion on a problem or on their proposed response, or options from another perspective. These exchanges were characterised by previously established trust in shared values and in judgement. Thus they draw on the characteristics of the coach/mentoring relationship identified from the coaching practitioner literature. They were focused, drawing on the experience of the second headteacher. One research participant found swift coaching useful in providing a limited number of options: he wanted his thinking to be extended but not overwhelmed. Another commented that swift coaching provided options which he was unlikely to reach through being questioned. The issues discussed in swift coaching tended to be the judgement issues proposed in the preliminary findings for this study.
- Social coaching, like swift coaching, relied on established trust. However it differed in that it was realised through longer *ad hoc* and apparently social conversations. Enabling the exploration of current issues, these conversations had a strong affective element of shared understanding. Social coaching therefore allowed both headteachers to explore their deeper concerns in a safe environment: it was an extended exchange without a planned agenda but in the context of a continuing relationship. A more formal version of this arrangement was proposed by one research

participant as he entered his second year of headship. The formality of this arrangement identifies it as a version of 'co-coaching'. However, it had a more exploratory agenda than co-coaching (CUREE 2005). A distinctive aspect of both social coaching and co-coaching is their mutuality, in that neither partner consistently takes the part of coach mentor. These were professional conversations frequently touching on deep values, and were of great significance to the headteachers engaging in them. Discussion here related to the highest levels of the four level model of coach/mentoring developed through the literature review.

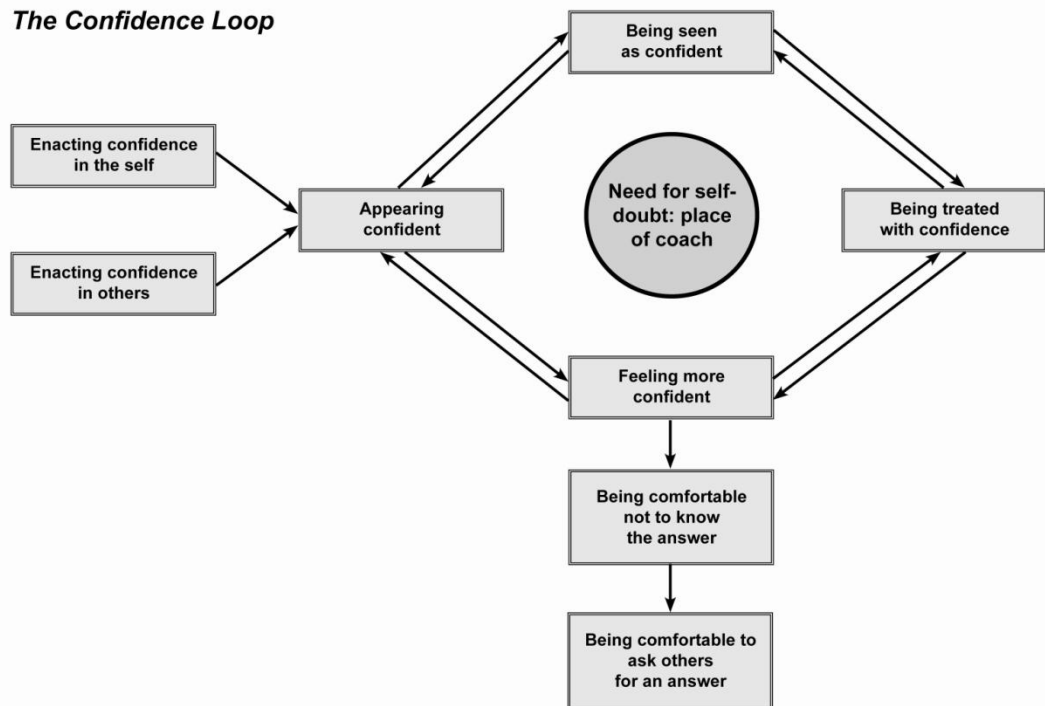
For both swift coaching and social coaching the most important expertise is that of headship, and both take place in a context of mutual confidentiality and trust characterising a coach/mentoring relationship. Both are made possible by a context in which the affective is acknowledged, although this is more overt in the case of social coaching. In the context of swift, social and virtual coaching, the new headteachers did not raise concerns about the potential adverse judgements of a looking glass self (Cooley, 1964) identified when working with a local authority coach/mentor. It would be interesting to explore further the conditions which reduce or remove this concern.

A main concern for headteachers was the portrayal and development of confidence, and this is now discussed.

#### **7.4 The Confidence Loop**

The new headteachers provided much data on the development of self-confidence in role, and indicated that this was a complex journey. The findings indicate that the first day in post was carefully planned, and the new headteachers maintained their wish to 'get it right' (Headteacher B) as they began to interact with the people and the events of their new school, and so develop their personal style of headship. While the aspiration to 'get it right' led to anxious self-questioning in the early stages of headship, there was the simultaneous need to enact the role of a consistently confident headteacher. The new headteachers' strategies to resolve

the tensions between their internal experience and the need to enact the role were reported in a series of experiences which can be modelled as the 'Confidence Loop'.



Initially the research participants reported a constant anxious self-questioning about whether the actions they were taking were the right ones. To move on from this point they reported deciding to take two important steps: behaving as if they were confident, and behaving as if they felt confidence in the abilities of others. Thus there was frequently a disparity between the headteacher's inner experience and how they chose to enact their role. In this research, coach/mentors helped the new headteacher to acknowledge and understand this conflict and thus more easily maintain the enactment of their role. The coach/mentors also helped the new headteacher to understand their powerful impact in endorsing the confidence of others, and to see that this was a distinctive aspect of the headteacher's role.

The two steps of deciding to enact confidence in the self and in others led to four linked and interacting outcomes.

- The new headteachers immediately enacted apparent confidence when interacting with others, despite any internal concerns. The example of a high-profile decision about the exclusion of a pupil indicates that this may entail two separate stages. The new headteacher needed to deploy technical skills in reaching a decision about which they could be confident. In reaching their decision, research participants reported asking headteacher colleagues for mentoring advice including opinions on proposed actions. The new headteachers also reported making a separate judgement to commit to that decision, taking into account the potential for formal or informal challenge.
- Then the new headteachers' enacted confidence led others such as staff and governors to perceive the new headteachers as in fact being confident. These perceptions of the headteacher's confidence were gained in both individual and public interactions, and encompassed a positive assessment of both technical and social skills.
- This perception of the new headteachers' confidence affected the behaviour of others, who treated them with greater confidence. The increased confidence of others might be experienced by the new headteacher as less scrutiny from the chair of governors, or as greater challenge from the coach/mentor. The new headteachers found that their consistency over time led to a greater sense of being endorsed by staff and pupils. Equally, one headteacher reported increased confidence from staff following her high-profile action in suspending a member of staff. Reaching the decision to suspend had required significant specialist mentoring support, including from a headteacher's professional association.
- Finally, each of these separate experiences increased the new headteachers' sense of a felt rather than enacted confidence. They reported this variously: as greater physical ease in contrast to earlier



reported experiences of dissociation; or increased confidence in taking or in rejecting a particular direction for the school.

Self-questioning was described by the research participants as a constant and anxious condition at the beginning of their headship, and thus self-questioning could be interpreted simply as 'lack of self-confidence' (Daresh, 1986). However, this research produced the unexpected finding that during their first year in post the new headteachers could learn to use self-questioning as a creative tool to be used developmentally.

Thus self-questioning appears to be an essential experience for the new headteacher, a skill which can be refined and developed. One research participant reported that that self-questioning kept her grounded in reality, and this was supported by a coach/mentor's observation that successful headteachers are sometimes less effective in second headships because of insufficient questioning of the self and others.

The research participants reported satisfaction in their early career at being asked for an opinion by their headteacher, and these may be instances of headteachers building on their self-questioning and seeking to develop a perspective grounded in the views of other staff. Thus creative self-questioning by the headteacher could lead, through questioning of others, to improved confidence in staff.

However the research participants also reported that as new headteachers they felt the need to be careful about the kind of questions they asked, and of whom, in case they conveyed lack of confidence. This may indicate that learning to ask developmental questions of junior staff while endorsing the confidence of both parties is a skill which develops beyond the early months in post.

The later development of this skill would also indicate a possible link to the gradual development of the creative use of self-questioning. While Cooley (1964) asserts that indifference to alternative opinions leads ultimately to megalomania, the more moderate finding from this study indicates a continuum of experience, providing a

perspective more directly useful to headteachers and coach/mentors in understanding the experience of anxious self-questioning in early headship. This study indicates that creative questioning of the self and others is a professional strength worth deliberate development.

The data supporting the model of the Confidence Loop indicate that self-management was a key priority for the new headteachers in this research. The new headteachers reported increasing ease in taking decisions during their first year in post and accounted for this by saying either that it was a matter of 'having done it once' (Headteacher B), or that they now followed their instinct. Thus the new headteachers understood that a change had taken place within them which they could not fully explain. The work of the headteacher frequently requires generative skills permitting adaptability and innovation, and in which:

*appropriate subskills are flexibly orchestrated to fit the demands of particular situations (Bandura, 1997, p. 440).*

Coach/mentor participants in the study confirmed this aspect of leadership development, in recalling their work of supporting new headteachers to disaggregate the skills and decisions required in, for example, managing a staff competence procedure.

Thus social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1997) may offer an explanation for the reported use of instinct in decision making; and its emphasis on bidirectional influences arguably supports this study's finding of interactivity in the Confidence Loop. However, social cognitive theory provides an inadequate account of headteacher agency in coaching and mentoring because it focuses on observation without sufficiently theorising the role of speech. Rather, social cognitive theory offers a more compelling account of learning models before headship. This supports the finding of this research that the learning models of new headteachers change as they take up the post.

## **7.5 Working with the coach/mentor**

The findings from this study indicate that the research participants felt a continuing need to learn and that as new headteachers they built a learning model different from the one which they had used as deputy heads or in other previous roles.

A key difference was their proactivity: the new headteachers sought out appropriate sources of support for identified needs, whether immediate or strategic. While these usually included a coach/mentor, new and previous colleagues were also significant sources of support. Coach/mentors reported proactively endorsing this approach and encouraging new headteachers to build personal support networks because the coach/mentor was a temporary provision. Thus newly appointed headteachers consistently chose to support their learning through contact with peers and more experienced colleagues, and beyond the dyadic arrangements of formal schemes. These accounts prioritise the role of the new headteacher in accessing effective support for current and strategic issues, and position coaching and mentoring for new headteachers as a developmental rather than a deficit model. Further they indicate the value coach/mentors who offer a form of developmental and formative understanding of accountability in contrast to the summative accountability of statistical measures.

The headteacher research participants indicated that their need to extend their learning was triggered by the challenges of their new context. This endorses the research participants' reports that full preparation for headship is not possible in advance of performing the role. On taking up the role the new headteachers demonstrated increasing agency and proactivity, identifying and fulfilling their own learning needs. Thus this study locates a need to prepare aspirant headteachers to identify and access those who can support their development in the first stages of headship. Such support cannot be provided in advance of need.

However, if the primary activity taking place within the coach/mentoring relationship is learning rather than teaching, and if agency is primarily with the headteacher rather than with the coach/mentor, there is the question of what

coaching and mentoring distinctively offers. A clue was provided when research participants responded to a question about the impact of their participation in this research. They consistently reported welcoming the opportunity to articulate their ideas, and how this had sometimes affected their thinking and subsequent actions.

Their responses might indicate that within the interviews I had taken the role of coach rather than of researcher. However, the research participants attributed the change to their voicing rather than to my questioning. Further, in conducting the interviews I was alert to the risk of role drift, and was frequently aware of framing alternative questions or prompts, one from a coaching perspective and the other from a research perspective. In these circumstances I consistently chose the question which belonged to the research perspective. Equally, I consciously phrased questions as a researcher seeking to understand the participant's current perspective, rather than as a coach seeking to support a client's development. Nevertheless, the research participants consistently reported that voicing their thoughts had changed their thinking on some issues. In all the interviews I noted the participants' willingness to talk, and how few questions or prompts were required. A sample page from an interview is included at appendix 7.

In this study the articulation of issues in the presence of a trusted other, including the researcher, was reported as having a specific impact above what might be achieved by merely thinking through the issues. It might be suggested that this impact was the result of making thought available by vocalising it and then receiving challenge from the coach/mentor. However, where the trusted other was the researcher, she asked questions very different from those she would have chosen in the role of coach. Nevertheless the researcher was seen as providing two important aspects of the role of the coach/mentor: a valued opportunity for the new headteachers to articulate issues, and also a secure trusting space for that articulation to occur. Within that framework the headteachers put thought into speech and then reported changes in their perspective or in how they acted.

This account supports the constructivist rather than performative understanding of speech and language in the coach/mentoring relationship. The coach/mentor enables new knowledge to be created by providing a situation where the new headteacher can step away from being an engaged performer and temporarily take the role of a reflective learner. Articulating thought was reported as beneficial even without developmental questioning from a coach/mentor. The articulation of an issue could lead, with minimal intervention, to a revised approach. However the coaches were aware of the power of their small interventions. Taken together these accounts indicate that agency within coach/mentoring relationship is complex and a potential issue for further research.

Unexpectedly, the new headteachers consistently reported a significant role for the coach/mentor in providing reassurance, a view endorsed by the coach research participants. Of course expressing a need for reassurance might be interpreted as an indication of weakness, entirely inappropriate to a hero headteacher. However this was not a bland emotional comfort, a strategy specifically discounted by one new headteacher. Rather it described the process of disentangling complex processes such as teacher competency procedures, enabling the new headteacher to understand the implications of the different decisions involved, and to determine whether and how to proceed. There was sometimes the need to reach a decision about a decision; to decide in fact to proceed once the appropriate course of action had been established.

Thus coaching and mentoring for new headteachers can support the stages of speculating, testing and planning, and then of decision-making, and can accelerate that learning. This analysis prioritises two aspects of the coach/mentoring process: the articulation by the new headteacher, and the presence of the trusted coach/mentor. For the headteachers in this study, articulating thought as speech had a developmental impact, changing their approach to some issues. This emphasises the importance of the relationship where articulation takes place: unless trust was established the headteachers

limited what they would share, editing what they made available even to themselves as speech. The extent to which they were prepared to open their thinking to the coach/mentor through speech necessarily affected the value of supportive or challenging questioning within the coach/mentoring relationship. The implication is that without trust in the coach/mentor the new headteacher may not be able to be fully honest with themselves about more problematic aspects of challenging issues, especially those affecting their values.

While Vygotsky (1978; 1986) found that for children, speech in the presence of a supportive adult or peer facilitated problem-solving, this study suggests that something more complex is happening for these adult professionals as learners in a coach/mentoring context. When the new headteachers had more technical problems to solve, or gaps in their knowledge, they sought the support of a peer or experienced colleague. However, while Vygotsky's children were presented with problems to solve, the new headteachers were locating but also interpreting problems within a complex context in which they were subject to high visibility and conflicting expectations. Having identified a potential problem, they needed to configure their own understanding before going on to identify options and a preferred solution for possible implementation. In more challenging circumstances this might include needing to reach a level of self-confidence in their ability to solve the problem. Thus the work of the skilled coach/mentors could include supporting an appropriate articulation of complex issues, and then enabling the new headteacher to configure the problem in a way which made it capable of solution. Where these two processes were not needed, the new headteachers were confident to approach a wide range of colleagues for support. Where they were needed, the confidential and trusted coach/mentor was essential.

Hobson and Sharp (2005) suggest that coaching and mentoring provides an opportunity to work in the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) theorised by Vygotsky (1978) from his work with children as learners. He found that the presence of an adult learner enabled children to solve problems which were

otherwise too difficult, and that their articulation of thought was central to this process. However this study indicates that this theorisation based on the problem-solving of children does not adequately account for the experience of adult professionals cast as learners. While Vygotsky's children had a problem set for them to solve, the new headteachers brought their experience and expectations to bear on the school and its context. Thus, while they certainly faced some problems which presented themselves as discrete entities, the identification of more complex issues depended on their own skills of interpretation. For the new headteachers part of the work was to identify and interpret potential issues and their relative importance in a complex organisation. Research participants indicated that the skill of problem identification developed during their first year in post, and that only by the start of their second year in post had they identified more complex issues within the school.

Thus, for adult professionals, the work in the ZPD is not only problem-solving but the configuration of those problems from complex information. Equally, the context of problems had its own impact, and therefore understanding and solving problems needed to take account of the complexity of the organisation, and how the problem and its solution may impact on wider goals. Sometimes the new headteacher would opt to delay action, and the work with the coach/mentor concerned interpreting and solving problems, but also whether to act on a problem immediately or at all. Further, the headteachers sometimes identified affective reactions to apparently technical issues and this additional element changed both their sense of agency and the scope of the coach/mentoring. Only in trusting coach/mentor relationships might all these elements be safely articulated and the wider context freely shared, supporting both work on specific problems and associated development for the headteacher.

The overarching context for all headteachers and their schools is that of performativity. Full acceptance of the constraints of a performative culture could narrow the coach/mentoring agenda to a focus on measurable outcomes and limit

its scope. At the other extreme, using the lens of performativity to understand the nature of these constraints could set the headteacher at odds with the dominant culture and thus create professional risk. The data from this research indicate the new headteachers operating between these two extremes, but still troubled by the constraints of narrowly constructed performance measures. These tensions articulated both in terms of how pupil performance was measured, and how the Ofsted framework can constrain necessary development strategies. In both cases there was a perceived tension between what was measured and what was valued. While performativity is not a focus for this research, it has become an emerging theme for future research, and poses a particular challenge for the coach/mentoring community, in whose practitioner and research literature it has yet to be acknowledged as an issue. This analysis poses two questions not previously asked in the research or practitioner literature on coach/mentoring: how do those providing coaching and mentoring for senior public sector leaders understand their personal stance on issues of performativity, and what are the implications for their coach/mentoring practice?

## **7.6 Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed the impact on the self of the journey into headship. I have explored how new headteachers exercise agency in the coaching and mentoring relationship, identifying three additional models. Using the model of the Confidence Loop, I have demonstrated the interactive and iterative nature of the journey to confidence in headship. The model also places creative self-questioning as central to leadership development in headship. Following a discussion of the place of the work of Bandura (1997) in understanding the learning model of aspirant and new headteachers, I have extended the work of Vygotsky (1978; 1986) into the realm of adult leadership learning, suggesting that adults use articulation not only to solve problems but first to establish the nature of the issue itself. I have discussed the place of reassurance in the coach/mentoring relationship. Additionally I have indicated some implications of performativity, a



concept yet to be discussed in the practitioner or academic literature of coaching and mentoring, which has been identified as a fruitful area for further research.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusions**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This study has explored how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. Within a social constructivist paradigm and using grounded theory as its methodology, it has produced findings relevant to researchers, to coaching and mentoring practitioners, to aspiring and newly appointed secondary school headteachers and those seeking to support them, and to policymakers and the implementers of those policies at local and national levels. In this chapter I outline three areas of original contribution: to knowledge; to research; and to practice.

First I discuss three significant contributions to knowledge at the level of theory: the Confidence Loop; three versions of coaching and mentoring support; and the place of the articulation of issues by the new headteacher in coaching and mentoring.

Next I consider three contributions to research: the implications of the research approach taken in this study; the placing of formal dyadic coach/mentoring as only one support strategy accessed by new headteachers alongside other forms of support which have key characteristics of coach/mentoring; and the indication of a need for further research into the implications of performativity for the coach/mentoring of headteachers.

Finally I outline four distinct contributions to practice: the impact of heightened visibility on the sense of self; how new headteachers exercise agency in coaching and mentoring; the nature of the coach/mentoring relationship; and the implications of confidentiality and trust. I conclude with some observations about the implications of this study for headteacher preparation.

## **8.2 Contributions to knowledge**

The model of the Confidence Loop portrays the interactive and iterative route to self-confidence for new headteachers. The Confidence Loop also demonstrates the place of self-questioning in leadership development and provides a tool enabling new headteachers and their coach/mentors to understand the value of anxious self-questioning early in a new role and to transform it into the leadership strength of creative self-questioning.

This study also identifies three specific versions of support not previously found in the research literature and which demonstrate characteristics of coaching and mentoring: virtual coaching using ICT resources; swift coaching to obtain brief and rapid feedback on specific issues; and social coaching, a more reflective conversation between trusting peers where the role of coach/mentor was shared. While these three versions of coach/mentoring did not obviate the need for a sustained dyadic relationship, each was chosen in specific circumstances as the most appropriate way of accessing support. Each could also be placed within the four level model of coach/mentoring developed from the literature, and the negotiated relationship in each case matched the requirements of a coach/mentoring engagement, including the pre-eminence of the coaches' agenda. Each could also be related to the three kinds of issues for new headteachers identified in the preliminary findings discussed with coaches.

The study finds that the process of articulation of issues in a secure context contributes to their solution. Additionally it extends and adapts Vygotsky's work (1978), on problem-solving in children, into the world of the senior adult leader by demonstrating the complex levels of problem-solving within an effective coach/mentoring relationship. These include initial identification of a problem, understanding its nature and significance, and seeking to identify appropriate contextual solutions despite conflicting demands from different audiences.

Further, the study identifies complex processes at work as new headteachers seek to reach leadership decisions in their new context. While any apparent hesitation

may be construed as lack of confidence, this study indicates that rigorous review of options is a leadership strength.

### **8.3 Contributions to research**

In prioritising the agency of the headteacher, this study has accessed a wider range of data about current practice than previously reported research which focused on improving single dyadic relationships. Correspondingly the findings indicate that headteachers exercise strong agency in developing their coach/mentoring and wider support networks than has previously been documented. Previous research has focused on the provision, and thus the agency, of the coach/mentor. The deeper understanding of the role of client agency offers new ways to construct future research questions in the field.

In particular the study provides a deeper understanding of how formal dyadic coach/mentoring for new headteachers is complimented by a range of other sources of support some of which have characteristics of coach/mentoring. The new headteachers exercise significant agency in accessing appropriate coach/mentoring across the four level model for the range of challenges they encountered. There is a need for further research into the place of formal coach mentoring within the constellation of other support.

The study further acknowledges the performative context of education since the 1980s, and notes that headteachers in this study were aware of some tensions it creates. Although the coach/mentor relationship offers a unique safe space to step away from audience management and from the conflation of the headteacher's identity with that of the school, the study questions whether coach/mentors are aware of the implications of performativity in practice. It indicates some implications of the theory of performativity as a lens through which to examine such expectations, including the need to find a path between conflict and mere compliance. However accountability discourses are so pervasive that stepping outside them can feel unsettling, and so this study indicates a need for further research.

## **8.4 Contributions to practice**

Headship, with its emphasis on visibility and accountability, presented research participants with a radically different context for leadership learning from their previous experience, and the new headteachers needed to respond. Their instinct was to create a distance between themselves and colleagues, despite their previously valuing approachability in former headteachers. Such changed relationships resulted from changing attitudes on both sides, and were potentially in conflict with the new headteachers' espoused values. Subsequent reports of learning to be 'a bit more just myself' imply the initial enacting of an internalised distant model of headship, but also indicate that learning to enact the self in headship is not easy. New headteachers needed to understand and enact the version of the self which fitted the specific context.

The permanent gaze of audiences was surprising to new headteachers, but they accepted it as a feature of their position. They recalled moments of being acutely aware of themselves playing headteacher, and watching themselves play that role. For many research participants this initial amusing dislocation developed into occasional experiences of dissociation from the self. However, this experience of dissociation may not be a temporary phenomenon: dissociation became a necessary skill when personal feelings and professional requirements conflicted. Simultaneously the headteachers were aware of the identification of effectiveness with examination or Ofsted grades. The public and also the personal identification of headteacher with school meant that opportunities to step away from performance during coach/mentoring were all the more precious.

The new headteachers were active, selective participants in the coach/mentoring relationship. They very quickly judged the level and quality of support within the local authority, and set about finding alternatives where necessary. Thus this study indicates the strength of new headteachers: they choose how far to accept the perspective of the coach/mentor. Where they find a coach/mentoring relationship not useful they withdraw, reducing meeting frequency or limiting what they share.

Confidentiality and trust were significant elements of a successful coach/mentoring relationship. The concept of 'trust' was more extensive, allowing the new headteacher not merely to discuss problematic issues in a safe space, but more radically to step away temporarily from the constraints of office. Accepting a new headteacher's emotional reaction could enable its incorporation into the natural landscape of headship, allowing consideration of a problem without feeling overwhelmed.

For new headteachers whose schools pose a particular challenge to the new leader, finding a coach/mentor with parallel experiences was reported as a critical issue. The value of niche knowledge – such as about BSF – was consistently reported. Equally, the adaptability to flex between coaching and mentoring were considered essential. Further, matched or self-selected mentors worked beyond the usual remit of confidential personal support and challenge. The new headteachers further developed flexibility of support by moving beyond dyads for their coaching and mentoring, identifying and approaching the person best able to support specific needs.

This study makes a clear distinction between confidentiality and trust in the coach/mentoring relationship. Confidentiality is concerned with security of information; however, trust requires a relationship based on shared values and implies the admission of vulnerability. Both require the headteacher's agenda to be the coach/mentor's priority and cannot be assured in a context of conflicting accountability; for example, within a local authority. Therefore, in respect of their more challenging issues, new headteachers require an independent coach/mentor with no other agenda than supporting the headteacher.

This study found that dyadic coach/mentoring is part of a network of support orchestrated by the new headteacher, whose agency is therefore central. The most valued coach/mentors in this research brought an allocation of time in terms of days rather than hours. They also brought a flexibility of approach and support skills. Nevertheless coach/mentoring time was precious, requiring a strategic

approach to cover both strategy and problem solving. Therefore new headteachers both accessed and developed additional networks for support in daily or pressing issues, and to create collegial support beyond their first year.

### **8.5 Is full preparation of new headteachers possible?**

Throughout this study I have argued that full preparation for headship is not possible before taking up post. However, this study indicates that the preparation for new headteachers can be improved in three ways.

- Aspiring headteachers need to be more aware of the nature of the internal journey they are undertaking.
- They need to acquire the skills to make best use of coach/mentoring, in the many different forms this may take.
- They need to be aware of what changes in the self they are likely to experience, so they are ready to acknowledge them rather than be surprised.

### **8.6 Strengths of the study**

This study contributes to a previously neglected area in the research literature. In prioritising the agency of headteachers it is research rather than scheme evaluation. In published literature, the methodology of grounded theory has not previously been applied in this area. The social constructivist version of grounded theory has provided a consistent link between the research question and the constructivist epistemology. The methodology has also provided a rigorous method for data collection and analysis, leading to the development of middle-range theory including the Confidence Loop and three new models of coaching and mentoring.

The study drew on the researcher's dual background as headteacher and executive coach, in particular in achieving participation and trust from research participants, and in managing questions within semi-structured lifeworld interviews

for data collection. Data were collected from six new secondary school headteachers in a range of contexts and across their first year in post, with member checks incorporated into the final interviews. Data were managed with the use of NVivo, allowing constant comparison during analysis. Interviews with four experienced coaches offered a means of triangulating findings. Data are presented so the reader can see both evidence and analysis.

In addition to middle-range theory, the findings also provide three contributions to research and four to practice, as discussed in sections 8.2-8.4.

### **8.7 Limitations of the study**

This study involved six headteacher participants, and it is possible that different research participants would have provided different data for analysis. Four practising coach/mentors commented on the preliminary findings, and it is possible that different coach/mentors would have responded differently. One coach research participant became a coaching client of the researcher after the data collection was concluded but before the data analysis was complete. The agenda for this coaching engagement did not relate either to his role as a coach/mentor, or to working with headteachers. One of the headteacher research participants did not contribute to the second round of interviews and thus the data set from her was incomplete. This may also have affected her contribution to the third round of interviews because she did not have the experience of the second set of questions. This may have affected the overall dataset. The headteacher research participants had all started their headship within a period of five months, and it is possible that those starting during a different period would have reported different experiences. It is possible that those drawn to contribute to studies such as this have particular characteristics and this might affect the dataset for both headteachers and coach/mentors. The researcher had a background both in headship and in coaching and mentoring, and thus may have shared some assumptions with both groups of research participants which might have been more closely interrogated by a researcher who had only one of these



backgrounds, or neither. The researcher was the sole analyst of the data, and a different researcher might have reached different conclusions.

## 8.8 Summary

The research question and associated sub-questions for this study were:

Main question:

*An exploration of how newly established secondary school headteachers engage with coaching and mentoring in their first year in post.*

Sub-questions:

*i. What are the conceptual and developmental issues, including those in the areas of role clarification, expertise and socialisation, currently identified by new secondary school headteachers during their first year in post?*

*ii. How does coaching and mentoring influence the approach of headteachers to the identified issues, and which understandings do they bring to either or both terms?*

*iii. How do headteachers understand and account for their own increased expertise after a year in post?*

This study has shown that new secondary school headteachers exercise considerable agency in coaching and mentoring relationships: they find an appropriate partner, determine the nature and depth of the relationship, and develop a number of sources of coaching and mentoring support to fit their needs in different circumstances.

The new headteachers' conceptual and developmental needs fall into three main areas: the issues common to all headteachers, those which are context based, and issues where there is as yet no local or national expertise, such as the first test of new legislation. New headteachers also encounter a changing sense of self as they learn to present themselves to a wide range of audiences. Although at first they feel pressured to provide answers, a key element of the journey is to learn to support their own development by questioning others in the organisation. Their own experience of being questioned in this way in their earlier career had been developmental.

The new headteachers understanding of the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' focused on the place of confidentiality and of trust. They also sought out niche knowledge according to individual school circumstances. A very high value was placed on the coach/mentor's flexibility in response to the headteacher's specific need.

The new headteachers encountered many new and unexpected challenges in their first year in post, and drew increased confidence from dealing successfully with these new experiences. The support from coach/mentors was an essential contributory element to the success and resulting confidence. The headteachers provided examples of coach/mentors working with them across all four levels of coaching from skills development to the testing of values. It is significant that in seeking coach/mentoring support the headteachers turned, not just to an allocated coach/mentor, but to a wider circle of trusted contacts.

This study has used grounded theory as the methodology to explore how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. It contributes to filling a gap in previous research identified in the literature review in chapter 2. One part of its originality lies in the prioritisation of the headteacher's agency, while another rests with the methodological approach; grounded theory is not found previously in the published literature on this topic. The methodology, forming a consistent link between the epistemology and the research question, has provided rigorous methods for the collection and analysis of data, as described in chapter 3. In chapters 4-6 data from headteachers and coaches are presented, with the latter offering a means of validation. The findings are discussed in chapter 7 with data presented alongside analysis. Chapter 8 draws together the contribution of the study to knowledge, to research and to practice. Since this is a grounded theory study, it is appropriate that three contributions are middle-level theories; the Confidence Loop, three new models of coaching and mentoring, and a new understanding of articulation of issues as a contribution to solving leadership problems. Since this is a doctoral study, it is

appropriate that three contributions are to research; an extension to the work of Crow (2007) on the socialisation of new headteachers; the identification of the appointment process as a distinct stage in leadership development; and an unexpected finding at variance with the better-than-average effect. Since this is a professional doctorate, it is appropriate that it makes six distinct contributions to practice: how the learning model from earlier career stages changes in headship; the impact of heightened visibility on the sense of self; how new headteachers exercise agency in coaching and mentoring; the nature of the coach/mentoring relationship; and the implications of confidentiality and trust. It concludes with some implications for headteacher preparation.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Letter to potential headteacher research participants

Dear

### **Research into new headteachers and coaching and mentoring**

I am writing to invite you to participate in a piece of research which explores how secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring during their first year in post. I am a former secondary school headteacher working as an executive coach and this research will form the basis of my doctoral dissertation in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University. The research programme aims to advance understanding of how new headteachers choose to work with coaches or mentors, and participating in this research will enable you to contribute to this understanding.

I am looking for new secondary school headteachers who took up post from Easter 2008 or later and who are choosing to work with someone they would think of a coach or mentor during their first year in post whether or not this arrangement is part of a formal scheme. I wish to work with six such headteachers.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, the information sheet attached gives more details.

I will telephone you in the next few days to find out whether you would like to participate in this research, and if so to arrange a time to discuss what is involved and any questions you may have. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Linda Neal at the Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley Campus, Oxford OX33 1HX or via email on [linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07813 782 514.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Neal  
Research Student  
Business School  
Oxford Brookes University

## **Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Newly appointed Headteachers**

January 2008

#### **Project title: An exploration of how newly established secondary school headteachers engage with coaching and mentoring in their first year in post.**

Thank you for your interest in this study. Your experience is particularly relevant and I would like to invite you to take part. Before you decide this it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

This research explores how newly appointed headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. I am taking a very broad definition of coaching and mentoring as a sustained, one-to-one process of engagement of the headteacher with another person (or persons), in which the headteacher's particular and individual experience is the basis of the agenda.

The National Professional Qualification for Headship means that formal preparation for headship is more clearly specified than it was twenty years ago. Coaching and mentoring for new headteachers, which was suggested as an appropriate support strategy in the 1980's, remains part of the offer in Early Headship Provision. However there is a paucity of research looking at how new heads use coaching and mentoring alongside other available support strategies during this first period of their headship. The focus of this research is to increase understanding of how new heads use coaching and mentoring as they set about becoming the headteacher of their school.

If you decide to take part I will ask to meet you three times during the calendar year 2009. I will ask you to talk about your experiences of headship at that time and whether and how you are using coaching and mentoring for your own development. Each interview will last about an hour and will be digitally recorded, with your permission, to avoid the need to take detailed notes. Each interview will be transcribed, and I will send you a copy of the transcript to check factual accuracy.

All information collected in the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of the law. The data controller is myself, Linda Neal. Paper records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic files will be protected by the use of passwords. In accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity, the data generated will be kept by the University securely in electronic form for five years after the completion of the research project. Immediately following collection, all data will be in electronic format and will be de-identified to ensure anonymity; i.e. pseudonyms rather than real names will be used to identify research participants and their schools. Transcriptions will be made by Virtually Sorted, a specialist company, which will comply with standard security protocols. Findings from this research will be used within Linda Neal's doctoral thesis, and may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate scholarly journals. Participants and their schools will be referred to by



pseudonym in any publication arising from this research. Every effort will be made to secure the anonymity of participants, but participants should be aware that in such a small sample this cannot be guaranteed. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research. If you do decide to participate, and therefore to contribute to our further understanding of this research topic, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You would be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

The study is being conducted by Linda Neal, a doctoral student in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), as part of her doctoral programme and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. Linda is being supervised by Dr Kate Gilbert of the Business School and Dr Marlene Morrison of the Institute of Education, both senior researchers at OBU. The research programme which began in September 2007 will run for approximately three years.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Linda Neal at the Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley Campus, Oxford OX33 1HX or via email on [linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07813 782 514. Research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University and if you have any concerns about the way the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on [ethics@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@brookes.ac.uk).

I will contact you in the next few days to find out if you would like to participate in this research and wish to discuss it. If appropriate we can then set up either a face-to-face meeting or a telephone conversation so I can answer any questions you may have. You are of course welcome to contact me direct on 07813 782 514 to set up a meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. I hope it has given you an outline of my research so that you have enough information to decide whether a further conversation would be appropriate.

Yours faithfully,

Linda Neal  
Research Student  
Business School  
Oxford Brookes University  
Wheatley Campus  
Oxford  
OX33 1HX

## **Appendix 3: Letter to potential coach mentor research participants**

Dear

### **Research into new headteachers and coaching and mentoring**

I am writing to invite you to participate in a piece of research which explores how secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring during their first year in post. I am a former secondary school headteacher working as an executive coach and this research will form the basis of my doctoral dissertation in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University. The research programme aims to advance understanding of how new headteachers choose to work with coaches or mentors, and participating in this research will enable you to contribute to this understanding.

For the first part of this research I have interviewed six new secondary school headteachers who took up post from Easter 2008 or later and who chose to work with someone they would think of a coach or mentor during their first year in post whether or not this arrangement is part of a formal scheme.

I am looking for up to four participants who work with new secondary school headteachers. I will ask them to look at my preliminary research findings, and to talk about them from the point of view of a coach or mentor.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, the information sheet attached gives more details.

I will contact you in the next few days to find out whether you would like to participate in this research, and if so to arrange a time to discuss what is involved and any questions you may have. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Linda Neal at the Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley Campus, Oxford OX33 1HX or via email on [linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07813 782 514.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter.

Yours sincerely,

## **Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### **Coach/Mentors of Newly appointed Headteachers**

March 2010

#### **Project title: An exploration of how newly established secondary school headteachers engage with coaching and mentoring in their first year in post.**

Thank you for your interest in this study. Your experience is particularly relevant and I would like to invite you to take part. Before you decide this it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

This research explores how newly appointed headteachers use coaching and mentoring in their first year in post. I am taking a very broad definition of coaching and mentoring as a sustained, one-to-one process of engagement of the headteacher with another person (or persons), in which the headteacher's particular and individual experience is the basis of the agenda.

The National Professional Qualification for Headship means that formal preparation for headship is more clearly specified than it was twenty years ago. Coaching and mentoring for new headteachers, which was suggested as an appropriate support strategy in the 1980's, remains part of the offer in Early Headship Provision. However there is a paucity of research looking at how new heads use coaching and mentoring alongside other available support strategies during this first period of their headship. The focus of this research is to increase understanding of how new heads use coaching and mentoring as they set about becoming the headteacher of their school.

If you decide to take part I will ask to meet you once during the late Spring 2010. I will ask you to talk about your reaction to the preliminary findings from the first stage of my research. The interview will last about an hour and will be digitally recorded, with your permission, to avoid the need to take detailed notes. Each interview will be transcribed, and I will send you a copy of the transcript to check factual accuracy.

All information collected in the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, within the limits of the law. The data controller is myself, Linda Neal. Paper records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic files will be protected by the use of passwords. In accordance with Oxford Brookes University's policy on Academic Integrity, the data generated will be kept by the University securely in electronic form for five years after the completion of the research project. Immediately following collection, all data will be in electronic format and will be de-identified to ensure anonymity; i.e. pseudonyms rather than real names will be used to identify research participants and their schools. Transcriptions will be made by Virtually Sorted, a specialist company, which will comply with standard security protocols. Findings from this research will be used within Linda Neal's doctoral thesis, and may form the basis of articles submitted for publication in appropriate scholarly journals. Participants and their schools will be referred to by pseudonym in any publication arising from this research. Every effort will be made to secure the anonymity of participants, but participants should be aware that in such a small sample this cannot be guaranteed. Copies of any article(s) accepted for publication will be made available to you, should you wish to receive them.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research. If you do decide to participate, and therefore to contribute to our further understanding of this research topic, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. You would be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

The study is being conducted by Linda Neal, a doctoral student in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University (OBU), as part of her doctoral programme and has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at OBU. Linda is being supervised by Dr Kate Gilbert of the Business School and Dr Marlene Morrison of the Institute of Education, both senior researchers at OBU. The research programme which began in September 2007 will run for approximately three years.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Linda Neal at the Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Wheatley Campus, Oxford OX33 1HX or via email on [linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:linda.neal@brookes.ac.uk) or by telephone on 07813 782 514. Research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University and if you have any concerns about the way the study is being conducted, please contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on [ethics@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@brookes.ac.uk).

I will contact you in the next few days to find out if you would like to participate in this research and wish to discuss it. If appropriate we can then set up either a face-to-face meeting or a telephone conversation so I can answer any questions you may have. You are of course welcome to contact me direct on 07813 782 514 to set up a meeting.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. I hope it has given you an outline of my research so that you have enough information to decide whether a further conversation would be appropriate.

Yours faithfully,

Linda Neal  
Research Student  
Business School  
Oxford Brookes University  
Wheatley Campus  
Oxford  
OX33 1HX

## Appendix 5: Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

**Full title of Project:** An exploration of how newly established secondary school headteachers engage with coaching and mentoring in their first year in post.

**Name, position and contact address of Researcher:**

Linda Neal  
Doctoral Student, Business School  
Oxford Brookes University  
Wheatley Campus  
Wheatley, Oxford OX33 1HX

**Please initial box**

- |    |   |                          |
|----|---|--------------------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | I agree to the interview being digitally recorded.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | I understand that a pseudonym for myself and for my school will be used in publications, but that in a small sample anonymity cannot be guaranteed.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | I understand that the confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limits of the law, i.e. it is possible for the data to be subject to subpoena or a claim under the Freedom of Information Act. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
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## **Appendix 6: Questions for interviews with headteachers**

### **First interview**

1. How did you become a headteacher?
2. During your first year in post, did you find any surprises in what it means to be or to become a headteacher?
3. During your first year in post, where did you look to find support?
4. What were the most significant kinds of support you found?
5. When you were thinking about this meeting you probably had some thoughts about the areas we might talk about, and I'm wondering if there is anything you thought about before we met that somehow hasn't come up for whatever reason.

### **Second interview**

1. How would you describe your journey so far into headship?
2. What issues, or kinds of issues, have you looked for support on since we last met?
3. What is it that makes it possible for you to ask some people for support but not others?
4. Thinking of the kinds of support you have been offered or have found for yourself, would you identify any of them as coaching, or as mentoring, or as something else?
5. Anything else you would like to include.

### **Third interview**

1. My research is about coaching and mentoring. In this context can you look at the issues on these cards (to be provided) and choose about four that are important to you and talk about them.
2. If you were given a free hand, what kind of coaching and mentoring support would you offer for newly appointed secondary school headteachers?
3. How could a coach or mentor most usefully have worked with you during your first year in post that would have made a difference?
4. Looking forward to the next phase of your headship, what kind of challenge and support do you now need or look for?
5. Thinking back on your experience of headship so far as if it were a journey: what have been the key points on that journey? What remains to travel?

## Appendix 7 - Sample data

Interviewer: But you've turned that round really quickly.

Interviewee: Beginning to turn it round – it's part of a longer process. I reckon it's really going to take three or four years to get it fully embedded. I have been really lucky with one or two colleagues moving on. Not that they weren't part of the vision but they chose to move at the right time. So I have appointed a superb replacement SENCO and the title, again the line in the sand, wasn't SENCO it was Head of Integrated Services. Who again was very focused on the vision, but also brought a lot of local contacts. She came to me from the local authority, so I could break down immediately this barrier about multi agencies, because she had been one of the agencies who couldn't get into the school last year. She told it from the other side, "Nobody asked me to come in Fiona. And on the one occasion I did come in I had been invited by four separate colleagues about the same child and nobody knew I was standing in reception about the same child." There had been no wrap around joined up thinking going on. I think that what has been difficult at times is there has been a lot of having to lead by example and lead from the top. I haven't been automatically able to delegate in the way I would really have hoped to and say "you take that away and put those services in place" because nobody has seen how that practice happens. A huge focus therefore had to be rapid training of the Assistant Heads in order to give them the skills that they needed. That's now beginning to pay dividends.

Interviewer: And how have you done that?

Interviewee: A lot of CPD. A lot of sitting down and listening. A lot of telling them "Yes you can and I want you to do it, and I want you to take responsibility for it." A lot of when they bring something in to you say "Yes that's fine" rather than having to sit down and discuss and have a lengthy talk. But no "That's fine, it's your job description, that is what I am paying you to do, you know, you go off and do it. I'm quite happy with that, I want it to be your responsibility". And encouraging them in meetings to be very open. A lot of reading of body language in meetings as well. Colleagues sitting quietly but you can tell by their body language that they want to say something. I do have a couple of colleagues, especially at the leadership team meetings, who have had a huge amount of autonomy, perhaps one had too much autonomy, and is struggling with a head who wants to grapple back and say actually I'm driving the ship and I expect you to work... gosh that sounds like I'm a power maniac, I don't mean it in that way. But it feels sometimes like I need to be a team player, but I am the team captain and they've been allowed to be the team captain and take key decisions about the school which the head previously really was not involved in and should have been where a health and safety and legal framework should have been. Especially when it comes to target setting when you don't even know what targets have been set for your school.

Interviewer: That's quite central is it?

Interviewee: It is. Not the academic targets, the targets about attendance, exclusions etc. The head previously had no input into that. Sorry, I'm being a bit of a butterfly now, but one of the Assistant Heads who was very involved in the vision could see where I wanted to go but very junior in the post, initially in meetings wouldn't say anything. And it was watching his body language and saying, "Do you want to come in on this?" or making sure "I hear what you say about that, what do you all have to say about that?" Sort of reading the chemistry between them to make sure they have an equal say so they feel empowered. A couple of them were not empowered. I have used the SSAT a huge amount to deliver appropriate training. I've also used - I've always get the acronym one – it's either NSP or VLA it's those initials, I'm not quite sure of the order. And that is again about the SEALs agenda, behaviour management agenda and empowering the Assistant Heads to work through that. It's been in pulling in key people on key meetings...

## **Appendix 8: Tree Nodes from NVivo**

Benchmarking

Beyond Y1

Boundary issues

Challenge and support

Coaching mentoring approaches

In school issues

LA

Networks

Preparation for headship

Reassurance

Right

Role of the HT

Speed

Surprises

The Coach Mentor

The Headteachers' Club

Tricky issues

Trust



## Appendix 9: Expanded tree node from NVivo

### Surprises

Audiences

Being The HT

Budget & HR

Daily

'Good' schools, why change...

Lack of accountability

Lack of support

Loneliness

Paradoxes

Range of skills and knowledge

Self doubt

## Appendix 10: Preliminary findings

### Research into how new secondary school headteachers use coaching and mentoring

#### Preliminary findings

1. In their first year in post the new secondary school headteachers in the study developed ways of 'doing' and 'being' the headteacher both for themselves and for others. This involved modifying their leadership style and learning new ways to lead that took into account the ambiguity of being both the team captain and a team player; of being seen as the figurehead while managing feelings of vulnerability.
2. The headteachers in the study encountered three types of problem;
  - a. Those which all headteachers could expect to encounter, such as budget issues or the need to respond to new legislation. The need was frequently to develop new knowledge.
  - b. Those which were context based, such as the decision about whether or not to exclude a student. These tended to arise quickly and need a rapid response in circumstances where the interests of stakeholders are conflicted. The need was usually to make a judgement which would hold in the face of formal challenge. Even more challenging were:
    - c. Those where there is no local or perhaps even national experience, such as the first challenge using of a piece of legislation. Thus a fine judgement was required in circumstances where there were few sources of guidance.
3. The headteachers in the study particularly valued coaches and mentors who were able to flex their approach between coaching and mentoring, and those who worked with the headteacher and the school beyond the formal role of coach or mentor to the headteacher.
4. The headteachers in the study used a wide network to provide coaching or mentoring support on specific issues. They directed their enquiry to the contact they found most appropriate.
5. The headteachers in the study found that the most significant element of a coach/mentor relationship is trust. They found it difficult to have trust where the coach/mentor is within the local authority.

