Possibility Thinking and Social Change in Primary Schools

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Possibility Thinking and Social Change in Primary Schools

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This paper reviews the nature of PT (transformation from what is to what might be, in everyday contexts for children and teachers), and reports on how PT manifested in two English primary schools engaged in social change. It identifies shared characteristics across the schools as well as unique ways in which PT manifested. With a focus on uniquely positioned professional wisdom, each school was engaged in change which rejected some assumptions whilst integrating new ideas relevant to their community, leading to quiet revolutions. Implications for primary schools which generate their own practices and narratives regarding educational futures, are discussed.

Keywords: word; Possibility Thinking, Social Change, quiet revolutions, preferred educational futures

Introduction

Possibility Thinking (PT) as the engine of creative change

Coined by Craft (2000, 2001) in the context of creative educational practice in England, Possibility Thinking (PT) offers a ‘democratic’ notion of creativity, focusing on the everyday. Posing the simple question, ‘what if?’ is the engine which drives the shift from what is to what might be – or, from a child’s perspective, ‘what is this?’ to ‘what can I or we do with this? And alongside what if thinking, inherent in PT is as if thinking; taking on another’s perspective. This may be intuitive, in the way young children undertake role play or may be more consciously intentional – such as the way that a sensitive primary teacher may move around their empty classroom at the same height as the children they teach, to sense the impression made.

Craft proposed PT as the everyday creativity involved in successfully identifying and navigating life (Craft, 2000, 2001) foregrounding personal agency in enabling route-finding. Initially a theoretical account it was later researched empirically, beginning with pre-school and early primary children. This work, which concentrated on the ‘little c’ end of the creativity spectrum chimes with work published subsequently by Boden (2004), another English scholar, who refers to such novelty as ‘psychological’. In the United States, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) distinguish mini-c creativity (personal meaning-making), from everyday creativity or little c (creativity shared with others) and the other end of the continuum representing high impact and high originality or ‘big C’ creativity. This latter is what Boden calls ‘H’ creativity or ‘historical’ creativity that changes the world, or transforms paradigms.

Since the mid 1990s, the authors have, with a number of University- and school-based colleagues, co-investigated PT empirically using a qualitative research approach. We have analysed carefully selected naturalistic episodes of playful, focused and sustained activity across the age span 2 to 11 and in a range of curriculum contexts. Our analysis
has involved both inductive and, later, deductive analysis. There have been two main foci to the empirical work to date: the nature of possibility thinking, and what fosters it.

**Focus 1: The nature of PT.**

The early empirical studies developed Craft’s original conceptualisation generating a framework for identifying PT in a seminal study undertaken by Burnard et al., 2006 with children aged 3-7, defined in a later chapter (Craft et al., 2008):

- **Posing questions:** children’s verbal and non-verbal questions, typically made visible through playful ‘as if’ activity
- **Play:** children’s highly engaged, serious, extended exploration, imagining situations, generating diverse ideas and problems and solving these.
- **Immersion:** children’s deep involvement in a benign environment combining high emotional support with high cognitive challenge.
- **Innovation:** children’s strong, playful connections between ideas, triggered, scaffolded and extended by thoughtful adult provocations.
- **Risk-taking:** children courageously reaching into original spaces.
- **Being imaginative:** children engaging in what might be, designing and inventing.
- **Self-determination:** children exercising independence in generating and following through ideas.

Later studies refined this framework. The first generated a taxonomy of how children’s questioning in PT episodes triggers innovative ideas and action, with imagination and risk-taking (Chappell et al., 2008). This study revealed the vital role of the inherent breadth of possibility in any learning context, and relationships between question-posing and question-responding. Also researching PT in younger children (four year olds), Craft, McConnon and Matthews (2012) highlighted the role of adults within PT emerging from child-initiated play, the blending of individual, collaborative and communal creativity (an idea derived from Chappell, 2008) and confirmed the role of risk-taking for these younger learners.

A study of PT in older primary children aged 9-11 (Craft, Cremin, Burnard, Dragovic, Chappell 2012) further highlighted the role of children’s questioning stance, verbally and nonverbally but could not discern risk-taking at all (perhaps reflecting constraints in education for older learners). The study underlined the role of imaginative and playful behaviour among these older children, and the emergent PT feature of peer collaboration.

Spanning the whole primary age range, a fourth study by Cremin, Chappell and Craft (2012) systematically re-analysed all immersive, playful episodes from earlier studies, and revealed the inherent role of narrative in these, shaped both individually and reciprocally. The team identified three types of narrative: fantasy, everyday and historical. All narrative episodes shared in common: a sense of character, plot, sequence, significance and emotional investment. This re-analysis showed that not only was narrative integral to ‘as if’ PT but that in shaping questions and imagination, children’s narrative was much more potent than adults’.

The studies of PT among children, adults and the interactions between children and adults reveal how the core features of PT are driven by question-posing and question-responding through individual, collaborative and communal engagement, framed by a
shared narrative, occurring in an immersive context. PT essentially is an engine of change.

Alongside these studies of the nature of PT, have been investigations into what enables it.

**Focus 2: Pedagogy that enables PT.**

Our studies reveal that teaching for PT involves an inclusive learning environment in which:

- children’s experiences and ideas are highly valued
- dialogue between children and between children and teachers is encouraged
- an ethos of respect is nurtured and children as well as teachers experience meaningful control, ownership, relevance and innovation in learning.


The breadth of inherent possibility in any potential task is also important. This requires pedagogical sensitivity. Highlighted in the original seminal study of pedagogy and possibility (Cremin et al, 2006) in 3-7 year olds, was the importance of the enabling context in which teachers offer children time and space to develop ideas, prioritise learner agency and ‘stand back’ in order to observe children’s active engagement and to select when to intervene. The complexity of standing back was further developed in the study of four year olds’ child initiated play (Craft, McConnon, Matthews, 2012) discussed above. Here an imaginative dynamic was revealed between practitioner and child; teachers ‘stepped forward’ and ‘stood back’ as appropriate, encouraging, through use of provocation, children’s imaginative narratives. Studying the wider, 3-11, age range as discussed above Cremin et al, (2012) reveal that narrative itself feeds more questioning, so opportunities for narrative development are important in the primary classroom.

**From what is to what might be: PT generating social change**

The studies discussed above suggest that with age, PT increasingly involves collaboration and developing shared views. Craft (2013) has recently begun to consider the potency of PT in enabling engagement with social change. She has coupled the PT notion with that of wise, humanising creativity (WHC) (Chappell & Craft, 2011; Chappell with Craft, Rolfe and Jobbins, 2012) arguing that WHC can be triggered by PT. Chappell and Craft, with Rolfe and Jobbins, (2011) originally proposed that WHC involves attention to the ethics of creativity and also the way in which people are both made by as well as making, creativity. WHC generates ‘quiet revolutions’, or social change valued by the community as a whole in which participants play co-emancipatory roles. This paper reports on a small-scale study of PT in such social change in English primary schools.

**The policy context to creative social change in primary schools**

As the new government controlled primary curriculum was unveiled for implementation in September 2014 (DfE 2013), schools faced both increasing freedom to organise curriculum, pedagogy and learning, and yet continued to operate in a landscape focused on performative outcomes of children and teachers, characterised by, for example, inspections, national testing and accountability (eg Garland & Garland, 2012). Yet,
there was evidence of continued highly creative stances adopted in many schools, resisting and transforming this agenda since the early 1990s (Troman, Jeffrey and Raggl, 2007). There remained in schools and beyond, considerable interest in a more flexible and creative agenda, to which this work seeks to contribute.

This small-scale study involved two case studies. Using the frame of PT as a conceptualisation for creativity, and attending to the social and ethical dimensions of school change, we sought to capture how these schools were engaging in social change, through two research questions:

What is creative social change in this school?

How is the school going about it?

Research Design

In common with previous PT studies detailed above, this study was qualitative and, interpretivist. This study foregrounded relativist awareness of the reflexive nature of social knowledge, reflecting the epistemological constructionist view ‘that meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

This study sought to explain how people make sense of their social worlds. We sought to document and interpret multiple perspectives and to characterise complex lived experiences of the schools as organisations. As in previous studies of PT a tight fit was sought between epistemology and ontology and the methods of data collection and analysis so as to strengthen the rigour of the study (Gavin, 2008).

Involving two case studies, in Yin’s (2009) exploratory tradition, this study adopted a purposive sample, involving two primary schools which publicly state their preferred educational futures (Bell, 2010). Two cases enabled a compromise between the limitations of single case study and the challenges of multiple case study (Yin, 2003). The two cases offered distinctive social, geographic and historical contexts, each providing rich and unique data.

Selection of the sites harnessed the following sampling criteria. Schools were sought with:

- A prior relationship with at least one of the researchers
- A commitment to and reputation (e.g. with the local university, or national organisations such as the Cambridge Primary Review Trust) for fostering creative engagement in children and staff
- Successful approaches to nurturing children’s achievement and attainment
- A mixed population of pupils including some eligible for government support due to disadvantage
- A public commitment to and clear leadership on developing their own approach to educational futures

The two case study schools

The case study schools were located in South West England. They have been given pseudonyms.

St Saviour’s Primary School is a denominational (Church of England) school located on a green site close to a Cathedral city centre. Formed in 2005 when a first and middle
school combined, it is a 430 pupil primary school (4-11 years) with three classes in every year. It offers after-school provision for 82 children. 4% of the children (i.e. below the national average) attract the Pupil Premium Grant – additional funding to help disadvantaged children, including free school meals provision. 6.5% of the children have English as an additional language. The most recent inspection report found that the school was good but with room for improvement in terms of children’s achievement and attainment (with the exception of the Reception classes for children aged 4-5 which were outstanding).

Greenfield Community Primary School, which describes itself as ‘creative’, is located on a large site with its own field areas, in a small town overlooking farmland and allotments. It was built in 1911, and has been extended and modified to accommodate two classes in each year from age 5 to 11, and currently provides for 455 children of whom 1.4% have English as an additional language. The school encompasses a nursery with 52 places for children aged 3+. Greenfield offers after-school provision for 45 children. 8.1% of children attract the Pupil Premium Grant. The school has an excellent reputation and standards of attainment are high. Government inspections have judged the school as Outstanding.

The head teachers in both schools had been in post less than five years when the research was undertaken. Each had been appointed on the retirement of the previous head; at St Saviour’s the head teacher was new to the school, and at Greenfield the head teacher had been promoted from her previous role as Deputy Head.

Ethical issues
The research followed British Educational Research Association’s code (2011) addressing informed consent, confidentiality and secure data storage. Following approval from Open University (OU) ethics committee, written informed consent was acquired from teachers and parents; children’s consent was gained verbally. Consent forms were stored securely, and computer-based data was anonymised and stored on password-protected machines or secure file sharing areas.

Both researchers faced ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ issues. Knowing the schools in advance was one of the selection criteria, as with a focus on coming to understand lived experience, we hoped to achieve greater sensitivity and depth in this way. However our relationships with the schools were uneven.

Both researchers had worked with Greenfield Community Primary School on a previous PT study and a pupil voice study (Craft, Cremin, Burnard, Dragovic, Chappell, 2012; Chappell, Craft, Jónsdóttir and Clack, 2008). Both of these studies involved a co-participative approach so we had spent time in the school working with teachers and children and interpreting data with them. One researcher had remained in touch with the school in relation to her Higher Education (HE) teaching and in relation to a later probe for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (Craft et al, 2010). This long term relationship spanned the previous head teacher’s retirement and replacement with the current head. Both researchers were therefore fairly long-standing ‘insiders’ in this site.

By contrast only one of the two researchers had developed a previous relationship with St Saviours, and in a less multi-faceted way, mainly in relation to her HE teaching.
whilst the previous head was in post. She had also got to know the school and its new
head teacher whilst working with a national organisation which supports schools in
evidence-based and research-informed provision. As a result one researcher had a
partial insider insight into this school.

The differing prior insights and relationships, meant a richness of engagement was
possible in one site born of a shared history, which could not be replicated in the other.
The researchers were very aware of possible sensitivities, for example possible sense of
obligation for the schools to participate and potential abuse of trust, issues of
confidentiality, long-term anonymity and particular insights which are possible only to
insiders (Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs 2010). Being an insider-researcher, also brought
tensions in how distance could be created between data, its interpretation and the
community that had generated it.

Methods and data collected
This study sought to understand the instantiation of leadership for creative change in
each site. To this end there were two levels of data collection as follows.

Entry point: A recorded and transcribed Headteacher interview, supported by
school documentation, ascertained key forums for change within that school.
Where appropriate, conceptual drawing or journey mapping (Chappell and Craft,
2011) was used.
Engagement with change: Follow up data collection was decided upon after the
Head Teacher interview and included interviews, focus groups, activity and
classroom observations as appropriate to that site. These decisions were driven
by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological mode, to assist in positioning and
relating different foci of change within each site. Hence the difference in Level 2
data (shown in Table 1) in the two schools with the decision taken in negotiation
with each Headteacher

Table 1 here

Analysis
The analysis was undertaken with respect to the two research questions:

What is creative social change in this school?
How is the school going about it?
All data was drawn on in each school in relation to each research question.
For each research question two kinds of analysis were undertaken;

Inductive, using a qualitative analysis approach, identifying recurrent themes, and
constructing coding categories (Creswell, 1998; Radnor, 2001).

Deductive, using the existing PT framework as a reference point.

Blind triangulation was carried out by the researcher who had not been involved in the
data collection verifying the coding of the other researcher. This led to some small
changes being made to the analysis where reinterpretations of data were necessary.

Findings
As stated above there were two research questions asked across both cases. This section
is structured so as to firstly show the evidence for PT features as a way of framing what
creative change is in the schools. It then shows the emergent outcomes of the inductive
analysis in relation to what creative change is and how each school went about it.
What is creative change in these schools?

Deductive PT analysis

Table 2 shows how the evidence (Yes, No or ? – questionable) for PT features, including those generated most recently in the Cremin et al (2013) study, manifested in each site’s data in relation to understanding what constituted creative social change.

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Overall, question-posing and question-responding can be seen as present in both schools although with different profiles. They are present across the Greenfield’s data set, with question-posing more focused within the St Saviour’s Headteacher’s data. This reflects the slightly different sources of the change drivers in each school which become evident across the data below. Imagination, self-determination, action-intention and narrative plot/sequence are strongly represented in both data sets, information on which is also provided in the findings below. The data supporting the presence of risk is comparatively thin compared to other features, although as is also discussed below this does reflect data patterns in some (e.g. Chappell et al 2008) but not all previous PT studies (Craft, McConnon and Matthews, 2012).

Innovation is strongly present in both Headteachers’ data, although not present in the Greenfield Children’s Focus Group and the St Saviour’s SMT meeting data. This is perhaps to be expected as within a short one-off focus group the children were unlikely to perhaps be able to pinpoint school innovations. Neither were the SMT in a pre-governors meeting discussion likely to focus in on school innovations as their meeting agenda was considering Levelling in numeracy and literacy. Interestingly, for the emotional/aesthetic element Greenfield’s evidence is stronger where the detail of the findings below shows St Saviour’s as driven more by ‘evidence’ from research being carried out within the school community. Greenfield, especially with the Thrive programme embedded within it, perhaps works more emotionally responsively to ideas and needs as they emerge. Both schools seem equally strong on the Individual, Collaborative, Communal dimension although with the different dynamics of this reflected in the way they use evidence and responsiveness as explained further below.

As with previous PT studies the features of Play and Immersion are taken as context rather than core features within the analysis, and are therefore not included in Table 2. The data certainly demonstrated that both Head Teachers are committed to and immersed in their headship and their school. The St Saviour’s Head describes her commitment to and engagement in the school when she tells with a smile how she and her husband are in, out of hours, sorting out problems: ‘my husband does part of it but we’ll be in here on a Sunday likely because of ghosting machines you know this and that and the other’. She also tells how her husband, a teacher himself, has ‘done childcare for the last 6 years’ indicating the extent of the St Saviour’s Headteacher’s involvement with her school in relation to her family life balance. The Greenfield Headteacher comments less on her own work-life balance, however the tone of concern and long-standing affection with which she discusses the school, how honest she is about how ‘tough’ the past year has been and the comments from the teachers regarding the ‘respect’ they have for her (‘Beverly [pseudonym] makes it, she’s fantastic, she not only cares, she does provide and I’m lucky enough to have this job which I really enjoy’), all indicate her full involvement in and commitment to the school.
Play is previously defined in PT classroom as ‘highly engaged, serious, extended exploration, imagining situations, generating diverse ideas and problems and solving these’ This is not evident in this data set, as the definition is less appropriate to whole school social change. However the data does show evidence of a playful approach to change in the Headteachers’ language and the imaginative approaches they take to the problems they need to solve as part of making creative social change happen. The St Saviour’s teacher delighted in telling the researcher that she ‘completely ignores’ the new curriculum, as well as how she changed the schools rules to let the children play with sticks when she first arrived, much to the distress of some long-standing, perhaps more authoritarian staff. At Greenfield there are less obvious examples in the Headteacher’s demeanour, however when she discusses the Thrive programme, she tells of ‘blowing-bubbles or messy play’ which she indicates are appropriate whoever might need to engage in them. Interestingly both Headteachers were originally from Early Years backgrounds and this may have contributed to the playfulness evident in their leadership approach and the atmospheres they create.

Bearing in mind Play and Immersion as context and the pattern of evidence detailed above, what follows next is the core PT features as evidenced in the two data sets.

**Questioning and question-responding**

Mooted as the key driver for PT (Chappell et al, 2008), question-posing and question-responding are strongly evident within all the Greenfield data, whilst being evidenced most strongly within the St Saviours Headteacher’s data. The Greenfield Headteacher discussed how her SMT poses questions to staff: ‘We will put an idea to particularly teachers…and say ‘we thought about this what do you think?’ And we will have a discussion and we’ll come up to a consensus’. The Greenfield Deputy Head teacher discussed his own view on question responding as part of the process of change: ‘we need to respond to what we’re doing well, what we’re not doing quite so well at, and what our kids like too’. The St Saviour’s Headteacher talked about her own personal question-posing as follows: ‘I might read something and think ‘I really like that idea I wonder will it work? Or what would it look like here?”’ A good example of question-responding can be found especially within the St Saviour’s data where the Headteacher discusses how she uses evidence from her own investigations to respond to research questions that are being asked within the school in relation to change.

**Imagination**

Imagination as a feature of creative social change was also strongly evident across most data sources. As an indicator of imagination, the Greenfield Headteacher talked about having to go beyond the known when she said: ‘we are preparing our children to solve problems that we don’t know what they are yet, to do jobs that we don’t know what they’re gonna be, they don’t exist, they’ll need skills that we don’t even have yet’. The St Saviour’s Headteacher also made a similar point when she discussed how ‘we do not know what their future is going to hold’, and how therefore schools need to not simply focus on ‘English and Maths’. Elements of imagination can also be found, for example, in the St Saviour’s SMT meeting, one of the teachers talks of finding ‘inspiring’ ways to encourage boys reading, and the Greenfield students talked about being ‘creative’ because of the introduction of *Philosophy for Children*.

**Self Determination**
Both Headteachers and most of the staff interviewed showed strong self-determination as part of how they engaged with social change. The Greenfield Headteacher discussed how they went about change ‘in true Greenfield [pseudonym used] style’ which meant that they were able to stand their ground against initiatives or policies which did not fit with that style. She said: ‘government policies…actually we’re trying to keep the impact of them as small as possible.…. we’re just trying ….to it’s sort of like you know a big bouncy ball and they keep pushing us and …you know we just push it back’.

Perhaps demonstrating even more self-determination the St Saviour’s Headteacher went so far as to say ‘I completely ignore the national curriculum, the new national curriculum coming in, because of the information I have from Robin Alexander’.

The Headteachers gained confidence for their self-determination from different sources. The Greenfield head’s seemed rooted in the school’s Outstanding Ofsted status and it’s longstanding reputation as a creative school. At St Saviour’s the Headteacher’s confidence, as she says above, came from sources such as their involvement in Robin Alexander’s Cambridge Primary Review. Her faith was also a strong source of her confidence in her Church of England school: ‘I have a faith perspective as well which I think is fundamental to the way that I operate’. She also describes herself as ‘very driven’. Looking to other data, the Greenfield teacher who was interviewed demonstrated the wider self-determination evident in the SMT staff there when she said: ‘we feel really passionate that what we’re doing is right’.

**Action Intention**

The Greenfield Headteacher demonstrated action intention well when she reported how she had said to staff: ‘I want to see the practice - get the paper work done later’ – that was completely revolutionary’. She had a clear intention regarding the importance of practice over bureaucracy which she wanted to see taken through into action. This stance was different to previously. Her intention with her approach to change overall was summed up when she stated: ‘to try and change the world or the country I can’t do that, but if I can get people here to think that it’s important to care for each other and think that it’s important to be responsible and all those sorts of things then maybe it’ll spread a bit’. In contrast, the St Saviour’s Headteacher very boldly stated: ‘I’m out to change the world’. The teacher interviewed in St Saviour’s demonstrated that the Headteacher’s intention and ensuing action in relation to using research to drive school change, was present in staff’s thinking: ‘We all need to be going in the same direction, we will need to have that consistency, so that we’re all.. singing from the …same songsheet … we’re going to do more of that I think… it’s really powerful to do it actually, the research’.

**Risk**

Interestingly, it was questionable whether the Headteachers’ data itself showed signs of risk taking. It may have been evident in the St Saviour’s Headteacher’s references to having to be ‘fearless’ and the Greenfield Headteacher’s references to taking quite radical decisions such as having to ban some troublesome parents from the school grounds, which had not been done before. The questionable presence of risk is a recurrent theme in PT studies which will be considered in the discussion section. However in Greenfield School the Deputy Headteacher did also infer that they were taking risks when he described how by asking long-standing teachers to be more stepped back in their pedagogies, they were ‘moving people away from what they feel most comfortable with’. This could be interpreted as a risky strategy and he acknowledged that it was ‘a long journey’.

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Innovation
Innovation was apparent in different ways in the Headteachers’ interviews and in other elements of the data set too in how both schools went about change. For example, the Greenfield Headteacher stated relatively confidently that: ‘once that project goes there’s always something exciting and something new in the way that we’re working’. She also recognized the school’s reputation for its creativity ‘We were quite ahead of the game…when we started this creative curriculum’ and seemed to value it as a way to continue working: ‘I think every time we have something new there’s an element of creativity about it…thinking outside the box and not do what we’ve always done’. Although the St Saviour’s Headteacher seemed more often to talk about adapting ideas and strategies from other contexts, there was certainly evidence of one new initiative which seemed to have grown within the school: ‘we made an appointment in our admin team to have someone that solely does communication which was quite new, this was about 2 years ago, we now have a website that is second to none and it’s a living website, we have Twitter and Facebook and which again is alive because Jane [pseudonym used] … keeps it very rich’. The St Saviour’s teacher also commented on another creative initiative that the Headteacher had instigated within the school: ‘She’s made a massive change in terms of the school grounds here… and that’s been very much her links with the parents and … some fantastic energy from …. a really driven group of parents who’ve… done an awful lot of … making use of the grounds here and in a creative way’.

Narrative features
The idea of PT activity having a narrative driven by characters, a plot, a sequence, and significance was an accompaniment to PT which was developed by Cremin et al (2013). Both Headteachers structured their discussions of their school leadership and its connection to change in terms of a narrative, especially in terms of a plot with a beginning, middle and end. For example, the Greenfield Headteacher described how: ‘the reason I haven’t gone is I just need to finish’. It is not difficult to read the narratives as having different characters within the schools in them, and the significance of different narrative threads can certainly be seen. In both schools ‘children’s well-being’ was one of the most strongly significant parts of the narrative, and in Greenfield this was formalized within a well-being initiative called ‘Thrive’ which was discussed by both the Greenfield Teacher and Teaching Assistant. Language across the data demonstrated the flow of narratives; the Deputy Headteacher at Greenfield consistently referred to a ‘journey’ as well as the school being like a ‘flowing river’. And both Headteachers used the metaphor of a ‘bubble’ to help them to represent the narrative of how they maintained the kind of change that they wanted to see within their schools. The Cremin et al (2013) narrative-focused paper also highlighted the importance of an emotional driver to PT narratives. Both Headteachers referred to emotional elements when they discussed change. The St Saviour’s Headteacher said: ‘I picked up at this point huge anxiety, so I suppose I’d put I’d sort of put red round this one, and for staff it was not a happy time’ and, quoting a parent she said: ‘this is everything I’ve dreamt my children’s learning experience would be thank you’ and I thought - you know – that’s a really heartfelt moment’. Equally, the Greenfield Headteacher commented in relation to literacy policies: ‘we have to do that but it hurts just because they feel wrong, they just feel wrong…yes the phonics and the grammar and punctuation, because it’s because it’s not in context’ and ‘children’s wellbeing is absolutely key’ and ‘that’s kind
of my principle that the children…and their families are as well and happy as they can be and if they’re having a hard time they’re supported’.

Individual, Collaborative Communal Dimension

Finally, there was change being driven individually and collaboratively both from the Headteachers and where appropriate from their Senior Management as would be expected. Room for communal change was also apparent, especially in Greenfield, where one of the teachers described the relationship with SMT as follows: ‘I think a bit of humbleness in that they don’t think they know it all, they know that they’ve got experts throughout the school and so they will bring everything to the table’. In St Saviour’s one of the staff described giving children ownership of the change too:

I think the bit for me has been I think that these moves are more than happy, that actually people do take part, and for children to have a bit of ownership of that as well would be good because they are saying, you have to understand we are in it together and that’s why I think they’ve taken it on.

It therefore seems possible to characterise the social change happening in both schools as ‘creative’ and according to the analysis above, defineable in terms of PT and its inherent features. Importantly, question-posing is a strong feature if not the main driver of change in both schools, even if it arises from different sources. Imagination, self (or community)-determination, action-intention and narrative plot/sequence are strongly evident in terms of the question-responding activity that ensues to make creative change happen. Risk is perhaps present, although as with other PT studies, longer time in the field is necessary to confirm whether and how this is at play. The schools’ reputational selection for their creative approach to change was indicative that innovation might be present as an outcome of possibility thinking driven creative change, and this does indeed seem to be the case. The people in the schools demonstrate different ways of integrating emotions into school change, and the ICC dimension is present but with different dynamics. Overall we can see creative change in these schools can be framed in terms of PT – moving from ‘What is’ to ‘What might be’ and seeing this through to action to make change happen.

Not only was the data analysed using this PT framework, it was also analysed inductively to understand how else creative change might be characterised. This is especially important as PT is a frame which has previously grown from theorizing classroom activities and this study is looking at social change in the context of organizations and their surrounding environment.

Inductive Analysis – What is creative change?

The inductive analysis generated five additional themes which help to characterise the kind of social change which occurred above and beyond PT. These are detailed below.

Embedded in core values/principles

The Greenfield Headteacher stated that how the school develops is connected to its vision and values: ‘this is why this vision and values is so important because you’re keeping to your principles of what you know is right, and whatever is coming at you’. The Deputy Headteacher also commented on the strength of this …‘I got a real sense for that four years ago when I was applying for a job here…the ethos here is exceptionally strong’. At St Saviour’s core values are equally as strong. The Headteacher discussed the importance of respect and trust, and for her especially her
faith perspective: ‘I have a faith perspective as well which I think is fundamental to the way that I operate, and keeps me personally focused about why am I doing this’. She also discussed how she had said to the children that she ‘trust[s] you to do things in school’. One of the staff commented on this: [the Headteacher] suggested they were allowed to play anywhere… in terms of health and safety you could say that could be … but actually you know it seems to work out, particularly since they’re allowed to go wherever’.

Challenging, complex and controversial
The Greenfield Deputy Headteacher recognised the challenge of change when he discussed working to develop pedagogy in a new direction: ‘people that are very used to working in certain ways, so moving people away from what they feel most comfortable with…in the way that they teach is a challenge, we’re not talking about one staff meeting and off you go’. The St Saviour’s Headteacher also understood challenge, especially from an economic perspective:

Economically, I am feeling very challenged…we’re…at least £500 per pupil lower funded… I’m not getting pupil premium either, so I’ve got a very high level of need, but not necessarily those that are claiming….indices wise we’re the second most deprived school in Devon on the indices of deprivation

Interestingly despite this, or perhaps because of it, St Saviour’s school was still able to go about social change in a creative way to see through its vision. From a lighter point of view one of the teachers commented on how even small changes could be controversial. She said that some of the Headteachers’ changes ‘have been quite controversial actually. She lets children play with sticks…initially that caused a lot of controversy … we did have issues with some of the younger ones…but I would say it’s not nearly as high profile [now]’.

The Greenfield Headteacher also emphasized complexity in terms of trying to integrate the Thrive scheme whilst maintaining standards and developing other areas of school growth. She said: ‘it’s so complex what we’re trying to do and we can’t do it on our own you know and beneath the surface, you need to know it’s been tough, this year has been really tough”.

Driven by children and wider school community (ie internal)
The St Saviour’s Headteacher was clear that for her change: ‘is about children’s voice, it’s about their right to learning, it is about equality’. She also wanted to make sure everyone had the chance to be involved: ‘I’d be in sorting everything if I could you know in the details, but actually it’s empowering other people to do their the bit’. She also talked about getting groups like the governors involved in activities like ‘pupil conferencing’ – ‘I give them a question that’s linked to school improvement planning so how do you know that your curriculum is better‘. Governors carried out semi-structured interviews with children to contribute to the school evidence-base for change. A teacher also commented: ‘she’s done loads in terms of getting the parents on board’.

At Greenfield the sense of community is palpable. In relation to embedding the Thrive initiative, one of the teachers commented: ‘I think one voice is very hard to get something across … I’ve been very lucky in that there’s been three voices and since Claire’s [pseudonym used] come back four to really push it’. The Head commented that: ‘if I was going to put any factor at the top I would put the community thing at the top you know it’s not my school it’s our school’. A teacher’s statement reinforced this: ‘I think the people are the core’.

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Embedded in staff

In both schools change seemed to be embedded the most in the often long-serving staff teams. At St Saviour’s, one of them said: ‘it’s the staff are the main, well it’s a team work thing’. The Greenfield Headteacher commented that ‘the staff…are amazingly stable’ and that ‘we need to respond to the strengths of members of staff as well as people who are very passionate about certain things and they’re, you know, they are keen to have an influence outside their classroom and so is the school but we can do that’. One of the teachers reinforced this when she said: ‘our discussions here are very organic, so the creative bit comes in there where everyone is mixing into the pot’.

Embraces digital media

The St Saviour’s Headteacher especially commented on how she had become particularly aware of needing to use digital media for change. She said: ‘IT, digital media so I’ve very much became aware of the need to think differently’, and this led the school to make an appointment with special responsibility for digital media which led to the school website now being ‘second to none’. They had also been approached by a secondary school to show them how to use Google Cloud which St Saviour’s has become expert in. This embracing of digital media did however come with a warning when the Headteacher stated: ‘it’s a bit of a monster and I think it’s being mindful that it doesn’t take over’. Greenfield’s embracing digital media had interestingly emerged in a more bottom up way, with one of the Early Years teachers being keen on blogging and the Reception class leading the way using blogging as a way of communicating with the rest of the school and its community.

Inductive analysis: How are the schools going about it?

Having established the ‘what’ of creative change in these two sites, the second research question focused on how the schools went about it. There were four emergent themes common to the two sites:

Operating ‘in a bubble’

When asked to offer a metaphor for how they saw change in their schools, independently of each other, both Headteachers said that their schools were changing ‘in a bubble’. The Greenfield Headteacher said that this was about: ‘government policies, but actually we’re trying to keep the impact of them as small as possible’.

From a similarly protectionist stance, the St Saviour’s Headteacher said:

I have to keep an eye set on a very clear vision that will enable my school to weather a storm so it’s almost like you know when you see a little spaceship bobbing and it goes through that disruption.

Navigating performativity as necessary

This was especially pertinent in St Saviour’s where the Headteacher on one level was pushing for an Outstanding OFSTED: ‘I want to be able to get to a position that we are judged say by OFSTED as an outstanding school, because I want to say to people you don’t have to compromise on what you believe is right for children’. She was also simultaneously clear that: ‘I completely ignore…the new national curriculum coming in because of the information I have from Robin Alexander …we have a research-based principle around our curriculum ,and that we don’t need to be rushing off to do something different’.

In Greenfield this was more in the Deputy Head’s hands. He was careful not to let the National Curriculum and its measurement demands take over from the school’s core
ethos. He said: ‘There will be national curriculum so we’ll have to respond to it…my job is…to make sure people remember that national curriculum is a tiny part of what we do…affectively about 20% of what we do, we’ve got a huge opportunity to still do what we want to’.

**Inner-driven by core values yet responsive**
The St Saviour’s Head discussed how the school’s core values were driven by the children:

> just wanting their curiosity, their interest to be aroused by what they’re doing,
> that’s the bit that’s driven so no matter where I’ve gone it’s always been about and you know ‘are you just doing it for your own convenience as a teacher, or are you doing what you feel the children want or need?’.

Similarly the Greenfield Head positioned one of the school’s main drivers as children’s well-being reflected in its integration of the ‘Thrive’ wellbeing scheme across the school. In relation to keeping responsive she said:

> Sometimes it’s not really long-term planned, it’s sometimes something somebody says or you know, something we read somewhere and it develops our thinking and it makes us go in maybe a slightly different direction, so we don’t stand still’.

**Happening in relationship with other schools/organisations**
Both schools, whilst having their own vision, spurred their change on in relation with other schools around them. The Greenfield Headteacher said: ‘The only way we can make it possible is if we work together…we’ve done some paired visits and we started off with just the Heads going and seeing each others’ schools …and what we’re trying to do now is to get children to go from one school together…in the learning community’. The St Saviour’s Head discussed something similar with senior staff in the SMT meeting when she said: ‘the ones we’re working with [schools], they’re doing their own curriculum, so they’re sticking with it’. In both cases being in relationship with other schools seemed to give confidence to the change process within the school. Overall, then, the deductive and inductive analysis revealed commonalities between the two schools as well as differences between them. We will consider the importance of these in the next section.

**Discussion and Conclusion**
Across both the commonalities and the differences, what is clear in both schools is the potency of a professional guiding frame for change informed by knowledge. This frame is often intuitive, whilst acknowledging how to teach the disciplinary areas required along with a focus on children’s well-being and constant attention to development. This is an approach that we have identified in other studies at a teaching and artist practitioner level and referred to as professional wisdom. Chappell et al (2011) describe this as

the wealth of teaching information and expertise that practitioners develop about their own practice, a deeply contextualised knowledge, often informed by intuition. [it is] professionalism which puts wisdom and intuition to the fore. This can jar with performativity agendas but doing so allows…practitioners to experiment, deconstruct, self-direct and judge their successes, failures and next directions. It
allows for critique and provocation beyond what is currently accepted; it is not
about ‘one model fits all’

In this study we can see professional wisdom evident in the Headteacher’s own
leadership for change but also evidently encouraged in the teaching staff. Looking
across both the deductive and inductive analysis in relation to professional wisdom in
answering the first research question, we can find resonance in the evidenced PT
features of self-determination, question-posing, risk-taking, and action intention. The
emergent inductive characteristics of social change in the two sites also resonate.
Change is embedded in staff, in core values and principles which are grounded in the
context and previous experience, and driven by children. It is acknowledged as being
challenging, complex and controversial. Similarly, professional wisdom as described
above allows for failures and critique. It is well-informed, committed to the
community and continually evolving on the part of staff – and with the five dimensions
discussed above - was embedded, then, in the nature of social change in each of these
two case study schools.

In relation to the second research question, how the schools went about this,
professional wisdom seemed also to frame the ground between the two schools who
each saw their own approach as distinctive. The common ground they shared, as
discussed above was the notion of operating ‘in a bubble’ and navigating performativity
where necessary; attitudes in which they were perhaps given confidence by that
professional wisdom. The fact that they were inner-driven by core values yet
responsive showed that perhaps each school was driven by its own collective
professional wisdom in which core values guided curriculum selection and organisation
as well as pedagogy and approaches to learning. Each school had a strongly held view
of what was important for children’s learning. Yet despite having strongly held and
actioned distinctive core values driven by professional wisdom, each school also
recognised the need to be responsive to wider changing policy and practice contexts and
was active in how to ensure thoughtful engagement with these. Professional wisdom
here is also perhaps characterized by a humility which saw both Headteachers seeking
and embracing relationships with other schools and organizations in order to learn from
them and to position themselves within a collegial community of like-minded
professionals.

Another concept identified in Chappell et al’s (2011) study of wise, humanising
creativity (WHC) and partnership practice which can offer further insight into the kinds
of change underway in this study, is that of ‘quiet revolutions’. Chappell et al drew on
the work of Fielding and Moss (2010), and Eisner (2004) to conceptualise quiet
revolution as an incremental cumulative way of connecting personally-held and
societally-useful values in order to make potent change happen as a result of WHC.
Here we can see both head teachers wisely connecting both personal professional and
school-based principles and values into their own framework for creative social change.

It is in extending our discussion into the territory of quiet revolutions that it perhaps
becomes pertinent to highlight the key differences between the schools, seemingly
stemming both from Headship style and school circumstances. Table 3 details these,
and shows that no two quiet revolutions are ever quite the same.

Table 3 here
In each site the ongoing quiet revolutions manifested differently. Where Greenfield talked of not being ‘bogged down’ in policy initiatives and relying on its creative reputation in order to maintain and be driven by its core values, St Saviour’s used evidence to combat those initiatives where necessary. The two head teachers were confident but saw themselves as having different kinds of reach, and drawing on different relationships to trust and collegiality, one being deeply embedded in the history of the school, the other bringing a fresh perspective. Both were inspired by others and these inspirations gave a different flavour to the change they actioned. The Greenfield Head teacher was more consultative across the board whereas the St Saviour’s Head’s approach to change was strongly informed by a personal vision which remained responsive to others. Greenfield’s whole ethos was characterised by foregrounding children’s well-being via an identified initiative, whereas St Saviour’s saw well-being as pervading how change worked more generally. St Saviour’s emphasised teachers’ creative freedom per se whereas Greenfield was working to move certain pockets of teachers away from directedness. Perhaps because of its longstanding reputation as a creative school with an outstanding OFSTED grade, Greenfield needed to be attentive to performativity and was able to be accommodating of change as the school team decided, whereas St Saviour’s, seeking that outstanding OFSTED grade was more responsive to it and perhaps therefore more actively seeking change in relation to it.

But despite these differences in the manifestation of their quiet revolutions it seems clear that professional wisdom enacted in individual, collaborative and communal ways is perhaps the most powerful shared feature across the sites. Alongside understanding social change in these schools as characterisable in terms of PT, the driver of professional wisdom leading to unique quiet revolutions is important. It helps us to understand how some schools are able to stand their ground and create a wise, intuitive and informed framework to maintain creative change foregrounding children’s well being, in the way that they see fit. In the current climate of the new primary curriculum (DfE 2013), where schools face both increasing freedom to organise themselves, and yet a continued and perhaps stronger focus on performative outcomes, it is not that these two unique journeys can or should be replicated elsewhere but that their analysis and detailing here in relation to the wider theoretical frameworks of PT, professional wisdom and quiet revolutions can provide provocations and examples for other primary schools to further develop their own practices and narratives in relation to their preferred educational futures.

References


### Table 1: Level 2 data

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### Table 2: Evidence of PT features in this study

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Table 3: how the schools were different

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<td>both schools are:</td>
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<td>- using professional wisdom</td>
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<td>Confidence in achievable change</td>
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<td>Inspired by others (Alexander)</td>
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<td>Consultative vision building</td>
<td>Head’s vision influences all</td>
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<td>Flattened hierarchy, teamwork a focus</td>
<td>Head drives change encouraging others</td>
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<td>Moving away from teacher directedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodate change</td>
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