Governance, Democracy, and Parental Engagement:

The Co-operative Academy Trust Model – An Alternative in Neoliberal Contexts of Education?

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# Abstract

This thesis presents the research undertaken to explore alternative governance and stakeholder engagement, in the neoliberal context of education. The Co-operative Academies Trust (CAT) is a Multi-Academy Trust sponsored by The Co-op Group. The research involves one case study school within the CAT, and explores significant strategic, structural, organisational, and operational deviations of the CAT in relation to co-operative values, democracy, and stakeholder engagement in decision-making. Furthermore, utilising Bourdieu’s thinking tools, the relational power interactions between parents and leaders of the Academy, in the social field; the bounded polity of the case study Academy, is explored.

This is a qualitative study, grounded in critical theory. Therefore, the research approach is a critical ethno-case study. Documentary analysis was triangulated with semi-structured interviews with the CAT Director, Principal, Chair of Governors and three parent governor representatives. A focus group was conducted with five parents following an observed parent forum meeting.

Findings show the commitment to a Local Governing Body (LGB) demonstrates an alternative in itself. Furthermore, the values-led brand and strategic identity, alongside the placement of senior Co-op Group employees in the LGB, ensure the strategic direction is focused upon co-operative values and community: an ‘ensconced’ form of localism. This contributes to the “lived reality” of co-operative values in community regeneration. Operationally, the realisation of the co-operative value of democracy is subordinated to technologies of rational self-management, and a distrust of non-professionalised stakeholders. There are signs of cultural shift under the New Public Management umbrella, occurring concurrently with parents demanding deliberation and voice in decision-making, whilst also experiencing hysteresis and symbolic violence, in relation to language, agency and a neoliberal doxa in the social field. In conclusion, having the trust and courage to release power in the local context, through a democratic deliberative system, will privilege stakeholder collaboration.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1. Parental Engagement in Governance of Co-operative Schools: A Personal and Professional Interest

My personal interest in this area of research stems from a lifelong career as a senior member of staff in schools in areas of disadvantage. My passion has been equality and voice, and often in communities of disadvantage these rights are nullified and misrecognised. Yet in the best of schools I have worked, parents and community members have been engaged, to some degree, in decision-making and valued for their contribution as part of a Co-operative Trust school model, and in others not even local ambassador boards exist. I believe that the engagement of parents and community members in decision-making in local schools has far reaching effects both within the school, in the community that the school is a part of, and local democracy.

## 1.2. Definition of Key Terms and Concepts used in the Thesis

There are several key terms and concepts used throughout this thesis. A working definition of these is offered immediately below and, where appropriate, expanded upon later in this chapter and in Chapter 2.

### 1.2.1. Co-operative

It is important to foreground a concept of a co-operative before defining democracy, for the purposes of this research, as they are a mutually linked discourse in co-operative rhetoric (Davidge, 2017). A co-operative is an organisation which is owned and governed *democratically* by those stakeholder members, and a co-operative school as a construct is one such structure (Davidge, 2017). It is also defined by the International Co-operative Alliance - ICA (2020) as a space whereby people of the community are brought together in an equal and democratic way. Regardless of who those members are, they are managed directly and democratically through a one member, one vote rule. This is dynamically different than a Schumpeterian democratic ideal with a representative majoritarian rule (Escobar, 2017). Equality in this democracy is extended to all members regardless of how much capital an individual places into the enterprise, capital not being defined specifically as financial.

### 1.2.2. Democracy

Democracy is a significant feature of the principles and values of a co-operative enterprise and is one of the six values which underpin all organisations calling themselves co-operatives as outlined by the ICA (ICA, 2020). However, in terms of what democracy means in relation to co-operatives, little detail is evident (Kaswan, 2014). The definition of democracy on both the Co-op Group website and Co-operative Academies Trust (CAT) website (Co-op, 2020) refers to a commitment to learners, parents/carers, and staff members, aligned with international principles of co-operatives, “having a *say* in how our schools are run” (Co-op, 2020) and are committed to everyone’s *voice* being equally heard. But what that voice is and how it is heard is not prescribed, nor is democracy in more refined terms (Davidge, 2017). A definition of democracy has significant implications for this research. A definition will act as a yardstick as to the extent to which the governance structure embraces the ideals of democracy, the type of democracy and the construct of voices being heard, if acting with legitimacy and agency in the co-operative enterprise that is the CAT school identified as the site for this research. Especially as any definition is limited from national and international co-operative organisations (Kaswan, 2014). The discursive notions around the language of “voice”, “have a say” and “stake” are signifiers of a participatory democratic process, the language invokes an understanding that individuals have empowerment and equality in terms of what they want to say and from where they say it, that is, their positionality (Davidge, 2017), in alignment with a deliberative democratic prospect. Chambers (2012) suggests that deliberative democracy is a collective practical reasoning model, whereby a group of equals come together to take decisions. Dryzek (2009) states that deliberation is central to any democracy, and that the more inclusive, authentic, and consequential the deliberation is, the more democratic the process and polity is. In terms of *inclusivity*, Dryzek (2009) suggests this relates to the diversity of those involved in the deliberation and should include all those who have a stake in or are affected by the deliberation focus. *Authenticity* refers to the participants’ openness to go into deliberation knowing that with reflection, they might change their minds, exhibit reciprocity. *Consequentiality* connotes an impact, directly or indirectly, on the decision-making process. Communication inclusivity is also central to the talk-centric proposition within the context of deliberation - legitimising story-telling (Engelken-Jorge, 2016), everyday talk, testimony, rhetoric (Mansbridge et al, 2012), from talk at the school gates to more formal sites of decision-making deliberation, such as parliament (Hendriks, 2009) or school governance (Mansbridge et al, 2009). What differentiates deliberation from talk is the resultant consequentiality (Dryzek, 2009; 2017). For Chambers (2012) the communication needs to be decision-orientated, has exchanged reason-giving, and, like Dryzek, resulted in an exercise of power, directly or indirectly. Deliberative democracy focuses upon the process of deliberation in democratic processes but is not defining the processes themselves. Hence, deliberation is a key aspect in consensus-finding forums to voting and representation (Chambers, 2012). For the purposes of this research, democracy will be defined in line with deliberative democratic principles as outlined above.

### 1.2.3. Neoliberalism

Hardin (2014) sites neoliberalism as binary in opposition to democracy, but concedes that as a term it is overused, lacks specificity and is ambiguous. Neoliberalism, therefore, as a term is used to explain processes and practices which are diverse and unconnected, subsequently threatening the usefulness of the term (Wilkins, 2016; Hardin, 2014). To aid clarity, Springer (2012) suggests that neoliberalism should be considered via four overlapping, porous perspectives, rather than discrete, bounded perspectives. The four perspectives that Springer (2012) suggests being: neoliberalism as an ideological hegemonic project; neoliberalism as policy and programme; neoliberalism as state form and neoliberalism as governmentality. Springer (2012) explains that neoliberalism as policy and programme refers to the relationship between neoliberalism and the state, framing public services with an economic logic, and market-led public choice. Closely linked to neoliberalism as policy and programme is neoliberalism as state form. Here, Springer (2012) explains that the state subsequently abdicates responsibility for the risk and responsibility for reconfigured public services. The risk and responsibility placed with the ‘new’ middle tier (Simkins et al., 2019). Finally, neoliberalism as governmentality reflects the self-regulation of those who are now responsible and managing risk, in line with the enactment of government desire. Ball (2017) suggests governmentality is a Foucauldian expression of how bio-power and neoliberalism utilise regulatory and disciplinary power to normalise behaviours and expectations relating to policy and programme, securing the societal norm that individuals and organisations defer to and strive to excel in. Economic, judicial, constitutional, and organisational powers are actively utilised by governments to manage and intervene in social constructs such as education and governance. A key feature of governmentality is to problematise institutions, or peoples, through a binary discourse of effectiveness, such as efficient/inefficient or professional/amateur. This ensures that public services, and aspects of it, such as governance, can be determined and judged. Thus, enabling self-evaluating and self-regulatory bodies to identify strategy for their self-determined trajectory to effectiveness and comparisons for the market-rationality (Wilkins, 2016). For the purposes of this research, neoliberalism will be defined not as one aspect or perspective, but a more clearly defined plurality of porous and overlapping perspectives in line with Springer (2012).

### 1.2.4. New Public Management

Globally, New Public Management (NPM) emerged as a mode of public sector organisation to ensure “efficiency, quality and performance in order to become economically competitive in the global marketplace” (Forrester and Garratt, 2016:182) against a backdrop of market-based reforms to education introduced in the late Thatcher and Major Conservative governments (appendix 1). Whilst the shift to an NPM approach was global in its influence, the degree or extent of development was variable and country dependent (Knill and Tosun 2012) and continues to be so (Wilkins et al., 2019). What has not been variable about the emergence of NPM has been the emphasis on marketisation, with competition in the marketplace leading to performance rewards and a greater share of distributed resources. Furthermore, whilst there has not been a reduction in government intervention hierarchically, there has been a shift of the intervention towards market regulation (Knill and Tosun, 2012).

NPM essentially has replaced bureaucracy and professionalism with private sector practices, activity-based costings and centres, leadership introspectives and a focus on adding value. Furthermore, Ball (2017) suggests NPM practices promote consumer-centred, competition-driven and results-orientated foci. Although, in reality, bureaucracy has in effect just changed its form and its place to proliferate in the site of decentralisation (Greany and Higham, 2018). In practice, NPM features a focus upon outputs rather than inputs - the separation of client or consumer from provider - using competition to enable the client to perceive quality (through the interrogation of performance data in the public domain) and empowered to exert choice, the decentralisation and delegation of budgets and authority to chains of line management (Ball, 2017). Ball (2017) also suggests that the implications of NPM are paradoxical in that there is a determination to decentralise and move away from control over the minutiae towards delegation, but a drive towards enhanced surveillance technologies focused upon the measurement of progress towards performance expectations and self-evaluation such as performance management processes and target setting. This is what Ball (2017:57) terms performativity, a “regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons, and displays as a means of control, attrition and change.” Furthermore, this has led to an interplay between market-place autonomy and regulation of educational standards, which Hall and Gunter (2016) purport has occurred through the re-visioning of roles and practices to managing, management and managerialism. This marketisation of education according to Locatelli (2019) challenges the notion of education as a public or common good.

### 1.2.5. A Common Good Reframing of Education

Locatelli (2019) puts forward an argument for a reframing of education which is alternative in the neoliberal context of education, which valorises private good education. Private good is an individualistic framing of education, individual currency in the form of qualifications for example. For a common good reframing of education Locatelli (2019) posits several features need to be in place. These being a dynamic opposition to neoliberalism and the marketisation of education, the development of community networks of co-operativism and the values of co-operatives, and finally, the development of the instruments of participatory democracy, and by inference, parental and community engagement in decision-making.

### 1.2.6. Parental Engagement

It is key here to define parental engagement, and to differentiate between parental involvement and engagement. Epstein (1995; 2010) initially outlined a typology of parental involvements. These six types of involvement are outlined in table 1.1. However, Casper (2011:S6) further refined these interactions, categorising them as either involvement or engagement.

Table 1.1 Epstein's (1995) Six-Part Typology of Parental Involvement

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Typology | Description | Casper (2011) |
| Parenting | Basic obligations of families | Involvement |
| Communicating | Obligations of the school to communicate to the parents, families, communities | Involvement |
| Volunteering | Presence in the school – involved in supportive activities | Involvement |
| Learning at home | Where parents, families, communities are involved in learning activities at home | Involvement |
| Decision-making | Focused upon decision-making, participation, leadership and advocacy | Engagement |
| Community collaboration | Relates to collaboration and exchanges within the community | Engagement |

This differentiation, outlined by Casper (2011), between involvement and engagement is determined by an increasingly collaborative relationship, or partnership, which exists in parental engagement between parents and schools. Effective engagement requires an equivalence of power, or power sharing, rather than the teacher/school maintaining control (Casper, 2011). Furthermore, Casper (2011) suggests parental engagement is created through shared responsibility and co-construction, it ranges across all age groups and across contexts beyond the home and the school.

The parental involvement and engagement distinction is further established in a continuum proposed by Goodall and Montgomery (2014). The position on the continuum is based on who has the power, predominance, and agency in relation to the activity, with involvement and engagement at either ends of the continuum. Parental involvement, as suggested by Casper (2011), is school over parent, and parental engagement represents parental agency, and power to determine the action required. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest that those parents ‘engaged’ will demonstrate greater commitment and ownership, than those parents who are ‘involved’.

Whilst Goodall and Montgomery’s (2014) continuum privileges parental engagement in learning, rather than wider school activities, it adds weight to Casper’s postulation that parental engagement is distinct from involvement because of the increased collaboration, equity of power, shared responsibility, and co-construction beyond the home/school dimension. Although, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) consider a more graduated continuum in relation to home learning which Casper (2011) suggests is singularly involvement. This distinction further reinforces decision-making activities and community collaboration as dimensions of parental engagement rather than involvement.

Goodall (2017) suggests that school and parental interactions are often based on a deficit model, this is illustrated by Goodall (2017) utilising Freire’s banking model of education. A banking model being characterised by the transmission of information or knowledge, determined by the educational organisation, without negotiation or involvement; power lies with the educator (Freire, 1993). Subsequently, this frequent model of parental involvement by schools is not parental engagement (Goodall, 2017).

## 1.3. The Policy Context of the Research

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) was, arguably, a pivot point for the neoliberal imperative for schools in England. As a result, neoliberal principles were embedded into the policy and practices of the public sector by the Conservative government, and in education particularly, teachers’ roles changed from that of developers of curriculum and pedagogic practitioners to one of deliverers and managers of educational standards in newly perceived business units of schools (Hall and Gunter, 2016). These principles promoted an emphasis on the deregulation, decentralisation, and privatisation of public sector services, as well as governance based on market principles. NPM (1.2.4.) models and practices were developed to secure the processes needed to ensure decentralisation was effective (Forrester and Garratt, 2016). In terms of education, the 1988 ERA ignited the disarticulation of the system. Until 1997 the Conservative government drove the centralisation of education with the onset of an economic logic applied via market-driven principles, parental choice, and a new diversification. With the 1988 ERA came the National Curriculum and SATs, Local Management of Schools, league tables, City Technology Colleges (CTCs) and Grant Maintained Schools. This Conservative government pushed for privatisation which included the inspection of schools in the form of a new body – Ofsted.

The New Labour government, 1997-2010, did little to reverse Conservative education policy. New Labour, however, shifted the emphasis to raising standards, combating social exclusion and the growth of a knowledge economy and as such, created the 2000 and 2002 Academies Programmes (Gunter, 2012). These Acts developed the ideas of CTCs into the creation of City Academies. These original academies were focused on failing secondary schools and direct intervention, and then expanded from urban, failing and city to an enhanced programme.

The Coalition government which came into office in 2010, driven by the then Secretary of State Michael Gove, introduced a further Academies Act (2010). This saw the rapid expansion of the academies programme, offering the consumer – parents – greater choice, and diversity, with the primacy of the market at the heart, and minimal state intervention. The principles behind these changes were increased autonomy and greater freedoms, under the guise of social mobility. Outstanding schools could now convert to academy status, and later good schools (2011), as well as opening up the space for diversity introducing the notion of the Free school and Studio schools (Forrester and Garratt, 2016). Additionally, Gove secured the power to force schools into academisation, despite local, parental and governor opposition, demarking a greater democratic break than New Labour (Ball, 2017) who in some cases failed to convert some schools due exactly to local opposition. The push for greater privatisation of education continued rapidly with the 2015 Conservative government, which pursued the goal of all schools becoming an academy by 2022. This goal was stated in the white paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DFE, 2016) however, due to opposition from teaching unions and Conservative backbenchers, this was removed from the Queen’s speech to be pursued via other routes (Guardian, 2016). Significantly, during this current period of Conservative government the expansion of the academies programme, including Free schools, has been dramatic, and has also seen the dominance of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the privatisation of state education (Forrester and Garratt, 2016). Ball (2017) suggests the rapid expansion and dominance of MATs as anti-democratic: opening up state education to commercial activity and subsequently handing over public assets to private control.

It would be purposeful to explain here the significance and differences between differing school groupings which has grown out of the created space for diversification. Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are a form of multi-school grouping (Woods and Simkins, 2014), which are a legal entity as a group, regardless of size, and who received funding directly from central government. In MATs, which are currently the most dominant form of multi-school grouping, the decision-making authority is the Trust Board which is accountable and responsible for all the academies within the chain (Gibson and Outhwaite, 2022). There is the opportunity for MATs to develop local boards, known as Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) or advisory boards, which may be based in the individual school or regional or not at all, but significantly they have no legitimate decision-making authority, unlike LGBs in maintained schools. Furthermore, these are not mandatory, they are advisory and their presence and the degree of delegated powers are at the discretion of the MAT (Gibson and Outhwaite, 2022). They are often associated with trust (Baxter, 2019; Baxter and Cornforth, 2021). Simkins et al. (2019) identified, and underpinned by the DfE (2020a), that the ‘norm’ and preferred model for MATs are for large chains of schools, mixed in nature which are governed by one overarching governing body (the Trust Board) regardless of geographical spread, with the CEO at the helm. There is the requirement for two parents’ governors to be in place but where those parents sit is again at the discretion of the board (DfE, 2020a). They could be represented on the regional or local advisory boards, for example. What frames these models of governance as neoliberal refers to section 1.2.3., whereby neoliberal governance is framed with an economic and market-led logic, with associated contraction to the centre, and the self-regulation of those who are now responsible and managing risk, the Trust Board, driving the focus of self-regulation in the direction of the enactment of government imperatives (Springer, 2012; Ball, 2017). These practices, along with the activities of New Public Management (1.2.4.), secure a democratic deficit (Ball, 2017) as professionals replace stakeholders in determining the image of the organisation with the drive to replicate the image and function of the organisation in the image of the market (Wilkins, 2018). Woods and Simkins (2014) suggest that these models of governance do not focus on democratic diversity and on an output form of legitimacy, that is results, rather than an input form of legitimacy in the form of local representation in decision–making. Academies can remain as a single entity in the case of standalone or ‘converter’ academies. Converter academies being good or better schools, from an Ofsted perspective, that could convert from Local Authority control to become a standalone academy in relation to funding and governance. The current Conservative Government however is now placing financial disincentives for standalone or single academies to remain in place (Gibson and Outhwaite, 2022). Other forms of multi-school grouping exist, such as Foundation Trust schools. These schools remain under Local Authority (LA) control, so are not a legal entity as a group: they retain their individuality in terms of governance and decision-making, but funding comes via the LA. However, the Foundation Trust Board must be comprised, in the majority, of foundation (or partner) governors. The Co-operative Trust School model is a variation on the Foundation Trust School model in relation to its governance structure (section 1.4). Similarly, under LA control are schools which may choose to work together collaboratively as soft Federations or as hard Federations where the LA has imposed a working relationship with varying degrees of decision-making authority, such as a shared governing body or an executive head. This later model predates the 2010 Academies Act and as with other multi-school groupings that are not MATs or under LA control, are diminishing in prevalence (Woods and Simkins, 2014; Gibson and Outhwaite, 2022).

## 1.4. The Co-operative Approach to Parental Engagement in Governance - an Alternative to Neoliberal Contexts of Education?

As outlined above, the rapid marketisation of schools opened the space and encouraged diversification of schools. The Co-operative Trust schools (a specialised Foundation Trust School grouping) and CAT academies (a Multi-Academy Trust) are two such diversifications who took advantage of the space.

The first type of Co-operative diversification, the Co-operative Trust school, in the current educational landscape have purported to offer a set of international values and practices, which are democratic, and are a means of “ameliorating or challenging capitalist economic or social organisation” (Facer, Thorpe and Shaw, 2012: 332). Facer et al. (2012) further suggest that Co-operative schools are providing a co-operative tradition to parents, local communities and educators looking for “an alternative to the neoliberal marketisation of education” (Facer et al., 2012:332).

In terms of governance, all Co-operative schools must work with the values of the Co-operative movement (Facer et al, 2012). However, a key feature of Co-operative Trust schools, as well as CAT academies, is the belief that schools and academies must respond to the needs of the local context and therefore have a commitment to the local community and stakeholders, but there is no blueprint for any Co-operative school (Woodin, 2015). This lack of blueprint means that the schools or academies can organise themselves in relation to curriculum and pedagogy as other trust schools or academies are. The two types of Co-operative education organisations need to be differentiated here. There are Co-operative Trust schools (a specialised Foundation Trust) which originally came under the authority of the Co-operative College – a charitable arm of the Co-op Group, and Co-operative Academies under the authority of the CAT (MAT) with direct accountability to the Co-op Group. Much has been written about Co-operative Trust schools as alternatives as these have structured governance differently and formally, because of its commitment to international co-operative values, to enhance democracy in relation to stakeholder groups (Allen 2018; Wilkins, 2019a). Stakeholders from community, staff, pupils, and parents are included on the Trust board, in fora and on the governing bodies themselves (Wilkins, 2019a; Davidge, 2017). However, little has been written about Co-op Academies as organisations and their position as an alternative, although there is a public commitment to working in the most deprived areas in the country (Norris, 2019a) and to linking the regeneration of deprived communities to regeneration of schools in those areas (Norris, 2019b). Davidge, Facer and Schostak (2015:62) state that “a school that is co-operative in name but adopts all the hierarchical forms of organisation and practices of mainstream schooling remains incompatible with the vision of co-operation that is the legacy of the early pioneers”. This presents a conflict between alternative, historical values and a neoliberal context of education and is a key exploration undertaken in this thesis.

Therefore, in summary, Co-operative Trust schools (a form of Foundation Trust, which is legally a different entity to a MAT) are purporting themselves as an alternative to the neoliberal marketisation of education (Facer et al., 2012:332), in that they are community focused, based on co-operative values rather than neoliberal values and in doing so have constructed school governance to be multi-layered and stakeholder focused. Multiple stakeholders being represented in multiple stakeholder groups, the Trust Board, and the LGB (Allen, 2018). Woods and Simkins (2014) underline this difference by recognising democratic diversity, representative legitimacy and structural difference which promotes agency, in school governance, as points of alternative which is arguably presented in the Co-operative Trust Model of school governance. This is a difference to the current expectation of multi-school groupings such as a MAT (Simkins et al., 2019) where governance is expected to be conducted from the centre, one governing body for multiple wide-ranging schools, both in nature of the schools in question but also geographically. This is a point of difference (see 1.3.). Whereas CAT schools or academies, are a legal entity in the form of a Multi Academy Trust (see 1.3 for the governance structure of a MAT).

## 1.5. Defining the Research 'Issue'

Co-operative College offered Co-operative Trust schools as an alternative in the neoliberal marketisation of education in relation to stakeholder engagement, with co-operative values and democratic principles underpinning the governance model. CAT academies also operate under the same universal principles and expectation of co-operation: values of self-help; self-responsibility; democracy; equality; equity; and solidarity (ICA, 2020). The research “issue” is to ascertain if the CAT academies are also an alternative in relation to stakeholder engagement, specifically parents, in the co-operative democratic expectation of governance. This is not to explore if CAT is the only alternative to neoliberal expectations of school governance, there are likely to be others, but is it an example of one such alternative from the ‘norm’ identified by Simkins et al. (2019) and Gibson and Outhwaite (2022). Furthermore, the problem was to explore how that alternative manifests, if at all, in values and strategic direction, organisation and structures or practices in relation to parents as stakeholders. This potential for alternative is key given the tension that Hardin (2014) states between neoliberal imperative and democratic deficit associated with governance currently, and the concurrent tension with democratic practices associated with co-operative values (Wilkins, 2019a).

## 1.6. The Importance of Conducting this Research

The resultant implications for professional practice from this research are an understanding of co-operative values and what a democratic alternative could mean in a neoliberal context of education; how democratic models of parental engagement in governance can exist practically in neoliberal contexts and an understanding of how theory can underpin the practice of why and how parental engagement in governance in areas of deprivation can be challenging, but also recommendations for new approaches.

## 1.7. Research Design and Methodology

Considering a socially critical paradigm, the methodological choice for this research is a critical ethno-case study (Parker-Jenkins, 2016). The exploration of the co-operative model and the engagement and role of parent stakeholder groups as decision-makers, or agents of consequence, within a CAT academy, is considered an instrumental case (Stake, 2000). The case study maintains its critical status by focusing upon the power in the case, and the power relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders, and ethno- in that ethnographic/case study methods are employed.

The research was a qualitative study which involved six semi-structured interviews with the Director of the Trust, the Principal and Chair of Governors, and with parent governors. A focus group was held with participants of the parent forum. A governor board meeting was observed, as well as a community committee and the parent forum meeting. Documents and websites were interrogated to triangulate interview data.

## 1.8. The Research Questions

In relation to the discussion above, the research aim was to explore how one CAT Academy engaged with stakeholders, particularly parents and community groups in an area of deprivation, to secure authentic decision-making partnerships based on the international co-operative values, specifically democracy.

Therefore, the research objectives are:

To examine the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and to explain how this model is perceived to be, or not, an alternative to other current models, in a currently perceived neoliberal context of education.

To explore the enactment of democratic principles, in line with the research definition outlined above, in relation to parents, stakeholders and governance, and wider governance, practices in the case study Academy.

To investigate the extent of parental engagement in decision-making.

Subsequently, the research questions are specifically:

RQ 1 What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and how can this be considered as alternative?

RQ 2 To what extent is the co-operative value of democracy realised, in relation to parents as stakeholders?

RQ 3 To what extent does the CAT model of governance engage with parents as decision-makers?

## 1.9. Structure of the Thesis

Following on from this introductory Chapter (1), Chapter 2 reviews relevant education policy developments and literature, and sets the context for the research. Chapter 3 explains the research design and methodology relating to the critical ethno-case study, as well as exploring and outlining key Bourdieuisan thinking tools, which provide a second layer of analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis of data*.* Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and analysis. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis, summarising contribution to knowledge, discusses the strengths and limitations of the thesis, makes recommendations for practice and future research, and closes with a reflection on professional learning.

## 1.10. Summary

In summary, key definitions for the research have been outlined in this first chapter, as well as the policy context that has facilitated the growth of diverse educational spaces such as the CAT. Furthermore, the importance of this research, the CAT governance model – its engagement with parents and community stakeholders in a neoliberal context – has been explored, along with the key ‘issue’ to be addressed, as well as how it will be addressed. What follows in Chapter 2 is a review of the key literature relating to this area of research.

# Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

## 2.1 Introduction

What follows in this chapter is a review of relevant literature. In the first instance the current policy context of governance and academisation is outlined. The resultant professionalisation of governance and the concurrent democratic deficit in governance is also reviewed, situating current governance policy and practice as detached, both physically and geographically from the parents, communities and stakeholders in the community that constitutes the ‘local’. The chapter then continues to explore the literature relating to ‘alternative’ specifically the Co-operative model of governance, democratic alternatives and also models of alternative presented against a reading of neoliberal government expectation, such as the Group Parameters Continua (Simkins et al., 2019). The chapter is finalised with a review of parental engagement and representation governance, its importance, and inherent challenges, in areas of deprivation.

## 2.2. Professionalisation and De-Democratising Governance – Devaluing the Stakeholder

Foregrounding any discussion relating to school governance, is a need to distinguish the term from the concept of education governance.  Education governance is, according to Wilkins and Olmedo (2019), a broader concept in which strategies, techniques or frameworks are developed to govern complex organisations, because of a shift from a hierarchical top-down model of government to new flexible modes of governance which are defined by plural and dispersed forms of power.  These rationalities and techniques of educational governance are designed to embed self-governance and determine the activity of actors towards the fulfilment of ‘good’ governance.  Furthermore, education governance is focused on securing a culture of self-evaluation, self-review and subsequent public evaluation that makes use of information gathering instruments to make known the performance of staff and students (Wilkins and Olmedo, 2019) and securing neoliberal deregulation (Wilkins, 2018).  School governance therefore becomes a contested site of bureaucratic centralism (Wilkins, 2018) in which the hierarchical control of previous governments is removed yet bureaucracy is devolved to the site of school governance and governors are professionalised and responsibilised to perform accountabilities whilst submitting to the regulation of the market.   School governance, from a governmentality perspective, is a site in which “governors are acted upon and transformed as objects and subjects of government” (Wilkins, 2018: 107) and is a site of conscription whereby governors are performing service agent roles, ensuring that data is produced to make the organisation more knowable and amenable to the external scrutiny and be held accountable to funders, regulators, and parents as consumers (Wilkins, 2018).

For the purposes of this thesis school governance is considered as

“a field of activity and intervention directed at bringing certain professional practices and technical judgements to bear upon the actions of senior school leaders … designed to bring about improvements to service delivery by making senior leaders accountable for outcomes relating to the educational and financial performance of the school” (Wilkins, 2018:99).

School governance is a currently contested site (Wilkins, 2018; Connolly, Farrell, and James, 2017), one such contestation is wrestling over the merits of stakeholder versus skills-based governance. Although Kulz (2021) would argue that presenting a stakeholder model to those embedded in a neoliberal political rationality would now be received as an archaic concept. Private actors, who can be affected by, or who can directly affect, an institution’s performance, such as parents or community members, are considered stakeholders in the governance of local public institutions. Stakeholders are also those who are subject to the policies determined by the public organisation. Stakeholder governance incorporates membership of the governing body reflecting local representation with the purpose of representation of the “stake” (Connolly, et al., 2017). A neoliberal concern over the stakeholder model is the diverse plurality of local communities and this model’s vulnerability to the viewpoints and interests of the stake itself, producing adapted and localised policy responses to national perspectives (Wilkins, 2016). Stakeholder governance could, Wilkins (2016) postulates, undermine a central blueprint for school improvement which is a key driver for school governing bodies. A response to this potential hijacking is to professionalise governance with skilled and expert participants. Lord Nash, (GOV., 2013) the then Schools Minister, in a speech to Independent Academies Association national conference, stated:

people should be appointed … because of their skills and expertise as governors; not simply because they represent particular interest groups … Running a school is in many ways like running a business, so we need more businesspeople coming forward to become governors.

Skilled and expert participants in governance, or a skills-based governing body, have the requisite professional, business-based, competencies to implement the activities of technocratic governance (Connolly, et al., 2017). The organisation’s direction is set through the clarity of vision, ethos, and strategic direction of those representatives on the governing body, as well as to assure accountability through effective monitoring and analysing of student and staff performance, and financial data (Wilkins, 2014), as well as to “provide confident and strong strategic leadership” (Ofsted, 2019:66). The professionalised skills-based model is more likely to fall in line with delocalised, centralised policy perspectives from central government as Wilkins (2014:88) argues this mode of governance is more technocratic, rather than democratic, in its drive to secure both efficient consensus and “streamlined accountability”. The Conservative – Cameron – government's accelerated growth of the academisation programme, with its malleable, but corporate-controlled, skills-focused governance (NCTL, 2014; NGA, 2015) and endorsement of diminished, skills-based governing bodies for maintained schools, exemplifies this crusade (DfE, 2015; Ofsted, 2016).

Allen (2018) contends that this drive for professionalisation is arguably a political construct concerning neoliberal ideology, rather than an effectiveness strategy; as does Wilkins (2021), who suggests that this ideology focuses on the replication of the education system in the image of the market and with a market logic. The decentralisation of governance – public contracts outsourced to private companies or charities, the privatisation of assets and the withdrawal of direct bureaucracy and direct support to schools – requires a shift to professionalisation from stakeholder models of governance, as good governance requires rigorous management of financial and performance activities (Wilkins, 2016) driven by NPM (Knill and Tosun, 2012). Hence, governors need to be effective in surveillance technologies, both in their implementation – holding senior leaders to account – and because they are subject to them, with the subsequent introduction of new legislation, guidelines, and policy frameworks, as discussed below, to give a steer to government expectations and normative behaviours without direct interference (Wilkins, 2016). Wilkins (2016) purports that one surveillance device is Ofsted and Ofsted’s perspective on how well they as governors perform their surveillance role. Governing bodies are subject to scrutiny from Ofsted in relation to the quality of the school’s vision and strategy, and ensuring the resources are well managed and that leaders are held to account, as well as having a clear understanding of role and carrying it out effectively (Ofsted, 2019). Significantly, the combination of smaller professionalised skills-based governing bodies with related academisation structures, will lead to de-democratisation or a democratic deficit due to the focus on skill over stake (Allen, 2018).

The drive continued to de-democratise and de-politicise governance with the Conservative government white paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016), under the then Secretary of State for education Nicky Morgan, its intention, in Local Authority (LA) controlled schools, to eliminate parents from governing bodies with a stakeholder purpose was both explicit and tacit. In this white paper, the position of parents as governors is portrayed both as critical for the success of the white paper and specifically as 'symbolic' (DfE, 2016:65; Baxter, 2016), intensifying the drive for the professionalisation of governance. Significantly, the white paper's intent, arguably, was to disempower parents by eliminating the requirement for their participation in shaping the course of the school through democratic processes – the democratic deficit. Knill and Tosun (2012) would consider this policy approach as a problem-solving activity, in alignment with neoliberalism as project (section 1.2.3.). However, as policy is more than a literal interpretation of text, it needs to be understood in terms of its discourse and power, as the intricacies and complexities of the policy’s frame of reference convey significance beyond the text alone (Taylor et al., 1997). Additionally, *how* the policy is enacted by those responsible individuals is determined by their interpretation of those intricacies and complexities in policy creation and the language and vocabulary employed, “part of the condition of acceptance and enactment” (Ball 2017:8). Subsequently, the drive for professionalisation was promulgated within the white paper (DfE, 2016) with the inherent flexible approach to determining governance structures, also partnered with the intent that all schools became academies. Whilst this white paper failed to make legislation, there was a continued pursuance of the academisation programme and the professionalisation of governance. Both the object and subject of policy are clarified and readied for enactment by the presence of the discursive and non-discursive components of the policy. Ball (2017b:30) postulates “power is as much about what is said and thought as what can be done… it is discursive”; it involves a transaction of power relations. Hence, Adams (2016) proposes that perception and cognition are altered when policy is considered as both text and discourse (Ball, 2017). Policy text should not be thought of as standalone without inference or politically motivated discourse but realised as highly constructed language to give more than superficial textual meaning and subsequently constructs a truth and society that is politically determined.

An outcome of the May Conservative government (2016-2019) (appendix 1), in relation to parental governors as stakeholders, is the *Constitution of Governing Bodies of Maintained Schools* publication (DfE, 2017a), which still determines LA controlled schools to have two parents representatives on the board of governors, and the *Governor’s Handbook* (DfE, 2020a) requires that MATs must have two parental representatives on trust boards, or can alternatively have two representatives on the LGBs, which may or may not be local to the individual school but may be regional. There is an expectation from government that academies will centralise governance in one overarching governing body rather than localise (Simkins et al., 2019). It can be argued that since *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016), there has been a series of documents, such as the *Constitution of Governing Bodies of Maintained Schools* (DfE, 2017a) which have progressively and determinedly, both discursively and non-discursively, pursued the disempowerment of parents as stakeholders from democratically contributing to their local school both in a decision-making or representative function as valued formal contributors, with the aim of continued professionalisation of governance. This leads to a democratic deficit in autonomous governance structures which are neither accountable to stakeholder groups nor to local democratic government (Allen, 2018). Additionally, the DfE (2017a) states that parents’ voice is sought, and that parents and community members should be engaged with; however, it also explicitly states that governing bodies should **not** attempt to do this through the membership of individuals in the governing body structure. It could be argued that the government’s perspective therefore is that governance is not a forum for stakeholder views or interest, but functions only as regulatory professionalised body of the school; Wilkins and Gobby (2021) term this the instrumental-rational function of governance. Therefore, any engagement with stakeholders should be carried out in different fora. The *Governor’s Handbook* (DfE, 2020b) has reinforced this view, stating its aims as being to place stronger emphasis on parental engagement. Whilst not defining what parental engagement is, the publication recognises the importance of parental engagement impacting upon a child’s learning, however, it states that parental engagement should **not** be confused with representation on a board, but nor should it also be seen as a one-off exercise. The *Governor’s Handbook* (DfE, 2020b) outlines guidance for boards to communicate the structure of the board to parents, how the school operates and how the parent can support children’s progress in education. This is implicit of a one-way information direction, with no decision-making expectation, yet it has added a requirement of boards to make use of parental engagement to inform strategic decision-making. There is no further clarification on the process or extent of this. Arguably in the worst cases, powerless local advisory boards could be consulted and responded to without representation from or to the wider parent or local community, or ignored by MATs altogether, reinforcing a democratic deficit. In summary, the government is driving the professionalised skills-focused governing body agenda, extending to those who are parents and community members, utilising them for their skills rather than their stakeholder view. Relegating the stake to an undetermined mechanism to be taken account of to a greater or lesser degree, without obligation, to be incorporated into strategic decision-making. Furthermore, partner publications such as the *Competency Framework for Governance* (2017b) are explicit and tacit in reinforcing a model of governance based on skills, normalising an apparent depoliticised technocratic practice.

A professionalised governance programme has, suggested Wilkins (2019a), shaped *epistocracy* (the rule by the most knowledgeable) in the focus on the membership of governing bodies being effectively skilled, securing technocratic governance, and *monopoly* (the rule by hierarchy) as essential elements, with a consequential degeneration in participatory, or democratic, governance. Monopoly needs further explanation: as outlined above there is an expectation that MATs will form one overarching governance. The DfE (2016:50) states that “the best governing bodies will take responsibility for a number of schools”, with subsequently “fewer, more highly skilled boards having oversight of the clusters of Trust schools”. Monopoly is further illustrated in that Boards of Trustees of MATs can determine the composition of governing bodies (NCTL, 2014) and subsequently very few schools have their own LGB. Large MATs often have a governance culture which means all schools in the trust have to adhere to standard operating procedures in relation to teaching, learning and assessment (Wilkins, 2016). LGBs, if they are in existence, are associated with an individual school or academy but often have no legal or statutory powers normally associated with governance – that is held by the overarching governing body; local entities often are advisory in capacity (Wilkins, 2019a). Subsequently, even though there is a recommendation, without explanation of how or the extent, in the *Governor’s Handbook* (DfE, 2019) that parent and stakeholder voice should be sought, Woods and Simkins (2014) express concerns over what they term ‘localisation’. Fundamentally, how stakeholder voices are represented, and how schools and academies are held to account, through governance, to be alive to the contextual requirements of their parents and community, if academy governance is centralised (Wilkins, 2016; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014) and governing bodies are smaller, non-stakeholder operations (Connolly, et al., 2017). This is underpinned by Ranson and Crouch (2009:47) who equate ‘the expansion of professional power at the expense of elected volunteers, and the corporatising of school ownership’ to decentralised education reforms.

Wilkins (2019b) suggests that the plurality of education providers is normalised through neoliberal routines; routines of performativity designed to hold leadership to account and to measure performance which rationalise competition: competition between schools (Greany and Higham, 2018; Kulz, 2021). All schools and academies are vulnerable to the tensions of performativity. However, those schools or academies which espouse co-operative values as a bedrock of direction and performance, with a highly contextualised approach to what it means to be co-operative, could find these normative commitments from government and its co-operative values competing, and in conflict, with the interests between the school and their stakeholders (Wilkins, 2019a).

Neoliberal hegemony over national and local governance policy and practice is equated by Wilkins (2016) as Foucauldian governmentality. Whilst government has relinquished control of governance to MATs – decentralisation – it still retains control through the discourse of governmentality and the instruments of governmentality; school governance, Ofsted, DfE publications, the discourse of business and of skills-based governance are all examples (but not exclusive) designed to secure the machinations of government whilst not directly controlling it. Those subject to governmentality become self-regulated and it is important those participants are free and autonomous to carry out their own self-evaluation and self-regulation, giving the illusion of decentralisation: performativity (Wilkins, 2016; Ball, 2017). The discourse surrounding skills-based governance, the need for it and the judgement of it, is to ensure that the gap left by the removal of the middle tier is filled to enable the successful self-evaluation and performance of governors as “quality control agents and expert publics”, thus successfully forging links between their formally autonomous selves and operations with “the public ambition of government”, thus disregarding stakeholder voice (Wilkins, 2016:72).

Subsequently, governmentality is so suffusing that it regulates the big discourse but also regulates the everyday discourse (Adams, 2016), therefore, securing the commonplace normalisation to the discourse of neoliberalism (Ball, 2017). Furthermore, Rayner (2018) suggests that normalisation occurs and is enhanced through contextualised governmentality, which is where those subject to, and in acceptance of, the hegemonic discourse go on to regulate the choices and construct locally-contextualised versions to secure further localised normalisation, agency belief and localised self-regulation. Governmentality, in all forms, will render vulnerable any ambition of Co-operative schools and academies to represent an alternative to neoliberal economic logic of education (Facer et al., 2012).

## 2.3. Co-operative Schools and the Promise of Democracy – What Alternative?

### 2.3.1. Alternative Models of Democratic Engagement in Neoliberal Times

What it means to be educated, and who should control education, is a contested site, “a crucial struggle” between neoliberalism and authority and identity (Riddle and Apple, 2019). Brown (2015) suggests that democracy and its principles, as an understanding of rule by the people, is being assaulted by neoliberal technologies. A democratic deficit, Wilkins (2014) suggests, has been signified with the professionalisation of governance and a neoliberal political rationality, with democratic principles, such as empowerment and participation, coming secondary to market principles of value for money, relevant skills and knowledge and a narrow, instrumentalised conception of what good governance is. Democracy is believed to be impractical and incongruent with NPM systems of surveillance of and by the governing body with increased accountability to both the DfE and Ofsted (Wilkins, 2014). When considering how to re-democratise polities such as school governance, deliberative democratic practices have been advocated to empower stakeholders within the system (Mansbridge et al., 2012), but, also, advocates have proposed changing the system structurally (Locatelli, 2019; Bryk et al., 1999; Hodgson and Spours, 2012). Furthermore, Locatelli (2019) and Hodgson and Spours (2012) propose that governance focused on market-driven outcomes needs to refocus on outcomes which secure education as common good or as public value. Locatelli (2019) distinguishes the framing of education as private good, public good and common good. Public good framing has subsumed within it private good, and is economically framed with a formal democratic structure, whereas education framed as a common good requires a democratic cultural shift in governance, in that it requires a framing of education that is shared and relational and is common in both production and benefit. Common good reframing is not one which can be commodified, economically or otherwise. Significantly for this research, a common good perspective demands that instruments of participatory democratic governance, where all stakeholders’ voices are engaged, are enacted. Furthermore, it demands that networks of co-operativism are constructed within communities to take responsibility for shared institutions, as well as embodying the principles of dynamic opposition to neoliberalism (Locatelli, 2019).

To discuss systematic change which achieves a democratic rebalance, it is important to foreground this discussion with Newman’s (2001) framework of governance. This framework highlights the tension between centralisation and decentralisation in governance models and the subsequent tension with democratic processes. Furthermore, the model highlights the tension between market-driven outcomes and a need for control and efficient processes. Newman’s (2001) framework considers the interaction and dominance between four modes of governance. These modes are: hierarchical; rational-goal; self-governance; the final mode is open-systems: networked interactions, with fluid, distributed power, and task group-focused policy implementation. Figure 2.1 shows how public participation and democracy are enacted in these modes of governance (Newman, 2001). As an example, Baxter (2014) suggests that the Coalition government of 2010-2015 had a predominance of both hierarchical and rational-goal modes in practice. For a systemic change to occur which redemocratises governance modes of operation, the self-governance or open-systems mode of governance need to be privileged over hierarchical or rational-goal modes of governance, as outlined in Newman’s framework (2001).

Towards decentralisation, differentiation

Towards centralisation, vertical integration

Towards continuity, sustainability

Towards competitiveness, innovation

Figure 2.1 Democratic Innovation and Public Participation: models of governance (Newman, 2001:140), with axes added from Newman (2001:79)

Privileging an open system, or self-governing mode of governance, is secured when practiced as Democratic Localism (Hodgson and Spours, 2012). Hodgson and Spours (2012) suggest that there are three forms of governance as localism which, like Newman (2001) and Baxter and Cornforth (2021), also highlight the tension between centralisation and decentralisation. Utilising Newman’s four modes, each of Hodgson and Spours (2012) proposed governance models have different profiles of dominance of the four modes (fig. 2.1). According to Hodgson and Spours (2012) the first form of governance is Centrally Managed Localism – aligned with New Labour’s approaches of a high degree of centralisation and marketisation. This approach is an example of centralised targets, top-down policy decrees, with the encouragement of competition, and weak collaboration, through market-driven forces. The second form is more associated with Coalition and Conservative government approaches – Laissez-faire Localism – which further aims to remove the middle tier by empowering communities and third sector, or private partnership, in public services to act as consumers and active participants in how local delegated services money is spent. However, this is also associated with reduced income from central government. The discourse embedded in this approach is increased market-driven reform, greater links with private-partnership providers and empowerment within this for local communities and citizens (Hodgson and Spours, 2012). The final approach is one of Democratic Localism. This approach has at its heart a focus upon public value (Mazzucato and Ryan-Collins, 2019), rather than market-driven outcomes, and decentralisation. Democratic Localism is a refocus of the balance of power, resources, and relationships between representative, democratically-elected national, regional, and local bodies. It secures the participation of local, public and community members as part of decision-making and co-production of services – it has public value or common good as its value base – and ensures effective, bottom-up feedback in policy development (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Bryk et al., 1999). For Democratic Localism to be a viable alternative reform needs to occur not only at the site of localism, but at state level (Locatelli, 2019; Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Olmedo and Wilkins, 2016). Hence, securing a democratic cultural shift which requires political courage to give away power and a focus upon public services, particularly education, as a common good (Locatelli, 2019). This presents a distinct and limited role for the state and an acceptance that there is a new role in securing entitlement, setting standards and policy principles, amongst others. Locatelli (2019) goes further to suggest that this cultural shift needs to occur also at the supranational level as globalisation exists in determining policy at a global, national/state level and ultimately at a local level. Ball (2017) calls this glocalisation; a locally mediated form of the global perspective filtered through the layers of state interpretation, selection, and adherence. Examples of Democratic Localism can be found in devolved governance in the UK and educationally in the Chicago School’s reform (Bryk et al., 1999; Bryk et al., 2010). In the latter example, LGBs in areas of high deprivation gained power from a decentralisation programme and a restructure which rebalanced the power of the LGB by ensuring that parents were the majority representatives on the panel. The representative local bodies enabled six parent members, two community members, two staff members and the principal to determine locally the vision and direction as well as attend to the performance of the school: significantly shifting the rubber-stamping culture (Young, 2016) that the parents had previously exhibited in significant decision-making. To secure the necessary shift towards a form of Democratic Localism, the agnostic-political perspective in governance is the shift that needs to occur. This perspective is the conflicted site of governance, with political pulls from values to state-led principles to localised operationalism (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021). Partnering this perspective is the instrumental-rational perspective on governance – the functional, organisational aspects of governance which can be perceived as apolitical, although arguably all apolitical operational events are mediated and chosen through the political lens.

The second approach to re-democratise polities, such as school governance, is change in practice with the introduction of models of micro-level democratic practices or innovations (Ercan and Dryzek, 2015) within the system. This has been advocated by Beauvais and Warren (2019) and increasingly utilised according to Escobar and Elstub (2017) to facilitate empowering participatory and deliberative democracy in governance. The principle of a micro-level democratic innovation, or “mini public”, is to engage participants in a deliberative democratic process, by taking a representative sample of all those community members or stakeholder groups and distil the numbers to be representative of the whole. This differs from a stakeholder representation model of governance with mini-publics offering a greater degree of engagement and built capital for participant support to empower them to have authentic decision-making capabilities (Escobar and Elstub, 2017; Wilkins, 2019a). Mini-publics can take the form of citizens’ juries, stakeholder assemblies, consensus conferences and deliberative polls (Ercan and Dryzek, 2015). However, whilst recognising that there are benefits to the mini-public approach (Beauvais and Warren, 2019; Escobar and Elstrub, 2017) as single entities, these innovations are also considered by some to undermine the re-democratising process (Ercan and Dryzek, 2015; Curato and Böker, 2016; Lafont, 2020), in that the power is held by those organising them; the design of them, the composition of them, those who are included or are not and when to hold them or not, are subject to the discretion of those, possibly partisan, *organisers* (Curato and Böker, 2016). Further, they may not be representative of the electoral body (Lafont, 2015; 2020) and are not a substitute for public judgment, which misrepresents the view underpinning policy formation, or the development of mass democracy (Lafont, 2020).

If the contention is that democratic practice needs to be broadened, then the use of a mini-public, as a formally designed micro-deliberative innovation, as a single entity is not the answer (Beauvais and Warren, 2019; Hendriks, 2009). However, a turn towards a deliberative democratic system, whereby the mini-public is only one element of the whole system, along with macro deliberation and local deliberation (Lafont, 2020), is widely acknowledged as enhancing the democratic governance of any polity, such as school governance (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Erman, 2012; Ercan and Dryzek, 2015). Especially as democracy is only strengthened, suggests Erman (2012), when inclusive participation, accountability, authorisation, and deliberation are increased across a system or polity. Ercan and Dryzek (2015), significantly for this research, suggest that deliberative democracy has its roots in critical theory, as the focus upon deliberation changes the way that ‘small p’ politics works, that is how power dynamics change within group relationships, and is emancipatory, Böker and Elstub, (2015) suggest for those involved in the deliberation. Furthermore, the consideration of democracy through a deliberative perspective, rather than through activism or protest, is also key as expression of stakeholder concerns that are made through ‘voice’ rather than vote (Erman, 2012). Parents or stakeholders, however, may well resort to deeds (Rollo, 2017), dissent (Sparks, 1997) or protest and activism if their vote or voice is not listened to (Lingard and Hursh, 2019) and are key components of a deliberative democratic system (Sparks, 1997). Mansbridge et al. (2012) state the deliberative democratic system can be understood across many institutions or polities but significantly in a school governance polity. The system itself is a set of entities which are interdependent and distinguishable from each other, and functions, and is legitimised, on epistemic, ethical, and democratic levels. Mansbridge et al. (2012) state the deliberative system is compensatory, that is elements of the system may produce good quality deliberation or democratic outcomes, other elements being more defective or less deliberative, but that that these elements when looked at from the whole system compensate for each other and be determined as beneficial. Whereas Dryzek (2017) suggests that the deliberative democratic system has *public spaces,* where free or macro-deliberation and participation takes place; informal in orientation, and more interested in how the broader discussions in public sphere might influence communicative action (Hendriks, 2009) (section 1.2.2), and *empowered spaces* where authorisation takes place and accountability is upheld. Erman (2012) postulates that this system perspective has its origins in Habermas’ two track perspective deliberative democracy: the *informal* opinion forming talk and the *formal* authorised deliberative decision-making space. Hendriks (2009) conceptualises the system as a plurality; overlapping spheres of public deliberation, which can take the form of micro- or macro- public deliberation or a mixture of both.

One of the main criticisms with the deliberate democratic system perspective is the evaluation of the effectiveness of its whole (Dryzek, 2017). Whilst Mansbridge et al. (2012) advocate judging both the quality of the micro-event and the whole system, very little is offered in determining what this would look like (Dryzek, 2017). Dryzek (2017) firstly considers evaluating the deliberative democratic culture as a way forward, which Chambers (2000) defines as a culture in which the citizens have a sense that their participation in the public space has significance and meaning. Böker (2017) further defines culture as the norms and informal meaning, customs and expectations that drive behaviour of the everyday person in the political space is embodied with fairness, equality, and the right to justification. However, Dryzek (2017) subsequently, advocates evaluating the system not through the culture but relatedly through the bounded notion of the polity, where the polity is the political dimension of the organisation. This relates to Wilkins and Gobby’s (2021) concept of the agnostic-political perspective of governance. The polity itself can be evaluated as the extent to which it obstructs or encourages the development of democratic deliberative integrative norms, in securing “competent, critical, inclusive and egalitarian communicative action” (Dryzek, 2017:630). Considering the extent to which the role of the stakeholder is a democratic agent within the polity being evaluated, (Erman, 2012) and the related role of power in the deliberative system and associated polity (Hendriks, 2009) can provide further evaluation. An individual, a stakeholder, within the polity, navigating the public or empowered spaces within the system will have democratic agency if they have both political equality (both equal and actual opportunity) and political bindingness, whereby those stakeholders or democratic agents exercise their equality to be part of the decision-making process (Erman, 2012). Hendriks (2009) suggests that within the polity and excised through the system, power is wielded to both positive and negative effect to influence the deliberative nature of system. Hendriks (2009) considers that both power *over* (coercive power) and power *with* (generative form of power) are influencers. Therefore, the polity, as in the case of this research into Co-operative governance, can be evaluated against its integrative norms, and through the extent to which its stakeholders are deemed democratic agents, as well as the role of power *over* and power *with* relate and are manifested in the polity itself.

Allen (2018) has proposed a model of democracy for governance, the empowered participatory governance model. The model has three main principles which focus upon: firstly, bottom up participation of stakeholders, where local stakeholders are engaged to become problem solvers/ decision makers; secondly, the governance structure itself being designed to meet the needs of the organisation and stakeholders to secure channels of communication; and thirdly, deliberate solution generation, which is where participants are sought from a wider field than the formal group and participants are engaged to generate group choices. Allen (2018) has identified that the Co-operative Trust schools model focused on democratic governance structures engaging all stakeholder groups in formalised groups –Trust membership and governing body membership – holds true to the principles of the empowered participatory model. However, in practice, Davidge (2017) found that just the presence of the stakeholder groups and co-operative structures designed to secure a more democratic governance was not enough to make it so, significantly, that leadership intent was also necessary as was a cultural shift. Woodin (2015) suggests that Co-operative Trust schools were a hybrid model and not as truly democratic in practice as in theory.

Huxham and Vangen (2005) state that when considering participatory democracy, such as the deliberative democratic system, two factors need to be considered: democracy as process and democracy as participants. Huxham and Vangen (2005) further suggest that when considering stakeholders or participants in democratic processes, there should be consideration regarding the engagement of both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are those who choose to participate, possibly with their own negotiating powers and agendas. However, the external stakeholders are those non-participants who are hard to reach but who should be consulted, who could be from underrepresented minority groups or parents with lower cultural capital who find the participation more daunting. The external stakeholders could become undermining if not consulted (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). These hard-to-reach external stakeholders could be represented via a third-sector interface (Cullingworth and Escobar, 2017) which may or may not be the internal stakeholder.

### 2.3.2. Alternative Others within a Neoliberal Policy Framework

When considering what alternative could look like if not related to democratic processes per se, Woods (2015) suggests that strategic identities can provide a perspective on how organisations can be alternative. Woods (2015) outlined three constructions of how those actors in the organisation signify the uniqueness of the identity and the assumptions that are made about each alternative in the wider society. Firstly, is alternative as choice, whereby if the hegemonic mainstream or most common form of education is not appealing, then on the periphery is an alternative: a different, possibly lesser, or abnormal choice. Secondly, there is alternative as assimilation, whereby the participants shape themselves in line with the hegemonic mainstream but practice a recognisable difference in relation to educational culture. Thirdly, alternative as challenge, whereby the alternative is conceived as an equal option to the mainstream and a challenge to the dominant assumptions of education. This form of alternative exists as a legitimate option in its own right, has a strong sense of integrity and confidence, and is not defined specifically as an opposition to the mainstream. Woods (2015) goes further, to propose a second variable to the strategic identities in outlining the stances that each of the alternatives could take towards their boundaries and the external relations. Separation is a stance that gives a protective boundary in that its function is to maintain the culture of the alternative not to be contaminated by the mainstream or other alternatives. Subsequently there are very weak relationships with external bodies, such as other MATs or organisations such as Education Endowment Foundation. Engagement, not to be confused with the earlier definition of parental engagement (section 1.2.6.), is a stance of compromise: the boundaries are porous, in that to achieve objectives there is movement across the boundaries. With this stance there is a view that alternative form will be practised but at the expense of retaining or even reinforcing the “dominant, instrumentally driven culture” (Woods, 2015:48). The final stance that Woods (2015) suggests is activism. Activism is about taking action to ensure that the alternative is protected and/or taking action to secure wider social change and to secure the change of the hegemonic mainstream to bring it in line with the alternative perspective, as well as to enable participatory relationships which result in a challenge to inequalities and develop democratic learning communities. Co-operative Trust schools offer themselves as an alternative - and it is suggested by Woods (2015) that Co-operative Trust schools are purporting alternative as assimilation in terms of strategic identity and take the stance of engagement, pushing for activism.

Relatedly, a more explicit representation of the strategic identity (Woods, 2015) is branding. Courtney (2015) has offered a typology to differentiate schools, but of particular interest to this research is the differentiation of schools or academies through the lenses of locus of legitimation and branding, as these lenses have the potential as signifiers of alternative. Here, Courtney (2015) states that legitimation is considered the source of authority which secures a school or academy as one of its type that enables it to determine, or determine for it, its identity. Corporate legitimation is sourced through the business or philanthropic organisation that runs the school and has been borne out of the neoliberal policy of the essential inclusion of businesses and charitable organisation involvement in education and its determination. Complimentary to legitimation is branding; as Courtney (2015) states, branding is the set of characteristics that the school or organisation claim to identify it as unique. For example, and pertinent to this research, the Co-op Group brands itself heavily on its co-operative values and so do its academies. Branding can be construed as consumer-orientated or competitor-oriented, and Courtney (2105) goes further to state that when the orientation is promoted to positively position the brand ahead of others in the field, then it must be construed as symbolic violence as opposed to enhanced symbolic capital. Maguire et al. (2011) however, consider what is “not ordinary” by suggesting that branding, promoting, and marketing elevate schools out of the ordinary, which they are compelled to do in order to differentiate themselves in a marketised logic of education, but that notions of branding equate to fabrication. Maguire et al. (2011) go on to determine that fabrication is a construct of a reality which may not exist but is produced for the external eye to give the illusion of the desired reality. The fabrication is supported by further illusionary discourse in the form of forensic and epideictic rhetoric, both in the form of select text and images. What is key is to be able to differentiate between branding that is authentic, and therefore alternative, and branding that is merely “not ordinary”.

A further model of what an alternative can be is provided by Simkins et al. (2019) which focuses upon factual, structural, or operational variables rather than a perception/principle-led alternative as outlined above. Simkins et al. (2019) who build on the work of Salokangas and Chapman (2014), relating to *group*, where group is the degree of perceived group membership – a togetherness – and *grid* – how centralised is the control of the group – members of group being the academies in a MAT, for example. Simkins et al. (2019) use this to consider the unique position of school groups along a continuum of four parameters. These being: how the group was formed – forced or voluntarily, for example; how the group is structured – the make-up of the different members’ locality phase homo/heterogeneity; how the group is organised – management, orientation, and governance; and what the basis of intergroup relationship is: outward-looking or inward-looking (table. 1.1). The uniqueness of the position along these four continua can determine the degree of alternativeness from the mainstream hegemony. There is an expectation, Simpkins et al. (2019) suggest, that government prefers that MATs have a high *grid* profile, that is high levels of centralised control and in terms of groups’ organisation: centralised management structures. Centralised management structures, for example, mean a single executive head or leadership team, centralised governance structure with a single governing body at trust level or removed from the local, and inward-looking: focused upon the needs and expectations of the trust. This signifies limited autonomy (Simkins et al., 2019) and looking at Table. 1, predominantly situated along the right-hand side of the schema. Any alternative would be represented being predominantly situated on the left-hand side of the schema.

Table 2.2 Group Paraments Continua (Simkins et al., 2019:336)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Parameters of each variable** | | |
|  | **Group formation** | | |
| **Initiation** | Built from below |  | Created from the centre |
| **Membership (reason for entering partnership)** | Voluntary |  | Forced |
|  | **Group structure** | | |
| **Scale** | Small number of schools |  | Large number of schools |
| **Geographical scope** | Local based |  | Widely spread |
| **Internal status differentiation** | Homogeneous: schools with similar levels of material and symbolic capital (e.g., all high performing schools) |  | Heterogeneous: schools with differing levels of material and symbolic capital (e.g., a mixture of well/poor performing schools) |
| **Phase composition (primary secondary, etc)** | Single phase |  | Mixed phase |
|  | **Group organisation** | | |
| **Management** | Decentralised management (separate heads; no overarching executive) |  | Centralised management (single executive head or leadership team |
| **Governance** | Decentralised governance structure (separate governing bodies) |  | Centralised governance structure (single governing body) |
| **Orientation** | Outward looking: primary focus on community and parental groups associated with particular schools |  | Inward looking: primary focus on objectives and outcomes for the group |
|  | **Intergroup relations** | | |
| **Mode of exchange** | Primarily on basis of professional reciprocity |  | Primarily commercial |

### 2.3.3. The Role of Parental Engagement and Ofsted in Improvement Strategies.

As well as rebalancing the democratic deficit, a further consideration for engaging with parents in governance is the impact that parental engagement has on student outcomes. Parent, family, and community engagement, as well as partnership programmes, increase not only student attendance and outcomes (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016) but children’s learning (Sime and Sheridan, 2014; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Reay, 2017; DfE, 2019). Additionally, parental engagement increases the percentage of positively engaged families (Epstein and Sheldon, 2016), without which, Chapman and Harris (2004) outline, impacts negatively on school improvement. They suggest that the marketised education system has exacerbated the performance differences of schools in different socio-economic settings, and furthermore, that those schools in difficult circumstances who do not engage with parents, or their communities are less likely to improve. Rogers et al. (2012) postulate a key form of parental engagement is governance or engagement in decision-making, but whilst this level of engagement occurs in some schools, what the engagement looks like, or the extent of the engagement is ethnically and socio-economically dependent. The outcomes gap for students in low socio-economic locations, especially inner cities, compared with middle-class areas in relation to indicators such as attendance, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures, attainment, and exclusions, are significantly wide (Harris et al., 2006; Reynolds et al., 2006; Muijs, 2010; Greany and Higham, 2018; Baxter, 2020).

What is significant here is that the most significant factor in influencing school behaviour, Greany and Higham (2018) suggest, is Ofsted and the accountability framework, regardless of the current Ofsted judgement the school or academy holds, as do others (Altrichter and Kemethofer, 2015; Connelly et al., 2017), despite the link with parental engagement and performance and improvement. This is in part due to positive status that a good or outstanding Ofsted judgement can confer to a school, and its competitive advantage (Simon, James, and Simon, 2021). Greany and Higham (2018) found that with a positive change in an Ofsted judgement the socio-economic profile of the school changed in that there was a reduction in the number of students entitled to free school meals and as these students underperform nationally, there is a double boost, as subsequent performance data would arguably improve, therefore further securing the positive benefits of a good or better Ofsted judgement, plus the benefits of marketability and attraction of the ‘right sort’ of families. Greany and Higham (2018) also found those schools with a negative change in Ofsted judgement, or lower status schools, were faced with a concentrated set of challenges relating to undersubscription, higher mobility and disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged, migrant and hard to place students. High levels of stress from external accountability pressure were found by Greany and Higham (2018) and Altrichter and Kemethofer (2015) which resulted in schools prioritising the interests of the school, that is future Ofsted judgements, over the interests of, often more vulnerable, children. According to Greany and Higham (2018), low status schools, to seek improvement, relentlessly focus on externally measured student progress and attainment data, narrowing the focus of internal activity. Their improvement strategies focus on external accountability framework expectations (Altrichter and Kemethofer, 2015), which in England equates to quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development of pupils and leadership and management. As stated previously by Greany and Higham (2018), the focus on all schools in relation to performance as a core is Ofsted expectations, as outlined in the evaluation schedule. However, the greater the accountability pressure, Altrichter and Kemethofer (2015) suggest, the greater the focus on normalising to the external accountability framework expectations, with numerous short-term strategies employed in relation to the framework to achieve this, to the exclusion of any strategy which deviates from the narrow expectations of the framework. They go further to suggest that engagement with parents and communities is sacrificed, as is any other longer-term strategies to support improvement, due to capacity limitations. This absence of a parent and community focus occurs as it is not seen as a potential strategy for school improvement, in the School Improvement and School Effectiveness (SISE) perspective, more a factor, in a deficit model, as to the cause of the low status in the first place (Levin, 2006). However, proponents of SISE such as Harris et al. (2006) and Muijs (2010) suggest school improvement strategies need to shift from a school level approach to consider parent, and community engagement as legitimate.

### 2.3.4. The Challenges in Partnership: Parental Engagement as Governance in Areas of High Deprivation

Parental engagement and parent, family, community partnerships, as outlined in section 2.3.3., are well established, effective strategies for improving performance outcomes for young people in schools (Muijs, 2010; Auerbach, 2010; Ofsted, 2016). Furthermore, as outlined by Auerbach (2010), participation, as parental stakeholders in governance, is a significant form of parental engagement. Additionally, democratic participation and local cultural responsiveness are developed through parental and community engagement when utilising a critical epistemological social justice framework (Green, 2017), as advocated within this thesis, as well as confronting social reproduction (Auerbach, 2010). Critically, Auerbach (2010) postulates the imperative of cultivating authentic partnerships, by school leadership, with community stakeholders and parents.

Parental engagement, or partnership, in such agency as governance, relies on collaborative advantage, which Huxham and Vangen (2005) suggest is the success of, or the addition of value to, common collaborative aims which could only be achieved together. Establishing the purpose of the collaboration or partnership is complex and multifaceted, integrating the explicit, assumed, and hidden aims of the collaboration, the organisation and the individuals involved (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Considerable joint investment is required to establish the purpose of partnerships, according to Huxham and Vangen (2005), utilising strategies such as strategic visioning, requiring the collaboration between the school and formalised community groups. With less investment, they suggest, formalised development is diminished, producing an informal relationship with an exchange of information, such as a parents’ forum within a school. Partnership work relies on overcoming issues around member participation and member empowerment. Trust, control, and power are key perceptions which need to be addressed in the partnership for it to be successful as does the type of collaboration or partnership established, as this can determine members’ perception of trust, control, and power. Baxter (2020) differentiates between trust and distrust, as not in binary opposition but as distinct constructs. Trust in relation to governance, Ehren and Baxter (2020:10) suggest, is “the trustor’s willingness to take a risk based on assessments of a trustee’s competence, benevolence and integrity”. Furthermore, they suggest that trust, accountability, and capacity are inextricably linked. Distrust however, Baxter (2020) suggests is distinct from trust. The binary opposition to trust is absence of trust, but distrust is an explicit act, by which the individual, organisation or system is expected not to be relied upon and will engage in active harmful behaviour. This construct of trust and distrust is significant in establishing roles and partnership in governance, particularly parent governors or those engaged in decision-making in schools, such as parents.

Partnership, according to Powell and Exworthy (2002), is a mechanism of social coordination, or governing structure: a quasi-network. Partnership, they suggest, is not equivalent to networks as with a network the relations between members, and the mode of governance, are “conducted on the basis of mutual benefit, trust and reciprocity” (Powell and Exworthy, 2002:16) and partnership working does not infer this. However, Auerbach (2010: 735) suggests that authentic partnerships do facilitate a “reciprocal empowerment model, with families and educators co-constructing roles and engaging in dialogue and mutual learning”, a view shared by Green (2017) and Woods and Simkins (2014). Connolly et al. (2017) define parents and community members engaged operationally as stakeholders or those actors, who impact on, or are subject to the actions of the education establishment. Crucially, Connolly et al. (2017) suggest that the stake itself should be unmistakably privileged and subsequently valorised and addressed, that is authentically legitimatised, despite the problematising of stake and the potential for strategic derailment. Furthermore, due to the vagary of extent afforded to parent or community representatives for agency and advocacy of their stake, Connolly et al. (2017) suggest the sum and substance of the stakeholder role be clarified within the governance structure. Auerbach (2010) appreciates the discord between stakeholder privilege and its status in the parent-school partnership yet insists that those with a stake are engaged in an explicit authentic partnership. This is defined by Auerbach (2010:729) as:

respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that

value relationship building, dialogue, and power sharing as part of socially just,

democratic schooling.

Subsequently, authentic partnerships within this research will equate to Auerbach’s (2010) definition.

The challenge of governance is often socio-economically dependent; in areas of low socio-economic status, it is difficult to recruit or engage parents as participants in governance (Rogers, et al., 2012; Connolly, et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2016). This is exacerbated if there is socio-economic deprivation partnered with unsatisfactory performance (James et al., 2011). Frequently, parent representatives struggle to navigate the complexities of engagement and decision-making in governance, which is made more daunting when results are low. This struggle is attributed to poor resource access (Connolly, et al., 2017; James et al., 2011) and inauthentic power-sharing to secure engagement, as defined by Auerbach (2010), as well as the type of partnership expectation established. Critically, as well as being socio-economically dependent, challenges for governance are also ethnically dependent, and exacerbated when the two are partnered, the most ardent participants in governance are likely to be white and high-status socio-economically, with the least likely to participate or engage are parents from poorer, ethnically diverse communities (Auerbach, 2010). James et al. (2011) outline two related concepts of governance capital and governance agency, which can mitigate or not the complexities parent governors face and find challenging as stakeholders. Governance capital is defined by James et al. (2011) as a capacity and motivational dependent network to support the governance role; governance agency is the capacity to act. Governance capital is also socio-economically dependent, with low governance capital creating more challenging participation and engagement issues in areas of high deprivation compared to areas of low deprivation; this can be related to the individual’s habitus, which will be discussed in section 3.4., and subsequent social, cultural, and economic capital. Significantly, technical language and rational articulation are barriers to successful experience and performance in governance for individuals in high deprivation areas, and can limit contribution, especially if support is also lacking (James et al., 2011). What this can create, Young (2017a) suggests, is a puppet board, with parents as stakeholders ‘technically’ making decisions, activity is reduced to inauthentic rubberstamping. Locatelli (2019) frames this as “engineered consent”. This is resultant of an absence or thin parent/community representative relationship, situational uncertainty, partnered with the socially constructed, highly technocratic and regulatory nature of governance, Young (2017a) contends, overwhelming and disempowering participants, subsequently diminishing contribution. Additionally, parents feel conflicted if they propose an alternative or question decisions, concerned they may be disadvantaging their children. Auerbach (2010:730) postulates this manifests “in part because of … linguistic and logistical barriers, cultural discontinuities, a sense of intimidation and legacies of distrust”. Leadership, Auerbach (2012) identifies, is crucial and a key drive to secure authentic parental engagement. However, this is not to problematise the individual or support a deficit model of parental engagement or agency in activities such as governance. Kulz (2021) suggests the professionalised logic of governance produces the explicit and active exclusion of parents from low socio-economic and ethnic minority backgrounds from engaging. Furthermore, Kulz (2021) argues that the professionalisation of governance, privileging the predominantly white professional, middle class, is raced and classed. Wilkins (2019c:101) also purports that the technologies of rational self-management determine the active limitation of those who are perceived to be unable to satisfy ‘narrowly bounded judgements’ of good governance to navigate success in the highly marketised and business logic of governance. Baxter (2020) would suggest these are not the trusted individuals, but the distrusted.

## 2.4. Summary

In summation, this chapter has outlined the current literature in relation to the contemporary policy and practice of governance. Alternatives to a neoliberal narrative in the form of re-democratisation have been explored, considering approaches to democratic localism and the concept of a deliberative democratic system which whilst normative has the potential to be practically sustained, as evidenced by current practice of its component parts, for example, mini-publics. The evaluation of a polity such as the CAT, in relation to its democratic pedigree has been explored though the models presented by Erman (2012), Dryzek (2017) and Hendriks (2009). Further models of alternative presented by Simkins et al. (2019) and Woods (2015) have been outlined, along with the concept of being “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011). The literature is contextualised by relating to the engagement of parents in this process of re-democratisation, the benefits of this and the challenges in areas of deprivation, such as agency and capital, the formalities of governance and trust, as well as the contrived exclusion of parents in areas of deprivation from governance which can be considered as raced and classed (Kulz, 2021). In the next chapter, the research design and methodology are explained.

# Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction

In the chapter that follows, an explanation of how the research has been conducted in relation to the chosen research paradigm is given. The rationale for the sampling of participants and documents is outlined. The process of data analysis is explained, including how Bourdieu’s thinking tools are applied to the findings, as well as how methodological congruence is achieved. The research design is justified outlining the steps taken to collect and analyse data, with two further sub-sections which will elaborate on the rationale for data collection and data analysis. Ethical issues and issues of trustworthiness are deliberated as are validity, reliability, and reflexivity. The final section considers the limitations of the research design and methodology.

## 3.2. Research Questions

The research aim was to explore how one CAT Academy engaged with stakeholders, particularly parents and community groups in an area of deprivation, to secure authentic decision-making partnerships based on the international co-operative values, specifically democracy.

Therefore, the research objectives are:

To examine the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and to explain how this model is perceived to be, or not, an alternative to other current models, in a currently perceived neoliberal context of education.

To explore the enactment of democratic principles, in line with the research definition outlined above, in relation to parents, stakeholders and governance, and wider governance, practices in the case study Academy.

To investigate the extent of parental engagement in decision-making.

Subsequently, the research questions are specifically:

RQ 1 What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and how can this be considered as alternative?

RQ 2 To what extent is the co-operative value of democracy realised, in relation to parents as stakeholders?

RQ 3 To what extent does the CAT model of governance engage with parents as decision-makers?

## 3.3. Paradigm Consideration

It is important here to state from the outset that consideration of the research paradigm needs to be examined, as this poses questions of positionality and reflects a need for a thorough investigation of reflexivity to be discussed later in the chapter (section 3.12). The theoretical frame which underpins this research is based on a socially critical perspective and considers the work of socially critical exponent Bourdieu (section 3.4). Raffo et al. (2010), categorised theory based on the intention of the perspective, whilst still recognising that both perspectives can be viewed through a multileveled focus: the micro layer – a focus on the individual; the meso level – a focus upon the immediate social context such as families, communities, or schools; and the macro level – power, social structures, and inequality. This research has considered all three levels.

The Co-operative Trust schools’ model, as opposed to the CAT, is purporting to share power more equally with stakeholders using the vehicle of democracy, a co-operative value, an example, arguably, of a socially critical approach.

Considering the above and the objectives outlined in section 3.2., the most applicable research paradigm, therefore, is a critical (social) paradigm. Identifying this research paradigm is key as it alerts the reader to the conduct of research and relatedly the assumptions that the researcher brings when considering ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives, defining the research frame of reference (Punch, 2014).The axiology, the ethics, or values of those undertaking the research, Guba and Lincoln (2000) outline, are integral to the understanding the paradigm selected, which, because of the critical perspectives and values held, underpinning this research, will determine that a (socially) critical methodology will be employed.

When considering the critical ontological position of this research, a consideration of what ontology is, is needed. Ontology is considered here to be the perspective of what is elemental to reality (Crotty, 1998), or the nature of what exists, but specifically to this research how social reality is understood (Blaikie, 2007). In a critical theory paradigm, the social reality or critical ontology is framed by Guba and Lincoln (2000) as historical realism. Subsequently, the view of reality underpinning this research, historical realism, is one which suggests that the ontology, or the reality of society, is shaped by society itself and the values associated with the dominant discourse, relating to politics, culture, economics, gender, and standards of ethical behaviour. Furthermore, Lather (2006) suggests that the nature of social reality may be constructed socially but is constructed primarily through the language and actions of those in hegemonic positions, subsequently crystalising the currently fixed reality (Lather 2006). A significant factor in how historical realism determines reality is the interplay between the language articulated, power imbalances and the social world (Frowe, 2001; Lather, 2006).

In terms of paradigm, partnering the ontological perspective is the epistemological perspective. Epistemology explains how we know this reality, (Punch, 2014). Furthermore, epistemology gives a way of thinking about research ideas or phenomena, which may differ for individual researcher’s and will correspond to their ontological perspective (Blaikie, 2007). Critical theorists argue that because of the nature of the knowledge being sought: critiquing domination and subordination, promoting emancipatory interests, explaining discursive and social phenomena (Anyon, 2009), grounded in social action (Crotty, 1998), whilst exposing the societal power imbalance (Green, 2017), critical epistemology is subjectivist epistemology. Subjectivism is suggestive of an ideology that proposes the observer imposes meaning, without contribution from the object or phenomena being observed, and as such for any observation, any individual doing the observation will have a unique and may be alternative interpretation of the same event (Blaikie, 2007). Thus, for transparency, and in relation to this research, this epistemology is transactional and is value-mediated or constructed (Guba and Lincoln, 2000; Lather 2006). Subsequently, critical theorists take a counter view from the norm; critical research should be filtered through a transparent value set, rather than values which are hidden or removed, which by doing so puts front and centre the purpose of emancipation of those groups vulnerable to oppression (Punch, 2014), such as stakeholders, particularly parents in relation to governance as in this research. Critical epistemology, Guba and Lincoln (2000) suggest, is where the critical researcher observes individuals behaving through the filter of hegemony, societal indoctrination, and its political construction of society, displaying an expected behaviour. Furthermore, they suggest, expected behaviour is reinforced, the critical observer notes, as the subject mimics others behaving in an indoctrinated way.This governmentality (section 1.2.3.) makes the subject self-regulate behaviour to conform to the desired norm. The interpretation of these observations or events by the critical researcher is value-dependent. It is therefore essential for this research, and transparency, that the values underpinning the research are made explicit and are formed from a socially critical perspective as outlined by Raffo et al. (2010).

A similar epistemological perspective that could have been considered is the constructivist perspective, which is closely related to the interpretivist ontology. Like the critical theorists, this perspective acknowledges multiple realities having findings which are observer dependent (Yin, 2014). In this perspective the participants’ views are predominant (Creswell, 2014) and meaning is negotiated through interactions with others through historical, social, and cultural norms and is shaped and made sense of as participants engage with the world (Creswell, 2014).However, this epistemological perspective does not go far enough in presenting findings which advocate for political or social change, or confront social injustice or oppression, providing a voice for participants and, further, to advance the political, social, or institutional reform agenda to change the current reality. In this research the critical paradigm is identified as the findings will provide a voice for stakeholders – that is parents and community members in areas of deprivation – particularly those who wish to redress the democratic deficit with authentic engagement in decision making within their community school.

## 3.4. Operationalising Bourdieu’s Thinking Tools

The main function of Bourdieu’s thinking tools, argue Costa and Murphy (2016), is to give visibility to the hidden and nuanced structures and perceptions that lie below a first comb-through of a social world explanation. As outlined in section 3.3., and in order to get below the literal and examine power relations, it is insufficient, postulates Thomson (2014) to rely on what is said, or what happened, when trying to understand the power-based, interactions between individuals or social phenomena. Furthermore, utilising a Bourdieuisan framing, analysis can go beyond and beneath a literal interpretation of the data (Costa and Murphy, 2016). To go beyond this first layer of data, Thomson (2014) suggests, there needs to be an examination of the social space in which the interactions and events occurred, and as Costa and Murphy (2016) concur, an analysis of both the structure of the field and agency within is required. What follows in this chapter is an outline of how the research was conducted and data analysed. However, it is necessary to foreground this process by examining Bourdieu’s concept of social field in relation to this research, and subsequently, his thinking tools, as these constructs when applied to the data in a second layer analysis, allows the research to get beneath the literal meaning to consider the power dynamic and agency between actors in the social field or polity of City Academy’s governing body.

Bourdieu (1998b:40-41) postulates that a social field is:

A structured social space … It contains people who dominate and who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the filed. All the individuals … bring to the competition all the relative power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and as a result, their strategies.

Therefore, education can be conceptualised as a social field, or social arena (Lingard et al., 2005). The social field may be layered in that there are interacting sub-fields, Lingard et al. (2005) outline how the local governance or local education is a related sub-field of the national education field, which is again a sub-field of the global education policyscape. The social field is influenced by a meta-field, the field of power which permeates all other fields, yet it is not a social field in itself (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015). What is significant about the field of power, Hilgers and Mangez, (2015) propose, is its two poles, economic and cultural, that are in binary opposition, determine the extent of autonomy afforded to the social fields it influences, depending on which is dominant. There is little autonomy if the economic pole is dominant as opposed to the autonomy when the cultural pole is dominant. Lingard et al. (2005) suggest unequivocally in the field of education and all it related sub-fields the economic pole is dominant and therefore little autonomy is afforded to the social fields of education. The social field in this research is the bounded polity that is the governance of City Academy, which is a sub-field of the national education field, the actors engaged in this field are parents, parent and other governors, the Principal and the CAT policy makers.

Bourdieu’s accompanying thinking tools, or field mechanisms (Grenfell, 2014), of habitus, doxa, symbolic violence, capitals and hysteresis are deemed key in constructing a fully comprehensive understanding of the shades and nuances of autonomy and the human agency of the actors engaged in the field, in this case governance. Therefore, what follows is an exploration of each of the concepts which will be utilised to provide a deep analysis of data.

Within the social field there are unquestioned, fundamental shared beliefs, which do not need to be proclaimed explicitly, known as the doxa. The doxa, Deer (2014) explains, will present an apparently natural order of opinions and assumptions, a taken-for-grantedness of what goes without saying. Deer (2014:115) goes further to suggest that whilst there is the appearance of “going without saying”, doxa is inextricably linked to both the field and habitus and is highly constructed. The dominant actors within the field will invoke the doxa, Schubert, (2014) contests, that all actors within the field are subject to, by enacting a symbolic economy utilising both symbolic capital and symbolic violence, as the doxa is perceived to be essential in maintaining the status quo (Schubert, 2014).

Symbolic violence is defined by Bourdieu as the “violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu, 1992:167). Symbolic violence is predominantly language-based (Bourdieu, 1991), and as such in all forms of communication, such as governing body procedures, structures and formalities, language can invoke domination and power, subsequently reiterating the doxa of the social field (Green, 2013). A further source of symbolic violence emanates from the concept of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984); distinction is a concept whereby groups of individuals distinguish themselves as distinct from others by virtue of taste or culture. The degree to which distinction or taste diverges from necessity defines taste (McKenzie, 2016). The degree of distinction demonstrated by groups become sites of symbolic struggle, as those with taste or distinction have control over what knowledge, practices and currency is valued, legitimised, and rewarded (Crossley, 2014). The symbolic economy demands that taste remains distinct: if unification of taste occurred there would be no superiority for those groups or class distinction (McKenzie, 2016). Dominant language-registers and signifiers of middle-class cultural capital are appropriated as distinguishers of taste, and as such become the focus of symbolic violence to those who have speech patterns incongruous with the dominant language or linguistic signifier, or who have cultural capital which is misrecognised. Bourdieu’s study of migrant Algerians to Paris (Schubert, 2014; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and those Algerians living in colonialised Algeria (Bourdieu, 1990; 2003; Go, 2013; Schubert, 2014) exemplify some of his work on symbolic violence and habitus.

Habitus is a contested concept that can determine the player’s success in the field of play: the polity (Mills, 2008; Reay, 2015). Bourdieu (1990:53) contends habitus is “system(s) of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1990:53). Furthermore, Wacquant (2016:65) defines habitus as a disposition where the “internalisation of the externity and the externalisation of internity” is secured, or norms and capacities – which are engrained forms of emotional, cognitive and practical expression, resulting from past interactions in different social fields and interactions in the current field of practice. Significantly, habitus is a transformative concept rather than solely reproductive, in that its malleability and exposure to different social situations demanding novel responses will erode and change habitus (Wacquant, 2016). Those social situations rely on an exchange of capital – cultural, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Rawolle and Lingard, 2013). It is the extent and nature of the available capital which shapes the habitus. Governor capital (James et al., 2011) is a variation of Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of social capital.

Hysteresis is a significant concept and occurs when there is a misalignment between the field and the habitus – that is, where there is a structural lag – Bourdieu (1977) postulates, between opportunities presented and the disposition to grasp them. Hence, if a social actor engages in a field with a habitus vulnerable to misunderstanding the doxa, Hardy (2014) suggests, they are then subject to hysteresis. Furthermore, a social actor who is successful, in terms of positioning in one social field, such as their community group, may experience hysteresis if, when entering a novel field, they find they do not have the habitus to enact the same positioning in the new social field (Hardy, 2014). This was exemplified by Bourdieu in his observations of the experiences of Algerian migrants to Paris (Hardy, 2014).

Reay (2004; 2001; 2015; 2017) suggests habitus and capital are vulnerable to a neoliberal system of education which privileges and valorises the norms and practices of white, middle-classness. Reay (2001) contends working-class and ethnically diverse communities (Reay et al., 2007) are exposed as educationally deficient, not clever or cultured enough. Subsequently, they are determined as vulnerable to the domination of the white, middle-class doxa, that they are deemed incapable of realigning as a result of not having the ‘right’ habitus or the ‘right’ type or amount of capital (Wallace, 2016; McKenzie, 2016).

Bourdieu’s thinking tools have been explained above, in order to frame a layer of analysis that was applied to the data, to evaluate the power-based interactions of actors in the social field that in this study is the governance of City Academy.

## 3.5. Methodology

Bryman (2012) suggests the methodological question is influenced by five factors. The first three having already being discussed above: ontology, epistemology, and theory. The final two are values and practical considerations. In relation to values, Bryman (2012) states that research should be value-free as they reflect the personal beliefs of the researcher, this is, however, at odds with the critical epistemology as discussed previously (section 3.2), which suggests that critical research is value-mediated and subsequently and explicitly the researcher’s values should be pronounced from the start. This focuses the role of reflexivity to be discussed further in the chapter (section 3.11.). However, Bryman (2012) suggests that when considering the practicalities of research, whilst the need to appropriately match methodology and methods with the research question is fundamental, there may well be circumstances and constraints which deem one particular method or methodology not feasible even if ideal, and that the choice of methodology and methods is a coming together of both the feasible and the ideal.

The methodology of choice for a critical paradigm is the critical ethnography, as advocated by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) amongst other critical theorists (Lather, 2006; Carspecken, 1996; Anyon, 2009). There are other approaches such as action research (Punch, 2014) but the critical ethnography is the primary choice. Critical ethnography is the same as the ethnographic method in that it is the study of cultures and lives lived, through the participation, openly or not, of the everyday, observing what happens and listening to what is said, over an extended period (Punch, 2014, Bryman, 2012). How it is different is that whilst ethnography can be perceived as an observation or description of a way of life (Wolcott, 1999); Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) state that critical ethnography intends to confront the injustice of a particular group or society, not just to describe it. Parker-Jenkins (2016) goes further to suggest that critical researchers should go beyond an observation or description and advocate for the emancipation of marginalised groups, highlighting political issues and issues of power, hegemony, and dominance.

A facet of an ethnographic methodology is participant observation, which is believed by many researchers to be the prime data-collection method (Parker-Jenkins, 2016). Davidge’s (2017) ethnographic research in a Co-operative Trust school exploring stakeholder voice, applied a participant observation methodology, which was facilitated by her employment in the research site allowing her to absorb the site’s culture and practices. Bryman, (2012) however suggests that there is a typology of role within participant observation that deviates from the traditionally-held beliefs of the highly immersive, time-consuming, involved participant observations as the prime data source, as exemplified by Davidge (2017). At the opposite end of the continuum, Bryman (2012) suggests, is a role for group interaction but no participation in activity, with the main sources of data collection being document analysis and interview. In this research, this latter role of non-participant observation will be utilised based on the practice that Young (2016) outlined when observing the interaction between governors and stakeholders, and the subsequent practice of governance in full governing body and committee meetings.

When considering the methodological choice for this research, whilst acknowledging the perspective of the critical theorists, Bryman’s (2012) practical considerations were reflected on. Critical theorists propose a critical ethnographic approach; however, a protracted amount of time based at City Academy was not practicable unless employment was accessed in the CAT case study school, this, however, was not the case. Fundamentally, Bryman (2012) suggests that ethnography is in flux and is often conflated with case study, which chimes with Parker-Jenkins (2016) who calls for an ethno-case study approach. An ethno-case study approach has commonality with both case study and ethnography: in the overlap of research methods approaches; the in-depth focus and the degrees of participant observation, what is different however, is the time spent immersed in the field. Therefore, practically, and appropriately for the paradigm, given the argument above, this research has employed a critical ethno-case study approach.

Considering the above and the aims of the research, this case study would be considered an instrumental case; a bounded phenomenon, positioned to give insight into a theory or issue and is atypical, which gives insight into the typical (Punch, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests that this is an unusual case whereby it deviates from the theoretical or the everyday, and as such contributes to understanding the norm. Punch (2014) suggests that there are further forms of case study such as the intrinsic case, where the case provides a better understanding of this one case. In this research the instrumental case maintains its criticality by remaining focused upon the relationships and power dimensions within the case, between government policy, the organisation, and its stakeholders. It also maintains its ethnographic source in terms of the conflated methods advocated by Bryman (2012) for the ethno-case study approach.

Stake (2000) advocates that case study be read as flexible in nature and can be conducted utilising several research designs (Yin, 2014). Four basic designs are suggested by Yin (2014), one of which is the embedded, single-case design which is employed in this research. The single instrumental or unusual case – that is the CAT and City Academy – has multiple embedded units which have been investigated. The largest unit being the organisation, represented by the academy itself, and the smallest unit being individual parent governors. The methods utilised to investigate and triangulate data whilst conducting the case study could be quantitative or qualitative or both (Bryman, 2012). However, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) suggest that critical qualitative methods are key and further suggest that a critical hermeneutic approach is utilised allowing the researcher to reinterpret the hard data, not taking the data at face value, and getting to the abstract understanding of social forces. Therefore, as outlined from a critical perspective, qualitative methods were utilised ensuring that the quality, thick and deep data collected could be analysed to ascertain the inherent power dynamics between those individuals involved in governance. It is key that the critical qualitive methods deployed, secure the social realities of governance, by exploring cultural, historical, and political perspectives (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000; Carspecken, 1996).

## 3.6. Research Design

The research design needs to secure methodological congruence (Richards and Morse, 2013), this is where the component parts of the research are cohesive and that the design supports the outlined issue, purpose, research questions and in this paradigm the values underpinning the critical nature of the research. Appendix 2, (see table 1) outlines the research question, how the data were collected and the source of data collection, as a way of demonstrating the methodological congruence (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016) of this research. Yin (2014) states that an evaluative case, such as utilised in this research, should cover the complexity and context of the case through the triangulation of multiple forms of data collection and subsequent evidence to enable the confirmation and corroboration of findings. Methodological and sample triangulation and hence validity (Basit, 2010) will be further discussed in section 3.9. But in summary, methodological and sample triangulation occurs for each research question. The document analysis at both organisational and academy level, in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews with the Director of the CAT, the Principal, the Chair of Governors and parent governors, as well as observations of meetings, were designed to provide data for multiple perspectives on RQ1. All data collection methods provided data for RQ2. The primary source of data for RQ3 came from interviews with the parent governors and the parents’ forum, alongside observations of their meetings.

Data collection was initiated through a review of the CAT website and analysis of documents: the Articles of Association; Memorandum of Understanding; Scheme of Delegation, as well as the CAT three-year Strategic Plan and the Academy Improvement Plan (AIP) (appendix 3). Primary review of the documentation supported the interview schedule for the Director, Principal, and Chair of Governors. The first interview was conducted with the Principal of the case study site, City Academy. The first interview had been planned to be the Director of the CAT however, circumstances prevented this from happening. The interview with the Principal took place at City Academy. The second interview was with the Director of the CAT at the head office for the Co-op Group, Angel Square, Manchester. Initially there was no plan to interview the Chair of the governing body of City Academy, however, after the interview with the Principal it became apparent that it was important to do so, as the Chair was a key driver of the co-operative way from the Co-op Group Head Office. The Principal had made it clear that senior employees such as the Chair of Governors were placed in the LGB to support co-operative values enactment. The Chair became the third interviewee. Three parent governors were interviewed, and a focus group was conducted with parents from the parent forum. Non-participant observation of a full governing body meeting, the parents’ forum meeting and the community engagement committee were undertaken.

## 3.7. Methods for Data Collection

Interviews are a significant way of identifying how reality is constructed by participants or how participants define a situation (Punch, 2014; Frey and Fortana, 2000), such as their perception of decision-making; it is a way of identifying how individuals perceive phenomenon (Silverman, 2014). Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017:7) suggest identifying and exploring how reality is constructed by the participants, parent and community members is fundamental in a critical research study such as this, to establish “how people make meaning of their lives and how they represent their lived experiences”. In contrast, but with data still relevant for this research, Rogers, et al.’s (2012) conducted a significant data-driven exploration of socio-economic and ethnicity dependent parental engagement and participation in schools, including decision-making partnerships. In Rogers et al.’s (2012) research, they surveyed 200 principals. However, how the reality or lived experiences of participants were constructed as authentic partners was not examined and therefore, Swaminathan and Mulvihill (2017) argue, such a reductionist approach is dehumanising in large-scale quantitative research. As such, this not a methodological approach advocated in this research. James et al. (2012) also utilised a survey approach when researching the roles and experiences of 5000 Chairs of governing bodies. However, as well as producing intrinsic data, the subsequent data allowed for identification of sites for deeper sampling as case studies. The data collection in the subsequent case study employed semi-structured interviews with the Chairs of Governors, the Principal, further governing body members as well as observations and document analysis. This triangulation of methods secured an understanding of the lived-realities of Chairing governing bodies, and furthermore, this research case study is reflective of James et al.’s (2012) more detailed practice.

A semi-structured interview combines both pre-prepared research pertinent questions as well as scope for novel or additional questions as the moment provides. This approach allows for a less restricted, more tangential, flexible route through the interview, facilitating elaboration, when necessary (Silverman, 2014), and ultimately more detailed data (Basit, 2010). Swaminathan and Mulvihill, (2017) additionally suggest approaching interviews dialogically, or as guided conversation (Yin, 2014), securing a co-constructed sense-making of what has been articulated between the interviewer and interviewee, ultimately, Basit (2010) suggests producing richer more illuminating data. Subsequently, this approach to the semi-structured interview promotes novel supplementary questions, whilst side-lining the illusion of cross-examination. This is significant, as evident in interviews situations is power residing with the interviewer. This power imbalance manifest particularly when subordinated social actors, such as the parents of the forum who were second-language speakers, give accounts or responses regarding their experiences which are mediated through the discourse of the dominant cultural and society (Swaminathan and Mulvihill, 2017). Young (2016), when observing full governing body and committee meetings, in her study exploring governor practices, used non-participant observations. When considering which meeting to attend, Young (2016) judged its potential for dynamic, discussion-led interaction. Furthermore, Young (2016) had a two-layer approach to the analysis of data collected, firstly an open approach, and secondly a thematic approach focusing on the emergent themes from observations.

A focus group is a way of securing responses that are more explicit, by generating discussion; respondents can stimulate each other’s contribution (Punch, 2014, Frey and Fortana, 2000), in ways that may not otherwise be elicited (Bryman, 2012, Basit, 2010). The focus group is constructed with at least four participants (Bryman, 2012). The function of the interviewer is to facilitate discussion, moderate and ultimately to take note of the resultant contributions or co-constructions (Bryman, 2012; Punch 2014).

Documents provide a wealth of information (Punch, 2014), and as they illustrate the organisations perspective of its own reality, or how it wants its reality to be perceived, Atkinson and Coffey (2011) advocate documentary evidence being analysed for their intent and their ‘public’, to completely get to the crux of the document itself. The analysis of the documents should, Bryman (2012) suggests, elucidate the organisation’s ambitions, philosophy, culture, and conventions (Bryman, 2012).

### 3.7.1. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted whereby the parent governor interview schedule was constructed to elicit responses which would respond to each research question and was peer-reviewed in relation to the methodological congruence, but also for purposes of bias, as discussed later (section 3.12.) when discussing reflexivity and transparency. The pilot study interview schedule subsequently formed the basis of the one used in this research. In practice, the semi-structured interview carried out in the pilot study elicited a wealth of data, primarily because it was carried out utilising a dialogic approach, rather than the interrogations sometimes attributed to interviews. The venue or space for the interview was fundamental in securing trust and a dialogic approach during the interview. During the pilot study the venue for interview was determined by the participant to enable them to feel comfortable, however, the venue was too informal, ultimately lead to disruptions in collection and concentration, this was not an issue for this research. In the pilot study, there was limited choice in relation to which governing body meeting to attend, as in the period of time allocated for the pilot study only one meeting was scheduled. This meeting was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The non-participant observation process in the pilot study was interesting as it produced only one valuable interchange in an observation period of over 2 hours. However, that said, the one event sampled was significant enough to warrant the methods inclusion into this research. The one event being the non-verbal assertion of power and authority from the CEO of the Trust towards a parent governor.

### 3.7.2. Data Collection

Interviews took place with the Director of the CAT, the Principal, the Chair of Governors and two current parent governors and one recently who had recently left the governing body all from the case-study site. The interview schedules are found in appendix 4. The semi-structured interview schedule utilised was constructed to elicit both detailed and relevant information to enable evaluation of the research questions. However, whilst the interview schedule was semi-structured and piloted, the practicality of the interview was to respond to the answers of the participant, whilst holding to the frame of the semi-structured interview schedule, hence enabling a dialogic format, which put the participants at ease whilst still maintaining the integrity of the process. During the interviews for this research, the participants were given the opportunity to determine the venue or space for the interview, but within the parameters of a venue which would ensure no disturbances or distractions, as learnt from the pilot. The interview with the Principal took place at City Academy, the Director of the CAT took place at the Co-op Group Headquarters, which was also the venue for the Chair of Governors, however, this participant preferred to be interviewed via Skype as this was a common, comfortable mode of meeting for her, which was also time efficient. Both the parent governors had been met at City Academy and relationships initiated prior to interview, both of which were conducted via phone, as again both participants were comfortable using the phone for conversation. A further interview took place with a parent, now employee of the Academy, who had just stopped being a parent governor. As this person had only just stepped down, her perspective still had relevance and would bring a different experience than the parent governor who was also interviewed who had just joined the governing body. This final parent governor was interviewed on site, face-to-face. The participants’ choice of interview venue in this research was privileged reducing the imbalance of power between interviewer and participant, but due to the venue choices being the participants place of work or home, in the case of telephone interviews, the gained ownership whilst securing quality uninterrupted data (Creswell, 2014). Prior to the interview of the parent governors and the parent focus group, their age bracket other demographics were established, such as ethnicity, first-language or second-language speakers, employment, and level of education (see table 3.1). All the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder. Once recorded, the data were professionally transcribed electronically verbatim. In relation to storage, all paper documents were placed in a lockable drawer. Pseudonyms were used. The coded pseudonym list was kept electronically, along with all other electronical data and associated data analysis and stored on a hard drive, backed up on a further hard drive, both of which were password protected.

Table 3.3 Details of Parent Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pseudonym** | **Gender** | **Age bracket** | **Employment** | **Ethnicity** | **Degree level education** | **English as a 1st or 2nd language** |
| Louise (PG) | female | 40-49 | Professional | White (British) | Degree | 1st language |
| Martha (PG) | female | 40-49 | Professional | White (British) | Degree | 1st language |
| Hetty (PG) | female | 40-49 | Professional | White (British) | No degree | 1st language |
| Parent Member 1 | female | 40-49 | Not professional | Pakistani | No degree | 2nd language |
| Parent Member 2 | female | 40-49 | Not professional | Pakistani | No degree | 2nd language |
| Parent Member 3 | female | 30-39 | Not professional | Pakistani | Degree | 2nd language |
| Parent Member 4 | female | 30-39 | Not professional | Black - African | No degree | 2nd language |
| Parent Member 5 | female | 30-39 | Not professional | White (Polish) | No degree | 2nd language |

Non-participant observation took place during two governing body meetings, the full governing body meeting, and the community engagement meeting (examples of field notes and record schedule - appendix 5). In the case of this research, this activity allowed for the observation of participants as decision-makers within a governance structure and the relationship the parent governors have with their governing body peers in their naturalistic setting (Bryman, 2012). In this research, the first two governing body meetings calendared – a full governing body meeting and a community committee meeting – after the interviews of the Director of the CAT, the Principal and the Chair of Governors were observed and recorded as this enabled the triangulation of data from the interviews and behaviours in the meetings. This was then triangulated and explored further with the interviews of the parent governors. When considering an observation approach for this research, Lambert’s (2012) event sampling approach was favoured over Young’s (2016) two-tiered approach. Event sampling is an approach that requires the observation of the entire event, such as the full governing body meeting. However, the sampling occurs only of those pertinent interactions, or those non-verbal or behavioural interactions that the researcher deems significant. In this research, behavioural and non-verbal interactions were recorded that occurred between the parent governors and other members of the governing body, as they added meaning to the verbal articulations (appendix 5). The meetings in this research were recorded to cross-reference time stamped events with the dialogue event.

A focus group was facilitated to elicit the views of those parent community members who do not reside in the formal structure of decision-making but had a wish to make representation or be heard. This was a semi-structured focus group, that is, questions were identified in the schedule (appendix 4) with the focus on stakeholders’ understanding of their agency and function in a structure which incorporated democratic governance and a public space.

The final method of data collection to be discussed is a document analysis. All the documents reviewed, except one – the AIP – were publicly available on the CAT or City Academy website or both. These documents related to the CAT and City Academy’s policy and practice relating to governance, strategic direction – therefore intent –, parents and community, and co-operative values. One government website was interrogated to identify the first 50 top performing MATs. Once this list was identified, the website of each of these academies was reviewed to source their Articles of Association. Once the Articles of Association were found they were compared to the model Articles produced by DfE to ascertain if they had been amended in any way. The list of these documents is found in appendix 2.

All interviews, focus group and observations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. It was deemed important to ensure an accurate verbatim record was made as this allowed for accuracy and clarity of the data collected and its subsequent rehearing of the events (Silverman, 2000). Audio recordings were advantageous in a number of ways; it allowed for attentive engagement, a focus on those being interviewed, as well as allowing the behavioural or non-verbal interactions to be noted, whilst being secure that rehearing would enable anything missed to be picked up (Basit, 2010; Silverman, 2014). Rehearing is significant when triangulating multiple but concurrent sources of data, such as transcripts of discussion and observational data of behavioural interaction. Audio recording was preferred over audio-visual recording, due to the undue influence over interactions, or perceived intrusiveness between participants or between the interviewer and interviewee (Basit, 2010).

## 3.8. Research Sample

The research sample discussed here will examine sampling of participants for interviews and focus groups, as well as documentation and event sampling for non-participant observations. For the interviews, purposive sampling was employed in that those members of the Co-op organisation, the Principal of the case study site and parent governors had a unique and representative understanding of the research in question. The parent governors interviewed were white, professional middle-class women, two of whom were educated to degree standard, who were aged between 40 to 50 years old (table 3.1). Purposive sampling relies on the knowledge and understanding that the researcher has of the study, in order the researcher can select those participants to effectively represent the purpose of the study itself (Basit, 2010; Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2014), by the nature of selection not all members of a population will be part of the sample or represented (Basit, 2010). Snowball sampling was planned to be used when sampling for the focus group, this is where the Principal and parent governors had agreed to identify stakeholders from the parent forum meeting to form the sample for the focus group, as they were aware of which parents were regular attenders of the focus group and most likely to agree to participate. However, due to the number of parents present at the meeting, opportunity sampling took place: those parents who able to stay after the meeting and felt able to contribute to the discussion formed the focus group.

In relation to the semi-structured event sampling approach to non-participant observation, the events sampled were behavioural responses to verbal interactions with parent governors and their governor peers. Events both positive and negative were recorded including events such as finger pointing, open palm hand gestures, and interruptions – to include or to cut off – parental contributions. The semi-structured approach allowed for behavioural events which had not previously been identified to be included as an event.

Documents were purposively sampled, which were relevant to the CAT and City Academy’s policy and practice relating to parents and community members as decision-makers, and the role of community regeneration and to co-operative values, particularly democracy, realised as policy (appendix 3).

A final consideration needs to be of the site for the case study itself. Once the Director acting as gatekeeper, had agreed to participate as an organisation in this research, he suggested that City Academy was a good example of working with parents in relation to parental engagement. The Principal was contacted and agreed to also participate.

## 3.9. Data Analysis

Data here are the documents sampled, the verbatim transcripts of interviews, and of governing body meetings. Data were coded and processed using NVivo 12 software (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). The coding process involves chunking data with common themes, experiences, or linguistic terms (Creswell, 2014). This level of organisation allows the data to be indexed, manipulated, and accessed more easily (Punch, 2014). The sample documents were coded using thematic analysis that focused on the content and purpose of the document (Flick 2020) relating to the research questions. A priori codes were initially identified from both the research questions and from first readings of the data, both document and transcripts, for example ‘branding’, ’being Co-op’, ‘democracy’. The NVivo 12 codebook showing all the nodes used and their descriptors are presented in appendix 5. A word frequency cloud manipulation was applied to all transcripts in NVivo to identify the top 100 words, with synonyms, in order to act as an initial check on common information which could be further utilised as a node, an example of which is figure 3.1. The bigger the word the more frequently it was used.

Figure 3.1 A Word Frequency Cloud of the Principal's Transcript

Text

Description automatically generated

What was significant, after this process, was the a priori code of democracy, for example, was not prevalent in the word cloud analysis, but words such as leadership, to different degrees, did emerge as potential codes/nodes for analysis use. The subsequent emerging codes were identified as a result of more in-depth analysis, for example ‘decision-making’ or community resource’ (see appendix 6).

The data underwent a three-level coding process (Richards, 2005), firstly the data were subject to a descriptive low-level coding, including biographical information of those participating (table 3.1 is a section of this coding). The second level of coding was topic level, reducing the volume of data in readiness for the third stage. Analytical coding was the final level of coding the data underwent. Analytical coding concerned both the clarification of understanding and the conceptualising or theorising of the data. During this final phase of coding, the annotation facility was utilised, which enabled the recording of key interpretative points which emerged during the coding process. An example of which was during the coding of the Director’s transcript, the annotation read “what he is saying about alternative, is the permeation from the Trust from the Group, through senior staff members as governors in school is helping them shape their co-operative value message”, these annotations supported the writing of findings and the discussion. There needs to be an absolute clarity between the code and its definition in order to secure reliability (appendix 6). Additionally, when data fragmentation occurs during coding, Bryman (2012) postulates two subsequent disadvantages; a loss of narrative flow or a loss of contextual or social setting, and Dean (2017) suggests further that fragmentation can also lead to a loss of the voice of the whole (Dean, 2017). This was a feature in this research and the whole transcripts were revisited often when writing up findings to hear their voice again (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998).

The data underwent further analysis; Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:104-5) outlined a three-level analysis which ultimately leads to the elucidation of the interrelationship between individuals, their habitus and positioning in the social field, the field structure, and its positioning amongst other fields.  Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) firstly suggests examining the social field in relation to other fields such as government and establish power relations within the social field.  Secondly, there should be an analysis of the positioning of those within the social field, and examination of capital, as capital is the currency by which individuals gain or buy position in the social field.  Finally, Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) suggests analysing the individual, their habitus and capital, in terms of their relationship with others within the field as how their habitus and capital positions them in the field in relation to others will determine the extent to which they have agency.  Costa and Murphy (2016) suggest that this second layer of deeper analysis is flexible in terms of when it can be applied and is useful at different stages of the research.  This level of analysis is completed after the first layer of analysis has been undertaken as outlined above.

## 3.10. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the course of this research, British Education Research Association (BERA) - Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018), as well as Staffordshire University Research Ethical Review Policy (2019) have been complied with. Research ethics require the researcher to main a standard of conduct in relation to ethical application of all processes of research from preparation to communication to follow (Punch, 2014). BERA ethical guidelines (2018) propose key principles when undertaking ethical research. These principles are that participants should be free to participate voluntarily without coercion; that participants rights should be protected and respected; participants should be fully informed about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, and further what their participation will entail, as well as any benefits or risks to involvement. Further those participants should be assured of anonymity, and practices robust enough to safeguard confidentially, their personal, or any other, data. BERA (2018) continue that the research should be worthwhile and of value in relation to outcomes, which outweigh the negative effects or potential risks to participants, as well as being designed with integrity and with independence, and if not that the research be explicit regarding the impartiality.

In relation to this research and ethical considerations, Basit (2010) identified key ethical considerations which underpin the ethical guidelines complied with in the is research (BERA, 2018; Staffordshire University, 2019), the first consideration is access – to seek the gatekeeper’s permission: in this research the Director of the CAT gave permission for the research exploring the CAT academies and signposted the case study site. Further permission was sought successfully from the Principal of City Academy. Informed consent, or autonomy (Staffordshire University, 2019) is fundamental; all participants in this research were given participant information sheets (appendix 7) to read and they signed the participant consent form (appendix 8) in line with Staffordshire University policy, prior to participation. There were three anomalies, in that because of a lack of prior information, three participants had the participant information sheet and the participant consent form read to them, as one person was visually impaired, and two people could not read or write. All consented to participating verbally and those who read the information aloud signed on their behalf. Creswell (2014) suggests that consent may not always be written down. Therefore, for this research, all informed consent was secured, and all participants were made aware of their roles and rights in relation to participation in the research. Anonymity is a key role in securing trust and everyone in this research was assigned a pseudonym, as was the specific site of the research. A separate coded list identifies the individual with the pseudonym. This is linked to confidentiality, a further consideration. Participants were made aware that their personal information would not be passed on to third parties, and that the coded list with pseudonyms would not be made public. However, one caveat to this is that the Director of the CAT, although not named, will be difficult to keep anonymous or remain confidential on publication. This participant was cognizant of this at the time of participation. A final consideration from Basit (2010) was deception, which was justifiable if the participant was unlikely to participate if the true nature of the research was revealed. In this research there is no deception, however, the participants requested a debrief of findings after publication.

## 3.11. Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2014) suggests that if trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility have been addressed then validity is secured in qualitative research and further proposes an 8-point guide that should be secure validity. These eight points relate to: triangulation; member checking – do the participants agree accuracy? using thick descriptions; clarifying researcher bias – ensuring reflexivity is explicit; ensuring that all data is presented regardless of negative or discrepant contribution; spending extended periods in the field gaining trust and credibility; peer debriefing; and finally external auditing.

A key facet in validity in any qualitative research is triangulation (Basit, 2010) and can overcome concerns relating to concurrent validity, construct validity and reliability (Yin, 2014; Basit, 2010). Construct validity is securing that the correct data collection methods are being utilised to secure data which will support the resolution of the research questions (Yin, 2014). Relatedly, concurrent validity is ensuring that there is convergence of the resultant data from differing data sources (Basit, 2010). Finally, reliability is the repeatability of the data collection methods for the same results to be elicited if the same process was repeated (Punch, 2014). Triangulation is elicited as methodological and sampling (Basit, 2010). The data that has been collected for this research has been triangulated both methodologically and via sampling, in that two methods, evidence data for individual research question (appendix 2). This exemplified by the methods employed for research question two, which were semi-structured interviews, observation, and analysis of documentation. When evaluating the triangulation of sampling for example – validity, the interview data from the Director of the CAT were triangulated against the interview findings of the Principal of the Academy and with the parent governors.

Internal validly is concerned with securing a match between the research methods and data collection and resolution of research questions (Basit, 2010) or is there a good match between the observations and analysis of collected data and the analysis or findings attributed to them (Bryman, 2012). In this research, the research questions have been resolved in that findings support the analysis of the data, securing internal validity. This was further supported in that internal validity was secured during the pilot study which utilised similar data collection methods.

For detail on the discussion of external validity or generalisability (Basit, 2010) see section 3.11.

The reliability of the study is focused with how repeatable the research is and if we would obtain the same outcome if we replicated the process (Punch, 2014). Reliability and concurrent validity converge in aspects of their definition see above.

## 3.12. Reflexivity

Haynes (2012) advocates that reflexive research and practice, should be transparent in terms of the values and aims underpinning the research and the researcher, and whilst value-free is advocated by some (Bryman, 2012), those undertaking critical research need to communicate the values through which the data will be filtered (Haynes, 2012). The critical researcher, therefore, is explicit in presenting their individual and political beliefs, as well as their values pertaining to the research they undertake (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). Reflexivity demands that researchers analyse positionality in relation to the research (Dean, 2017) and secure a critical self-analysis during the research (Basit, 2010). However, Haynes (2012) goes further to suggest that being reflexive secures the researcher’s understanding that there is a mutual, continual, and iterative relationship between the influence that the researcher has on the research and the research has on the researcher. The influence that the researcher exerts on the research is based upon the fundamental assumptions the researchers have of the site of study, but also in relation to the researcher’s values and political views, (see section 3.2.), but also their use of and interpretation of language. This is especially significant from a subjectivist perspective, Haynes (2012) suggests, where truth is not out there ready to be objectively found, but the “truth” or findings are mediated through the history of the researcher. Reflexivity will secure an understanding of how these preconceptions may have influenced the topic of study to the methods deployed: choice of questions to ask and, to a certain degree, which voice is prioritised, including the researcher’s, over another in the reporting of findings. Haynes (2012) suggests reflexivity occurs on multiple levels; significant in this research are considerations of theoretical reflexivity, methodological reflexivity as well as cultural, social, and political reflexivity and subjective reflexivity.

My professional background is one which has extensively and deliberatively been in areas of high deprivation, and professionally I have spent longer in senior leadership roles in schools than not. This professional experience has always involved working with parents in many forms but particularly as governors, and as part of a Co-operative Trust school, working with parents as stakeholders in larger groups and in parent fora. I have also worked in governing bodies as a governor, with parents as fellow governors. I also have experience of working for two MATs that have both disbanded any semblance of an LGB or advisory board for their academies and actively sought to remove parent or community voice from decision-making processes, formal or informal. As such I am positioned also as a critical researcher advocating for stakeholders in areas of high deprivation, to be entrusted and legitimised as partnered, empowered, and authorised decision-makers in their education organisations, to be part of a wide-ranging democratic system and to overturn an increasing democratic deficit in schools. Therefore, it is crucial that as a researcher my bias is either removed from the data and its collection (Basit, 2010) or it is acknowledged if evident. Subsequently, any participants in this research will be illuminated with both the purpose and critical character of the research, as well as its foundational values. There does need to be concurrent alertness to participants’ responses which mimic, as a result, the responses they think the researcher would wish to hear.

A reflexive journal was kept throughout the study, which is one of several strategies outlined to maintain reflexive awareness (Haynes, 2012; Dean, 2017). The journal was significant in establishing reflexive thought during the research. For example, from the journal in the period of time between interviewing the leadership of the CAT and the site of the case study, further research into democracy – the democratic deficit and deliberative democratic systems – revised the thinking and the theoretical perspectives involved in this research (theoretical reflexivity), which in turn resulted in the subtle amendment of questions and thinking during the interviews with parent governors, which generated a different perspective than previously was considered (methodological reflexivity).

A second example relating to cultural, social, and political reflexivity comes from the personal beliefs and values outlined above, in that care needs to be taken when interpreting the data in relation to how the researcher perceives the political discourse around parental engagement in decision-making and how the researcher subsequently realigns the discourse in the findings as a result of analysis of data through my own lens, to promote the value of parental engagement through my own beliefs. A final, related example of my reflexivity from the journal is one of subjective reflexivity; this is when the researcher may be both the subject and/or the object of the research. Whist this is not explicitly true, positioned as a senior member of staff in a school in challenging circumstances, the tension between the observation as the outside researcher looking in at interactions with parents and organisational decisions made, without parent consultation, and having an academic view on this, but also recognising myself as a professional, who in the same circumstances understands the pressures from a neoliberal system to secure standards above engagement is palpable. Other strategies to maintain reflexive awareness are to: write down theoretical assumptions and presuppositions about the focus of research; consider how research questions are revised and why; keep a reflexive journal or diary; keep field-work notes – thoughts and feelings; review audio recordings not only for the data collection but also for the researcher’s performance during the interview; discuss and evaluate responses with peers and participants (Haynes, 2012; Dean, 2017). Dean (2017) further suggests a substantial autobiographical analysis of the researchers own class and political positioning. All these strategies have been carried out during the course of this research.

## 3.13. Limitations

By not undertaking an ethnographic study, as such, there are issues to overcome such as trust and opportunity. The time spent immersed in the field of an ethnography is significant for two reasons: firstly, to capture significant events, but secondly to gain the trust of the individuals enabling them to share their perception of reality. In the case of this research, time was spent prior to interview developing a rapport which overall negated this as a potential impact. However, there was the potential for this with parents from the parent forum, but other than spending a significant amount of time in the community gaining their trust; it was practical and feasible to spend time with them prior to the focus group, which supported their openness. In terms of opportunity, as the observations were of specific planned activities, then full advantage of those events were taken for observation, so nothing was lost.

A criticism levelled at case study concerns generalisability, or external validity; if the case is a bounded phenomenon, questions are raised as to how the findings can be generalised or utilised in different contexts (Punch 2014; Bryman 2012; Stake, 2000). In the instrumental case, when the data leads to the conclusion that the case is different or is atypical in relation to the norm, which is the focus of the CAT model, then an alternative understanding is elucidated by comparison with the atypical (Punch, 2014). The case study, therefore, will secure conceptual, or analytical generalisability (Yin, 2014), in other words generating additional approaches or proposals because of analysis (Yin, 2014); either develops future work or becomes the output of the research (Punch 2014; Bryman, 2012).

The identification of events to be sampled could be considered contentious, in that the non-event could be perceived as an event. When sampling events that occurred during the governing body meetings and using only those events that relate to parent governors, if the parent governors in themselves do not contribute or are not invited to contribute or are ignored, these are significant behavioural events to be recorded, despite being categorised as a non-event. The perception around non-events, and their importance, is related to the power dynamic between members of the governing body and parent governors in this instance, for example is there a reason relating to dominance and subordination why those participants did not contribute, this is underpinned with James et al.’s (2011) concepts of governance capital and governance agency. In this research, semi-structured event-sampling took place of the meeting as this provides both a framework for observation but also gives flexibility as to what else is noted (Punch, 2014; Creswell, 2014). The advantage of semi-structured approach over more constricted, structured approaches or complete freedom is that events and non-events were cued for observation (Bryman, 2012) but gave the flexibility to determine what else might be significant as it came up. The observational data recorded in line with the pilot study presented few, if any, meaningful events to be analysed.

The final limitation to be discussed is the support required for the parent forum. Whilst the role of the interviewer in the focus group is one of facilitator (Bryman, 2012), in this case the confidence levels of some of the parents were limited so their contributions were few. As facilitator, there was need of the role of distributor of voice, in that a criticism of focus groups is the potential for dominance of one or two participants, in this case that was apparent, so as facilitator, there was a need to include or encourage all participants to contribute to a greater or lesser degree of success.

## 3.14. Summary

The research undertaken was framed with a critical paradigm which privileges those without power over those with. The ontology is one of historical realism, partnered with a subjectivist epistemology. The data collection within the case study focused on semi- structured interviews and documentary review. The leadership of City Academy, the Principal, the Chair of Governors, and the Director of the CAT were interviewed along with three parent governors. A focus group was facilitated with five parents from City Academy’s parent forum. All data were coded, utilising NVivo 12 software. Ethical consideration was thorough, and the limitations reflect the generalisability of case study, the development of trust and rapport as well as the confidence of those participating in the focus group. The data, in the following chapter, will be presented as findings.

# Chapter 4 – Findings

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings which are organised to address each of the research questions. Research question 1 will be considered in section 4.2. and will take in to account the legal requirements associated with the branding of the CAT, and how that is delivered though governance and stakeholders; how the governance model is organised, structured, and operationalised in relation to stakeholders and localism. The concept of alternative is considered through the delivery of the values and principles associated with the CAT and the Co-op Group, and whether or not the objective, or “lived reality”, of the branding message is achieved. The model of governance and how this deviates from expected models of governance, from the perspectives of MATs, and views of alternative is also considered. Section 5.3. reviews the findings in relation to research question 2, in terms of how democracy, a key value of the Co-op Group and the CAT, as co-operative organisations, is realised in relation to parents as stakeholders. The findings in section 4.3. are considered against evaluation frames of deliberative democratic governance; the concept of the Academy and the CAT as bounded polity, the extent to which there are deliberative democratic integrative norms, or not, and the extent to which parents feel they have democratic agency. As well as illustrating the balance of power *over* versus power *with*, in the polity. Research question 3 will be discussed in section 4.4. and 4.3. This question considers the degree to which the CAT model develops parental engagement through partnership in decision-making. This section considers evaluating the extent to which the CAT engages, or involves parents, as stakeholders, in decision-making as authentic partners.

## 4.2. CAT Model of Governance

The first research question (section 1.8. and appendix 2) explores the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders, and whether and to what extent the model could be considered an alternative in neoliberal contexts of education. The findings in this section of the chapter respond to the purpose of the organisation and its legally binding contracts to secure the enactment of co-operative values. This is important to foreground, as this links to the subsequent model of governance that the CAT determines for its academies. Furthermore, this frames the organisational, structural, and operational activities of the governing body, and any deviation from normalised structures (Simkins et al., 2019) or organisation of MAT governance, and a view of whether alternative can be arrived at.

### 4.2.1. Purpose Branding – being Co-op.

The history and origins of the Co-op Group, (section1.3), the original Rochdale pioneers, and the establishment of co-operative shops with reading rooms above them to support education, as well as financial fairness, is clearly a source of pride for those interviewed at an establishment level. The Director of the CAT, the Chair of Governors, and the Principal of the Academy all articulated the history of co-operativism as the fundamental basis and longstanding link between co-operative values and principles, and education. As the Director of the CAT articulated, when linking the first organisation – what has become the Co-op Group – with education:

in that house [location of first Co-op shop] upstairs there were some spare rooms, and so what happened some of the men could read, so when the erm shoppers came in they were given the option of buying food and also being taught how to read so following that, every other store, Co-op store that opened had a reading room or an education room above it, so going right back to the origins of you know why is the Co-op involved in education and why has it had this relationship over the years, is because of all of that you know and education is one of those principles of the co-operative movement.

This house is now the home of the Rochdale Pioneers Museum, relating the history of the origins of the Co-operative movement, and a location that Stan, the Principal of City Academy, was sent within the first two weeks of his appointment to the first CAT academy, as a way of reinforcing the weight of history, values, and principles behind the organisation. And now the headquarters of the Co-op Group is a flagship, modern, state-of-the-art building: Angel Square, in Manchester. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the building itself is of significance, is symbolic and omnipresence, embodying all that is now modern Co-op group and historical co-operative values. The data suggest this imposing, cutting-edge design as well as the power that is held within it, and all this exudes, inspires awe and pride from interviewees and in the way they talk of their meetings or student council sessions being held at “Angel Square”. All aspects of Co-op Group business are based in Angel Square, from insurance to retail and the CAT. The co-operative values, which have its origins in that first house, “are front and centre in Angel Square” (Stan, Principal), but what has evolved, throughout the Co-op Group is “Ways of Being”, which is an operationalised interpretation of the co-operative values and, apparently, more easily remembered. These Ways of Being are used throughout the Co-op Group, from rewards for employees to leadership toolkits, as well as in the practice of every academy within the Trust. Julie, Chair of Governors, and senior Co-op Group employee, explained that:

Within the school environment, and within Co-op Group, we have brought Co-op values and couched them, framed them within four Ways of Being Co-op ...at a behaviour level one is show you care. Two, do what matters most. Three, be myself always and four is succeed together, now when I look at those as Ways of Being, if you could live and abide by those and experience them in the context of how I am treated in the classroom, in the context of how the learning is, … makes it very different.

These Ways of Being, operationalising the Co-op values, are so “front and centre”, as Stan (Principal) purports, in that they are visually presented on the walls of all the academies, there are CAT awards for these behaviours, for pupils and staff, as well as rewards and nominations throughout the Co-op Group for employees, and even on the different coloured lift doors of the Angel Square flagship building. Therefore, these Ways of Being are an operational spine that runs through all of the Co-op Group, and CAT, not just at pupil level – there is an expectation that in “Co-op” this is how you behave. Ultimately, this unifies the arms of the Co-op Group under one umbrella; expectations of the CAT are no different than retail or insurance staff. The internal marketisation of the Ways of Being, match and unify the external association of values with the Co-op brand image throughout the Co-op business and the CAT. The Director of the CAT considers that this reality of Co-op values, longevity, and commitment to doing the right thing, makes parents feel safe with Co-op, ideally because if they have this view of the Co-op Group then this is what also underpins the values and behaviours evident in Co-op schools.

The ICA is the guardian of the set of co-operative values and principles fundamental to the functioning of the Co-op Group and the CAT. The values outlined are enshrined and legally binding in the Articles of Association and funding agreement between the CAT and the DfE. This contract deviates from the model Articles of Association provided by the DfE, in that it specifically outlines that all CAT academies will adhere to:

a. the Co-operative Values as set out in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity of the International Co-operative Alliance (being at the date of the adoption of these Articles self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others),

b. the Co-operative Principles as set out in the Statement on the Co-operative Identity of the International Co-operative Alliance, supporting the Academy in:

(i) being a school, which serves the community and sets out to be owned, valued and sustained by the community it serves,

(ii) working directly and with other mutual organisations to combat social exclusion and deprivation and to build a sustainable and vibrant community and local economy,

(iii) providing learners with a global perspective rooted in the values set out in this Article, helping them to become responsible and articulate citizens in a global economy affected by rapid environmental and economic change,” (CAT (2021:4) Articles of Association).

This is significant, in that the legal contracts of the Articles of Association and funding agreement clearly outline the principles by which the CAT will operate and, subsequently, how the CAT academies must operate, therefore linking values and principles to funding rather than a specific policy or blueprint for each academy. After reviewing the Articles of Association of the first fifty MATs from the DfE list of MATs (DfE, 2020b) (section 3.5.3.), only those with religious character (five of them) had an additional, but identical, statement incorporated into the articles, binding those schools or academies to adhere to their religious character. There was one exception. This was a MAT, also in the north of England, which was also based on co-operative values, but not associated with the CAT. Therefore, it can be argued that it is unusual, but not exceptional, to include prescriptive values and expectations in the Articles of Association (if not of religious character) as this becomes legally binding, but the uniqueness comes in the form of the origins of the ethical values and principles in these Articles of Association. The Director of the CAT in his interview said that:

we’re doing what matters most, so those values and principles are non-negotiable … the rationale for it is, that actually it is, about regenerating local communities.

What is clear, from analysing the documentation and interviews, is that co-operative values and regeneration of the community, particularly communities in areas of deprivation, are as important as school improvement. The 2019-2022 three-year strategic plan for the CAT (2018) outlines, “Working Together to Make Our Academies Better and Communities Stronger” (p3) as a focus for intent, along with, “We will regularly review … at a local level. This is where we want the regeneration of our communities to come from” (p10) and “We Exist to Add Social Value” (p4). These strap lines and statements are foci for strategic implementation and operational enactment. The CAT sees academy improvement working hand-in-hand with community regeneration. The Co-op Group as the sponsors of the CAT, arguably, require both foci to align with their core values and principles. This is supported by the Director of the Trust, who stated:

… for us if it was just about school improvement, getting the school to good, which is what the DNA of many trusts is, then actually the Co-op wouldn’t be in it.

The Director went on to say that, in his opinion, most trusts do not care about, or consider, the local community. The Director particularly exemplified the Harris Federation. The Harris Federation is one of the largest, highest performing MATs, primarily London-based, and the Director is suggesting that what matters most to Harris is not the children from the community in which the academy located, it is totally focused on the drive for results, academy improvement and Ofsted judgement. Children, the Director is suggesting, do not reside in the community in which the academy is located and that children travel to better performing schools in London, such as the Harris Federation academies, rather than attend the local academy. It is more difficult to secure the best outcomes for students in areas of disadvantage, compared to cohorts of children who do not come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Director argues that the CAT is constructing an academy of the community, which local children attend, and as such the CAT has a responsibility to contribute to the regeneration of the community as well as to secure better outcomes for students. According to the GOV.UK compare schools’ site (DfE, 2020b), the CAT has one of the highest percentages of disadvantaged students of all MATs with 68% of all primary students being considered disadvantaged and 55% of all secondary aged students being considered disadvantaged. Yet, primary performance is above average and secondary performance is ranked second in relation to percentage of students. Whereas Harris federation has 11% of its primary students considered as disadvantaged and 40% of its secondary cohort (DfE, 2020b). This drive to regenerate communities is outlined in the strategic plan for the CAT (CAT, 2021) with the ambition to secure 40 academies in total in areas of deprivation by 2022. The drive for more CAT academies in areas of deprivation, and how to support their regeneration, is identified as threefold by Stan, Principal of City Academy: firstly, Model – because the CAT have a successful model which works in areas of deprivation; secondly, Education – because by providing high quality education, with a focus on co-operative values and principles, has the long-term effect of sending back out in to the community co-operators who hold the co-operative values and principles at their heart to support community regeneration from within; and thirdly, Community Support – the immediate impact of what the Academy offers to the community regardless of whether or not those community members have young people at the school. The Director of the CAT also suggests that in areas of deprivation there is a need to support regeneration, as these areas do not have the power of middle class educated individuals who make their presence and voices felt, to secure the change and successes they want for their children.

### 4.2.2. Organisational/Structural – the CAT Model

This section of findings considers how the CAT governance is organised and structured to ensure that the contractual and values-led obligations, represented in the brand, are operationalised and secured locally.

Firstly, it is important to note that the CAT governance model is presented as an LGB and that each academy within the CAT structure retains its own LGB. This is unusual, as MATs are expected to retract governance centrally and reduce the local. Taken from the CAT *Governance Documents*, source section 4.1 (CAT, 2021b:8), the constitution of each LGB is composed of:

at least 2 and up to 5 members appointed by the Co-operative Group. These individuals will be agreed by the Co-operative Group and they may include members of staff from the Co-operative Group, elected members, ex-employees or any person the Co-operative Group deems suitable to appoint, in its absolute discretion; two staff members, (one teaching and one non-teaching staff member); two parent members elected or appointed …; the Headteacher (or Executive Headteacher if applicable) of the Academy (the “Principal”); up to two members from each Partner if the Academy has formal partners; and up to one Local Authority representative member.

City Academy has, in line with the CAT Governance constitution, 3 sponsored governors, including the chair of governors, all of whom are senior figures in the Co-op Group. There are 2 parent governors, 2 staff governors, 2 community governors, one of whom is an LA councillor, and one partnership governor. The data presented within this section is sourced from the Chair of Governors, the Principal and the two parent governors, as well as the Director of the CAT. The constitution of the LGB is traditional and deliberatively so, as the Director of the CAT says of the constitution of the LGB:

very similar to Local Authority set up, … we’re not exclusive, … we do try to keep as much power with ‘Stan’ [Principal of City Academy] as possible.

And furthermore, when asked if the CAT acted in the role of the traditional Local Authority with an LGB, the Director went on to say:

yes, that’s exactly it…what we have done in this system is trying to maintain local presence and a local understanding, councillors can join but actually do you know what, we’re going to make sure there is (sic) some people in there who have got a sense of what a good school looks like.

There is a caveat with this traditional or maintained school model of governance that the Director of the CAT is advocating. This is evident in the inclusion of the statement “what a good school looks like”. The Director shared his experience of inspecting LAs and in particular inspecting education committees who are democratically elected but who have no knowledge, in his opinion, of what good education looks like in this context of education (neoliberal, Ofsted-judged education):

Councillors…there is…the lead for education there, who doesn’t know a bloody thing about education. Generally, they don’t, and they are expected then to challenge their most senior education officer on what is a good education. I just… so what I am trying to say is that we mustn’t see it… in old order stuff we must look forward to… we must try and find, I am not saying we have got the answer, but we have got to try and find some other solutions, this is a different model.

The Director of the CAT, as expressed in the data, is passionate about the maintenance of the LGB, and with councillor representation, but in a different model whereby what is known or judged to be good, is quality assured by those who have credibility in that area. The Director is looking to facilitate a hybrid approach with localisation privileged, rather than a centralised approach. The Director is also advocating the relinquishing of what he regards as the “old order”; the one person one vote approach to democracy, and also the “old” LA model of democratically elected representatives of the community having the responsibility to challenge the quality of education with limited knowledge or experience to do so.

Interestingly, one of the purposes the CAT Director suggested for the maintenance of an LGB was about regeneration of communities, which is a primary objective of the CAT and Co-op Group:

It is about regenerating those communities, so if there is a local governor who wants to… come on the governing body he can, or she can.

This inclusivity and localisation in the retention of an LGB, localises, widens, and deepens responsibility for the school and its community, and the regeneration of both. By being inclusive, broadening the governance to traditional constituent members, such as partners and LA councillors, it arguably secures greater power and influence to draw upon to secure resources from a greater pool, as well as including individuals who have been democratically elected from within the local community. Therefore, what is represented is a hierarchical LGB, which mirrors in inception and in constitution, a maintained school governing body and LA relationship. Furthermore, this secures power being held with the Principal and the LGB whose focus, it can be suggested, is an application of “expertise” from a variety of arenas, who know what “good” looks like in their own arena and draw upon that expertise to ensure that the school and the community are well developed. This is the difference in the model. For example, the Director of the CAT has expertise in quality of education, the Chair of Governors has expertise in co-operative implementation, the co-opted governors and local councillors have expertise in community development.

Davidge, Facer and Schostak (2015:62) state that “a school that is co-operative in name but adopts all of the hierarchical forms of organisations and practice of mainstream schooling [such as governance] remains incompatible with the vision of the original pioneers”. When asked about this quote, the Director of the CAT responded strongly and felt that both could be achieved, but that accountability was a key factor, someone had to be responsible, and that responsibility rested with the local leadership. He stated:

we have a very hierarchical structure … with accountability at various levels so I know that if … the Trust went down the pan, I would lose my job, and I know that if actually Stan’s [Principal] performance of the Academy over time didn’t do well, I think he would lose his job as well, now if in a hierarchical way that actually places the emphasis on leadership and responsibility for leadership resting with the most senior member locally, erm I don’t really have a problem with that. There is this sort of like view going back, we all need to have a voice, so when you give everybody the voice and then they all come together and it all goes… and we have got loads of culture schools like that, who the hell is…accountable.

In essence, the Director of the CAT suggests the structures of CAT governance are highly hierarchical and hold individuals in leadership positions highly accountable for performance, arguably in line with NPM. He goes on to suggest that both are achievable; co-operative values of the early pioneers are achievable within the current hierarchical and highly accountable structures of governance and education that are currently enacted within the CAT. The CAT Director also felt that other co-operative models of governance, such as the Co-operative Federation model (that is the Co-operative Trust model), led to “chaos or were too convoluted”: part of “the old order”.

### 4.2.3. Operational – how the CAT Model of Governance Operationalises Roles and Practices to Secure Goals.

In section 4.2.3. the findings outlined relate to how roles are operationalised in the CAT governance model to secure the expectations of the goals of the Co-op Group and CAT outlined in the Articles of Association.

Stan (Principal) recognises the significance of the sponsor’s governors in the LGB, and views their presence as the CAT and Co-op Group’s commitment to governance at a local level, as he explains:

there’s a real commitment to governance …, which is different than I’ve felt when I was in other schools, em both in terms of the Co-op as a sponsor providing high-quality governors em to provide challenge and scrutiny and all those kind of things, em to give us a different way of looking at things … you get a business way of looking at things, tempered with a quite a strong values-informed way of looking at things from some of those really skilled governors, and we’ve got some quite … senior, skilled, professional people from the Co-op Group on our board of governors, as well that, they feel like a much more professional, challenging body of people than any of the governors that I’ve worked with in previous schools.

As well as Stan outlining his perception of the CAT and Co-op Group’s commitment to governance, he also feels they add a professional value to the governing body. There is power involved in the presence of high-level, senior Co-op Group employees being co-opted and installed in the LGB by the Co-op Group: that is placed power, which Stan (Principal) views positively as it provides support and a feedback loop:

actually them installing some quite powerful governors … there’ll often be a Trust representative at the meetings [too], so there is some oversight … and expectation there by installing …influential, articulate, professional governors on the governing body …, the Chairs of Governors are Co-op, senior Co-op figures. …we’re hardwired back … into the group the tradition, the values, the business, all of that which just keeps us rooted.

Therefore, Stan views this relationship positively, underlining his view of the value of professional individuals contributing to the Academy, but most importantly maintaining a link back to, and with the Trust, the sponsor, and the values of the Co-op Group. This view of placed power, to have influence and oversight over how the Academy is run, via the LGB, is supported by the Director of the Trust. The Director of the Trust suggests there is no expectation for the LGB to have a blueprint for producing and running a CAT academy, other than the expectation to run the LGB meeting and come to decisions based on co-operative values (Scheme of Delegation, CAT, 2021b) and said in interview:

the Co-op have said there is power, this underlying control that they have is trying to give that to the schools to interpret that with their children. So, there is no model that we have that says you have got to do it in a certain way but there has to be a mechanism, however it is determined, whereby those parents and those staff and the kids feel as though they have got some engagement and can influence.

The Director is articulating a requirement for engagement for parents to influence how the Academy is run. The Academy philosophy and mechanism for this, in relation to a definition of engagement, will be discussed in section 4.3. The Chair of Governors recognises that she, as a senior member of the Co-op Group, is placed on the LGB for two reasons, which she believes makes it a different entity from other trusts: firstly, contributing to the difference Co-op is making in society, whilst fundamentally believing in Co-op values; and secondly, to “ensure that the Co-op values are attended to and lived by, in a really conscious fashion” (Julie, Chair of Governors). This is underlined by the Director of the CAT who states that, whilst no overt power is exercised in relation to structure or function, the power of the Co-op Group is very present. He explained power is initiated through control:

the control here is [that] a senior member of staff, Chair of Governors, Co-op on each governing body, that relationship between that and [compared to] the local vicar or the local shop keeper who is your Chair of Governors is very different.

And here the Director of the CAT was referring to power and control in adherence to, and compliance with, the values and expectations of the Co-op Group and CAT. In essence, those senior members of the Co-op Group are installed in the LGB to provide a local gatekeeping role: to be the guardians of the CAT/Co-op Group values and expectations, and their implementation locally. The sponsor’s governors have power and influence, and are there to ensure that, whilst there is no national blueprint for a CAT academy, a local one is drawn up, or implemented for each individual academy and done so in line with Co-op values and expectations, and the Chair of Governors feels this very strongly, as outlined in her reasons for being on the governing body.

The three parent governors (Martha, Louise and Hetty) are all white, professional women between the ages of 40-50 (section 3.6.). They, as parent governors, had quite a clear understanding of what they felt their role was in the LGB, and what they intended to achieve by stepping up to volunteer. There was a strong commitment from all three interviewed that they wanted to make a difference to the Academy and the community, be a part of something bigger, that is, more than the parent forum, involved in decision-making and to ensure that their children were not disadvantaged; Martha outlines her motivation for joining the LGB, which is representative of the three parent governors interviewed:

being involved with … development and what is going on in the school and … being able to offer an opinion or ask questions or challenge the … leader of the school, … why… is that happening or … why aren’t you doing this and it’s just… because you want the best for your child, and it is … being involved in that decision-making … [I] want to be part of that.

There is a plurality of reasons for joining the governing body. None of the parents directly stated that their motivation was to be a voice for parents, but when asked about that, they all felt that their contribution was to be a representative for parent voice. However, it was not a declared priority or a perceived responsibility for them until they were prompted; at this point Martha (parent governor) said, “if it affects my son then it will… it could be affecting others you know”. Not only do they see that they are offering their experience as parents, to contribute to the decision-making processes in the school and to be a de facto representative voice for other parents, but they are also very aware that they come with professional skills and experiences. All three parent governors have professional expertise and skills, being involved in HR, finance, or education respectively – one of whom was also employed by a Co-op Bank. When asked, the Principal said that he had not deliberately recruited parent governors with specific skills. However, the parent governors feel they have been encouraged to put themselves forward for the role of parent governor, albeit not directly, because of their skillset and behaviours demonstrated at the parent forum and subsequent governing body or committee meetings. They also valued for their skills, rather than their “stake”. Behaviours which they suggest are – being articulate, able to question and ask for feedback, being able to challenge, arguably, leadership behaviours. Louise is very proud, it appears, that she is recognised for her skillset and feels valued as a result:

I think that I have been recognised for my experience and skills erm Julie [Chair of Governors] … wanted to do a development day and she knew the experience that I had had … and she asked me if I would do a developmental slot on the erm development day erm I have also been asked to sit on a number of exclusion panels erm and a couple of weeks ago the Principal asked me to erm support erm an interview panel, so I do think that they are aware of my skills and my experience and that they are using them to the best of their ability yes.

Louise welcomes the opportunity to use her professional experience to contribute to the development and practices of the Academy. Hetty suggested that her experience of being sought out by the Principal was due to her feedback and challenge to the school during parent forum meetings:

like I say I was quite proactive in feedback and challenge to the school and he said he just pointed out, ‘look this role is available’, I knew about it via the normal channels, but we were having dialogue over something else and he just said like just to point… or just to make you aware this role is available and sort of like gave me a bit of confidence, so to speak, like you know, ‘would you consider it, would you consider it?’, not asking me to apply, there was no pressure but ‘would you consider it?

Martha had the same sort of experience during a parent forum meeting. The Principal has a clear drive for skills-based professionalised governance, and to secure parent governors who can function in the professional governance environment, which is arguably privileged over stake. This is demonstrated when the Principal describes the behavioural and “professional” differences between parent governors and parent forum members:

when we have a parents’ forum, we have to properly contract that meeting, cos I’m not dealing with a room full of parent governors who are skilled professional people who understand how meetings work I could be dealing with a room full of anyone, and we have.

The Principal is suggesting that he needs to outline a clear set of rules or guidelines prior to each parent forum meeting, by stating the need for contracting. Furthermore, that those parents who attend the forum are not able to, without guidance, follow meeting etiquette and are subsequently not professional enough to act without boundaries, or restrictions, provided for them. There is no judgement here that the Principal is suggesting that parent forum meetings are not valuable or important to him, but this underlines his privileging of professionalised skills-based governance and parent governor behaviours.

### 4.2.4. Lived Reality of Brand at the Local Level.

The findings relating to the lived reality of the legal framework in which the CAT academies are contracted to are illustrated in this section. The data is drawn upon to illuminate the CAT as an ethical alternative, and whether or not it is successful in its brand expectations. In terms of an application or enactment of brand locally; the “lived reality” of the values and principles of the Co-op Group and the CAT, at academy level and education, City Academy focus on a curriculum and wider curriculum, which, in line with the CAT three-year strategic plan, is designed not only to deliver currency but to secure young people as co-operators, delivering education with a view of the common good. There are many examples from the data of student-centred education based on a common and co-operative good, developing young people as social entrepreneurs, agents of social justice, working in the community to benefit those wider community members. The CAT, for example, host a student council conference at Angel Square, as Stan, Principal, says:

they’ve had a few meetings together as a Trust-wide student council body at Angel Square where they, [or] that’s [the meeting] informed, I know, the Director of the CAT’s thinking when erm he’s been trying to consider em you know the new CAT’s strategic objectives.

Therefore, the data suggests that there is significant weight placed on developing and educating young people in co-operative and democratic ways. The Director of the Trust arguably has ambitions for the young people in the Trust to become politically aware, he wants them to be contributors to change, and “if that means they become the next Tory leader, then so be it” rather than co-operative, left-leaning participants.

Ofsted reported that education did not stop at the gates when the Academy was last inspected, as exemplified by the Academy having secured lottery funding for, amongst others: family cooking and lifestyle courses for the community held in the Academy, as well as securing funding for a new-build community arts centre, for the community and Academy use. The Principal believes that by securing an arts centre for the Academy and the community, they are also securing a fair deal for the community and providing access that otherwise the students and community would not, or could not, access; cultural capital exposure. The community resource usage also extends from cadets to scouts to local arts groups to local music services running out of the Academy for community use.

The embodiment of the Co-op Group branding, in relation to community regeneration and the Academy, that is, the lived reality of community regeneration, adding social value and immediate impact, which was discussed earlier in this section, is exemplified by a project called the “Hub”. The City Academy LGB, one member of which is employed by a local council housing association, worked together with the housing association to secure a disused building next to the Academy from the City Council. Once secured, the partnership between the Academy and the housing association renovated the building, and now provides a skills development hub for local community members to enable them to re-enter the jobs market, as well as offering start-up pods, or business units, for local community members at cost. Stan, the Principal, talked about the partnership impact of working in an LGB:

we talk about the communities that we serve regardless of if we have a charter that comes to us … which is a challenge, another example is the hub building down the road that’s em an example of where we sought out partnership with one of our local em housing associations … they are part of a social regeneration wing to what they do … and we worked with them through one of our governors.

What is apparent in these findings is that the legacy of the original pioneers of the co-operative movement remains a lived reality; the co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, solidarity, equally, and equity are clearly evident in the examples of co-operative education within the Academy, and within the community, through such partnership work with the housing association to work towards regenerating the local community. The values and principles as outlined in the Articles of Association for which the CAT and academies are beholden legally to adhere, are being enacted at City Academy in relation to regeneration of community. Democracy as a value will be discussed in the next section. Furthermore, relating to the structure of the LGB (5.2.1.), the purpose of maintaining the LGB is again exemplified by the partnership work of the governing body with the housing association, which arguably would not have occurred if the LGB did not exist; the localised need may not have been identified, the partnership governor may not have been accessible, the valuable community resource may not be in existence.

## 4.3. The Bounded Polity – the Realisation of Democratic Values in Operational Decision-making.

In this section the second research question (section 1.8.) is explored. This research question focuses upon the enactment or realisation of the co-operative value of democracy and how the LGB of City Academy operates in relation to the concept of a democratic deliberative system and its parents as stakeholders. The findings are organised in relation to three perspectives of evaluation of a democratic system (section 2.2.1). The three perspectives being: the extent to which the bounded polity, the LGB, encourages or obstructs democratic deliberation (section 2.2.1.), where deliberation is consequential, authentic, and inclusive (Dryzek, 2017); the extent to which stakeholders, parents, exhibit democratic agency (Erman, 2012); and the extent to which power is exerted *with* stakeholders or participants rather than *over* (Hendriks, 2009). Furthermore, the bounded polity is considered as two components: the empowered space – the LGB of City Academy (section 4.3.1.), and the public space – the parent forum and annual survey (section 4.3.2.), (Dryzek, 2017). In this section there will also be data relating to parental engagement and governance capital and agency, which enables consideration of research question 3.

### 4.3.1. The Empowered Space – the LGB of City Academy

The parent governors of City Academy are democratically elected representatives of the parent body or stakeholders of the Academy. When considering what effective representation means, Louise (a parent governor) feels that it is about representation of voice and fairness, and what it is not about is individual complaints that she feels should be dealt with through the normal communication channels at the Academy. Louise articulates a strong sense of voice, justice, and a commitment to having a knowledge-base which is broad and will support her in undertaking her role effectively. Louise says in relation to effective representation:

I think to be knowledgeable about the school, about the community, about the parents and carers and pupils and understanding of where the school is in terms of results erm and to represent erm parents and carers you know … I think for me to be effective I need to ensure that everybody that I represent understands what my role is, it isn’t for them to collar me and say I don’t like the way somebody has spoken to my child, that is not what it is about … my role really, and also I think because of my career, it is all about people, and making sure that fair is fair yes and that people’s voices are heard and that people are included, so I think that has helped in my passion for the role as well, the fact that it is all about making sure that people’s voices are heard…

Louise’s view demonstrates an understanding of her role as a professionalised, skills-based governor, arguably, engaged in neoliberal rational activities and as an actor of surveillance. Further, this articulation of inclusivity evidence, in part, a sense of deliberative democratic principles and her understanding of her role as representative of stake: in that Louise is articulating that all parent voices are legitimate and should be taken into account. Louise goes further to purport that communication with parent stakeholders must be transparent, and hints at a deliberative process, or at least, a feedback process to encourage engagement. As Louise says of parent voice, her responsibility is:

…making sure that things are suggested, are considered and not everything is a good idea and if it is not that is fine, but I have been adamant with Stan and Julie, and her predecessor, that it is fine to not carry somebody's suggestion forward but we need to let them know that we’re not, because otherwise there will come a point where they just stop contributing, stop bothering to say anything because they are not getting [a response]… they don’t know if their voice has been heard.

The concept of feedback to stakeholders is key for Julie, the Chair of Governors, but the how of this engagement and feedback will be explored later in 4.3.1., as it relates to the mode of operation as a governing body and is key to the culture and integrative norms that exist between the empowered and public spaces.

It is clear from what the parent governors report, that they have a strong sense of their own consequentiality, inclusivity, and authenticity (section 2.2.1.). The representative parent body – the parent governors – feel they are encouraged to participate in discussions at the governing body meetings, whether that be the full meetings or committees. They feel that their views are valued, and they are “not rubber stamping” (Young, 2017a) anyone else’s decisions. Hetty states,

You’re having an input on young people lives, be it in the school, outside of the school, the community, it has been Co-op, it is what we do… the thing(s) that are brought before you, you have to discuss as a team, you have to make a decision as a team, everybody has got their experience and input, and I think as a parent you are at the sharp end of the stick of the decisions that are made, and therefore you can see the impact of those decisions… for me it was a great experience, … I did not feel parent governors are lesser governors, not the case, in fact to a degree it is the opposite, … so when you say but if you do that, have you thought about this? Sometimes they haven’t.

Hetty views her interactions as authentic, in that those other governing body members considered her contributions with equal weight, but they also added extra weight when it was related to the parent stake. Hetty also felt that as a group they would listen to her as parent governor, giving the opposing opinion, and they were open-minded about listening. The LGB were authentic in their preparedness to change the decision if they agreed to do so, in Hetty’s opinion. Here Hetty speaks about offering negative feedback:

at the primary school I was involved with and erm you had… there were times when you had to give negative feedback and there was very much a defensive wall went up and if they didn’t like what you were saying it got ignored … here, you can give, and I have done more than once given negative feedback to school, …, the school take it on board, they listen to it, but it might not… do anything about it because they don’t agree with it because there are other things that I don’t know about, but [others] they take it on board, and they listen and they accept it.

This view is reiterated by Louise, who says:

I have… given my opinion on [things] that have been carried forward and then there have been things that haven’t … when I air my view and opinion it is listened to, it doesn’t always have to be taken on board but for me my role is to be a voice.

Julie, the Chair of the governing body, perceives she is active in ensuring that parent governors do feel valued and have equality of opportunity in relation to voice and decision-making. As she says here:

… they have equal voice to everyone else. They were part of our visioning day, … we consider them to be very important because when we do things as a school we will always talk to Louise and Hetty in terms of …How did it feel being on the receiving end of it? … did it feel like we were doing what matters most? Did it feel like we cared in the way we executed that vote?

Julie is seemingly articulating an authenticity in decision-making and trying to ensure that through relationship-building and consultation, parent governors feel they are valued and respected for the role they take in the governing body; that it is important as a way of feedback for implementation of strategic decision-making. The visioning day(s) facilitated discussion and time to spend considering documentation, such as the CAT three-year plan (CAT, 2018), to set the direction of the Academy and the LGB. This also suggests political equality and bindingness in relation to the agency that the parent governors have or perceive that they have.

From the findings here, the perception of the parent governors is that they do have authentic opportunities to engage in deliberation and that they do have consequentiality. Therefore, this perception relates to parent governors having democratic agency, in that they state they have equality of opportunity to engage in discussion, which is reinforced by the Chair, and that there is a bindingness: the consequentiality of their actions. The parent governors claim that their professional skillset has prepared them for this role and further demonstrates their governance capital and agency. This is further illustrated below when considering how prepared they are for the role, and how they perceive others, who were not as skilled or professionalised, were not prepared.

When asked if they have felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of governance, or the role, they were unanimous that their previous experiences in employment had prepared them for this and were unfazed. However, they all have had experiences in different governing bodies whereby they saw other parent governors being overwhelmed, or non-participatory. Hetty says that:

I had a rough idea, I mean at the time I worked for a bank … and dealt with some quite senior people up to the chief exec, so dealing with the documentation at that high level which is similar to what you get at governing body, they don’t faze me, whereas I know other parents it does because of the formality of the documentation.

And Louise also outlines how her experiences in the workplace have made her unperturbed by the formalities and technologies of governance. Louise says of feeling comfortable in governance:

Of course, yes, yes and I think a lot of it from my career background, … dealing with people, … I am used to supporting stores, producing business plans, objectives, do you know what I mean? It is all quite familiar territory for me.

However, Louise goes on to say that she has supported others, new to governance, in their role as they have felt uncomfortable speaking:

as part of my commitment to the primary school, I am the co-operative governor there, so they have got two new parent governors erm… and I have noticed that … for whatever reason they don’t feel as comfortable speaking. I was just thinking about the experiences I have had, … and I have said to one of the parent governors at the primary school, ‘what did you think about this what I said?’ Well yes [I] agreed, “well why didn’t you say”, “because I didn’t want to repeat you”.

Louise feels strongly about this and wants to mentor Martha, the new governor to the City Academy governing body, as she is unsure of Martha’s experience of governance previously. However, Louise also feels it is the Chair of Governor’s responsibility to secure discussion and decision-making contributions from those members who do not contribute. She says:

there are some people that attend meetings and don’t contribute and that is then down to the Chair isn’t it to say, ‘what is your opinion?’

Both Stan, the Principal, and Julie, the Chair of Governors, concur with Louise’s perspective about the role of the Chair, and are keen to ensure that there is a culture of contribution and participation in the governing body, as Julie says of her first experience of chairing the governing body:

the climate that I needed to create as a Chair … enable[d] them to contribute because when I first got there, they were mute. Even when you asked for a view you didn’t really get one … creating an atmosphere where you could have a challenging conversation with a warmth with an intent that everyone wants to improve.

There is a climate for contribution and Julie has spent a significant amount of time with each governor individually to ascertain their history and experiences and skills, their professional skillset. She says:

I spent a lot of time with each of the governors separately make a connection with them on a human level, found out a bit about them you know both in terms of where were their skills and experience and what they could bring to the party.

The focus here is on relationship-building, and again on the skills and experiences they could bring to develop the professionalised element of their role as governors. The governors have also completed their skills audit, a government framework document which identifies the professional skill deficit of the LGB. The language Julie uses demonstrates that the climate being developed may well be participatory, but has its integrative norms embedded in the business model, or the rational-goal model, of, governance, and the technologies associated with effective surveillance: the tools of NPM. This is evident below, in the data from Louise, regarding the NPM leadership strategies that the Chair employs, and that Louise is complicit in. Louise, seemingly, is playing the social field, and is well aware of the doxa associated with it.

Parent governors perceive themselves, quite strongly, to be equal actors in the deliberative process that takes place. They perceive themselves to have equal opportunity and equal influence over the decision-making processes undertaken in the LGB. However, it can be argued, and this is supported by Louise, that not all discussions are authentically deliberative, and governors are steered towards particular ends. Louise says of Julie, the Chair of Governors:

obviously, Julie is a significant character within the Co-op I know it is very obvious to me because of my background that she has her own plan, and it is about us buying into it, however she also invites other people’s input which is great.

Louise recognises, she perceives because of her previous experiences, that not all decisions are truly authentic and claims that Julie uses “buy-in” as a way of engagement into discussion, even if the decision has already been made or half-formed. This is further underlined by an event transcribed from the full governing body meeting. Julie used a technique that Adair (1987) calls “does anyone disagree?” Julie prefaces the start of a discussion with the statement “I’m happy with this ... what do you think?” Arguably, by using this technique Julie is using language which purposefully provides pressure not to disagree, directing a steer and curtailing any authentic deliberation. When asked what they felt about this statement in interview, Martha considered she would judge the situation in the moment, if it were something that would have a major impact on parents then she thought she would challenge the statement or offer an alternative view. Louise remembered Julie saying this and said:

I know that she has got her own agenda and I wouldn’t be surprised if she had … shelved upstairs somewhere what she wanted to achieve, now I don’t know whether she applied to be the Chair of Governors or whether it was suggested as part of her role within the City Academy Trust, … but I think that yes obviously if you are going to pit that statement in front of a question then it will only be the… the bravest people that would say no, I think it is a load of bollocks.

Louise ties in positional power, which comes with the Chair’s position in the hierarchy, with this statement, which arguably adds more weight to the pressure not to disagree. Louise further suggests that she would not be “fazed” to say she disagreed if she did. Louise recognised this association with “rubber stamping” decisions (Young, 2017a) and says:

… I wouldn’t ever just nod and agree to something, if I felt I needed to say what about this bit? … again, if I had a real issue with something, then I would be more than happy to say, “well can we just have a bit more of a discussion, what about X, Y and Z.

This governance agency that the parent governors display is related, it can be argued, to their professional skillset and habitus, which evidently enables them to effectively function and not be intimated by the linguistics and formal technologies of governance and hierarchy; this will be discussed further in the Chapter 5.

What follows are findings relating to the perceived authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentially, or democratic agency, of those parent governors involved in the visioning day. Whilst it has been construed as inclusive by including the parent governors, inclusivity refers to the inclusion of those whom it affects, or those subject to it. These findings also relate to the technologies of NPM, employed in the guise of deliberation or authentic co-construction, shining a light on the agnostic–political dimensions of governance.

The visioning day was a significant event in that it represented a shift in the strategic practices of the LGB, towards co-construction, and also in the parent governors’ perception of their consequentiality. As part of this, a vision for the direction that both the LGB and the Academy were going to take was determined. A response to the CAT’s three-year strategic plan and the response from the Academy’s annual parent survey further informed the AIP. Uniquely for the LGB, it also envisioned the change in direction that the LGB would take in relation to operational practices. Julie, the Chair of Governors, feels strongly that the governors must be a part of creating the vision for the Academy as they then can own it and, arguably, drive it through the AIP. Julie says here:

I don’t think a governing body can truly own governance and governing if it doesn't co-create the vision and the erm school improvement plan. They would have no sense of ownership of it.

This sense of ownership, and subsequent drive, is evident in that the second visioning day was held without the Principal as part of the development of ownership, and to secure a base for the governing body to provide the challenge demanded of the role. As Julie states:

Firstly, fundamentally, our job is to support and challenge and if we do not do that with rigour then you know, if the governing body doesn’t have teeth or demand that [we] have a role? And a presence, then is no point in us doing it.

As part of the support and challenge role, the visioning day(s) led into the formulation of the AIP. This is a means by which the governing body can then hold themselves and the Academy senior leadership team to account for the performance or outcomes of the Academy as determined by the AIP. Julie says the parent governors were a significant part of this, having equal voice and leading on aspects of determining the direction, performance standards and mechanisms by which all could be held to account:

I have two parents currently on the governing body erm they have equal voice to everyone else. They were part of our visioning day [where] we made sure that within the strategy document and the school improvement plan, that we now are clear about what those values and behaviours [co-operative] look like in the context of different objectives that sit in the school improvement plan.

One of the parent governors, Louise, led on an aspect of the visioning day and as Stan, the Principal, said:

Louise, one of our parent governors led a whole section with the rest of the governing body, so you can’t say that they’re there just to fill a seat because … she pulled on her … HR background and … her psychology stuff she’s doing.

Here Stan is justifying the legitimate and significant role he feels the professionalised, skills-based governors have on the governing body. He is reinforcing the equal voice, the democratic agency, that he says they have, and also the central leading role that he articulates the parent governors to have.

The parent governors who were involved in the visioning recognised they were playing a part in the whole Academy strategic direction-setting. Hetty felt that it was important in that it was setting:

...the vision [of] where we’re going as a school, where we are going in the community, where we are as part of the wider Co-op Trust movement… there was a group of us in the room, different ideas were banded about, everybody put in as they saw fit, and everything was noted down and Julie took it all away… we were there for the full day erm literally every wall in this room was covered in flip charts with notes and comments.

The group that was brought together was the governing body, and whilst there were community and sponsor representation through representation on the governing body, the group was exclusively governors. Louise articulated the impact of the visioning sessions and that the impact was evidenced in the full governing body meeting. The impact of the visioning day was the co-construction of the AIP, which was presented by the Principal Stan, at the full governing body meeting. A focus of the AIP was the community regeneration expectation as outlined in the Articles of Association and the CAT three-year strategic plan, as well as the information gleaned from the annual survey of parents that all CAT academies undertake. As Louise says:

you know Stan wants the Academy to become a hub for the community, so there was a lot of discussion around that, … lots of questions asked about how we felt, what ideas we had, how we could erm make an impact in this particular area, …and then Julie asked for a number of people to commit to have a couple of extra days you know just to put some meat on the bones of what we had all pulled together so we were invited along to Angel Square where probably myself, Julie and I think three other members of the governing body [attended].

From this, there is evidence of the community regeneration aspect of the CAT and Co-op group application of branding becoming integral to the operational functioning of the Academy, with the Co-op gatekeepers – sponsor governors – ensuring the Co-op Group values and expectations are a lived reality in the local community. This is further evidence of an outcomes focus for governors, constructing the technologies of governance and surveillance. There was a sense of pride when Louise was highlighting that the outcome of the visioning day was included in the Principal’s report in the form of the AIP. When asked about the outcomes of the day in the full governing body meeting Louise said:

you might have noticed at the meeting that Julie referenced us to a document where we could see that some of the things we had discussed in our visioning day, I think it was included in Stan’s… the head’s report…

Louise is highlighting her perceived consequentiality here. When asked if this vision was shared and held by all members of the community or parent forum, Louise was a little less sure. Here she says:

I don’t know in (sic) the finer detail and of course it is still a working document and I suppose it always will be a fluid document, it has to be, doesn’t it? … I couldn’t say that we actually spell out anything to do with the school improvement plan [to the parent forum members].

What is being said here is that this mode of operation of visioning and improvement planning, the co-construction, is exclusively reserved for those in the empowered space - representative governors. Those in public spaces are not party to decision-making in relation to co-construction or even to consultation or sharing of the final documentation. Yet, arguably, these are the public who are subject to the strategic direction. They have not had shared with them the work that their representatives had done on their behalf in relation to setting the objectives and direction of the work of the Academy, even in relation to community engagement.

One of the reasons, it can be argued, that parent governors perceived they are valued, have voice, and are actively involved in authentic decision-making is that their experience, skills and histories enable them to be efficient in navigating and conforming to the integrative norms of deliberation within the empowered space. This subsequently privileges those skilled and articulate individuals who can deliberate in a recognisable rationalist characteristic way. Should those representatives of the parent body come from ethnic minorities, second language speakers or those from areas of deprivation, which is the community around City Academy, this may not be the case. The Chair of Governors, Julie, recognised this when she said of non-skilled, but stakeholder parent governors:

what I work hard on to do is to suggest to them they are credible, and that representation of parent voice is what they are there to do, that representation of how they experience school through whatever lens is valid … I would talk to them … in this guise are you comfortable to bring … it’s in that relationship building right in the off.

Whilst Julie articulates this, her language around governance appears to be focused on neoliberal rationality and professionalised skills-based governance. However, authenticity, consequentiality and inclusivity are perceived to be in place by parent governors and extended only in relation to those representatives of stakeholders within the empowered space. This, it can be argued, is connected to the mode of working of the governing body and the skill level of those working within it.

To situate the findings that follow, the findings are organised into how the operational practices of the empowered space and its interconnection with the public space occur.

The Chair of Governors, Julie, is trying to establish more collaborative working practices and to engage more fully with the community, as outlined by the CAT principles. The LGB at City Academy are taking the first steps to shift how they use their annual parent survey. In the past, the Fortel survey has been given to all students, staff and parents in the Academy, and the Principal receives a significant amount of data that he digests and shares with various stakeholder groups that undertook the survey, and results are shared with the Trust. This is the CAT method of ensuring that parents have engagement and influence over the Academy (the Director’s quote in 4.2.1). What happens then is a response to those groups about the action taken. As Stan, the Principal, says:

there’s the Fortel survey so that’s another annual now that is something which is across the whole Trust so that is something that’s prescribed to us to do em so every year Fortel the company were commissioned to send out kind of a stakeholder engagement survey … it’s a bit about engagement, it’s a little bit attitudinal … it goes out to em kids across all year groups…it goes out to the whole parent body online and via paper if they want to.

What is key here is that this is a survey, and, it could be argued, a customer satisfaction survey, in the vein of ‘how are we doing? What do you like or not like? What can we do better?’ which is supported by the Director who says that the survey, “provides a useful sort of vehicle for parents to express their satisfaction, erm and doesn’t over burden them in having to attend various meetings.” A survey detaches parents from being part of the Academy community and reframes them as the client, or consumer; it places a space from which the consumer reports back satisfaction, but then requires no further interaction regarding the way forward. However, the Principal perceives that it provides the Academy with a wealth of information to contribute to its “not ordinary”-ness:

we do get back a report, we get the spreadsheet back from the Fortel guys with all of the stats and all of the percentage things …so that gives us useful intelligence em and we get to see the change as well we get a raw score and then we get a change thing to see the direction the thing is moving, and they share with us free text as well.

The Principal, Stan, here is outlining the “useful intelligence”, he gains from the survey. The Principal perceives the survey to be one arm of parental engagement undertaken by the Academy. The large majority is focused on the reduction of stakeholder engagement to numerical intelligence. It is a form of communication rather than engagement; however, what is key is how the intelligence is utilised. Stan explains the transparency of the process:

we also were sharing with parents the results of the Fortel survey. Em there are some stats there em and it talks about the scores I have to say it was really positive, parents have always been really positive, I mean they told us what they think through the Fortel survey and it wasn’t any different this year, the results were stronger this year even stronger than they have been previously, which is great em and stronger here than in the average across all the secondaries in the Trust as well so that’s a real positive as well.

Whilst Stan is keen to articulate that the results are shared back to parents, what is shared is performance, how well the Academy is doing, how the Academy compares to other academies in the Trust. This is both reductionist and a feature of NPM; it is reducing a complex entity to a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). Transparency here is about sharing information and action, ‘you said, we said’. The Chair of Governors, Julie, recognises that more needs to be done in terms of seeking stakeholder voice:

formal methods erm things like the Fortel survey erm we will seek view on but in this territory that you’re exploring now I think that we have got more to do so within our strategic plan for the governing body for next year, yes, we want to do a reminder to everybody around what is the governing body there to do, how you can make representation and how is it we can … all stakeholder groups actually to get voices to come into the room. We felt it was erm really important to educate parents more particularly within that parents forum to say this who we are this is our approach, it’s really important that your voice flows through then within the local governing body agenda.

The parent forum, parent governors and the LGB have a feedback loop; it is a bridge between the empowered space and the public space. It is very much a discussion at the LGB level after having heard what has been said in the parent forum, as Stan articulates:

I will talk in governors meetings if there’s been a parent forum, and parent governors will also have been there so kind of glues that thing backwards and forwards so and we talk about this isn’t this isn’t kind of like … it isn’t kind of fundraising its none of that this is about school improvement it’s about policy change, this is about stuff they’re not happy about, so we will often have the beginnings of an agenda that we think there are things we want to either bounce off or ask or see how things land or it could be anything really…in the past it’s been about changing the format of reporting and what they do or don’t want about how we communicate with parents em things like uniform, em shape of the school day, all sorts of things really. The last one was em we have our agenda we also let them come with any of their own agenda items so one parent time before last wanted a conversation around safer communities and knife crime and the stuff that’s going on in this area, so we had a conversation around that.

So, Stan is seemingly keen to share that the discussion that happens at parent forum is taken to full governors via a committee, and then discussed there at full governors. The Principal says he “let” parents come with their own agenda items, so it is shaping into a forum which has the potential for a two-way dialogue. However, to reiterate, the item under discussion, whether it be originating from the parents or the leadership, will be taken from the public space to be deliberated in the empowered space, and then feedback to the public space. The Chair of Governors, Julie feels that this *is* transparency, and that what is important are the next steps, in relation to them going back to the parent forum to report back on the decisions made. Here Julie discussed this key operational change:

what I’m encouraging is utter transparency, is the total attention to hearing what the voices … the stakeholders say and that we are very clear that all those things come into the room and that we play about into what the bulk of our parents say, what are students are saying and what is our community saying in the light of that, and the agreed outcome that we are all heading for, what is the decision that we are making and what’s our rationale for that decision, and then our important loop back in the piece that we need to get a really good rhythm on next year, is then putting a communication out to everyone to say we heard the voices, we heard the views, but as a governing body we’ve made a decision and this is how we’ve made the decision because …until stakeholders believe they have a voice and until you demonstrate that you’ve heard them erm and until you go back with that loop of communication, which says as a result of what you’ve said and as a result of the outcome that we’ve all been seeking, this is decision that we’ve made and we understand the consequence and implication of that decision and we all know it either supports your view or it butts up against it but we made that decision. If you do not get that loop in, you’re not as effective as you could be and, people won’t engage in such a robust fashion which is why we are going to do things quite differently as a governing body moving forward, because I want that to be much more …. errr… ermm well I want to feel our stakeholder’s presence and we should welcome it.

This is an important extract from the data, she is quoted at length to the exemplify the point, as it not only reiterates her view of how important she feels stakeholder and parent voice is, how committed she is to ensuring that voices are heard and given total attention, it also illustrates Julie's style and approach. Julie is keen to move forward with the governing body in terms of transparency, which means for Julie taking away the information to be deliberated in the empowered space and determining the decision to then be shared with the group who raised the issue. This is another form of detachment between the public space and the empowered space. Julie associates the, hoped for, continued engagement with a new approach of telling the stakeholders why the governors have made the decision in their favour or not: a decree. Not a new approach of utilising the valued voices to engage them in the deliberation, or the decision-making itself.

Hetty has a very clear and distinct, but similarly held view on the roles of the governing body and the parent forum, she is clear that strategic decisions are very much the empowered space - the governing body - and that there is no place for influence in the parent forum. She says:

Parent forum is just a voice, there is (sic) no decisions made, it is purely a two-way information…communication system erm there is no decision-making. There might be things put forward at parent forum that eventually end up their way to governing body but obviously it has to go through relevant staff and discussions with staff, but governing body is strategic.

This statement is an example of a clear steer about the functioning of the empowered space, and its relationship with the parent forum, which echoes a rational-goal mode or NPM mode of operation of the LGB. The integrative norms of the empowered space are not deliberatively democratic, but embedded NPM.

The following data demonstrate the integrative norms engender elitism, and a growth in esteem, and importance, that the governing body role has given individually for these parent governors, and the increased social capital they get from their relationships with Julie and Stan particularly. Hetty talks of the way the Principal, Stan, often took her to one side to gain her perspective before governing body meetings. She says:

So yes, he [Stan] came to be quite a few times over different aims, my personal opinion as a parent over different matters before it actually then went… we made a decision and it went to governing body because not everything comes to governing body, like I say it is strategic not operational.

There are numerous potential reasons for the private pre-meeting chats, but Hetty infers arguably, this is about being special. Louise clearly has an increased sense of value, or social capital, in association with Julie, with many positive comments from Louise regarding Julie’s style and approach. Here are two extracts from Louise about Julie:

I find every other opportunity to try and get in there and erm… make myself known, but I am part of Julie’s visioning group, and I truly believe that not all of the staff understand what the governing body does, so what hope have we got that parents and carers are going to understand, and students as well, I think there is a whole piece of work that needs doing and Julie has listened and you know we’re in the process of putting some meat on the bones with regards to that,

and the second;

we’re going to get another date in the diary … that is something that Julie is very good at because I have experienced before where things are mentioned, it is a big focus and then all of a sudden, the finger is off the pulse and the focus is on something else, but Julie is very good at having everything brought back to the table and keeping it current.

It is that point from Louise of being in “Julie’s visioning group”, not the visioning group or the LGB visioning group: it is the kudos that Louise values and she emphasises the specialness that she feels being associated with something that Julie has put together.

Martha is also keen to be part of the group, and both Louise and Martha talk keenly about the possibility of a ‘drinks evening’, just the governing body. Here Martha talks about it:

on the evening of the 12th, they are on about you know sort of drinks and getting to know everyone and chatting.

On the day of the 12th at the parent forum both parent governors in conversation were deflated at not having heard about the “drinks evening”, again reinforcing how the roles and associations appear to have a positive impact upon the self-esteem and social capital of those involved with this governing body. And it could be argued that the exclusivity adds to the extent of the esteem that these parent governors feel in association with perceived “important people” in important roles.

The Chair has influenced the direction and stature of the LBG, in terms establishing a more significant role for those in the LGB, and for the LGB itself, in determining the direction the Academy takes via the AIP, and strategies for determining this direction. The way that the Chair, and the Principal, have developed the LGB, and established relationships with them: private conversations, selecting them for specific activities, have arguably increased self-esteem and improved the social capital of those parent governors involved. There is pride when the parent governors discuss their contributions and involvement, however the exclusive nature of this representative democracy in practice brings into question whether the gains from social capital, being valued for professional skill, are more important than representation of stake.

### 4.3.2. The Public Space – The Potential of Parent Forum of City Academy

In this section of findings, the role of deliberative democracy in the public space is explored, in relation to the interconnection between the empowered space and the public space, and within the public space, drawing on pertinent data to address research question two.

The Director of the Trust has a view about the role of democracy in governance, which has been stated earlier, but here he is reiterating this view in conjunction with a perspective on the parent forum:

at the end of the day, you know we can listen to all of those voices, but we need to have a mechanism whereby a representative group of people make the decision [parent governors], and actually it is being open to having a way in which we can hear those voices.

The Director is restating that the practice of one person, one vote system causes “chaos”, that the representation model of democracy is valid, but that it should be informed by the public space. He is not saying that decision-making should be a shared practice. The parent forum is a public space, whereby parent governors, the Principal (usually) and parents join together to hear and be heard. The motivation for the parents to attend, as outlined in the focus group, are as the Principal outlined, they come to ask for information on a range of topics, from the introduction of the new Relationships and Sex Education Policy to homework, to the lack of triple science in the curriculum, to the attendance policy in relation to Eid, are some examples. The parents can see in advance a leadership-determined agenda, and newly introduced, the parents can request items to hear information about. These items the leadership of the Academy will facilitate by identifying the most appropriate member of the Academy staff to speak to the item. Several the parents concurred with parent member 3 (PM3), (section 4.6) who stated:

I come here to ask information, erm and obviously getting a voice heard, as well from a parent’s perspective and also from the Muslim community, but I am not in any way a part of any particular community, but obviously I come from a Muslim background.

And parent member 4, who was motivated because:

I came to the forum to get some new ways to hear about [school] and I have a topic I wanted to be able to ask a question about and get more information about how school is running.

The parents in the focus group all articulated a clear reason for wanting to attend, they had an interest in the information that the Academy wanted to table, they were interested in the agenda items that other parents had tabled. What was key was that these parents had an opinion and had invested time in knowing what the Academy was about, to be better prepared to meet the needs of their children. As parent member 4 stated, which was fairly representative of the parents in the focus group, her eldest child was in the school but was in year 8 and she wanted to gain a better understanding of what happens in schools:

so last year I was completely new, I didn’t know what is going on about how the school is running (sic) but this year I have a little bit more experience about how school… how things are going and especially [after] the parents evening for last year … but today’s specific, it was for me to come here and hear about erm his homework …

As well as finding out about key information, such as homework, there is a strong perception they are listened to and have consequence. Martha, a parent governor, who was a regular attendee of parent forum, cited several examples whereby parents at the forum had influenced or changed an aspect of Academy practice:

[I] question it and challenge it you know, and I sort of brought it up again [homework logging] at the next parent forum and it was sort of discussed and I think since then they have reviewed how the teachers log it and keep a, you know, sort of an eye on what is happening and make sure it doesn’t happen again.

Martha had felt this and other things such as planner content were the things that had been changed because of parent forum contributions, including her own challenges to the way the Academy runs things, such as the way conversations are held at parents’ evenings or the inclusion of a calendar page in the planner. The Principal, Stan, talks of the forum as a place of policy change:

it isn’t kind of fund raising, its none of that, this is about school improvement it’s about policy change this is about stuff they’re not happy about, so we will often have the beginnings of an agenda that we think there are things we want to either bounce off or ask or see how things land or it could be anything really. In the past it has been about changing the format of reporting and what they do or don’t want about how we communicate with parents, em things like uniform, em shape of the school day, all sorts of things really. The last one was em we have our agenda we also let them come with any of their own agenda items so one parent time before last wanted a conversation around safer communities and knife crime and the stuff that’s going on in this area, so we had a conversation around that.

Stan is stating here, quite strongly, that he believes that policy change happens at the parent forum, however, the findings do not evidence that policy change, but does support a great communication exchange rather than fund raising. What is clear, arguably, is a level of control and power over the parent forum to manage the deliberation and restrict the dialogue and agenda, to one which enables the parent forum members to perceive the consequentiality of their impact and input, yet only impact on day-to-day operational decisions: none of the examples cited by the Principal, or the parents, related to change which was of strategic significance. This reinforces the perception of the parent governors, as outlined above, and stated by Hetty, that “nothing strategic happens at parent forum, only information or operational considerations.” What is positive is the realisation that the parent voice is important and that although the Academy leadership may determine, gate-keep, what parents are “unhappy” about, and table this as an agenda item, the parents actually tabling their own agenda items is significant to dialogue. This is a small release of power over and as such it provides the parents with a sense of consequentiality. The ability to table an agenda item and to participate in discussion engenders a sense of being listened to, being valued, and having an impact. As parent member 3 says:

we do give them information about what we want to discuss on this parent forum, which is really good I think, because then it gives me an opportunity to think through what I am going to discuss and also for the school to know what is going to be brought up.

And as parent member 1 stated:

last time when I attended two or three things I raised up and I was really happy after that, they did it.

All the focus group members were in agreement that they felt listened to and that the parent forum was “moving in the right direction” and that “they try to do things” to make change happen. The parent forum members were effusive in praise for the Academy “it was a good school”, “no problem with the school”, all in total agreement that they were listened to and that they had influence: change makers. Yet there was an issue they wanted to raise which was in relation to a strategic policy, which they were not happy about. They wanted the Academy to change its policy on attendance codes for Eid celebrations, and they had raised it before and felt they had not been listened to on this important issue for them. They have experienced Julie’s version of transparency, an NPM approach to consultation, which means it is raised at parent forum and taken back into the empowered space to be deliberated by the governing body. Once deliberated and an outcome determined, the parents would receive feedback. There is, however, very little interconnection between the empowered space and the public space in relation to dialogue, communication, and feedback, which is a key component of Julie’s vision for effective communication of listening to stakeholder voice and being heard. In fact, there was an example of a second-language speaker, who started her query with her son’s experience and was closed down. The leadership perception being that any individual issues with children is dealt with outside the meeting, part of the Principal’s contracting of the meeting (end of 4.2.2.). However, this is an example of an individual, who as a second-language speaker started off with an anecdote or story to foreground her specific point to be discussed. Arguably by shutting the parents down like this, they are also shutting down their democratic opportunity, by not recognising the needs of parents who are second language speakers, or parents from poorer backgrounds. Thus, reinforcing NPM integrative norms. It could well be argued that the parents were represented by parent governors who do not represent them culturally or practically. All the parents present at the parent forum, bar two, were not of white ethnic origin and only two parents had English as a first language, living in an area of high deprivation, being represented by white, middle-class, professional, middle aged, English-as-a-first-language-speaking women. In the Community Engagement committee meeting, which followed this parent forum meeting, Eid was mentioned by the Principal to the committee. There was no deliberation of the point, Stan, the Principal, stated:

I think that actually some of the parents who are trying to explain their feelings about this and maybe doing so in their second language, which is extra stressful… and actually our response mainly is that unfortunately that is our policy and so we feel that they are coming up a little bit against a brick wall really.

The Principal, Stan, did say during the meeting that this has been raised and deliberated at full governors annually, and that “it comes up a lot”, however, what this is demonstrating is the parents feel passionate about this issue, and that whilst this is recognised, the Academy will not deliberate further. This is only partially the transparency that the chair is advocating when she talks of a feedback loop back to parents and stakeholders. It also brings in to question parental representation, and the role of democratic representation and stakeholder views.

Whilst still being positive about the Academy, and being overly polite, the parents wanted change. As parent member 3 says:

Yes, so that was why I was here yes, and I think they tackled it really well, the Eid celebrations, obviously we’re not pleased with what their policy is… but I think there is a lot of things that need to be done because you know we need to kind of sit together and talk to the school and see whether they can come to a negotiation.

It is interesting that they say the Academy “tackled it really well” yet go on to say they are not happy. It can be argued that this is related to a cultural context of second-language speakers, as a subordinated group, interacting with authority, in the form of Academy leadership, and to habitus. There is, arguably, a sense of colonialism in the response or relationship between those parents who are second-language speakers and the leadership of the Academy, in that those parents who are second-language speakers are seemingly acting in a way to placate those they see in power with positivity and using this to enable an entrée into a negative: in other words the parents recognise their place in the field, having some understanding of the doxa. This was what Bourdieu experienced, in part, with migrants from Algeria. The parents here want a change in the way that important issues for them are discussed. They offer a solution and want to be part of the deliberation. They want to have some power *with* the Academy, to determine what matters most to them. One parent, parent member 1, resorted to a form of activism, as she felt she was not listened to by the Principal, Stan.

I showed them, the Muslim parents, they gave me the names and the signatures and their contact numbers as well and that time [the Principal] thought we have lots of students, but you have only 27 parents and then I said, it is 27 means 27, there is only one parent raised up, stand up means there is something to listen [to].

Whilst this petition is a type of activism based on voice, it demonstrates an increased sense of polite frustration and dissent from the parents that they had not been listened to, and to their strength of feeling. The parents are also coalescing as a group, with a form of power *with,* to have a say on the decision-making, to secure a collective resistance to the injustice that exclusion from the deliberation has caused. They are normally *subjected to* policy decisions and excluded from groups constituted by those *affected by* the policy that decide policy, even though they are both *subjected to* and *affected by* the policy itself*.* This coalescing as a communal communication vehicle is also a way of recommunicating or reasserting the issue as the parents see it. It demonstrates a lack of democratic agency as the parents do not have political equality or political bindingness. Even when resorting to activism, they have no equality to have a political voice nor the power to exercise it. However, this micro-activism has also grown because of both a lack of understanding of representational governance, and a failure of representation to represent the views of the parents.

When the parents at the focus group were asked about the role of parent governors, all but one was unaware of the role or the individuals. At this point in the focus group the parents were also recognising themselves as a mutual resource, they were asking and answering each other’s questions, developing an enhanced social capital. This is exemplified by the exchange between two parent forum focus group meeting participants:

PM4: “Sorry, because me I don’t know, is it only the Co-op that they don’t allow Muslims to have the Eid celebrates?

PM1: Yes, because I heard about any other school, then I can understand oh yes, it is not only one school, but all other schools are all [in the city], they have minimum one day off, maximum two days off.”

The parent governors were pointed out to the focus group. Parent member 1 echoed what the other parents said: “Unfortunately, I haven’t seen them first time.” And parent member 4 thought that the role could be an important vehicle for communication:

No, I think it would be a good idea to go and see the parent governor because of Eid, I think like you raised this voice as a parent, maybe good to see the parent governor and have a view of … parent to see if you can arrange something and have a voice and see if for an idea, just to see if you can just raise something with her to see if she can do more and later to see if there is something you need the changes and see how many parents can attend to that…

This is a realisation by the parents that actually the parent governors could represent them in the empowered space, after organising a meeting first to deliberate the issue they want discussing. They are hopeful overall. However, one parent, parent member 1, felt that she had already spoken to parent governors and was keen now for action to happen:

But we already questioned them, they need to send our opinions or requests to the Principal and the Principal needs to be thinking about [it]… the parents need to be very, very cooperative because erm the school staff and the parents they work together because children they are like water and the parents and the staff at the school are two edges, the two edges they are strong, water will be flowing very fluently, and they will come anything inside, because the whole edges, both sides they knew that no one would be allowed to go inside because we need a light white water, clean water, everyone thinks about this but when we work together we can get our best and our child will be very, very happy, we parents, as with the school.

What stands out throughout the focus group is a polite, respectful assertion. The parents are very keen to engage in a deliberation to explain their point of view and to hear justification. However, they are also very keen not to be seen as anything other than co-operative and supportive of the Academy, and the opportunity they have through the forum to communicate. It appears they are treading a fine line of finding their way through power *over* utilising power *with*.

In terms of their consequentiality, they report a sense of being listened to but evidentially they have limited consequentiality, and despite the inclusive nature of the “open” parent forum, there is little support to suggest that the forum is authentic in its reciprocity in relation to strategic or policy change.

## 4.4. Parental Engagement

This section draws together findings from the previous two sections andconsiders how the CAT model of governance engages parents, or not, in the influence of the Academy decision-making processes, that is, research question 3.

The final consideration here relates to parental engagement and parental involvement. Stan, the Principal, feels strongly that as an Academy there are many informal opportunities to engage with parents. This is attested to in extracts from the data presented above, from parent governors and parent forum members, but that the two formal approaches are the parent forum, a key component of the Academy’s parental engagement plan, and the Fortel survey. Here, highlighted in his interview and quoted earlier, the Principal says:

[the parent forum is] a structured, formalised way of parent stakeholder engagement … and there’s the Fortel survey, so that’s another – annual, now that is something which is across the whole Trust, so that is something that’s prescribed to us to do em so every year Fortel the company were commissioned to send out kind of a stakeholder engagement survey.

If the definition of parental engagement that is offered in the introduction (section 1.2.6.) and extended in 2.2.4., is applied, then in the Fortel survey, whilst there is opportunity to articulate what parents, or community members feel is wrong, the survey is a form of communication between the parents and the Academy and would be considered involvement rather than engagement. Likewise, the parent forum shows limited evidence of partnership, or power, being held by the parents in relation to deliberation or in parents determining the direction that the parent forum takes. Any decision-making is low stakes. The parents now have the opportunity, or power, to table agenda items, however, this is at the discretion of the Principal, as is the agenda item itself; there is no real power to direct the discussion. As the Principal, Stan, says, he must carefully contract the meeting as the parents are not professionals who understand meeting etiquette. Therefore, there is power *over* the activity, which would suggest that this is, at best, an exercise in parental involvement. It is positive, however, that as well as informal opportunities to involve parents, the Academy has formalised two opportunities to involve parents.

## 4.5. Summary

In summary, it is key to articulate that the brand of the Co-op Group, and its enactment in the CAT, appears to be at least “not ordinary” in that it is not only co-operative, values-led, based on social justice and community regeneration, but that these values are enshrined in the Articles of Association, binding each academy legally to achieve these outcomes. There are high stakes involved in failing in these respects, in relation to brand advantage and protection in a highly hierarchicalised MAT landscape. The commitment to localised, fully delegated governing bodies is also “not ordinary”, and whilst this does occur, the government expectation, at best, is for regionalised governing body, but that could mean only one umbrella governing body for the whole Trust, so the commitment here is evident. The structure of the LGB is reminiscent of LA maintained LGB. However, the Director is keen to articulate a difference which is based on an expert local; those with expertise in their own arena who can utilise their own resources to extend the stretch of the Academy to secure the resources to deliver the goals in the Articles of Association. This includes skills-based parent governors, LA and social partners as well as senior Co-op Group employees, who, arguably, act as gatekeepers and guardians of co-operative values and community regeneration. The latter aspect is a lived reality; there are examples of the Academy delivering on aspects of community regeneration projects.

In terms of realising the co-operative value of democracy, whilst parent governors perceive they have consequentiality, inclusivity, and authenticity and ultimately, democratic agency, this is more an articulation of their professionalised skills and its alinement with the way that the LGB works. There is little evidence of deliberative democracy being extended here to parents in attendance at the parent forum, but some groups of parents do suggest a level of democratic agency. However, there is a demand for deliberative democracy by some, more marginalised groups of parents, which is currently not being acceded to.

The type of relationship with parents in the polity is based on the parent as consumer and the LGB as rational goal-orientated practice and NPM technologies. The power is *over* the polity rather than *with* the polity and the operationalism that occurs is reflected in this.

Utilising Bourdieu’s thinking tools in the next chapter facilitates the exploration of the power relations between those in positions of power, the leadership of the LGB and the parents who strive to be part of the decision-making processes or at least understand them and be represented in them.

# Chapter 5 – Discussion

## 5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the governance at the CAT will be discussed in relation to the case study school, City Academy. The governance relationship is considered between the CAT and City Academy, as well as the governance relationship between City Academy and its parent body, in part through the lens of what Wilkins and Gobby (2021) term the instrumental-rational and agonistic-political formulations of governance. The chapter will firstly consider the Co-op Group branding, and the importance of branding in the role of the governing body, which executes the Co-op Group objectives. The organisational, structural, and operational features of the CAT/City Academy relationship is explored in light of this, highlighting how the roles of co-opted and parent governors are operationalised, in terms of stake and skill. Furthermore, the chapter moves on to explain how democracy, a significant value of the ICA, the Co-op Group and CAT, is realised in the relationships outlined above: organisation as polity. There will also be discussion regarding the contrast between democratic and NPM-style implementation of parental engagement in governance processes. The final section of the chapter engages with Bourdieu’s thinking tools to analyse the power relationships between the empowered space and the public space, as well as presenting an argument for a model of alternative in which to situate governance at CAT and City Academy.

## 5.2. Co-op Group and the CAT Model of Governance.

A plurality of what can be considered as alternative exits from the findings and will be explored in relation to the model of governance of CAT and City Academy. These are configured through the instrumental-rational and agnostic-political formulations of governance (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021).

### 5.2.1. Branding – Being Co-op, its Purpose.

The Co-op brand represents and drives international values of co-operation, social enterprise, and community regeneration (1.2.2). The drive for ethical implementation of the brand is evident in the Co-op sponsor’s marketing through national television advertising, for example, a public commitment through the national press to working in the most deprived areas in the country (Roberts, 2018) and to linking the regeneration of deprived communities to regeneration of schools in those areas (Roberts, 2019; CAT, 2018). It is evident from this kind of exemplification that the Co-op Group branding is firmly installed into the fabric of the CAT, and their academies. The brand representation is subsequently enshrined in the CAT’s three-year strategic plan and the Articles of Association and funding agreement, which legally bind each academy to implement the Co-op Group’s brand message (1.2.2.). The unusual amendment of the Articles of Association indicates the high-stakes (Baxter, 2020; Simon, James, and Simon, 2021) level of commitment the Co-op Group and CAT have to the implementation of co-operative values and community regeneration. The Trust Director suggests that the CAT difference is the power of the sponsor’s ethical values to permeate the academies and focus not just on academy improvement, but also on community optimism and social and economic regeneration (4.2.1.). For the CAT, as outlined in the findings, community regeneration is non-negotiable, and is as important as, and inextricably linked to, school improvement. Locatelli (2019) would, it can be suggested, argue that the Co-op Group, through the CAT, aspires to a common good reframing of education. Locatelli (2019) places public good framing and common good framing on a continuum. It is clear from the findings that the CAT objectives represent a private good objective for those who participate in its brand of education, that is, it expects a successful qualification function. However, it further represents a public good framing of education in the values-led organisational, curriculum and community activities it expects. When considering the brand objectives, the ethical and principled rhetoric of the Co-op Group and the CAT, with its commitment to community, school improvement and co-operative values, including that of democracy, it would be significant to suggest that it was reframing education as a common good (Locatelli, 2019). The concept of common good, in terms of governance, as well as extended to good education proposed by Locatelli (2019), completely chimes with the rhetoric and some actualities of the CAT educational expectations. Common good reframing of education would be, according to Locatelli (2019), significant in redemocratising organisational and local governance and constructing a culture of co-operativism within the community to take responsibility for decision-making, and the quality of education, that the academies took locally. The positioning of the CAT on the continuum between public and common good education framing depends on the extent to which co-operativism and democracy are operationalised in the organisation at a governance and leadership level. This will be discussed further in section 5.3.3.

Part of the brand representation of the Co-op Group and all components of its business including the CAT, is its iconic and symbolic headquarters, based at Angel Square, Manchester. The building, it seems, symbolises a New Right statement of tradition and authority, the modern rooted in its history, conflated with entrepreneurialism and market-logic principles, yet a beacon of co-operativism, with a national reach. Located only miles away from the original Victorian Rochdale Pioneers building, the headquarters is a physical and metaphorical shift to its location in the economic and influential base of the Northern Powerhouse; from a bottom-up co-operative to a multimillion-pound organisation: a shining example of capitalism in co-operative clothing. From this hive of co-operativism employees are sent out to develop local versions of the Co-op Group co-operativism, such as local governance. And with reciprocity, those participants in the Co-op Group interests, such as parent governors or academy students, are brought into Angel Square to secure, arguably, the commitment to Co-op Group values and ideals, which are represented visually and symbolically on every wall of the building and at every turn in the organisation. As the findings suggest, for those who attended events at the Co-op Group headquarters there was a sense of awe and pride. The presence of the CAT located in Angel Square is, seemingly, a metaphorical arm around the Edu-business (Simon, James, and Simon, 2021), to stand behind it with its powerful brand expectations and to survey its progress at close quarters, whilst inculcating the brand message. This is much like the iconic and symbolic building of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) (Gunter and Forrester, 2009). The NCSL building was designed, Gunter and Forrester (2009) postulate, to house a physical and symbolic representation of New Labour’s ambitions for school leadership and demonstrated a modernity and a shift away from the old order by presenting a state-of-the-art investment for those who worked there and for those who were invited there. The iconic and symbolic nature of both buildings, arguably, advertise the power and ambition within, the brand advantage and the specialness by which those who work within are considered. Such a public pronouncement of power and success, it would seem, would be catastrophic in relation to reputational brand failure, which the CEO of Co-op Group alludes to in the Guardian (Butler, 2019), whereby the CEO discusses the banking failure on reputation of the brand.

Therefore, this demonstrates the complexity, the vulnerability and high-stakes nature of what the CAT is trying to achieve. Both the reputation of the sponsor, and its association with the CAT and the success of the CAT academies, and the reputation of the CAT itself are subject to risk. The risks relating to the ambitious CAT plan to increase its acquisition of schools in areas of deprivation to 40 by 2022 (Roberts, 2018; CAT, 2018), to the perception that parents and community members have relating to the ethical and co-operative values of the Co-op Group with CAT and its academies. Furthermore, risk is related to the Co-op Group brand itself, who have had significant brand reputational failures in the past, in relation to its unethical banking practices (Mangan and Byrne, 2018; Boyask, 2020). This ambitious acquisition plan would elevate the CAT as a significant player amongst MATs. Therefore, brand maintenance and advantage need to be privileged to secure this positioning; to realise a strategic identity beyond “not ordinary”. Simon, James, and Simon (2021) and Baxter, (2019) have postulated that brand advantage, or positioning, in the Edu-business world is crucial, as the brand name secures status in what they deem as the now heirachicalised system of MATs, with those more prestigious brands being privileged or positioned in the high stakes play of school acquisition. The strength of the brand, and its stated commitments are vulnerable to significant risk, as Wilkins (2019d:101) concurs, in relation to “unregulated market and moral hazards”, which need to be mitigated to maintain not only brand market advantage, but brand protection. Mitigation is suggested in the findings, with the positioning of gatekeepers, professionalised parent governors and boundaries spanners in the local (5.2.2.). Academies and MATs cannot afford to be considered anything other than “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011) in the performative, marketised and choice-focused context of education, as Simon, James, and Simon, (2021) outline above, that is market accountability (Courtney, McGinity and Gunter, 2018). Especially as entrepreneurialism, in which education is now entrenched, in any form, is postulated by Holloway and Keddie (2020) as incompatible with social justice, ethical virtue and common good, which are exactly the foundations on which the Co-op Group and CAT are based.

### 5.2.2. The Local Governing Body, its Organisation and Structure – A CAT Commitment

To achieve its purpose and mitigate any risk (5.2.1.), the CAT has structured and organised its governance of academies purposefully. The commitment from the CAT is to retain an LGB with full delegated powers, indicating its commitment to trust and the local to implement its objectives. Organisationally, MAT governance is notionally a nested model of governance (Baxter, 2019), the degree to which power is delegated from the apex is dependent upon the trust and the circumstances of the academy*.* This commitment then flows against what is recognised, Wilkins (2017) suggests, as in the whole scale decentralisation of governance from central government, with a gradual retraction of governance back to the centre of larger MATs (Wilkins, 2017; Baxter, 2019). Simpkins et al. (2019) (outlined in Table 2.1) and Baxter and Cornforth (2019), state that the expectations and desires of central government, in relation to governance in MATs, is a centralised governance structure with single or regional governance, as well as centralised leadership in the form of executive heads and leadership teams. The commitment to an LGB is in opposition to what Greany and Higham (2018) report as good practice from a government and Regional Schools Commissioner perspective. Furthermore, they suggest as MATs increase in size they have increasing layers of bureaucracy, individual schools have reduced autonomy, and practice a hierarchical model without local mandate. The constitution of the CAT academies’ governing body and the scheme of delegation clearly outlines an LGB for each of the CAT academies with full delegated powers, as an LA school would have, unlike other larger MATs (Wilkins, 2017; Simpkins et al., 2019). As underlined by Wilkins, (2017) and Wilkins et al. (2019) the commitment from the CAT in localising power and leadership within LGBs deviates from the norm, and therefore, it is at least “not ordinary” for a larger, and ambitious MAT (Roberts, 2018).

This form of LGB organisation represents a form of localism: governance which is located away from direct central functioning (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Stoker, 2019) (2.2.1.). The type of localism, or local governance, is significant as this determines the extent of autonomy and the extent of deviation from the norm the CAT model exhibits. Democratic localism (Hodgson and Spours, 2012), is identified as a form of localism which privileges the open system and self-governing modes of Newman’s (2001) modes of governance, and one which differentiates itself from rational-goal or hierarchy focused governance. These modes of governance link the polity and the citizen and increase democratic participation and co-production on policy. Democratic localism, which places public value (Mazzucato and Ryan-Collins, 2019; Locatelli, 2019) rather than markets as the driving factor, is also a model which aligns with democratic values. The findings from this study would suggest that the governance at the CAT, and its academies, are based predominantly in laissez-faire localism with degrees of democratic localism, recognising that no organisation is likely to be one form or another and that there will be elements of all or some. Elements of laissez-faire localism, according to Hodgson and Spours (2012) (2.2.1.), evident are: reduced centralisation and the ability to set one’s own agenda; a focus upon community empowerment and involvement; funding-driven not policy-driven. In relation to democratic localism, the CAT and LGB of City Academy demonstrate partial aspects of some elements of democratic localism, outlined by Hodgson and Spours (2012), such as a focus on all learners in a locality with a view of education as a common good, as a basis for citizenship and societal participation as referenced by the Director of the CAT and the Principal of City Academy, and a commitment to regeneration of localism and community. Laissez-faire localism and NPM technologies are differentiated only by the rhetoric of community participation, and as will be discussed further in this chapter, the governance at the CAT can be considered as exceptional NPM modelling.

Furthermore, structurally, the CAT LGB is reminiscent of maintained schools under LA control, with a purposeful difference in relation to role expectation. This structure is unlike Co-operative Trust federated schools, which present its governing body in relation to stakeholders as an alternative (Allen, 2018; Woodin, 2015). However, the CAT could be perceived as alternative in that there is a retention of the LGB in itself, with the delegation of power it retains, combined with the associated Co-op Group values that the agnostic-political formulation the structure could represent (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021). Therefore, although the structure of governance and scheme of delegation to the LGB deviates from that expected by a larger MAT (Simpkins et al., 2019: Connelly et al. 2014), it is in line with maintained schools.

The difference in the model as referenced by the Director, relates to both purpose and brand objectives and power, as well as to how the roles of each of the governors are predicated on the ‘expert local’, which is manifested in a form of “ensconced localism” (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022). What follows is a discussion of each of those roles within the structure that secure the difference.

The *Co-op Group governors* add a uniqueness to the make-up of the LGB membership in that the CAT places senior Co-op Group employees into the LGB. Although this represents a form of localism, this is not a centralised localism, as policy is not prescribed centrally, nor solely is the laissez-faire localised model in that policy production is autonomous. It is not representative of democratic localism as policy is not determined from the bottom-up (Hodgson and Spurs, 2012; Newman, 2001). Therefore, this is arguably an “ensconced” form of localism (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022), whereby senior Co-op Group members are spread across the Trust, localised in academies to steer governing bodies and academies to adhere to the principles of the Articles of Association/funding agreements, which are specifically related to being Co-op. This is about providing support through gatekeepers and knowledge providers, about steering each academy to localise to the needs of the community through the lens, values, and principles of Co-op. Ultimately it is about power, and with delegation of power comes the guardians of values, *ensconced* within the LGB to ensure that the power is utilised efficiently and in line with CAT values and principles. It is therefore brand protection and promotion, ensuring that each academy becomes the lived reality of Co-op values and principles. That the Co-op Group members of the LGB are professionalised, skilled, expert stakeholders for the Co-op Group, represents a form of what Wilkins (2019a) calls monopoly, producing in the localised arena a direct accountability up to those in the CAT and Co-op Group. They are also boundary spanners (Ball and Junemann, 2012) in the wider notion of networked governance that the CAT is. Furthermore, this is also an example of what Wilkins (2019a) calls epistocracy, rule by the knowledgeable, in this case knowledge of the Co-op brand, principles and values. In City Academy, the Chair of Governors was a very senior manager in Co-op Group and three sponsored members were employed by Co-op Group, and they were there, arguably, to ensure that a Co-op discourse was disseminated, a localised blueprint produced, in line with Co-op brand expectations: to determine the LGB agnostic-political formulation (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021) (see 5.3.4.). This is a form of governmentality, and Rayner (2018) would argue a form of contextualised governmentality. In that the discourse is localised and accepted by those on the LGB. They contextualise the discourse of being Co-op, whilst determining the co-operative direction that City Academy takes.

Epistocracy and monopoly (Wilkins, 2019a) continue with the professional, skills-based *parent governors* at City Academy. Parent governors at City Academy are all, in a community of high deprivation, professionals and highly-skilled. This being in line with the drive for the professionalisation of governing bodies (Connelly et al., 2017) and government expectations of “good governance” (Wilkins, 2019d). Those parent governors interviewed were employed in professional finance, business management or educational arenas. All the parent governors were white women, aged between 40 and 50, whose first language was English, in a school with over 50% of its cohort with EAL or Pakistani-heritage students, therefore in combination, not representative of the community of the school. This is in line with Auerbach’s (2010) and Rogers, Freelon and Terriquez’s, (2012) findings that white, professional, higher socio-economic individuals are much more likely to engage in activities such as governance than lower socio-economic individuals or from an ethnic minority. This is not in line with DfE expectations of an LGB which represents the diversity of its community (DfE, 2020). The parents themselves perceive they have been encouraged to stand for election, based on a combination of their skillset and behaviours demonstrated at the parent forum; skills such as being articulate, able to question and ask for feedback, being able to challenge, arguably, leadership behaviours. The parent governors have ‘graduated’ from the parent forum group, yet during the research the parent forum was populated with an almost exclusively ethnic minority and/or second language group of parents, who arguably, as outlined in the findings, had little awareness of the role of parent governors or of governance itself, despite the regular attendance of parent governors to the forum. Therefore, at City Academy the parent governors are arguably actively and disproportionately recruited as they have governance capital and agency because of their professionalised skill set (James et al., 2011). Auerbach (2010) and others (Connolly, et al., 2017; James et al., 2011) suggest that linguistic and logistic barriers, the formalities of governance and cultural discontinuities all contribute to this dearth of parents from poorer backgrounds, or second-language speakers, from coming forward, or arguably, being selected for recruitment. Furthermore, the combination of engagement and managing the complexities of decision-making (James et al., 2011), such as performativity regimes, inspection, data analysis and the requirements of financial acuity, (Wilkins, 2019d), in the form of corporate accountability (Courtney, McGinity and Gunter, 2018), ensure that some find it difficult to carry out the role (James et al., 2011). In this case there is the added barrier that the LGB privilege, seek out, and limit opportunity and participation to those parents with professionalised skills over those who do not demonstrate those skills; this is line with what Wilkins, (2019d) suggests is one technology of rational self-management, to limit participation.

The LGB place high-value trust in the capacity of those with professionalised skills, and actively distrust those parents without. Baxter, (2019) suggests that distrust is not the absence of trust, it is the expectation that individuals cannot be relied upon to not cause harm. Trust is related to risk management; in that it exposes a vulnerability related to brand and reputation (2.2.1.). The high trust that the professionalised parent governors have, related to risk mitigation, is further aligned with Huxham and Vangen’s (2005) suggestion that the level of trust relates to the perceived level of collaborative advantage that the professionalised governor will bring to the LGB. The professionalised parent governor is worth the extent of investment, the balance of trust, power, and control, as this will secure a collaborative advantage not perceived with the non-professionalised parent governor, the stakeholder, who would arguably demand greater investment with active distrust within a neoliberal framing of collaborative advantage, that is brand advantage and protection. The findings support, in line with Wilkins (2019d), government and CAT LGB policy in securing school parent governors who are efficient actors in the design of technologies of rational self-management. These technologies, therefore, limit participation, mitigating the risk of underperformance and enable the Academy to excel at combining the interests of government and sponsor, strengthening accountability, and the relations between schools and central government through positive brand advantage and marketisation (Wilkins, 2016; 2019d). Ultimately, this privileging of skill and professional attributes over stake is a direct result of government policy, which valorises and privileges the relationship upwards between the Academy, sponsors, and government, as well as positive external judgements, motivated by brand reputational advantage in the market, of being “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011), over the local and stake.

*Co-opted governors* are part of the difference that the Director of the CAT alludes to when referring to the LGB model (5.2.2.). This was a reference to the inclusion of the expert local in the LGB: the co-opted governors, the social partners. They act as boundary spanners (Ball and Junemann, 2012; Baxter, 2020) at a local level. They are not the old model of LA councillors who know nothing of education (5.2.2.) that the Director despaired of in his inspection experience, but they are professional stakeholders, who utilise their expertise to mobilise and maximise resources and capital: human, social, and economic, for use within the Academy. The findings show they act as brokers and bridges, managing the collaborations with others, and facilitating, as Ball and Junemann (2012) suggest, the flow of leading-edge information between their arena, the community, and the governing body (Baxter, 2020) because they speak a different “sectorial language” (Ball and Junemann, 2012:90), as well as connecting problems to solutions, such as the ‘how’ of community regeneration. This is contrary to the findings of James et al. (2010) who found that the link with the LA representatives was generally unsatisfactory and served little, if any, productive service. They went further to suggest that the relationship warranted further fruitful development. Greany (2020) also furthers this by advocating the deeper facilitation of the LA beyond the role of a boundary spanner so they can bind diverse stakeholders together to work towards realising a place-based vision. Being expert in their arena affords those partners power and additional reach to secure the objectives outlined by the CAT and Co-op Group for community regeneration and academy improvement. Representatives, as boundary spanners, are utilised to influence in the localised setting and in some cases have been democratically elected by their community. Arguably for the Co-op Group and CAT (5.2.1.), and evident in the findings, the regeneration of communities is as important as school improvement. Therefore, the inclusion of local councillors and co-opted governors, or social partners – the boundary spanners – for the Director and the Principal is crucial in representing further inclusivity and localisation. This Co-op agnostic-political formulation of governance offers a potential re-socialisation, rather than the dominant formulation de-socialisation that Wilkins and Gobby (2021) suggests with immediate contexts or local community, but not necessarily the Academy community, to serve the wider political and economic interests of the sponsor. Arguably, the boundary spanners as members of the LGB, at a local level, can work with other governors to drive and utilise their economic and social capital to gain unique access to resources that would be otherwise unavailable to the LGB or CAT. Furthermore, as boundary spanners they are extended high levels of trust (Baxter, 2020), in that they have not been limited in terms of participation but selected for the purpose of their capital. As trust exposes vulnerability and risks to the organisational goals (2.2.1.), trust is not extended lightly, the stakes are too high (Baxter, 2020) (5.2.1.). What is apparent in the findings is that the legacy of the original Pioneers of the Co-operative movement is to an extent a lived reality; the co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, solidarity, equally, and equity are clear in the examples of co-operative education within the Academy, and within the community, through such social partnership work with the housing association to work towards regenerating the local community. The values and principles as outlined in the Articles of Association for which the CAT and academies are legally beholden to adhere, are enacted, to a small but significant degree, at City Academy in relation to regeneration of community.

In summary, what is significant in relation to the CAT’s model of governance as an alternative is the positioning of the values and objectives behind the brand. The Co-op Group brand and what it represents is high profile in the public arena as an ethical, values-led organisation, based on co-operative values and principles and a commitment to social justice and community regeneration. As such, the CAT has complex objectives in relation to a public or common good education framing and is subject to significant risk to brand advantage and brand failure. To mitigate the risk, the CAT model of governance both forges forward with a localised approach to deliver the brand objectives yet utilises brand and local expertise in the form of gatekeepers, boundary spanners (Ball and Junemann, 2012) and carefully selected parent governors to secure the effective technologies of rational self-management, which in turn secures brand protection and brand advantage. This places in tension the brand objectives, co-operative values, and the agnostic-political lens (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021) through which the organisation delivers its objectives. The tension being the neoliberal political dominance or a common good reframing (Locatelli, 2019) in line with co-operative values that the organisation is committed to deliver. Furthermore, whilst not organisationally committing to a democratic systemic change in governance to a more democratic organisational configuration such as democratic localism (Hodgson and Spours, 2012), the brand objectives, its organisation as an LGB and the reimagining of the roles of those members of the LGB, represent a leaning away from a neoliberal dynamic towards a common good reframing of education or a democratic localism (table 5.1). What is key to the lived reality of co-operative values enacted with the people to present a further alternative, is the extent to which democracy and deliberative democracy is enacted within the operation of the leadership and governance of the organisation or polity.

Table 5.1 The Positionality of the CAT in relation to structural, organisational, and operational deviation versus neoliberal and democratic localism models of governance (arrows indicate the direction of tendency) (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Neoliberalism** (Simkins et al, 2019) | **CAT** | **Democratic Localism** (Hodgson and Spours, 2012) |
| Purpose | Maximisation of output, economic rationalism (Newman, 2001) | ICA values, community regeneration, school improvement | Public and common good (Locatelli, 2020),  self- governance, democratic enactment of shared core values, emphasis on self-government and consensual decision-making (Bryk et al., 1998) |
| Structural | Professionalised – skills-based governance, two parent representatives on centralised governing body. Exclusive representation | Professionalised, skills-based stakeholder representation, (with skill privileged over stake) but diverse and inclusive role representation, representation based on stake-field expertise | Local stakeholder and social partner collaboration, stakeholder model, majority parent and community membership (Bryk et al., 1999) |
| Organisational | Centralised governance, executive leadership, | LGB; full governing body, delegation to subcommittee, planned strategic events, ‘ensconced’ localism | Mutual accountability  between different layers of governance and social partners through the use of  ‘policy frameworks’ to create a strongly collaborative local system |
| Operational | Hierarchical/ rational goal model - NPM (Newman, 2001) emphasis on structures, roles, procedures, output, and meeting targets, KPIs | Hierarchical/ rational goal model - NPM (Newman, 2001) emphasis on structures roles, procedures output and meeting targets, KPI’s | Self-governance/ open systems model (Newman, 2001) fostering democratic participation and empowerment of stakeholders, building consensus, embedding networks, flexible responsive forms of participation |
| Parental and community involvement/engagement | If any stakeholder involvement - NPM; consumer satisfaction survey, one-way information flow | Parental involvement NPM; consumer satisfaction survey, two-way operational information flow (parent forum) | Stakeholder and social partners engaged in democratic deliberation and authentic decision-making |

## 5.3. The Enactment of the Co-operative Value of Democracy

What follows is a discussion exploring the extent to which democracy is enacted in both the empowered and public space, which forms the bounded polity of the City Academy’s governance and leadership. This is key to understanding the extent to which the model of the CAT governance is an alternative to the hegemonic neoliberal dynamic. In the discussion of the empowered space, representative democracy is considered alongside democratic agency and the illusion of democracy which can be present in spaces dominated by a representative democratic project. In the public space, again the democratic agency extended to the members of the parent forum is outlined, highlighting a contested site, with differing experiences, desires, and actions as well as dissent. Furthermore, the contribution of NPM and a rational-goal mode of operation (Newman, 2001), which dominates the operationalism of the CAT model of governance, is explored.

### 5.3.1. The Empowered Space – the LGB of City Academy

In the case of the empowered space, both the process of wider election to office itself, and the process of democracy availed of and practiced by the participants within the space the democratic enactment is considered. The primary form of democracy evident in the empowered space is in the form of representative democracy, realised in the election of parent governors: individuals elected by the parent body to represent them and their views at the LGB (Escobar, 2017). It is evident from the findings, despite the democratic process of election, that those representing the parents are not necessarily representative of their diverse community, nor their community’s stake (5.2.2). The *Governance Handbook* (DfE, 2020) has been updated to emphasise the importance of an LGB reflecting the diversity *of* the school community, although not going so far as to suggest that the reflection be *from* the school community; neither is the case in this LGB. Furthermore, the parent governors have been returned by a small mandate, for Louise, only approximately 4% of the Academy parent body voted in the single-candidate election, raising further questions regarding the legitimacy of representation and arguably, of the parent community’s knowledge, understanding or value of the parent governor role. The issue of legitimacy is further raised in that those elected representatives that they have been encouraged to stand for election based on their skill rather than their stake, (5.2.2.), and as such represents the deficit in “localism” that Woods and Simkins (2014) postulate. The representatives elected, in the ideal of Schumpeterian democracy (1.2.1.), are at least a best fit, according to Escobar (2017) of the views of those they go on to represent and should go to the empowered space to deliberate the pluralist perspective, to promote or protect the public’s interest, the stake, through a process of deliberation, bargaining or exchange of views, with other representatives of stake. However, counter to this, even in a best-case scenario, the findings here show that the white, middle-class, parent governors are not best placed to represent the diversity of the body they are attempting to represent. Kulz (2021) suggests this is not exceptional, that the professionalisation of governance is exclusionary, privileging individuals who perform in this business mode, and those individuals being white and middle-class: securing governance as classed and raced. Reay et al. (2007) state that to be white and middle-class signifies you as a person of value. This is heightened in a neoliberal rationality. Furthermore, representing the parent view is de facto from the parent governor perspective, with their primary motivation residing elsewhere. The impact of governor (mis)representation will be discussed later (section 5.3.2.).

The parent governors report they have a strong sense of consequentiality, inclusivity, and authenticity, as evident from the findings, which is significant in the realisation of deliberative democracy in the empowered space. The representative parent body – the parent governors – perceive they are encouraged to participate in deliberative democracy and that the integrative norms of deliberation are embodied in the LGB practices and culture. They perceive they have impact, that their views are valued, and they are not rubber-stamping anyone else’s decisions, counter to the experience Young (2014) found in her work on parent governors; there is a distinction here between talk or discussion, which may or not embody a belief of open-mindedness (Curato et al., 2017), and deliberation. Deliberation here involves reason-giving, decision-making and reciprocity. Both Stan and Julie are keen to ensure that there is a culture of deliberation in the LGB. Undoubtedly, there is a perception of a deliberative culture, and parent governors feel they are equal actors in the deliberative process; they consider they have democratic agency with equal influence as any other governor, within a contextualised governmentality (Rayner, 2018). However, as the data illustrates, not all discussions are deliberative, as governors are steered towards preconceived outcomes, as evidenced by the Chair of Governor’s use of language, foregrounding a request for a decision with, “I’m happy with this.” This is further supported by Louise, when discussing her experience of Julie’s approach (4.3.1.). This represents an illusion of democracy and therefore the perception that all actors are equal is also illusionary, and that roles and procedures, including democratic practices, are privileged. Furthermore, there is positional power behind the deliberative democratic performance, which steers the group to desired ends. This concurs with Locatelli (2019) who postulates that the illusion of democracy occurs when those in power invite participation in deliberative decision-making with the aim of engineering consent for predetermined decisions. This is known to some, Louise, and with that awareness enables those ‘in the know’ to participate in the game, as part of the integrative norms and it empowers them to stand up to challenge the direction of travel if they felt it necessary. Ultimately, it can be argued that the Chair of Governors in the language that she uses – around transparency and process of decision-making and feedback; the construction of effective processes and systems of accountability, which support the technologies of rational self-management; the use of positional power to implement strategies of engineered consent or fabricate an illusion of democracy – indicate a governance culture based in positional power, or hierarchy, and market logic and performativity. What is presented is an operationalised mode of governance that Newman (2001) would recognise as a blended hierarchical/rational-goal orientated mode of governance rather than a deliberative democratic ideal. From findings, the culture of the empowered space is one by which deliberative democratic integrative norms are played out and realised as the basic expectation of hierarchical integrative norms (Newman, 2001), with associated NPM technologies.

This foregrounding of deliberation with a statement from the Chair, the positional leader of the LGB, could be perceived as stifling deliberation and for some it would be, however for those current parent governors, they stated they would be unfazed and would challenge should they feel the need to. Arguably, a reason that the parent governors feel they have democratic agency and are efficient in navigating and conforming to the integrative norms of deliberation as it stands within the empowered space, is that this space demonstrates both hierarchical and rational-goal modes of operation (Newman, 2001). This subsequently privileges those skilled and articulate individuals who can deliberate in a recognisable rationalist characteristic way. Should those representatives of the parent body come from an ethnic minority, are second-language speakers or from areas of deprivation, which is the community around City Academy, they are likely to articulate, have a speech culture, and deliberate in ways incongruent to rationalist forms of deliberation (Curato et al., 2017). Therefore, whilst there is the appearance of democratic agency, it is connected to the mode of working of the governing body and the skill level of those working within it.

The visioning day(s) (4.3.1.) was a deviation from the normal operation of the LGB. It was a significant event in enhancing the parent governors’ perception of their consequentiality. Furthermore, the visioning day was significant in that it brought together the representatives of the community, parents, and sponsors, to deliberate the direction of the governing body and the Academy through the development of the AIP. This was achieved utilising the CAT three-year strategic plan and its focus up on community, as well as co-operative values. One of the parent governors led on an aspect of the visioning day. Whilst this key event provided a distinct opportunity for democratic agency to parent governors, and others who participated in the event, it was arguably elitist and had greater potential to be a micro-deliberative event, or innovation, than it was (Beauvais and Warren, 2019). As representatives of parents of the Academy community the parent governors are not truly representative of the community, demographically or culturally, as discussed earlier in this section, and furthermore have primarily self-interest motivations in becoming an elected parent governor, rather than representing the views of parents. As Erman (2012) would suggest, individuals who are elected as representatives may not be truly or widely representative of all stakeholders, which is arguably true in this instance, and therefore, when subsequently given the authority to act on behalf of the parent body, may not prioritise the view of those who elected them. Significantly, therefore, those who should have been included in the visioning day, or represented, were arguably, not. Therefore, those excluded were not involved directly, or indirectly, in the deliberation or decision-making. In relation to this event, the decision taken, and direction determined, were not shared or consulted on as a visioning document, nor when this was turned into the AIP at the parent forum or wider community. Beauvais and Warren (2019) suggest that democratic failures or deficits occur when, in line with the findings, there is a failure of those who should be included not being so, there is failure of deliberativeness and communication, and a failure of decision-making capacities, as an event such as this broadens the scope of those impacted upon by the deliberation, wider than those in the representative positions. The intention for the visioning day(s), it can be argued, was actually the increased efficiency of NPM technologies to support the polity in the drive for clearer KPIs, Ofsted framework mapped and outcome-driven action plans (section 4.3.1.), giving the LGB greater ownership or ‘teeth’ in its accountability function over the school leadership and Academy performance, as a rational-goal orientated LGB. This concurs with Greany and Higham (2018) who report that MATs have a great stake in self-policing, in that they are embedding and normalising practices of self-evaluation and improvement planning, as well as the language and concepts of Ofsted, as a result of external accountability which influences and constrains school leaders’ priorities and ways of thinking. Alternatively, the potential for the visioning day was to secure democratic agency within the representative body, the empowered space, however, there was the potential for greater democracy, and deliberative democracy, through the planning of this as a micro-deliberative event.

### 5.3.2. The Public Space

Stan envisaged that the parent forum – a public space, would be a strand for parental engagement; the success of this as engagement will be considered (5.4.). However, as a body it represents an opportunity in a deliberative democratic system for a public space, where deliberation and participation take place (Dryzek, 2017). In City Academy, a parent forum is not a prescribed activity from the CAT, although a mechanism is required for engaging with parents and ensuring parents could influence within academies. The parent forum at City Academy is a way of collecting the thoughts and concerns of parents allowing them to have a voice and a vehicle to consult or share information; Hendriks (2009) would suggest therefore it is a potential place of macro-deliberation. The perspective of the now parent governors who regularly attended the parent forum, and of those interviewed in the focus group, is that they have consequentiality (4.3.2.). They perceive and can cite changes they attest to, because of their intervention during deliberation at the parent forum. They further cite consequentiality through the power of being able to request agenda items, discussion points and the presence of members of staff to explain new policy and or protocol.

The primary impact of their consequentiality, from the findings, focuses on operational or functional aspects of Academy policy, not on policy itself. It was evident from the findings that there was authenticity on operational aspects, that is a preparedness to have an open mind, listen and be prepared to change opinion based on reason-giving, however, in terms of policy itself there appeared not to be. For example, issues had been raised over the attendance policy in the forum, which were deliberated in the full governing body and the community committee – that is the empowered space – and was not changed. However, arguably, in the empowered space there was no legitimate representative to advocate for the stakeholders involved and therefore, there was no political equality for that stakeholder group or political bindingness to have the same influence on the decision-making process. Erman (2012) would argue then that there is then not democratic agency for some of those stakeholders presenting at the parent forum.

In terms of inclusivity, whilst the forum is physically open to all, there were, seemingly, observable anti-democratic and excluding behaviours demonstrated by the Academy leadership. Stan in his interview talks about contracting at the beginning of the forum, protocols, and procedures for the forum to run, all of which align with Co-op values. However, when one parent does foreground her point with a narrative (4.3.2.), it is misconstrued as an individual child issue and she is curtailed, unlike her white male counterpart. As a parent for whom English is a second language, it is legitimate for her to articulate a point in a narrative form rather than a rationalist articulation, as her point was of policy significance in relation to curriculum construction at the Academy. However, as Curato et al. (2017) concur, those individuals who come from ethnic minorities, second-language speakers or those from areas of deprivation, which is the community around City Academy, are less likely to articulate in a rationalist form of deliberation. Those individuals may have speech cultures which are incongruous with rational deliberation and may depart from ‘rationalist’ forms of discourse that privilege dispassionate argumentation, logical coherence, and evidence-based claims. Those individuals may tell stories or be anecdotal, they may use as their starting point the concrete example of their child to foreground their point, as in the example, which they want to deliberate, which is a nuanced difference to wanting their child’s problem solved at the forum. Using talk, storytelling, anecdotes, humour, rhetoric, and testimonies are all legitimated forms of deliberative communication (Curato et al., 2017; Mansbridge et al., 2012; Hendriks, 2009). Hence, as the findings illustrate, some groups of parents’ experience excluding and anti-democratic behaviour or integrative norms (Dryzek, 2017).

A keystone of deliberative democracy is the access of mutual justification (Lafont, 2020; Chambers, 2012). When the parent members of the forum raise the issue of the attendance policy, they are not afforded the opportunity of formal deliberation, but they are expected, as they are *subject* to it, to adhere to the policy without question or recourse. Lafont (2020) postulates that the expectation of blind deference to a policy, to which the individuals cannot align, or cannot see themselves having proposed, legitimately can be claimed as anti-democratic, unless as Erman (2012) suggests, those individuals have control over the actors making the decision. Arguably the parents of the forum had no known control over the actors, the parent governors, if they were unaware of their existence or have a limited knowledge and understanding of what the parent governor’s role was. Their sense of injustice was palpable during the focus group and reveals itself in the discussion of the petition (4.3.2.). Lafont (2020) articulates that a deficit in democratic opportunity can engender a form of estrangement, or political alienation, in the case of the parent forum members, a misalignment in the values of the academy and themselves, and ultimately, a sense of great injustice. Significantly, if an individual accepts blind deference and the injustice, then they are disengaging from democratic processes (Lafont, 2020). The parents in question chose not to disengage, but they chose to dissent, to raise questions, to challenge the governance and leadership of the Academy for a deliberative end. This concurs with what Sparks (1997) suggests, that an alternative to disengagement is to dissent with deliberation as the goal, or as Rollo (2017) suggests they can commit deeds, which can range from speech to silent protests. As in the case of the parent forum members, dissent is usually the practice of marginalised individuals who contest the direction of the hegemony. The oppositional practices that constitute dissenting activity, or deeds (Rollo, 2017), occur when the institutional pathways normally accessible are either inadequate or unavailable (Sparks, 1997). Whilst a petition would normally be considered an institutional pathway between those of equal power, arguably, because of the power differential between the LGB and the parent body, the lack of deliberative or democratic opportunity, the petition represents a dissenting act, which requires the parent member three to have “courage” (Sparks, 1997).

What this discussion is not postulating is the converse of blind deference to the parent wishes, but if there had been the opportunity for true deliberation within the polity, whereby both parties engaged and mutual justification was secured, greater understanding of whatever the outcome was would have been achieved. What has occurred, it can be inferred, is a form of deliberation in the public space, the resultant petition is the outcome of everyday conversations, whereby a group of parents from the community have come to a mutual understanding of the attendance issue which directly relates to them. Marques and Maia (2010) call this an “argumentative density”, which may or may not be based in fact, but opinion. The conversations on the fringes of policy enactment are important to develop politicisation required for democracy and foreground the arguments which form the basis of the formal deliberation that the parents of the forum wish. There is the potential for the argument developed through everyday talk to be flawed and misunderstood (Marques and Maia, 2010), such as in the case of the parents’ interpretations of what was statutory and what was in the gift of the Academy relating to the attendance policy and the legal requirements of attendance. However, what it can produce is a spokesperson, such as the parent with the petition, with the collective public (or community) opinion and perception that they can “handle political situations” (Marques and Maia, 2010:630), amongst other democratically-socialising effects (Rollo, 2017). Furthermore, this power *over* that is exercised by the Academy leadership and LGB has coalesced those parents in the community and the parent forum in what Hendriks (2009) cites as an oppositional stance against the Academy policy.

Democratic decision-making differs from non-democratic decision-making in the tracking of the interests of those *affected by* the decisions – inclusivity, (Dryzek, 2017). However, Erman (2012) argues there is reason to support the view that democratic decision-making should be taking into consideration an alternative perspective that it is those *subjected to* the decisions, as those identified as the most to lose are those who should be afforded most power. In the case of City Academy, the risk of a change in attendance policy could elicit a decline in the Academy attendance percentage; a KPI in the marketisation of schools and academies, a technology of NPM. City Academy once had the worst attendance in the city and now has the best, which is highly marketable and therefore, elevates it to “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011) and provides academy and brand protection for the CAT and Co-op Group.

In summation, in terms of democracy being realised within the polity, it seems that representative democracy exists in the form of elections to the empowered space, and that within the empowered space there is an illusion of deliberative democracy, wrapped up in the integrative norms of hierarchical and rational-goal modes of governance operationalism. In that part of the expectations of hierarchical modes of governance is to perform a choreographed representation of deliberative governance, whilst the reality may be quite different – for example, engineered consent (Locatelli, 2019) (5.3.1.). Those with the advantage in this performance are those who know it exists and therefore can still perform with full understanding. The visioning days and the use of the Fortel survey (4.4.1.) have the potential to become micro-deliberative events, enhancing the deliberative democratic capital of the polity. However, the day is operationalised in the form of NPM technologies: an opportunity missed, as is the opportunity to share with the community what had been achieved on its behalf. Within the public space, parents in the forum have some opportunities to communicate with the LGB and leadership of the Academy but are afforded no democratic opportunities to become democratic agents of change, however, there are groups of parents who do feel strongly that they have had consequentiality and impact, but on aspects of operation rather than policy itself. In fact, the extent to which power *over* the polity exists, engenders enclaves of dissent and injustice, is classed, and raced, and ultimately privileges greater power and economic autonomy in being heard and deliberated with, over parent voices and democratic opportunities for stakeholders. This being the case, the CAT, and its model of governance, does not seemingly operationalise or realise the co-operative value of democracy in relation to parents as stakeholders nor in its normalised logic of governance. Therefore, when considering the prerequisites of common good reframing of education (Locatelli, 2019), those being a dynamic opposition to neoliberalism, community networks of co-operativism and the development of instruments of participatory democracy, the expectations of an organisation which privileges co-operativism and democracy falls short. Ultimately, education at the CAT is situated as public good, with common good goals.

### 5.3.4. NPM Rational-goal Practices

When considering how governance is actually operationalised at City Academy and the CAT, what is clear is that parent and community participation exist as realities of hierarchical and rational goal modes of governance (Newman, 2001). There is evidence of representative democracy in relation to parent governors in the empowered space, and a democratic illusion exists – for example, voting – as is expected and associated with hierarchical forms of governance (Newman, 2001). The dominant form of operationalism in this governing body is a rational-goal mode (Newman, 2001), or what Wilkins (2019d) would call rational self-management practices of NPM. What this means for participation in the rational-goal mode, is the parent, as client or consumer (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2016; Lingard and Hursh, 2019), is expected to feedback on aspects of school performance, “what are we doing well/not so well”, “even better if...”, this is evidenced in the annual parent survey that the City Academy and the whole of the CAT undertake. As consumers, parents receive feedback, “you said, we did” to maintain, if not consumer satisfaction, an illusion of partnership, participation, and market advantage. In relation to democracy and public participation, as shown in fig.1 in 2.2.1., and evidenced in the findings, rational-goal modes denote a “managerial framing of participation with limited delegation of power, diversity of consumer preferences acknowledged with an emphasis on funder and government requirements” (Newman, 2001), rather than responsive forms of participation as in the open-systems mode, delegation of powers to self-managing organisations or counter-publics as in the self-governing mode. This is part of neoliberal political rationality (Wilkins, 2014) that normalises NPM and rational-goal behaviours, because of governmentality and a form of contextualised governmentality (Rayner, 2018). For the CAT and City Academy, employing NPM strategies to achieve their goals limits the extent of democratic practice (Newman, 2001; Olmedo and Wilkins, 2014; Wilkins, 2019d), as is evidenced in relation to participation in decision-making and the realisation of democratic values. Realising democracy in relation to decision-making would mean delegation and redistribution of power and control from the LGB to the stakeholder.

The NPM and rational self-management technologies, (1.2.4.), secure, according to Hartley (2018), a performativity logic, with a focus on managerialism and professional, corporate and market accountability. Evidentially, the City Academy LGB effectively performs monitoring, audit, and evaluation, focus on target and goals, production of action plans, KPIs and maximising of outputs. The Chair of Governors recognises and strives for “good governance” as process and outcome, in the instrumental-rational formulation of governance (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021) which is the embodiment of NPM practices, and “good governance” in which the organisation is governable, answerable, and transparent (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021). The leadership practices of the Chair, in ensuring that the governing body: has ‘teeth’ and can ‘challenge’; owns the AIP and associated KPIs; and drives the direction of the organisation through the visioning days and day-to-day leadership of the LGB, indicate her belief in the organisation as being governable and answerable, and her commitment to transparency, as has been stated, in relation to the rationale for decisions made by the governing body back to stakeholders. As leader of the LGB, she has ensured that each member of the governing body had audited their skills against the governance competency framework (DfE, 2017), to evaluate capabilities of the body, and arguably demonstrating an internal business accountability of being fit for purpose. Furthermore, this operationalising enables the external scrutiny of the LGB to be made amenable (Wilkins, 2019c), and comparable to others utilising the same standards, which reduces risk and promotes advantage, if perceived to be good.

The Chair was, as were all leaders of the CAT and City Academy, passionate about the purpose of the CAT objectives, demonstrating a moral and altruistic motivation as outlined by Simon, James, and Simon, (2021) and accountability, and social, as well as business, entrepreneurialism (Holloway and Keddie, 2020). However, as outlined above, this, along with democracy, a key value of the co-operative movement, and one which is embedded into the Articles of Association, is at odds with rational self-management technologies. The instrumental-rational formulation of governance, whilst as Wilkins and Gobby (2021) suggest, is a globally recognised model of good practice and construed as apolitical, has been constructed in a neoliberal political logic, a logic that the Chair and leadership of the CAT and City Academy have been inculcated in through governmentality techniques, which, when rewards for success are great, discourse so strong and stakes so high, would defy a deviation from. The instrumental-rational formulation of governance formulation is not apolitical, it frames why the realisation of democracy in “how” the City Academy LGB works is limited, as opposed to its realisation as part of co-operative values and community regeneration in “what” the LGB works on. A second formulation of governance, therefore, needs also to be considered, subordinate to rational-instrumental formulation of governance, what Wilkins and Gobby (2021) consider as the agnostic-political formulation which recognises the politicisation of governance, and its foundations in the neoliberal logic. It can be argued that when power *over* is exhibited in determining what is to be focused upon, then the democratic and other co-operative values of the Co-op Group and CAT are realised, such as the contribution to the lived reality of community regeneration through co-operative values, the curriculum opportunities to develop young co-operators, the democratic invitation to staff to consult on the three-year strategic plan. However, tension occurs when the agnostic-political formulation is challenged, as evidenced in the findings by the parents at the forum demanding deliberative opportunities and the change in attendance policy. The privileging of the neoliberal logic over the parent stakeholder is significant in the domination of the agnostic-political formulation which requires the LGB to conform to government expectation of good governance over local deviations, which ultimately compromise co-operative values for market accountabilities. Kulz (2021) offers support by postulating the exclusionary impact of neoliberal rationalities, valorises the lack of democratic participation, white middle-classness and the valued professional, as well as technologies to extend the market value. Also, Kulz (2021) states that perceived failure of neoliberal rationality would be to reverse exclusionary practices not the converse.

This perspective determines that democracy conflicts with rational-goal modes of operation (Wilkins, 2019; Olmedo and Wilkins, 2014) and subsequently limits democratic behaviours from those in governance. Whilst appearing to be irreconcilable, the sets of interests of a neoliberal political rationalisation of behaviours, or the neoliberal normative order of reason (Lingard and Hursh, 2019; Kulz, 2021) of LGBs and governance, and the needs and views of stakeholders, can be reconciled. Whilst Wilkins (2019), argues for the introduction of mini-publics to the repertoire of governance practices, there are many arguments against this as a sole enterprise (Beauvais and Warren, 2019; Lafont, 2020) and that a fully deliberative democratic system would go further. The LGB at City Academy are taking the first steps to break free of the normalising expectation of rational-goal modes and neoliberal political rationalities by shifting how they use their annual parent survey. By shifting it from a perceived consumer feedback survey into the visioning day, albeit as a further source of evidence, its change of use becomes more strategic and part of a baseline for further development of community engagement, outside of the narrow Ofsted framework expectations. It has the potential to become part of a deliberative interconnection (Erman, 2012) between the empowered space and the public space, by influencing decision-making in the empowered space, with the potential to increase democracy in the system (Dryzek, 2009; Hendriks, 2009).

Of interest is the normalising expectation of behaviours and language of Ofsted and external accountabilities, in that both the Director and the Principal articulate that they are not driven by Ofsted expectations, stating that they would not chase the Ebacc qualification suite, or they would do what is right for students, for example. They both articulate that the CAT strategic plan has gone beyond the Ofsted framework and, whilst it was still there, it was very much in the background with the focus on its community and acquisition plans. This is counter to the findings of Greany and Higham (2018) who report that most MATs state they are driven by Ofsted and external accountability expectations in relation to curriculum, pupil progress data, performance of vulnerable groups, except for a minority of MATs who resist this, they argue, from a position of power, that is, they have an Ofsted Judgment of Good or Outstanding. City Academy would be considered one of those resistor schools, from a position of a good Ofsted judgment. However, whilst this may be true, what is also evident is the normalised expectations of operation and managerial behaviours relating to external accountabilities. For example, the enhanced focus on a challenging improvement plan, which is mapped to the Ofsted (and the CAT strategic plan) framework, its focus on quality of education and pupil and vulnerable group progress. Furthermore, the advertising of Ofsted quotations in Academy publications, the Ofsted training the Principal was undertaking and the regular whole staff training to achieve outstanding, all suggest a continued focus on Ofsted: a driving and normalising force. As does the external accountability framework of the Skills Audit for Governors (DFE, 2017c), which is actioned and used as a yardstick by the Chair. Greany and Higham (2018) report this as an increase in self-policing, standardisation and keeping up with policy, and a narrowing focus to prioritise the need of the school. Arguably, despite the pronouncement of resistance, the behaviours are inculcated and normalised to the extent that there is no other perceived course of action. This, despite a commitment to co-operativism, arguably because of extensive valorisation of NPM, and arguably, New Labour’s approach to monopolise leadership models through the NCSL (Gunter and Forrester, 2009; Thomson, 2017), as well as successive governments external evaluation instruments of good governance, which have established the discourse and discursive practices around leadership which Forrester and Garratt, (2016) suggest then have become known, accepted, or self-evident.

## 5.4. Parental Engagement

What follows is consideration of how parental engagement is configurated as part of the CAT and City Academy strategy for parents to have influence and engage in the operation of City Academy.

There is a significant role for parental engagement in the CAT and City Academy, however, what is in tension is a determination or understanding of what parental engagement is. From the Director’s perspective, it is key for each academy to determine instruments of parental engagement to enable parents to engage and have influence in the way the academy is operationalised. The CAT requires that all academies undertake the Fortel survey, at great cost. The Principal cites this and the parent forum as the two formal forms of the Academy’s parental engagement strategy, alongside many informal opportunities. The Academy, furthermore, has invested in a community liaison role to manage its community and parental engagement strategy and there is a dedicated objective in the AIP. Therefore, in terms of a parental engagement perspective the Academy, seemingly, engages in extensive activities and structures to provide a two-way communication system with parents, which is exactly what the Director states parental engagement is – good communication. The Director of the Trust, the Principal, and the guidance in the *Governance Handbook* (DfE, 2020) reduces parental engagement to a form of good communication. The role of engagement as outlined by the CAT and City Academy is in line with government expectations of parental engagement, not a decision-making role, but a communication role. The Fortel survey satisfies the DfE (2020) guidance which suggests that governing bodies undertake survey activities to utilise the information to inform their strategic decisions. To re-emphasise, the government publications actively reinforce that seeking information does not equate to a position on the board or LGB (DfE, 2017a). In a market logic, as is context of education, there need to be producers and consumers. Parents have been constructed as, arguably, detached consumers of private goods and education; Olmedo and Wilkins (2016) go further to suggest parents are also constructed as governors (professionalised), with oversight of schools and producers of education, in the visioning and development of new schools. As detached consumers, parents respond to surveys and participate in communication which enable information sharing, a customer satisfaction review, and are not expected to participate in deliberation, the construction of policy or contribute to decision-making. The parents, in doing so, are also engaged in developing a brand advantage, providing the information for the Academy to then compare and advertise its advantage over key indicators against previous year’s performance and against other members of the CAT. This is a reductive logic. Newman (2001) considers this a function of the rational-goal mode of governance, in that parents with limited power delegated to them, are expected to act as contributors to enquiry, which the producer, that is City Academy and the CAT, can reduce to comparators of funder and government requirements. This reduction is exhorted to external accountability agents as signifiers of good practice, or as Wilkins (2019d) suggests makes them amenable to external scrutiny. Apple et al. (2018) configure this construct of parental engagement as a *thin* democracy, a market-orientated version of consumer choice.

Returning to the original tension, a definition of parental engagement, what is presented in terms of the activity of the CAT and City Academy and participation from parents, requires very little, if any, delegation of power to parents to co-construct the arena which they are participating in; although they do have the opportunity in both the Fortel survey and the parent forum to raise concern, this does not mean that these need to be addressed. They have no authentic opportunity to lead or construct the direction of travel; therefore, this would be considered as parental involvement rather than engagement. This concurs with both the work of Goodall and Montgomery (2014) and the work of Casper (2011), where engagement is distinguished from involvement by the increased nature of collaboration, equity of power, shared responsibility, and co-construction beyond the home/school dimension, that is, in decision-making capacities and community collaborative activities. Furthermore, Auerbach’s (2010) perspective of parental engagement requires that school leadership, such as governance, engagement with parents and community members, in an explicitly authentic partnership, which values relationship-building, dialogue and power sharing amongst educator, family and community alliances. Auerbach’s (2010) perspective has its basis in a reciprocal empowerment model. What is significant here is the conflation of argument and definition of an authentic parental engagement, as outlined above and in opposition to parental involvement, and a conceptual understanding of deliberative democracy, as outlined in 5.3. and 2.2.1. By achieving one the other will also, seemingly, be secured. Apple et al. (2018) suggest further that to counter the thin market-oriented version of consumer choice and its twin, thin democracy, that the full, critical participation of parents or stakeholders needs to be secured in search of the common good, ultimately achieving a thick democracy. Locatelli (2019) would further this argument by suggesting that reframing education towards a common good, which benefits all in production and process, would, as outlined in 5.3.3.: be a dynamic opposition to neoliberalism, and the marketisation of education; develop community networks of co-operativism, and the values of co-operativism; and require the development of instruments of participatory democracy, which also conflate with the features of parent engagement and deliberative democracy above. However, what the CAT and City Academy present, is not parental engagement, it is parental involvement or what Apple et al. (2018) would consider as thin market-orientated consumer choice practices. This situating of the CAT version of thin parental engagement goes hand in hand with the CAT version of operationalising of thin market-oriented democracy in governance, in its pursuit of what Wilkins (2019c) calls narrow, instrumentalised conceptions of good governance.

## 5.5. Governance as a Social Field of Power Struggles and Decision-making

The site of the LGB at City Academy is appropriately primed for an analysis of power relations and symbolic struggles between actors within the social field that is the bounded polity of the governance of City Academy. The site of educational governance is more than just a struggle in a political/economic sense but can be viewed as a site of struggle on a symbolic level within the social field. This site of contestation represents a tension between actors over a conflict of interests and can be understood as a “decision-making” power game, with dynamic power relationships between actors in the governance polity/social field (Kaščák and Pupala, 2019). Therefore, this relates directly to the dynamic power relationships evident in the social field of the CAT and City Academy governance relationships, within both the empowered and public spaces. In this part of the discussion, Bourdieu’s thinking tools are utilised to analyse the relationships between the leadership of the Academy, the governors, and the parents as part of the forum, establishing how power is *over* the participating parents in decision-making. It is illustrated that the Chair of Governors and leadership of the Academy and its preferred orthodoxy dominate the field, privileging the habitus and capital associated with success in the field or playing the game, that is to professionalised individuals. Further exploration is given to how capital is exchanged, or not, to develop social or symbolic capital or to extend symbolic violence towards parents in the forum.

### 5.5.1. Power Struggles

The social field, in this case the LGB, is rewarded and cemented further by the perceived success of the dominant orthodoxy of the rational-goal mode of operation and effective use of NPM technologies, is the chair of governor’s illusio (Garratt, 2016; Bourdieu, 1990). The belief and investment in this illusio, elevates the capital associated with the mode of operation of the polity and the Chair of Governors herself, and subsequently cements her power and position within the social field. There is no doubt that the parent representatives have gained an enhanced form of self-worth or value from their experiences as parent governors, their experiences of membership of this group and of being sought out, as they perceive, by the Principal, have elevated their social capital and professional capital; as evidenced in the data, they talk with pride over their role and membership of this elite group, and this capital is exchanged in the community to ensure that they are seen as part of an elite to be sought out themselves. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest that within the social field the fundamental priority of those social actors is the accumulation and maintenance of capital as this establishes position and power within the field. The parent governors are keen to develop their social capital further, linking social capital, through the social association with the Chair of Governors, through the drinks evening, for example, and are disappointed when this does not occur. The closer their association with the positional power holders in the social field, the greater the parent governors’ social and symbolic capital. The parent governors feel valued and special in their relationships with the Principal and the Chair of Governors, who hold substantial positional power in the social field, and subsequently have an arguably enhanced perception of symbolic capital. What they are valued for are their skills, both personal and professional, their cultural and professional capital, and their habitus, which make them successful in the social field. Their habitus and substantial capital ensure they are successful in practicing the field. They understand the doxa; the regimes, language and technologies of governance are not barriers to their effectiveness, and therefore they appear to participate in line with the orthodoxy of educational governance, and the neoliberal hegemony. This means that those parent governors, valued for their professionalised skills over stake, become complicit with those in positions of power in maintaining and justifying the dominant orthodoxy which regulates and naturalises the interests of those in positions of power as legitimate symbolic capital (Garret, 2016; Bourdieu, 1990). What this means for the dominant hegemony, or power players, in the social field is reproduction of their regimes, and the maintenance of their position within the field (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015). Ultimately, if those players align with the dominant power, and practice in the field successfully, there will be no threat to the effectiveness or reproduction of the established social field from other counter hegemonies (Papanastasiou, 2019). The selection of identified parents, therefore, becomes understandable in relation to dominance and maintenance. For this polity, this means that the operationalising of NPM, and the democratic deficit within educational governance as a social field, will remain as the dominant orthodoxy and will be reproduced unless there are challenges from other sources such as new governors or parent pressure or the avant-garde (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015), or a shift in the great political field (of national and global governance). The illusio, it can be argued, of those players in the empowered space, subsequently misrecognises the role the mode of operation has in developing inclusivity and valuing voices of contestation.

The premise presented follows Bourdieu’s analysis of Algerian colonialisation by the French (Bourdieu, 1958; Hardy, 2014; Go, 2013). It can be established that the active presence of a middle-class hegemony ensconced amid a low socio-economic, ethnically diverse community with the deliberate aim of community regeneration, has many similarities. The domination of the hegemony during colonialisation, mirrors the approaches the LGB takes with the local community and parents, and the experiences of Algerians migrating to France, arguably, mirror the experiences of the parents in the parent forum and the interaction with the leadership and LGB of the Academy. For example, the LGB mobilised its extensive social capital cultural, within the Co-op Group, in exchange for economic capital to develop cultural capital in its own image: the building of the arts centre for the community. The arts centre does provide a community use; a form of economic, social, and cultural capital and ultimately, symbolic capital for the community, or for those that use it. However, the dominant power within the social field in the form of the LGB, is imposing the dominant practice of the social field on the community and its parents.

By developing the cultural arts centre to bring middle-class cultural experiences, such as a Russian ballet company and other high-arts experiences to the community, the LGB are exposing the low socio-economic, ethnically diverse community to middle-class expectations of culture to develop them in their like. This is a form of symbolic violence, in misrecognising the developed capital the community may already have. Therefore, what is also inferred is that legitimate capital is not possessed by those who are not middle-class, having little cultural experience beyond necessity: little distinction, ergo taste. Arguably to hand over the ‘programme’ to the community to represent their capital might legitimise this as taste, which would ultimately lead to no dissociation of what good taste or distinction was. Bourdieu (1986) argues that “taste” equates to middle-class cultural experiences, as the middle-classes have choices relating to cultural capital and as such can make a distinction between what is necessity and what is beyond as cultural experience. Furthermore, the symbolic economy works against valuing the capital present in the community of City Academy, and recognising it, as McKenzie, (2016) suggests this leads to the unification of taste, when symbolic economy demands separation. Ultimately, denigrating the capital inherent within the community.

Language is a key form of dominance and symbolic violence for Bourdieu (Shubert, 2008). For Bourdieu, the French language was imposed upon the Algerians as a form of domination during colonialisation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and the formal language register, which forms part of the doxa of governance and formal meetings, is dominant.

Ultimately, individuals hold a higher positional space in the social field if they understand and articulate a formal register, such as parent governors. As discussed previously (6.3.2.), the speech and articulations of second-language speakers, from the parent forum, and those of low socio-economic status are often not rational or of a formal register (Curato et al., 2017), and most of the parents of the forum were subject to exclusionary or anti-democratic practices by not being allowed to articulate through anecdotes or story, either by being curtailed from speaking or being made aware of this as malpractice. It is a further exercise of power *over* the parents.

Firstly, the Principal has significant power as the person with situational leadership over the parent forum, who accepts this authority, and as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) state, all linguistic exchanges are determined through a lens of historical power relations between a speaker with social authority, such as the Principal, and an audience who recognises this authority, such as the parents in the forum. Furthermore, when the exchange is between those who have a dominant language form, such as the Principal, and those who may be second-language speakers or from poorer backgrounds, then the dominant language or linguistic form is privileged over the other. Significantly, there is a perceived limited linguistic capital, when the parents who are second-language speakers and may not be fluent, speak in a non-dominant form (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This was evident in the exchange with the only white, English first-language speaker in the forum, who was allowed to pursue personal interest and foreground points of deliberation with narrative (fieldnotes). The parent in question was able to communicate with a formal language register and his linguistic capital was not misrecognised. The asymmetry of power involved in the exchange between the Academy governance and the parents of the forum is negotiated through an understanding of position; Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) would say that this is an exchange existing through the lens of the whole colonial history, not two people equally engaged. Secondly, it also reinforces a judgement of distinction and taste. Bourdieu characterises language and speech as a form of embodied cultural capital, whereby the conditions of acquisition, such as class environment, or arguably second-language speakers, leave its mark on individuals, for example pronunciation (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, language is also subject to distinction, in that the further language articulation deviates from necessity, and in a form expected of the dominant orthodoxy, the more the linguistic capital of the individual is misrecognised. This leads to the erasure of the validity and legitimacy of that person’s contribution or participation, which is especially pertinent in the case of the parent forum.

Furthermore, symbolic violence is apparent in the parent forum, the interconnection between the empowered space and the public space: the “migration” into the dominant space. By contracting the forum, the Principal is seemingly misrecognising the parents’ habitus and capital to navigate the social field and their unawareness of the doxa of the social field. The Principal assumes, as the data suggests, that the parents need to be controlled, or moderated – this is power *over* the parents. The Academy leadership controls agenda items forwarded by the parents, so dominate it, although allow some access to the field of play by allowing parents to table agenda items. By misrecognising the parents’ capital, it is considered of no value, dismissed (McKenzie, 2016). This is further evidenced in discussion regarding the presentation of a petition to the Principal. When a parent of south Asian origin, Muslim and a second-language speaker, tried to challenge an Academy policy, or at least negotiate deliberation of the policy, hysteresis was displayed, arguably mirroring the experiences of Algerian migrants to Paris (Hardy, 2014). The parent, whose habitus and capital within the social field of her community, afforded her a significant position and power, evidenced arguably by becoming a community spokesperson. The successful acquisition of habitus with her community represents the possibility of subversion of the orthodoxy, as she has been recognised as having a mutual language (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015). However, the parent did not possess the legitimate configurations of capital or habitus to gain social position or power within the social field that is the polity of the LGB or Academy leadership. Hysteresis (section 3.4) occurs when there is a mismatch of habitus in the new social field, where there has been a successful habitus in the field that it has been acquired, that is the community. The parent was not afforded the opportunity to engage in deliberation regarding the policy change. Even when the parent presented a petition, an act of dissent, however, trying to play the game and trying to navigate the doxa, her habitus and capital were misrecognised, as were the Algerian migrants exemplified by Bourdieu in Paris (Bourdieu,1999; Lane, 2000; Hardy, 2014). Furthermore, when those individuals or groups from low socio-economic status, migrants, or groups of second-language speakers, try to utilise legitimate social practices, such as petitions, they are deemed invisible, not valued as having exchangeable goods, so are misrecognised. The parents presented a non-threatening approach to the power-players within the social field, recognising social authority; they suggested that the Academy was “good”, “it listens”, yet they wanted their cultural practices given greater value.

There is, arguably, contestation here in the positioning of the parent, respecting the positional authority of the Principal, recognising her own position in the field of play, yet challenging that authority. Lane (2000) suggests, when considering colonialism and Algerian ‘peasants to revolutionaries’, that Bourdieu’s early configurations of habitus identified the internalised expectations and notions of the degree of opportunity afforded to colonialised individuals in relation to their position in the field, and as such developed a practical approach to this positionality, being ‘not free nor puppets’, which is incorporated into their habitus. This represents a functional pragmatism to play the game in a non-dominant field position, manipulation until revolution. The pragmatism that the parents in the forum exercised, in relation to their polite dissent reflect this positionality of their habitus in both fields. Thomson (2019) suggests that this results in habitus which inculcates way of being – knowing their place in the field, but this challenge represents a challenge to the doxa and reproduction, Thomson (2019) suggests that positions are jostled in the field to challenge the doxa, to challenge reproduction.  Their capital should be recognised and harnessed but the parents’ capital in this case study is not valuable in the current neoliberal context of education, represented in the dominant orthodoxy of the LGB field. Furthermore, the capital gained from maintaining policy and maintaining high attendance figures in the neoliberal marketisation of education, and as a function of the social field, is greater than the capital gained from privileging the cultural practices of the community and is therefore valued less.

## 5.6. Positioning of Alternative

To consider the plurality of possible alternatives that the CAT model of governance presents, it is important to foreground this with an exploration of what alternative is. Whilst this has been discussed earlier (2.3.2.), it is possible to postulate a further model for what alternative is, building on the work of Maguire et al. (2011) and Woods (2015) and as evidenced from the findings relating to the ‘lived reality’ of community regeneration, a key driver for the Co-op Group and the CAT. Furthermore, there is also the potential, based on the findings, to extend the model of Group Parameters Continua presented by Simkins et al. (2019) to place CAT and other MATs, as alternative.

Maguire et al. (2011) posit that to be competitive in the now heavily populated and marketised landscape of educational organisations, at both institutional and trust level, organisations need to present themselves positively in terms of quality to parents and to external observers. They need to offer diversity and differentiated choice to consumer-orientated parents, as well as for professional protection (Coldron et al., 2014), brand protection (Maguire et al. 2011) and brand advantage (Rayner, 2018). Schools and trusts need to position themselves as “not ordinary” according to Maguire et al. (2011) by utilising the tools of fabrication and rhetoric. The implementation of both tools can range from tenuous spin to authentic representation of the lived reality of the organisation. Furthermore, the gold star for fabrication is the Ofsted badge of ‘Outstanding’ and the subsequent report text, which when presented and utilised for marketing purposes levitates the school and trust (Maguire et al., 2011; Coldron et al., 2014) above the masses in terms of quality and points of difference. This is true for the CAT and City Academy, whilst not ‘Outstanding’, City Academy is judged as ‘Good’, and this is promoted through the Academy’s prospectus. The document is exemplified on virtually every page with quotes from the Ofsted report elevating the school to at least “not ordinary”. Furthermore, the Academy magazine – Autumn 2019 current edition at the time – advertises to the external reader further examples of brand advantage related to the Ofsted framework: progress, attendance, parent evaluation, and how the academy staff regularly hold ‘how to be outstanding [at Ofsted] sessions. As reported earlier (5.3.1., 5.3.3.), the whole AIP 2019-2020 is mapped to the current Ofsted framework to secure, arguably, coherence in action versus external expectation. Clearly, Ofsted as a framework and process is a key focus. However, other schools and trusts with less noteworthy overall judgements and reports, will select items of text or KPIs which will in some way distract the gaze away from poor Ofsted judgements or perceptions, and in some way(s) present some positive picture of “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011). Courtney (2015) identifies this type of promotion as ‘competitor-orientated’ branding, and here, subsequently positions CAT and City Academy as “not ordinary” at least.

To elaborate further, the large majority of fabrications come from Ofsted reports (Coldron et al., 2014; Greany and Higham, 2018) which are focused upon the limited range of content due to the prescriptive nature of an Ofsted report, its judgments, and associated criteria. Thus, fabrications could be stated as the accustomed discourse or a homogeneous discourse: the ones that are usually or habitually framed for fabrication. However, the fabrication and rhetoric also come from the strategic identities (Woods, 2015) (section 2.3.2.) and branding of the school or the trust – the unique selling point. This type of focus or fabrication can either create or reinforce the brand of strong sponsorship or a trust’s own branding, or even produce a localised version of the school trust interface. In the case of the CAT and City Academy, the priorities of the Trust and therefore the Academy, as evidenced in the three-year strategic plan and the AIP, are focused upon social and community regeneration. This goes beyond the accustomed discourse and of what Ofsted report, and actively support the brand objectives of the sponsor Co-op Group, as well as being a lived reality, as identified in the findings (section 4.2.4.). Therefore, this aspect of the Trust and City Academy’s work is a lived reality beyond the accustomed discourse, and therefore could be positioned as alternative. This is exemplified and presented in fig.5.1., a model which relates and links, through a continuum, “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011) to Woods’ (2015) types of alternative as strategic identity, by determining the extent of lived-reality, as opposed to fabrication and rhetoric.

Figure 5.1 A Model of Alternative Positioning, situating alternative, building on the work of Maguire et al. (2011) and Woods (2015)

Diagram

Description automatically generated

**\* Courtney (2015) outlines that type or categorisation is based on meaningful. Culturally, ideologically, historically, organisationally, or legally distinction.**

**The extent of lived reality of the promotion and branding: which can be customer orientated (Courtney, 2015), bottom up or top down, and based on heterogeneous sources.**

**Fabrication and rhetoric based on Ofsted and associated supportive statements. A version which is intended to be taken as true. Homogeneous fabrication.**

What is suggested with this model (figure 5.1.), is a continuum exists in which a school, academy, or trust, presents itself as having a point of difference from others, or not in the case of ordinary. The continuum graduates from ordinary into the realms of “not ordinary”. “Not ordinary” ranges from tenuous fabrications and spin to the lived reality of homogeneous or accustomed discourse surrounding Ofsted reporting parameters. It is only when the lived reality is evidenced outside of the bounds of the narrow Ofsted limiting foci of judgement (Greany and Higham, 2018) is transcended, that alternative is established, as this is an authentic point of difference from the mass fabrications of “not ordinary”. At this point on the continuum, “alternative” is categorised by type of strategic identity as outlined by Woods (2015) (section 2.3.2.); where type is defined by Courtney (2015) (see figure 5.1). Thus, the CAT strategic identity, when considered as part of a typology of alternative (Woods, 2015) (section 2.3.2.), would suggest that the CAT model of brand enactment through an LGB, is *assimilation*; an alternative which is distinct but part of the mainstream. What differentiates this from “not ordinary” (Maguire et al., 2011) is the extent to which this is a lived reality.

Simkins et al. (2019) presented the Group Parameters Continua as a way of categorising school or academy groupings, such as MATs or Teaching School Alliances. They stated that for a MAT the government expectation was a right-hand side orientation. For example, in terms of the parameter of Group Organisation there is an expectation that the MAT is centrally managed, with a single executive head or leadership team, centralised governance, with a single governing body, and inward focused, with a primary focus on objectives and outcomes for the MAT (Simkins et al., 2019), positions on the continua which are right-hand side orientated. When considering the positioning of the CAT and City Academy on the continua the findings suggest that in terms of Group Organisation and Intergroup Relations, the CAT would be situated on the left orientation of the continua, as discussed section 5.2 (table 5.1). However, when considering the operational reality of this appearance of alternative, the findings suggest that the CAT and City Academy conform to neoliberal norms and the technologies of NPM in relation to a mode of operation and interaction with parents. The findings, and subsequent discussion, have evidenced that parental interaction is illustrative of involvement rather than engagement, limits parental power and disempowers them, representing a thin market-orientated version of consumer choice, and culturally normalised power *over* rather than power *with*. As a result, the model presented by Simkins et al. (2019) has been extended to more fully utilise it as model to further distinguish alternative. The extended components in the table are shaded (table 5.2) the rest of the table is still true to Simkins et al. (2019). As evident in Table 5.2, the extended model of Group Parameters Continua, the CAT is still situated predominantly on the right-hand side; however, its positionality is more mid-continua rather than binary, in some unique attributes. For example, in mode of operation CAT represents a public good framing of education, with common good objectives so would be situated in the centre of the continua.

Table 5.2 The Extended\* Group Parameters Continua (building on the work of Simkins et al. (2019))

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Parameters of each variable** | | |
|  | **Group formation** | | |
| **Initiation** | Built from below |  | Created from the centre |
| **Membership (reason for entering partnership)** | Voluntary |  | Forced |
|  | **Group structure** | | |
| **Scale** | Small number of schools |  | Large number of schools |
| **Geographical scope** | Local based |  | Widely spread |
| **Internal status differentiation** | Homogeneous: schools with similar levels of material and symbolic capital (e.g., all high performing schools) |  | Heterogeneous: schools with differing levels of material and symbolic capital (e.g., a mixture of well/poor performing schools) |
| **Phase composition (primary secondary, etc)** | Single phase |  | Mixed phase |
|  | **Group organisation** | | |
| **Management** | Decentralised management (separate heads; no overarching executive) |  | Centralised management (single executive head or leadership team) |
| **Governance** | Decentralised governance structure (separate governing bodies) |  | Centralised governance structure (single governing body) |
| **Orientation** | Outward looking: primary focus on community and parental groups associated with particular schools |  | Inward looking: primary focus on objectives and outcomes for the group |
|  | **Intergroup relations** | | |
| **Mode of exchange** | Primarily on basis of professional reciprocity |  | Primarily commercial |
|  | **Group Operation** | | |
| **Parental interaction** | Engagement |  | Involvement (Epstein) |
| Power sharing / co-construction |  | Limited power/ telling |
| Power *with* |  | Power *over* (Hendriks, 2009) |
| Thick participatory |  | Thin market-orientated version consumer choice of (Apple et al., 2018) |
| Authentic Partnership/ empowerment Auerbach (2010) |  | disempowerment limited participation Wilkins (2019c) |
| **Mode of operation** | Democratic localism |  | Rational goal |
| Co-operativism |  | NPM |
| Common good orientation/ public value |  | Private good orientation/ private value |

\* Extended table shown in shaded boxes.

## 5.7. Summary

In summary, the findings demonstrate the difficulty in reconciling the competing accountabilities related to a neoliberal formulation of education which privileges market accountability over local democratic deliberation, what it means to be a school of the community responding to the needs of the local, even if values-led branding objectives represents democracy and co-operativism, as in the case of the CAT and City Academy. These competing accountabilities place in binary opposition the drivers of social justice and performativity, and humanist values and policy requirements. And exert significant symbolic violence against those vulnerable yet demanding stakeholders who want more but whose capital and habitus are seemingly misrecognised and dismissed. The CAT model of governance is complex in terms of determining its alternativeness in relation to stakeholders, however, what is seemingly established is that in terms of the purpose for education, and the use of organisational and structural deviations from the norm, in relation to larger MATs, the CAT model represents an alternative in the form of what Woods (2015) calls assimilation, it represents a lived reality for community regeneration. What also appears is that the value of democracy is not realised in any significantly different way than would be expected for a hegemonic agnostic-political formulation of governance, as Holloway and Keddie (2020) concur, ethically and socially just operationalism is being defined by neoliberal values and ‘imaginaries’ such as competition and entrepreneurialism. Finally, the extent of parental engagement is a thin configuration, which represents an involvement or a market-orientated consumerist view of the parent-academy relationship.

# Chapter 6 – Conclusion

## 6.1. Introduction

The research reported in this thesis is focused on an exploration of the CAT and the case study site of City Academy, and to what extent, like Co-operative Trust schools proclaim, they are an alternative in relation to stakeholder engagement, specifically parents, in the co-operative democratic expectation of governance. Furthermore, the research has also explored how the CAT and the Co-op Group governance is organised, structured, and operates, in relation to parents as stakeholders, to secure the Group's values and purpose and how and to what extent that alternative manifests, if at all. Whilst not specifically stating they are an alternative in marketing materials or on their website, the CAT and its sponsor, the Co-op Group, are presenting a desire to approach education alternatively, in that its stated purpose of education is that all its academies deliver on co-operative values and community regeneration. By determining the link between better outcomes for students in schools and community regeneration, as well as direct intervention from the academy to regenerate community, and their cyclical turns, the CAT is advocating a different social justice approach. This is a potentially alternative approach to education and its governance in a neoliberal context of education. Again, whilst not explicitly stating they are reframing education for a common good outcome (Locatelli, 2019), they have outlined a purpose which goes beyond the private good, the individualistic currency that qualifications achieve, or even the public good that collectively impacts upon the economic social interface. If the CAT as an educational organisation were to be an alternative and successfully reframe education for common good outcomes this would be significant. As outlined in section 1.2.1. and again in 5.4.1., for education to be reframed as education for common good outcomes, Locatelli (2019) posits several features need to be in place. These being a dynamic opposition to neoliberalism and the marketisation of education, the development of community networks of co-operativism and the values of co-operatives, and finally, the development of the instruments of participatory democracy, and by inference, parental and community engagement in decision-making. Furthermore, a key theme for this research, from the literature, is how the CAT’s model of governance can secure the legacy of the early pioneers, co-operativism – arguably a common good reframing – whilst navigating neoliberalism. As Davidge, Facer and Schostak (2015:62) state, “a school that is co-operative in name but adopts all the hierarchical forms of organisation and practices of mainstream schooling remains incompatible with the vision of co-operation that is the legacy of the early pioneers”. This study also explored the tension outlined above and the strength of a common good alternative of education reframing or not, in relation to the CAT.

What follows in this chapter is a consideration the key findings arising from each research question, the subsequent implications of these findings for practice, the contribution to knowledge of the research, and recommendations for policy, practice and for future research. The chapter ends with an examination of my own doctoral journey and the relationship between the research and professional self.

## 6.2. The Research Questions

What follows in this section is a return to the research questions and an evaluation of the extent to which these have been addressed.

### 6.2.1. What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders, and how can this be considered an alternative? (RQ1)

The purpose or objective of the CAT and the Co-op Group for the CAT is an ethical commitment to co-operative values and to community regeneration, and the interplay of school improvement to secure both. The leadership of the CAT envisions the focus on school improvement and community regeneration in tandem, through co-operativism, will cyclically secure social and economic growth and regeneration in communities of great deprivation. Furthermore, the CAT is ambitious in its acquisition plans in areas of deprivation, establishing itself as a major player in the hierarchical league table of MATs (Simon, James, and Simon, 2021). This requires the CAT to have brand advantage in the marketised economic logic of education currently. To underline this point, brand advantage enables the CAT to compete with other MATs locally and nationally, for students and acquisitions, in direct opposition to and in tension with co-operativism itself. Significant symbolic and economic power are exercised and underpins the big brand expectations of the Co-op Group and the CAT, as evidenced in the use of its flagship building, the corporatised approach to message and deployment of employees. Failure would be significant in damaging the Co-op Group’s reputation not only locally as the CAT, but nationally as the Co-op Group. Therefore, to achieve this complex and multi-layered set of objectives and expectations, and to mitigate significant risk of failure of brand advantage, the CAT objectives and to the Co-op Group itself, the CAT’s model of governance is designed organisationally, structurally, and operationally to be contextualised to meet the needs of the local.

Organisationally, utilising Simkins et al.’s (2019) (table 2.1) original continua to place MATs against unique characteristics, in line with government expectations and intent, a MAT would be placed to the right of the continua, in terms of organisation with a centralised management, centralised governing body, and an orientation which is inward focused on objectives and outcomes. However, what was found was for the parameter of Group Organisation, the CAT had a left-side orientation, which is unusual for MATs, especially a larger MAT (table 5.2). This signifies the commitment to and the presence of an LGB as well as being outward-looking to focus on community and parent groups.

Structurally, the Director of the CAT stated that maintaining an LGB was important to the localised agenda that the CAT had and that deliberatively the LGB structure was that of an LA maintained school model plus - the difference being the reimagined roles or purpose of the governors on the LGB. Members of the LGB included selected Co-op Group employees. Their role was to secure the implementation of co-operative values and the commitment to community regeneration, through the working practices of the LGB. The Director stated there was no blueprint for how an academy achieved its objectives but through the amendment of the Articles of Association, the academy was required, legally, to adhere to co-operative values and community regeneration. LA councillors and social partners as members of the LGB, were co-opted to secure resources and utilise networks to establish community regeneration programmes with the academy. Parent governors were white professional middle-class woman, aged between 40-50, and not representative of the community they served. They were, however, trusted (Baxter, 2020) by governance leadership (section 5.2.2.) as skilled professionals to implement and be part of the technologies of rational self-management (Wilkins, 2019c). The research has shown that whilst there was no blueprint for establishing how a CAT academy would meet its legal obligations, the structure of the LGB secured both the adhesion to co-operative values in producing the plan and the resources to meet the need. The reimagined roles for governing body members performed the functions of gatekeepers and local boundary spanners.

Operationally, whilst contextualised locally, the operation of the governing body did not perform in term of changes towards a democratic localism (Hodgson and Spours, 2012; Locatelli, 2019). Operationally, a focus on a blended hierarchical/rational-goal mode of governance operation existed with an emphasis on outputs, key performance indicators, greater clarity, and more effective modes of accountability such as improvement plans and target setting.

What has been found at City Academy is that the organisation, and the structures of the localised governance model, has secured the *lived reality* of both school improvement and aspects of social and community regeneration. City Academy has worked directly with social partners and LA councillors to redevelop and facilitate a community hub to deliver on housing and job-seeker skill development. This, therefore, is the utilisation of governance to secure the lived reality of social justice objectives which exist outside of Ofsted expectations or potential fabrications (section 5.4.1. and 5.3.4.)

### 6.2.2. To what extent is the co-operative value of democracy realised in relation to parents as stakeholders? (RQ2)

In the empowered space (section 5.3.1.), the parent governors are elected through a process of representative democracy. This research found that despite this the parents elected were not representative of the diverse elements of the community they serve. They did, however, report a strong sense of inclusivity, consequentiality, and authenticity: features of a deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2017). Furthermore, the parent governors feel they have political bindingness and political equality with all other governors on the LGB; features of what Erman (2012) considers as democratic agency. However, what this research also found was that the language and practices of the Chair of Governors indicate a culture lacking a consistent democratic pedigree. The language and practices relate to transparency and feedback to stakeholders, the construction of effective processes, such as the visioning day, and accountability systems designed in line with technologies of rational self-management (Wilkins, 2019c), as well as the use of positional power and engineered consent. This research unearthed a culture of blended hierarchical/rational goal modes (Newman, 2001) of operation, with an illusion of deliberative democracy. Those who are efficient in navigating this culture and conforming to its integrative norms, such as professionalised parent governors, are beguiled in to thinking they have authentic democratic agency and are part of deliberative democratic norms.

The public space (section 5.3.2.), as embodied by the parent forum, has the potential to provide a space for deliberation and participation in democratic processes of, or influencing, decision-making. Parents from the forum cited consequentiality and attested to changes in operational aspects of City Academy functioning. Authenticity, however, only extended to operational aspects rather than policy aspects. In terms of inclusivity, whilst the forum was open to all, some parents were not able to participate in discussion because as they spoke, they were curtailed, as they had speech cultures which were incongruous with rational deliberation. Parents at the forum, therefore, had limited political bindingness and limited political equality, and therefore limited, if any, democratic agency. This is because if they were not able to directly influence decision-making or Academy policy, and they were also not represented legitimately in the empowered space by those governors elected to do so. Therefore, importantly, it was found that whilst parents could have some consequentially over operational aspects of Academy functioning, they did not have the opportunity to engage in deliberative democratic events to directly influence policy or decision-making, nor did they have the legitimate representation for democratic agency in the empowered space. Significantly, what was also evident was that if your speech culture was not rationalist, as is often the case with individuals who are second-language speakers or from a low socio-economic background, you were excluded from contributing to discussion or raising a point for discussion, experiencing anti-democratic practices.

Whilst there is little evidence of the realisation of the co-operative value democracy, the research has established that the dominant orthodoxy is NPM or a rational-goal mode of working. What is also established, as outlined above, is that power is *power over* the polity rather than *power with* the polity (Hendriks, 2009). Through an analysis of the findings and power, utilising Bourdieu’s thinking tools, the research has uncovered that within the polity parent governors develop an increased amount of symbolic, social, and professional capital, resulting from their association with power within the social field that is the LGB. The Chair of Governors and the Principal cultivate the parent governors for their skill and professionalisation, as this is integral to maintaining and developing further the dominant orthodoxy, as skilled professionals will enhance rather than detract from the doxa. However, what is also apparent is that parents and community members are exposed to significant symbolic violence because of a misrecognition of their cultural capital as well as their linguistic or language capital. By contracting meetings and privileging the dominant linguistic form over the parents who use a non-dominant linguistic form, the parents are exposed to symbolic violence and misrecognition of their capital. They as a group are deemed invisible, and their value in terms of exchangeable goods is null.

The exercise of *power over* (Hendriks, 2009) leads to a dissenting counter-public group formation amongst the parent community. Through this research the emergence of the dissenting parent who exhibits hysteresis was identified. The dissenting parent(s) recognised their value or power within the field of play, so became functionally pragmatic. They understood the doxa of their community and were established in that social field yet recognised that in the social field that is the polity, they needed to demonstrate loyalty whilst challenging the policy they were dissenting against, mirroring the behaviours of the colonialised Algerians outlined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1958; Lee, 2000). The symbolic violence towards the parents and community members who did not add value to the dominant orthodoxy, led to a misrecognition of their legitimate habitus and capital, and ultimately erased the validity of their contribution or participation. The parents’ capital in this case study is not valuable in the current neoliberal context of education, represented in the dominant orthodoxy of the LGB field.

### 6.2.3. To what extent does the CAT model of governance engage with parents as decision-makers? (RQ3)

From the findings, both the Director of the CAT and the Principal of City Academy view engagement with parents as an important feature of organisational function. The Director stated that parents, students, and staff must have an opportunity to engage in and influence how the Academy is run. Both the Director and the Principal view engagement mechanisms in relation to parents as the Fortel survey and the parent forum, as well as the opportunity for parents to represent their peers as parent governors. The Director did suggest that by utilising a parent survey, it indicates the degree of satisfaction without parents having to attend meetings.

What this represents is a rhetoric of significance in relation to parental engagement, in that the annual parent survey is a thin, market-orientated consumer choice version of engagement (Apple et al., 2018) and the forum itself allows for the ‘involvement’ of rather than ‘engagement’ with parents in discussion of operational aspects of Academy functioning.

## 6.3. Contribution to Knowledge

This research has contributed to a greater understanding of a plurality of aspects in relation to the governance model of the Co-op Group, CAT and City Academy. What cannot be underestimated is the power of the Co-op Group in symbolically and economically driving forward its social justice campaign as an ethical, values-led organisation, based on co-operative values and principles and a commitment to social justice and community regeneration, through the CAT and City Academy. The omnipresence of the Co-op Group in the branding and in the symbolic use of its Angel Square headquarters and its employees is significant in the hive approach (section 5.2.1.) to securing its message and objectives. The complex objectives in relation to a public or common good education framing is subject to significant risk to brand advantage and brand failure (both reputationally and financially), and significantly to whom it trusts, and distrusts, its success to. The further contribution to new knowledge is the use of a contextual localism or an ensconced localism (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022) to secure success and mitigate risk. This situates the governing body locally and reimagines the roles of those local members of the governing body to secure the brand objectives. Gatekeepers are employees, including senior employees, of the Co-op Group whose aim is to ensure that the local practices of the LGB remain true to co-operative values, strategically and operationally. Local boundary spanners (section 5.2.2.) are those LA councillors or social partners utilised to extend the reach of the academy to secure resources which mutually enable the social and community regeneration objectives, with a local understanding of what is needed in the community to become a lived reality. What differentiates this from a democratic localism is the degree to which community members are empowered to participate or lead democratically in policy direction and decision-making: in this ensconced localism community participation is limited. However, the complex interaction of brand, social justice objectives and the local presence and reimaging of the roles of governing body members to secure the lived reality of those objectives represents an alternative to other models of governance currently utilised. Although what is not an alternative is the agnostic-political (Wilkins, 2021) perspective of governance still at play, regardless of the alternative objectives and features of governance structures, which brings into significant tension the co-operative reality, the democratic deficit, and narrow rational-instrumentalised configurations of good governance (Wilkins, 2019c). Moreover, this research has further contributed to the identification of this LGB as embodying rational self-management which privileges market and brand advantage, and amenability to external judgement over a co-operative local or democratic local alternative.

Therefore, this research contributes an understanding that the normalising impact of the promulgated and rewarded technologies of NPM and rational self-management in relation to governance make any other approach to practice incomprehensible and redundant. The extent to which democracy is realised as a core facet of co-operative values and co-operativism, being widely espoused as a significant feature of young co-operators, and passionately committed to by the governors, is limited to a thin version of representative democracy in the empowered space. Furthermore, an illusion of democracy, or illusionary democracy, is realised and engineered in practice by skilful leaders of NPM in the empowered space. Strikingly, what this research also contributes is the knowledge of the distrust and anti-democratic practices of the regime of NPM towards parents and community members, as well as significant symbolic violence towards those whose capital is misrecognised. Ultimately, the capital gained from maintaining policy, despite the dissent of those who are subjected to policy, in the neoliberal marketisation of education, and as a function of the social field, is greater than the capital gained from democratically privileging the cultural practices of the community and is therefore valued less. In fact, the extent to which *power over* the polity exists, engenders enclaves of dissent and injustice, is classed, and raced, and ultimately privileges greater power and economic autonomy in being heard and deliberated with, over parent voices and democratic opportunities for stakeholders. What this means is that those *affected* upwards are privileged over the realisation of the co-operative value of democracy at the expense of the parent group who are *subjected* to the policy and who feel injustice. However, that said, there is a structure in place for parents to congregate to ask questions and receive information: a low-level version of reciprocity.

The research has contributed to the knowledge of how the CAT and City Academy conform to an NPM expectation of parental interaction configured as parent as consumer rather than parent as co-operator whereby the interactions are based on an NPM exercise of KPI generation and competitor-orientated reductionist data collection and an illusion of consultation.

Whilst considering that the CAT model of governance does not work in dynamic opposition to neoliberalism, it does not develop co-operative networks within its community nor does it develop participatory or deliberative democratic opportunities, then this study would contribute that the CAT model does not reframe education for the common good, despite its social justice objectives. This is not a result of a lack of social justice objectives but of a lack of social justice mechanisms of operation. Furthermore, this research has shown that in line with Holloway and Keddie (2020), the entrepreneurial practices associated with NPM and CAT governance practices in operation are incompatible with social justice objectives. However, what can be evidenced is a local, social justice response to community need, within a public good reframing of education.

In distilling this contribution further, the CAT model of governance, as explored in City Academy, is a product of the neoliberal machine. The CAT model is a compromise or hybrid, in tension between maintaining the legacy of the pioneers (section 6.1.) and the demands of current conceptions of good governance. All the elements of a potential co-operative are present, except in how governance is operationalised. The rewards of conforming to expectations of what good governance looks like, brand advantage and brand protection (the significance of which cannot be underestimated), as well as the normalising impact of years of what good leadership looks like, render any other mechanism of practice in dynamic opposition to NPM as null. This is exercised and privileged at the expense of bottom-up accountability and the democratic rights of stakeholders to have a say in their school. Ultimately, the CAT model of governance represents an alternative in neoliberal contexts of education but not an alternative to neoliberalism.

To determine a view of what alternative looks like, the work of Woods (2015) and Maguire et al. (2011) have been built upon in this thesis, and a new contribution of alternative has been created by further developing a model of Alternative Positioning (fig. 5.1.), which secures a lived reality to distinguish between what is “not ordinary” and what is actually different, going beyond the bounds of what is expected to be amenable to external judgement (Wilkins and Gobby, 2021). By conjoining the work of Maguire et al. (2011) and Woods (2015), the literature has been added to by making more concrete what alternative is. As Maguire et al. (2011) suggest, “not ordinary” is often a fabrication or spin to secure advantage in the marketised landscape of education, and this may or may not be a lived reality. Furthermore, the impact of the prevailing Ofsted focus determines the focus for school action, so often what is construed as “not ordinary” is rarely outside of Ofsted expectations (Connelly et al., 2014). Woods’ (2015) typology of alternative does not readily distinguish between fabrication and actuality in all forms of alternative types; therefore, this new model distinguishes and makes more concrete the difference between what is “not ordinary” and the type of alternative, based on the lived reality of significant performance outside of the Ofsted box, based on Woods’ (2015) work. Subsequently, the value of this developed, conjoined model of Alternative (Fig. 5.1) for other studies, would be to enable researchers to ask questions of their data to establish a basis of authentic alternative or not.  Questions such as ‘are the claims based on Ofsted criteria?’ ‘Are the claims a fabrication or not, i.e., a lived reality?’ ‘Are the claims based motivationally in sources other than Ofsted and heterogeneous in nature?’.  Establishing the validity and reliability of claims of ‘not ordinary’ would position the MAT or organisation on one of two sides of the continuum, ‘not ordinary’ or ‘alternative’, once established that the claims of not ordinary, go beyond Ofsted criteria and are evidentially a lived reality, they breach the boundary of alternative and can be then judged as so utilising the three presented possibilities, again based on the analysis of the presented data.

Furthermore, the work of Simkins et al. (2019) has been built upon to extend their continua which positions groups of schools based on their unique attributes (table 5.2). A fourth parameter of Group Operation has been incorporated which outlines the mechanisms by which groups of schools engage with parents, their mode of operation, their degree of democracy and their purpose of education. By constructing this addition, it allows for the further identification of the uniqueness of the group and allows for greater insight into the heart of the organisation, as, arguably, regardless of where the group is placed either side of the continua, they will act as one if there is no distinction in how they act. For example, a decentralised governing body will be no different to a centralised governing body if they both practice parental involvement rather than engagement, or both employ NPM technologies. When utilising this table (5.2), it confirms and thus contributes to the understanding of the CAT City Academy as only being alternative (left situated) on the Group Organisation parameter. When compared with government expectations and practices of MATs generally (Simkins et al., 2019), as with the newly constructed Group Operation, the CAT City Academy falls on the right of the continua for this parameter.

## 6.4. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

There are two approaches when considering recommendations for the polity and realising the co-operative value of democracy, especially in neoliberal contexts of education and the associated democratic deficit: firstly, is at the case study site and as a model for others and secondly at the macro-level with whole-scale systemic change.

From this research there are many positives relating to the CAT and City Academy model of governance, policy, and practice (section 5.2.2., 5.3. and 5.4.). However, identifying areas which could be enhanced to deliver a more authentic partnership with parents and community stakeholders can only enhance the democratic polity and reduce the democratic deficit.

The first recommendation relates to the representation of parents on the LGB. They should be authentically representative of the community demographic, and go further than government guidance, to be also *of* the community. It is also recommended that, in line with Bryk et al. (2010), the proportion of parent and community members be increased on the LGB, to secure the voices of the diverse demographic it represents; furthermore, that these voices be recognised for their potentially unique linguistic and cultural capital.

The visioning day, as a problem-solving activity, determining the priorities and objectives for the LGB and the AIP, was arguably elitist and exclusionary. The second recommendation would be to reimagine events such as these to be delivered as mini-deliberative innovations, such as a mini-public, so that all those who are affected by the determinations or are subject to it, be involved in its inception, with hard-to-reach stakeholders engaged utilising third-sector advocates.

The third recommendation determines that a mechanism be established (Lafont, 2019) and in line with the critical nature of this research, to enable those parents or community stakeholder groups who would not have enacted a policy or who cannot align to a particular policy or decision, to challenge the Academy to facilitate an authentic mini-deliberative innovation. This would enable those stakeholders the opportunity to hear and be heard, and to reciprocally engage in a new understanding which may or may not result in change.

The City Academy facilitates the parent forum, which has great potential to be an authentic deliberative exchange. A fourth recommendation is that this forum and other opportunities, adopt the principles of co-operativism and Auerbach’s (2012) authentic partnership principles, subsequently enabling participants’ democratic agency, again recognising their unique non-dominant linguistic and cultural capital. Furthermore, community advocates such be deployed to engage with those hard-to-reach parent and community members as community boundary spanners.

Finally, for the CAT and City Academy the recommendation is to go beyond an ensconced localism (Hetherington and Forrester, 2022) to enact a model of democratic localism.

To secure these recommendations would develop a deliberative democratic system, erasing the edges of the democratic deficit established with the technologies of neoliberalism and practices of NPM; a deliberative democratic system in which the sum of its parts is greater than the individual elements. Moreover, it is a system which would enable the compensation for deficit aspects of practice. It would require a mind-set change. In the City Academy, the notion or prospect of a polity or governance which secures a deliberatively democratic system would embody democratic practices which empower stakeholders with the values of co-operativism. A system of governance which encompasses authentic representative democracy in relation to the diversity of the community proportionately represented, micro-deliberative democratic events such as mini-publics, alongside stakeholder groups with direct and equal political bindingness to others, with mechanisms to enable all stakeholders, including traditionally marginalised groups, to challenge those policies or decisions to which they are subject to yet cannot align to, to ‘call’ a deliberative event to authentically hear the views of those involved.

To further erase the edges of the deficit is to cast the net wider than the City Academy and the CAT. If, as the CAT has done, all MATs were compelled to deliver on social justice objectives, with boundary spanners and gatekeepers to ensure the local was privileged and were modelled on the CAT LGB model with the above recommendations enacted, then there would be, arguably, a further reduction of the deficit.

However, as outlined Kulz (2021) and Greany and Higham (2020), the external accountability framework, Ofsted, drives the direction of schools and academies. Therefore, unless there is a cultural rupture, reframing education authentically for the common good, government need to direct Ofsted to inspect for authentic deliberative democratic practices, democratic localism, and authentic parent community stakeholder partnerships. This would drive schools and academies to direct their policy and practice to a more democratic end.

## 6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Further research could, firstly, come from the contributions made to models of alternative and MAT positioning. It would be significant to establish if MATs are alternative or simply “not ordinary” in claims relating to Ofsted judgements and beyond. Therefore, to utilise the model of Alternative Positioning (fig.5.1) to research into MAT brand advantage would give greater clarity to those looking for authentic difference. Similarly, further research into the positioning of MATs on the Extended Group Parameters Continua (Table 5.2), newly amended and extended work of Simkins et al. (2019), focused on MATs and the newly formed Group Operations parameter, would enable an enhanced set of parameters to describe the unique characteristics of groups of schools and the trajectory of system change.

Secondly, further research could explore the extent to which governing bodies are local and representative of their communities, as well as an exploration of governance as models of social justice with mechanisms commensurate with deliberative democratic practices. Conversely, further research could determine the mechanisms that governing bodies use to engage with their stakeholders or not.

A final consideration into further research could be extended to brand, and its symbolic and economic relationship, its impact and the extent to which stakeholders recognise it, choose it and experience it.

## 6.6. Limitations

The detail of the limitations of the research are reported in section 3.13., however of note is that this research is a single case study, its generalisability is limited to the contribution that this thesis offers as an atypical case, from which further study investigation can take place. Furthermore, positioned as a critical theory paradigm, the case is limited and therefore cannot make the claims to challenge whole system change; claims for further investigation into whole system change can be made to maintain the integrity of the purported paradigm.

## 6.7. Doctoral Journey - Somnolence to Wakefulness

The starting point for a reflection on my doctoral journey is the conflation, or intersection, of positionality, reflexivity, and narrative inquiry. It is important to note that positionality and reflexivity have been discussed in relation to this research (section 3.12), and that here I examine my own professional practice. My growth as a researcher is exponential. With a limited base to navigate the field of academia, my period of somnolence, to ultimately presenting at international conferences and publishing papers in reputable peer-reviewed journals and blogs is remarkable. Personally, my positionality has historically been aligned with a critical perspective, although through this journey this now has a term assigned to it. Establishing positionality, as outlined by Dean (2012), is key, as our identity is continually formed, shaped, and redefined by our lived experiences. Reflexivity forces us, according to Haynes (2012), to constantly examine and re-examine our positionality in relation to both research, and importantly in this context, self, specifically the interaction of the duality of self as researcher and self as practitioner. Rehearsing or reliving events or experiences through an internal narrative, the telling and retelling of stories and experiences through the lens of researcher and practitioner, a form of narrative autoethnography (Creswell, 2013), has secured my reflexive process and the re-examination of my positionality in relation to professional practice and developing a clear understanding of the tension between my positionality and my practice. Whilst reflexivity could be construed as a negatively self-critical process, a preferred approach from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is the notion of wakefulness. Wakefulness, therefore, is an awareness of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which comprises the interaction of the social and personal, the continuity over time and the situation, and requires the inquirer to proceed forward with a constant alertness and awareness of risk and review (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Wakefulness in my examination of the professional journey is my attention to or awareness of, my positionality, the amendments of positionality and practice in relation to reflexivity and the retelling of experiences and narratives in the context of a professional in a neoliberal context. My wakefulness has led me to reflect on and be reflexive in the role I play in reproducing the system we are engaged in, as policy entrepreneur (Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012), and from an Ofsted perspective, an effective player in the field. My challenge has been when reflecting on the actions of the governance leadership of City Academy, to view through the lens of a critical researcher and to reflexively, and in parallel, through the lens of the senior professional and my own narrative which are conjoined. Practically, I have engaged in deliberation of what parental engagement could look like in practice in my Trust, in which there is no local representation of stake or local governance. I have engaged parents in authentic consultative processes to determine practice. As a leader and in my practical leadership of large numbers of colleagues, what I have become awakened to through this iterative process, is to give attention to, and be aware of, trust and limitation (Baxter, 2020; Wilkins, 2019c), not expecting the blind deference (Lafont, 2020) to policy, and to release control of policy implementation and the technologies of NPM to those who are subjected to it (Erman, 2012), rather than secure the illusion of collaborative processes in policy implementation.

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# Appendices

# Appendix 1 Table of British Governments since 1970

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Political Party (Prime Minsters)** | **Period of Administration** |
| *Conservative*  Edward Heath (1970 – 1974) | 1970 -1974 |
| *Labour*  Harold Wilson (1974-1976)  James Callaghan (1976-1979) | 1974 - 1979 |
| *Conservative*  Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990)  John Major (1990-1997) | 1979 - 1997 |
| *(New) Labour*  Tony Blair (1997-2007)  Gordon Brown (2007-2010) | 1997 - 2010 |
| Conservative -Liberal Democrats Coalition  David Cameron (2010-2015) | 2010 - 2015 |
| *Conservative*  David Cameron (2015-2016)  Theresa May (2016 – 2019)  Boris Johnson (2019- | 2015 - |

# Appendix 2 Research Questions, Data Collection Methods and Triangulation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Question** | **Method of data collection** | **Disadvantages (Cresswell,2014; Basit, 2010)** | **Initial Data Source** |
| RQ 1 What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and how can this be considered as alternative? | CAT document analysis.  Semi-structured interviews. | Be aware of private or unavailable documentation. Materials may be poorly written or incomplete. Documents may not be accurate or authentic.  Researcher presence may influence the “performance” and responses of the interviewee(s). Researcher needs to develop rapport with interviewee. | Co-operative Academies Trust policy documents, websites and documents pertaining to Co-operative schools’ conversion and governance. Cooperative Academies Trust 3-year Strategic plan - 2019- 2022  Director of CAT. |
| RQ 1 What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and how can this be considered as alternative?  RQ 2 To what extent is the co-operative value of democracy realised, in relation to parents as stakeholders?  RQ 3 To what extent are parents, as stakeholders, authentically engaged in practices of consequentiality? | Academy document analysis.  Semi-structured interviews.  Non-participant semi-structured observation. | Be aware of private or unavailable documentation. Materials may be poorly written or incomplete. Documents may not be accurate or authentic.  Researcher presence may influence the “performance” and responses of the interviewee(s) or be perceived as intrusive during observation.  Researcher needs to develop rapport with interviewee and needs to ensure they have the skills to effectively observe. | Academy policy documents, websites and documents pertaining to Co-operative schools’ conversion and governance. Governors 3-year plan. Academy 3-year plan  Principal with responsibility for Co-operative structure, Chair of governors of the Academy site,  3 parent governing body members.  2 governance meetings – 1 full governing body and 1 Community Engagement Committee. |
| RQ 1 What is the CAT model of governance in relation to stakeholders and how can this be considered as alternative?  RQ 2 To what extent is the co-operative value of democracy realised, in relation to parents as stakeholders?  RQ 3 To what extent are parents, as stakeholders, authentically engaged in practices of consequentiality? | Focus group –  semi-structured.  Non-participant semi-structured observation. | Researcher presence may influence the “performance” and responses of the group. Researcher needs to develop rapport with interviewees. Researcher needs to ensure individual dominance is dealt with, so all feel they can participate.  Researcher needs to develop rapport with interviewee and needs to ensure they have the skills to effectively observe. | 5 parent forum members.  Observe parent forum meeting |

# Appendix 3 List of documents sampled and reviewed

|  |
| --- |
| CAT Three-year Strategic Plan |
| CAT Articles of Association |
| CAT Scheme of Delegation |
| CAT Website outlining their Values |
| City Academy Website |
| City Academy Three-year improvement plan (AIP) |
| City Academy termly magazine |
| City Academy prospectus |
| City Academy Fortel survey presentation to parents and staff |
| City Academy minutes of parent forum meetings |

# Appendix 4 Interview schedules

**Interview schedule for leadership of the CAT, Principal and Director**

Research question 1 semi-structured interview schedule for interviewing Co-operative Academies Trust representatives -

|  |
| --- |
| * What is the history of the Co-operative movement in education? * How long have you been CEO/Principal/CoG of the CAT? * Why is the Co-operative movement important in education? * What is the value of a school becoming a Co-operative Academy? * It has been proposed that this type of organisation is an alternative to the culture of the marketisation of schools, why is this so? * Why were the values of the International Co-operative movement included in the Articles of Association? * What tensions are there between neoliberalism, performativity, and the values of cooperative movement? * What makes a Co-operative academy different? * How do you as an organisation hold the schools to account for their (cooperativeness) embodiment of cooperative values? * Why do areas of deprivation need Co-operative schools rather than others? * How can a Co-operative school regenerate communities? * How does City Academy a “Change Agent in the wider community”? * Why is stakeholder voice important? * Is there a shared vision for what a Co-operative school or academy looks like? Whose vision, is it? * Are all Co-operative academies similar in structure in relation to governance? * How do you understand governance to work in your academies, regarding roles and responsibilities? * How does the current governance structure enable the spread of democratic accountability, ie empowering stakeholder voice? P 70 Woodin. * Governance structures in Co-operative trust schools, whereby there is a membership scheme at the heart of governance; parents as part of the forum, which elects representatives to the trust board and governing bodies, are different to Co-operative academy trust schools, some maintained schools are also required to form a parent council in a similar role to the parent forum as above, why is the academy trust set up differently? * Woodin says that a school that is cooperative in name but adopts all the hierarchical forms of organization and practices of mainstream schooling remains incompatible with the vision of the co-operation that is the legacy of the early pioneers”. What is your view? P62 Woodin * Who is accountable for the performance of the school? * What is the role of governance in school performance? * Who makes the decisions in the governing body? Is it equal/democratic? * What role do parent representatives play? * How are new parent governors recruited? * How are parents engaged to participate in the decision-making of the school? * What support do parents, or community members, get to understand their role and expectations of it? * Do parents always stay as governors? * Why do you think they become disengaged? * Is the role an authentic role in relation to participating in the decision-making process? Why? * What would governance look like if it was authentic/democratic in relation to parental involvement?   Final question from me, is there anything that you wish to add that you haven’t had the chance to, which you feel may further contribute to this research? |
| **Additional questions for the Chair of Governors**   * What and how do you invest in the Governing Body? * How do you engage with non -professional parent governors? |

**Interview Schedule for Parent Governors on The Governing Body and at the Parent Forum**

Research question 2 semi structured interview schedule for interviewing parent representatives on governing body (*in italics for them only*)

|  |
| --- |
| * *how long have you been a governor at the school?* * *Do you enjoy being a governor at the school?* * *Why did you become a governor?* * *How comfortable do you feel in this role?* * *Do you feel you belong in the group?* * *Practically, what do you in the role?* * *What role(s) do you hold in the structure of governance of the school?* * What is the vision for the school and whose vision is it? * What role did you play in constructing the vision? * How was the vision been used in the school and community? * How does the community or other stakeholders have a say in decision making in the academy? * How do you understand governance to work in the academy, regarding roles and responsibilities? * what do you understand by democracy? * Is the governing body democratic? * *Who makes the decisions in the governing body? Is it equal?* * What role do parent representatives play? * How are new parent governors recruited? * How are parents engaged to participate in the decision making of the school? * What support do parents, or community members, get to understand their role and expectations of it? * *Do parents always stay as governors?* * Is the role an authentic role in relation to participating in the decision-making process? Why? * How much “say” do you have? * Do you feel you are respected for your contributions? * *What is the reality of governance working in practice?* * *What would governance look like if it was authentic/democratic in relation to parental involvement?*   Final question from me, is there anything that you wish to add that you haven’t had the chance to, which you feel may further contribute to this research.  Thanks for your participation |
| **Additional questions for Focus Group**   * Why do you come to the forum? * Do receive or give information or both? * Can you give examples of how things have changed when you have suggested something? * In what ways do you feel you are listened to? * If you have raised issues to change have, they changed it? How? * What is good about the forum? * How does information form the forum get to the principal and the governors? * What are the roles of the parent governors? * What are the other vehicles for parents to have a say in how the academy is run? * How does the academy work co-operatively with parents?   Is there anything else anyone wants to add about how the school works with parents? |

# Appendix 5 Field notes exemplar and record sheet of observations

Full Governing Body Meeting 18th November 2019 (Selection/exemplar)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Timing (mins) | Event | Comment/*field notes* |
| 3.5 | Lots of positive nods from the CoG |  |
| 7.4 |  | Cross academy co-operation mention in Chairs action (*useful exemplification)* |
| 11.41 |  | Community committee structures and voting discussion *(evidence of some democratic process)* |
| 14.34 | Positive nodding from CoG to contribution from new governor | Visioning Group discussed (*need to explore more in relation to participants, has feed into the AIP which is being discussed, need to remind STAN for a copy of AIP)* |
| 18.48 |  | CoG invites new PG to take on a role (*supportive and welcoming, CoG very skilled)* |
| 20.19 |  | “I am happy we do this – what do others think?” CoG (lots of this it must affect people who want to say no .. she’s quite imposing not one to mess with) |
| 23.47 | Terms of reference discussion |  |
| 25.3 | Governor to new PG open handed positive comment |  |
| 26 | Chair to Louise open handed gesticulation positive nod |  |
| 29.1 |  | Feedback form community committee to GB – community parking main issue |
| 30.59 | Heads lowered limited general contribution non engagement when PG was talking | Louise (PG) carried on the discussion re parking, spoke about staff parking in community or on the road |
| 34 | Chair of community committee laughing arm touching with Louise | Parking item finished |

# Appendix 6 NVivo 12 Code book Nodes, descriptors, and their potential relationship with the research questions

| Research Question | Name/Theme | Description |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RQ1** | **being COOP** | **any reference to coop-ness, being different as a result of coop-ness OR not** |
| RQ1 | alternative | any reference to Co-op being alternative to mainstream |
| RQ1 | being a federative co-operative model | Any reference to the Co-operative Trust school model of governance |
| RQ1 | brand | Any references specific to Co-op; being coop as a brand or organisation linked to values or principles |
| RQ1/2 | community resource | Any references to how the school enhance the community as a resource, in relation to it drive to regenerate the community economically or socially |
| RQ1/RQ2 | governance | Any reference to how governance is perceived to be different in CAT schools, or its governance model |
| RQ1 | leadership | Any reference to leadership of academies and its impact upon governance or parental engagement in decision-making directly or indirectly |
| RQ1/RQ2/RQ3 | parent forum | Any reference to parent forum as a decision-making body, or not, directly or indirectly |
| RQ1/RQ2 | values | Any reference related to the Co-op values or ways of being explicitly |
| RQ1 | communication modes | Any reference to how the message gets out to the community, considering if the community have equality of access |
| **RQ1/RQ2/RQ3** | **democracy** | **Any reference to democratic practices in relation to stakeholders, community or parents which points to a sense of democracy** |
| RQ2/RQ3 | activism | Any reference that evidences a deviation from deliberation to activism by stakeholders |
| RQ2/RQ3 | Decision-making or consequentiality | Any reference that is made to impact of voice that parents or stakeholders recognise themselves, or others do, as having had a consequence of their action |
| RQ1/2 | Climate | Any reference to what the perceived climate for contribution and subsequent consequentiality is like |
| RQ2 | Evidence of deliberative events | Any reference made to any event that could be considered a deliberative event democratically eg being mini-publics |
| **RQ1/RQ2/RQ3** | **Habitus** | **Any reference that indicates that habitus has impeded or enhanced a stakeholders perceived ability to contribute or have consequence. Would others perceive themselves to be able to do the things they are saying, as professionalised parent governors** |
|  | Social Capital | Any reference to networking that could lead to bridging or bonding social capital or symbolic capital |
| **RQ1/RQ2** | **NMP** | **Any references to practices relating to NPM practices** |
| RQ1/RQ2 | accountability | Any reference to who is accountable for the trust or academy and its relation to Co-op and/or democracy |
| RQ1/RQ2/RQ3 | challenge and support | Any references made to examples of challenge and support that have been made between parent governors’ stakeholders and school leadership in governance or feedback role |
| **RQ1/RQ2** | **Perspectives of governance** | **Any references to perceptions that individuals have regarding what good governance is or is not** |
| RQ1 | effectiveness | Any references related to perceived effectiveness of governance |
| **RQ1/RQ2/RQ3** | **power** | **Any references to explicit or implicit to power being exercised** |
| RQ1 | relationship building | Any references to where perceived attempts have been initiated to build relationships between leadership and parents as governors or as feedback givers |
| **RQ2/RQ3** | **role** | **Any reference to the roles of parent governors** |
| RQ2/RQ3 | skills | Any reference to specific skills parent governors have to do the role of governance |
| RQ2/RQ3 | skill building | Any reference to developing parent governors with the skills to function effectively |
| **RQ1/RQ2/RQ3** | **stakeholder voice** | **Any references to examples of when parental stakeholder voice has been utilised or has consequence** |
| RQ2/RQ3 | Eid | Any reference to Eid and attendance which has emerged in each interview |
|  |  |  |

# Appendix 7 Participant Information Sheet

**Application, logo

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**Participant Information Sheet**

**Title of Research Project:****The Co-operative approach to parental engagement in governance**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not you are happy to take part, it is important that you understand what the project is about, why I am inviting you to take part, and exactly what is involved. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

**What is the project about?**

The aim of this research study is to explore what the Co-operative Trust model is for school governance and how parents and community members are included in the decision-making process in the Co-operative model of governance, especially in areas of high deprivation. Further, how parents and community members are supported in their role as part of the decision-making process in Co-operative schools and academies.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are a member of a governing body or stakeholder forum which makes decisions on behalf of academies and determine its direction. You represent a diverse group of individuals with diverse views and experience.

**What does it involve?**

Taking part would involve you agreeing to be recorded, as outlined above, as part of your role as a governor, whilst taking part in an interview or participating in a governing body meeting. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Should you decline to be audio recorded, the meeting minutes and shorthand notes of the meeting will be taken instead. You would also need to complete a short information sheet; this does include information on salary and cultural habits. This information is needed to help me gain a better understanding of participants’ social, educational and economic background, the kinds of activities you enjoy doing in your spare time and related to the skills you bring to the governing role.

**Are there any risks or benefits?**

There are no personal risks or disadvantage involved in taking part in the research. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form to make sure that you fully understand what you are agreeing to. The research has been approved by the School Ethics Committee at Staffordshire University.

There are no personal benefits for the people who take part.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you change your mind at any point, you can withdraw at any time up to the point at which the data becomes aggregated for analysis purposes and you don’t have to give a reason for doing so. If there are any questions in the questionnaire or any subsequent interview that you would prefer not to answer, you do not have to answer them.

There is possibility, however slight, that participation in this study may cause emotional distress or anxiety for some people. If this occurs, then you will be able to choose to stop the interview. The researcher will be available to offer immediate support however should further support be required please contact your GP or MIND (www.mind.org.uk).

**Will I be identified in the report?**

No. None of the information that you provide will identify you or be attributed directly to you in the final report. The data may also be used for research publications, conferences or for teaching purposes. The anonymity of everyone who takes part will be protected in the final document and in any future research publications or presentations.

Any personal information that you provide will be confidential and accessed only by the researcher. Transcripts of the interviews will be stored securely whilst the research is being undertaken and will be destroyed in accordance with University and School procedures that are in force when the project is completed.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

This research is being undertaken for the purpose of completing a dissertation for a professional Doctorate in Education at Staffordshire University. If you have any queries or questions related to this research, please contact me – Jan Hetherington [h026804f@student.staffs.ac.uk](mailto:h026804f@student.staffs.ac.uk) ; If you have any concerns about this research, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Gill Forrester. Her email address is [Gillian.Forrester@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:Gillian.Forrester@staffs.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

# Appendix 8 Participant Consent Form

Application, logo

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**Participant Consent Form**

**Project Title**: **The Co-operative approach to parental engagement in governance**

**Please read each statement, and tick the box next to it to indicate that you are in agreement with the statements**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **I have read the participant information sheet and the nature and purpose of this research has been explained to me.** | **□** |
| **I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary, and that if I change my mind, I can withdraw up until the data has been aggregated for analysis purposes. I can do this without prejudice and without giving a reason.** | **□** |
| **I understand that I do not have to answer every question if I do not wish to and I don’t have to give any explanation.** | **□** |
| **I understand that confidentiality will be maintained throughout this project, and that I will not be identified in the final report.** | **□** |
| **I confirm that quotations may be used in the report, provided that the quotations are anonymised and do not reveal my identity.** | **□** |
| **I confirm I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation in it.** | **□** |
| **I understand that my data will be securely stored in accordance with Staffordshire University protocols and current data protection guidelines.** | **□** |
| **I confirm that I agree to take part in this research project.** | **□** |
| **I agree that any interview that I take part in may be audio recorded** | **□** |
| **I agree that anonymised data might be used for research publications, conferences and teaching** | **□** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Should I wish to receive a copy of a summary of the study findings I will provide my contact email in the address box below** | |
| **Participant Name (please print)** |  |
| **Signature** |  |
| **Date** |  |
| **Researcher Name** | **Jan Hetherington** |
| **Participant Email Address \* optional** |  |