An autoethnography: How does the influence from government policy and parental stakeholders shape a headteacher’s strategic decision-making, and impact on role identity, in a Southeast Asian independent school

Student Dissertation

How to cite:

Bird, James Nicholas (2022). An autoethnography: How does the influence from government policy and parental stakeholders shape a headteacher’s strategic decision-making, and impact on role identity, in a Southeast Asian independent school. Student dissertation for The Open University module E822 MA Education, childhood and youth.

© 2022 James Nicholas Bird

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Redacted Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:

http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00015443

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.
An autoethnography: How does the influence from government policy and parental\textsuperscript{1} stakeholders shape a headteacher’s strategic decision-making, and impact on role identity, in a Southeast Asian independent school

[12,000 words]

\textsuperscript{1}Throughout this dissertation the word ‘parent’ and its related terms refers to any caretaker adult, or set of adults, regardless of age or gender, charged with a child’s welfare and upbringing.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 1  
Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 2  
Chapter 2: Literature Review of Stakeholder Management and Parental Involvement ........ 4  
  2.1 Stakeholder management theory .................................................................................. 4  
  2.2 Stakeholder identification ............................................................................................ 5  
  2.3 Parental involvement, power and influence ................................................................. 7  
  2.4 Discussion .................................................................................................................. 10  
Chapter 3: Research design ................................................................................................. 12  
  3.1 Ethics of autoethnography .......................................................................................... 13  
  3.2 Memory ..................................................................................................................... 17  
  3.3 Document analysis ..................................................................................................... 17  
  3.4 Fieldnotes and reflections .......................................................................................... 19  
  3.5 Summary ................................................................................................................... 20  
Chapter 4: Data presentation ............................................................................................... 22  
  Table 1: Parental Interactions: Category of Interaction Versus Method of Communication 23  
  Document 3: Senior Leadership Team Meeting Minutes ................................................. 28  
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications ........................................................................... 33  
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 35  
Narrative critical reflection ................................................................................................. 36  
References ............................................................................................................................. 38  
Appendices .......................................................................................................................... 45  
  Appendix A – Research Schedule .................................................................................... 45  
  Appendix B – OneNote sample ........................................................................................ 46  
  Appendix C – Document list ............................................................................................. 47  
  Appendix D – Reflexive grid .............................................................................................. 48  
  Appendix E – Corpus of results ....................................................................................... 49  
  Appendix F – Analysis coding ........................................................................................... 50  
  E822 Ethical Appraisal Form ........................................................................................... 51
Abstract
[95 words]

This small-scale investigation explores the notion of parents as stakeholders in a Southeast Asian independent school. A principal’s interactions with parents are charted over a twelve-week period using autoethnographic fieldnotes, supported by document analysis, to explore the research questions: How do critical incidents specific to governmental policy involving parents shape a principal’s strategic thinking and planning? How does this policy context impact on role identity? The study surfaces a range of tension points and raises issues of work life balance, societal and organisational influences. From this, suggestions are made for improving school leadership practices.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Formal educational leadership in the Southeast Asian country where I work as a secondary headteacher, can be viewed as a complex ‘balancing act’: leaders required to tend to internal stakeholder needs, from students, parents, teachers and governors, whilst simultaneously respond to external regulations from the Ministry of Education, and remain accountable to international curriculum and examination providers. The changeable disposition of government, and the challenging circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the privately-owned independent school where I have worked since 2006. The requirements of leading a diverse teaching staff and the need to satisfy the concerns of school owners and fee-paying parents suggest I assume a contingency approach to strategic decision-making, where situational variables determine how leaders need to respond (Northouse, 2019), and contextual factors influence leadership (Yukl, 2013).

This study explores the idea of parents as stakeholders and how stakeholders influence leadership decision-making. Ministry of Education regulations are examined: mandated national subjects, compulsory attendance in national assessments, and a point-based accreditation inspection linked directly to a school's operating license have required schools to adapt their practices and subsequently this may have impacted parental expectations of school leaders. Two research questions underpin this investigation:

1. How do critical incidents specific to governmental policy involving parents shape a principal’s strategic thinking and planning?

2. How does this policy context impact on my role identity?

Understanding that each contextually unique research case poses its own ethical dilemmas (Sikes, 2012), Stutchbury and Fox’s (2009) ethical appraisal framework was used to assess the risks of involving other school leaders in the study. Ethical guidelines remind researchers of their own responsibility to work safely, particularly in overseas settings, and when examining sensitive issues (BERA, 2018, pp.35-36), and to take into account the well-being of research participants, recognising and minimising potential harm from their involvement (p.19). Critiques of government education policy, however much anonymised, considered both deontologically, in terms of societal norms and what is deemed right, and
consequentially, as not to damage an individual’s reputation or lead to the deportation of expatriate principals, raised concerns of participant and researcher safety. Therefore, autoethnography was chosen for this study: a methodology apposite to my interpretivist/Postmodernist paradigmatic position, that enables the researcher to generate data without direct involvement and with minimized risk to research participants. Furthermore, discussing issues raised by parents could reveal commercial sensibilities between private schools and intrude on relational boundaries between members of the international school community. There would also be ecological challenges seeking permissions from various school owners within the study’s limited timescale.

The dissertation begins with a synthesis of key stakeholder management and parental involvement literature as a way for educational leaders to consider how parents matter in educational decision-making both as customers in schools that operate as businesses and as partners in their children’s education. I then critique the challenges of using autoethnography seeking to address these concerns through the use of policy document analysis. Data from a reflective diary provides a series of autoethnographic accounts, that are written up as vignettes to provide a thick description of the policy context and organisational culture, allowing for analysis and commentary, and inviting the reader to engage in the world of the writer (Ellis, 2008, p.51). Reflecting on my headteacher role, I examine how competing stakeholder demands and priorities might result in role conflict and how an organisational culture possibly shapes leadership identity. I describe and systematically analyse my experiences, attitudes and behaviours, working in an undisclosed Southeast Asian school, to better understand underlying ‘logics’ in my actions and interactions with influential members of my school community (Hammersley, 2013, p.29). The study concludes with recommendations for improving school leadership practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review of Stakeholder Management and Parental Involvement
[2647 words]

This chapter reviews and synthesizes the literature on stakeholder theory and parental involvement as a way of contextualizing school leadership roles within competitive school markets. In doing so, it provides a ‘lens’ for an autoethnographic inquiry addressing research questions that explore external influences from government and parents, and how these impact a leadership role. A summary of the term ‘stakeholder’ as outlined in the business literature is refashioned in the context of a Southeast Asian independent school. Debates around stakeholder management are explored and contrasted with issues found in the parental involvement literature. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the unexamined ground between these topics, relevance to leadership studies, and how the notion of parents as stakeholders has informed this small-scale investigation.

Leadership definitions vary with situation and context, although a common understanding is that it involves processes of influence to achieve desired goals. The vast body of leadership and management literature includes scholarly debates over who has this influence, how and why it is used, and its intended and unintended effects (Yukl, 2013). Stakeholder management sits within the broader area of strategic leadership, and provides a focus for an autoethnographic narrative approach to understanding culture through cataloguing and reflecting on interactions made directly with parents. The ability of educational leaders to influence others is coupled with the need to understand organisational environments and act strategically by setting goals and aligning school stakeholders (pupils, teachers, parents, community) with the ambitions of the school (Davies and Davies, 2004) to improve learning and create value for all.

2.1 Stakeholder management theory

Stakeholder management theory is a conceptual framework to assist managers in understanding environments, to identify those who influence and are influenced by the organisation, to recognise their needs, and to utilize this knowledge in more effective strategic decision-making (Freeman, 1984). Originating in business management theory, its purpose was ‘managerial’, a way of thinking about and identifying areas of value creation,
although it is now commonly found in the literature on corporate social responsibility and is considered by some as part of ethics and moral theory (Parmar et. al., 2010). However, the theory has been criticized for being normative in the sense ‘it mixes business and morality’ (Laplume et al., 2008, p.1158), and much discussion on stakeholder management focuses on its underlying descriptive, instructional, normative, and managerial purposes (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). While stakeholder theory draws into question a firm's prime profit-making objectives (Laplume et al., 2008) and extends understanding of management roles and responsibilities (Mitchell et al., 1997), its use for moral betterment and as a measure of an organisation’s responsibility is contested (Greenwood, 2007).

In primarily seeking 'to understand managerial behavior regarding actors typically seen as outside the firm’s direct control and the implications of these behaviors' (Harrison et al., 2019, p.4), parallels can be made between stakeholder theory and school leadership research that suggests complex organisational cultures require leaders to adopt new skills that 'bridge' organisational boundaries. Close and Wainwright (2010, p.436) claim that 'to understand culture is to understand power and to better navigate issues of control and consent, of authority and accountability'. Close and Wainwright question whether leaders can shape the cultures of the organisations in which they work and call for a closer examination of how organisational cultures impact leadership practice. However, according to Davies and Davies (2004, pp.33-34), strategic action not only requires leaders to know their environments but also to understand their own values, and to communicate these ideas effectively through the organisation.

2.2 Stakeholder identification

Exploring organisational culture through a stakeholder theory lens requires school leaders to identify key stakeholders. Ackermann and Eden (2011, p.179) summarise how the notion of stakeholders has changed from groups on whom the organisation is dependent, to all who can potentially affect or be affected by the organisation, which perhaps indicates more generally how organisational thinking has evolved and a blurring of organisational boundaries. Mitchell et al. (1997) suggest there is no overarching definition of what a ‘stakeholder’ is or is not. This is because much of the literature describes stakeholders simply as those affecting or being affected due to an organisation's actions. However, as this broad
description presents unrealistic challenges for managers, a set of criteria is developed to evaluate stakeholders’ importance and recognise their ability to influence the organisation. Miles (2012; 2017) concurs there is no agreed-upon term for what defines a 'stakeholder' and claims that the theory is a contested concept impeded by this lack of clarity. Furthermore, theorists continue to redefine what stakeholder theory is depending on their particular use of the framework and as it evolves and is utilized in a diverse range of fields (Miles, 2012, p.291).

Stakeholder identification can take a ‘broad’ or ‘narrow’ view (Mitchell et al., 1997, pp.856-857). ‘Narrow’ definitions of stakeholders are those seen as vital to the survival of the organisation. In the independent school context, fee-paying parents fit well to the ‘narrow’ stakeholder definition as school fees are essential for the operation and development of the organisation. In understanding parents as stakeholders, it is important to both identify the group generalities and individual member specificities. As a diverse group, parents would seem to cover each region of Ackermann and Eden’s (2011, p.183) quadrant grid, described as ‘Crowd, Context Setters, Subjects and Players’, as parents display various levels of interest in school involvement and differing levels of power to influence. Parents can be understood as both 'strategic' and 'moral' stakeholders (Frooman, 1999) in the sense, they can both affect the organisation and are affected by it. School leaders need to strategically manage parent interests in a way that allows the school to meet its objectives. However, this 'emphasis on managing the stakeholder makes this approach unidirectional in nature, with relationships viewed from the firm's vantage point' (Frooman, 1999, p.192): equally, when parents are affected by school decisions a more ‘moral’ bidirectional approach may be required.

Typically, stakeholder identification involves using a Power versus Interest grid to position stakeholders within quadrants of influence. This involves a process of distinguishing between power and interest properties and ranking individuals and groups accordingly. Ackermann and Eden (2011, p.182) report managers using this technique required further levels of analysis for the exercise to be meaningful, and were encouraged to think about specific stakeholders. A further level of thinking considered whether stakeholders were ‘good guys or bad guys’ who might 'support or...sabotage...the organization’s strategy’ (p.184). However, this way of evaluating stakeholders, particularly in school contexts, could
be problematic as biases held by educators can inhibit genuine school-home partnerships (Fenton et al., 2017).

A further consideration following stakeholder identification is the connections between individuals and groups of stakeholders and the power dynamics of these networks (Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p.186). Whether formal or informal, these interactions can multiply a stakeholder’s power to influence. Parental involvement literature too often focuses on the ideal relationships between parents and school, and pays little attention to conflicts, particularly when parents act as an organized group (Lareau and Muñoz, 2012, pp.213-214).

2.3 Parental involvement, power and influence

Despite literature searches on school-parent relations being complicated by a boundless range of related terms, several prominent models emerge that analyse motivations and obstacles and make recommendations for improved partnerships between schools and parents. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) make a clear distinction between ‘parental involvement’ and ‘parental engagement’, seeing them on a progressive continuum. However, they understand the former as focused on parent-school relationships, and the latter as demonstrating increased commitment to children's learning. Although, they explicitly state ‘engagement with the school' does 'not equate' to ‘engagement with children's learning' (p.400). In their three-stage model, it is suggested schools engage with parents in a process that builds parent agency and gradually moves the onus of where learning takes place from being the sole duty of the school to a shared responsibility between school, parents and learners (p.401). A similar differentiation is found in the stakeholder theory literature as the term 'stakeholder management' gives way to 'stakeholder engagement', suggesting a more considered definition, where to manage implies control, and to engage suggests a more dialogical relationship (Clayton, 2017). However, debates within parent -involvement and -engagement literature persist over which terms have greater significance for children’s learning (Jeynes, 2018).

Ackermann and Eden (2011, p.181) recognize the heterogeneity of specific stakeholders from within a more generic stakeholder group. In an independent school context,
parents as the stakeholder variable, this means recognising different parents, or sets of parents, are understood as having higher and lower levels of influence, requiring managers to refine the stakeholder identification process and disaggregate certain groups and individuals from others (p.183). Mitchell et al. (1997, p.854) outline three qualities in their theory of stakeholder classification: 'power to influence'; legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship'; and 'urgency of the stakeholder's claim'. However, this class identification is only to heighten a manager's consciousness that classes of stakeholders exist. Ultimately managers need to tend to the differentiated needs of each group as stakeholders can change their 'class' depending on the situation (p.855). Indeed, stakeholder analysis is most effective when used for a specific purpose (Bryson, 2004). Stakeholder positioning being determined by context and situation is echoed by Ackermann and Eden (2011, p.183) and brings to the foreground Close and Wainwright's (2010, p.436) concept of 'cultural leadership' in which school leaders have a familiarity with and knowledge of their organisational culture which enhances rather than inhibits their strategic aims.

School attitudes towards children and their parents are likely to reflect broader attitudes towards the relationship between school and home and the perceived responsibilities of each (Epstein, 1995). In stakeholder theory terms, the question could be asked does the school consider its parental stakeholders as a group, or individuals, to be managed or to be engaged? Epstein (2018) claims there has been a significant change of attitude in the past three decades with regard to who has responsibility for children's learning. Whereas previously it was understood to be the sole responsibility of schools and teachers, more contemporary views recognise a broader distributed responsibility for children's learning that includes home and community. However, whilst being supportive of parent, school and community partnerships, Goodhall (2021) points to systemic issues of social and economic inequity driving the need for parental involvement schemes and underlying altruistic, economic and political motivations that while providing greater opportunities for families, ultimately relieve financial burdens on the state and lead to more socially-content citizens.

Jeynes (2018, pp.155-156) suggests an unequal partnership that has shifted from schools supporting parents to parents 'frequently succumb[ing] to the dictates of the school and the state'. A similar observation of power imbalance is made by Greenwood (2007) in her discussion of employees as 'invested stakeholders' within the firm. Like employees, parents
‘are greatly affected by the success or failure of the firm’ (school) (Greenwood, 2007, p.316), or more precisely their children are. While Bryson (2004, p.40) suggests ministering to stakeholder concerns and 'the common good' is ethically sound, Mitchell et al. (1997, p.882) note changing patterns of behaviour with organisations acting from a 'moral...social responsibility' to self-serving 'social responsiveness.' Furthermore, stakeholder management is often seen as 'difficult' and 'manipulative' (Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p.180), alluding to the idea that organisations that engage with their stakeholders are somehow acting responsibly; however, actual motivations and relationships are a lot more complex (Greenwood, 2007). In highlighting inequalities of power, Greenwood suggests engagement does not equate to acting with social responsibility as engagement can be used for more coercive purposes: to gain consent, control, cooperation, accountability, and to enforce involvement, participation, and trust (p.318).

Most educational administrators recognise the importance of school, family and community partnerships in improving student outcomes, however, there is a discontinuity in its implementation within teacher and school leadership training programmes (Epstein, 2018). Four areas where gaps exist ‘between rhetoric and reality’ are identified by Hornby and Blackwell (2018, p.110): individual parent and family barriers, child factors, parent-teacher factors, and societal factors. A significant branch of the literature examines obstacles and influences to parental engagement, such as social-economic status, emotional capital, well-being, parents’ educational attainment, family structure, as well as class and ethnicity (Harris and Goodall, 2008). School leadership is considered a key organising component in the successful development and running of school partnership programmes, although there appears to be a lack of opportunities for schools to share best practices on school-home partnerships (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018, p.118). Whilst acknowledging parent involvement in schools is primarily focused on improving children’s academic outcomes, there is also the suggestion that parental involvement activities are tokenistic and simply appease parental stakeholders (Avvisati et al., 2010, p.761).

Parent motivations for school involvement are surfaced by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) who consider the variables affecting parents’ own role perceptions and beliefs about parenting and how this influences a parent's involvement levels with school. They claim three constructs underlay a parent's involvement: perceptions of parental role; sense of
efficacy in aiding their children; and how the school is seen to encourage involvement (p.3). Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) similarly report parent perceptions of school leaders’ willingness to engage with communities is a significant factor in parent-school involvement. Epstein (1995, p.704) offers a framework of six types of school, family and community involvement and sees the school, home and community as three overlapping spheres of influence in a child's learning, recognising that school leaders can work for a closer integration or ‘build barriers’ (p.703) in the disaggregation of these elements. While Jeynes (2018), using data from several meta-analyses, distinguishes between school-based and home-based involvement practices, claiming the vast majority of child learning takes place with home-based activities.

2.4 Discussion

The parental involvement literature alludes to school, parent and community partnerships as normative in improving outcomes for children with the position taken by school leadership in relation to parental stakeholders determining the degree of this involvement. However, to what extent headteachers are in charge of school external relationships is queried by Close and Wainwright (2010, p.448) who propose a distributed leadership approach promoting inclusion and avoiding 'oppression and manipulation'. A similar dialogical process towards strategy development is advocated by Davies and Davies (2004, p.31). This contrasts with the first position on Goodall and Montgomery’s (2014) continuum that sees the school very much in control. There is a relationship akin to professional and client where stakeholders are 'strategically' managed (Frooman, 1999), information is unidirectional (from school to parents), and there are clear boundaries.

The shift from parents as customers to parents as partners suggests the need for changes in organisational culture to develop more meaningful levels of engagement. School leaders need to be accessible and this proximity should be mutually understood and accepted by both parties, and there is a redefining of roles and responsibilities. While studies have explored stakeholder management in higher education and universities, little is found on the framework’s use in school settings. Stakeholder theory offers a perspective for school leaders to consider their environments and analyse the relationships within an organisation, and how they work and change over time (Parmar et al. 2010, p.406). This is particularly
pertinent in school contexts, as each new academic year brings in a new body of parents. In independent schools, educational leaders need to understand the diversity of families (Epstein, 2018), recognise parents as key stakeholders and acknowledge that satisfying parental stakeholder concerns is essential if schools are to operate successfully.

The examination of stakeholder management and parental involvement bodies of literature revealed similar sets of issues of leadership boundary work and responsibility. The review informed the autoethnographic study through recognition of the importance of cataloguing daily communications with parental stakeholders, and reflecting on the power and influence levels within these interactions, as a way of understanding organisational culture within an independent Southeast Asian school. In the next chapter, autoethnography as a research methodology is discussed, as well as the data collection methods used in this study.
Chapter 3: Research design

This chapter introduces and critiques autoethnography, a methodology, and sub-genre of ethnography, purposely chosen for this study as it enables a researcher, imbedded within a particular setting, to generate data through observations and reflections on lived experiences whilst not directly involving or endangering research participants. In addition, this chapter discusses data gathering methods as well as the experiences and ethical challenges of being a researcher.

Ethnography fits with my subjectivist/relativist ontology that understands reality as multiplicitous in which reality is determined by the individual and context, and is socially-constructed (Bryman, 2018, p.33). This supports an epistemological view that accepts knowledge produced through interpretation and cognition, and consequently I position this research within a paradigm of interpretivism that uses research to better understand subjects’ experiences whilst simultaneously acknowledging dispositions of the researcher (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006, p.4). However, I am also sympathetic to Postmodernism’s questioning of power relationships and accepted norms around knowledge creation through the exploration of the use of language (Saunders et al., 2019, p.149).

Although ethnographic studies are typically conducted over a significant period, shorter-term studies can employ ‘ethnographic perspectives’ adhering to the main tenets of ethnography: data gathering is in situ; there is an attempt to represent insider perspectives; and a rich description of the culture being examined (Cohen et al., 2018). In exploring my ‘insider’ experiences, understood in terms of access to ‘privileged’ knowledge and ‘lived familiarity with the group being researched’ (Merton, 1972 cited by Mercer, 2007, p.3), autoethnographic fieldnotes were generated over a twelve-week period (Appendix A) to coincide with the last weeks of my school’s academic year. The second semester is usually a busy time with mock examinations, internal school assessments, international examinations, completing school reports, new student interviews, and for senior students, a graduation ceremony: All of which with the potential to yield significant opportunities for interactions with parents. However, the local municipal authority, responding to a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, had ordered schools ‘online’ during the early stages of my data collection.
This reduced the usual number of face-to-face parent interactions; however, I was still able to make fieldnotes of in-person meetings, phone calls, and frequent emails and instant messages. In total 199 interactions were noted in my OneNote journal (Appendix B), and the most significant events, relating to the research questions, were written up in detail.

3.1 Ethics of autoethnography

As a research methodology, autoethnography presents the researcher with unique challenges of self, representation and reflexivity (Bolen, 2017). Embodying three interrelated research concerns: an investigation of the self (auto); in relation to culture (ethnos); analysed and written up (graphy), autoethnography uses a blend of autobiographical and ethnographic methods (Ellis et al., 2011). How each of these components is given less or more emphasis shapes the goal, positionality and form of the research within the autoethnographic paradigm. My review of autoethnography literature suggested personal 'evocative' autoethnographies, in which subjective experiences are given emphasis, and storied towards a goal of emotional relatability, perhaps lacked the academic rigour found in more traditional social research. Therefore, I purposely chose to situate this study closer towards 'analytic' autoethnography that builds from an ethnographic tradition, and uses empirical evidence and self-reflections to form analytical arguments towards the investigation of a social phenomenon (Anderson, 2006).

The use of 'self' as primary data source presents complex ethical issues (Tullis, 2016; Lapadat, 2017). The researcher is required 'to turn a 'scientific' gaze on their own experiences' (Sikes, 2012, p.125), using this to explore social phenomena (Wall, 2006), as lived events are written up through a first-person reflexive narrative. How a researcher's self is centred and written into an ethnographic study immediately raises concerns of exposure and susceptibility (Berry, 2017). As a headteacher working in a context where the traditional idea of school leadership is an individual who is 'super-capable, multi-skilled, extraordinary' is valued (Starr, 2014, p.230), I sensed a reluctance to reveal personal vulnerabilities or perceived disloyalties to the school for fear of being perceived as weak. I have a genuine emotional attachment and investment with the school where I have worked for the past seventeen years. I was also aware that the investigation of government education policy documents needed to be handled delicately as not to offend my host country. However, I believe it
important to shed light on aspects of leadership practice that might normally be
underreported and unchallenged (Deckers, 2021), and to question the taken for granted
assumptions within one's own organisational culture (Close and Wainwright, 2010),
acknowledging that confronting challenging issues through autoethnography can be a
liberating experience (Haynes, 2018).

The notion that (auto)ethnographies endure, like an 'inked tattoo' (Tolich, 2010) and live on
well after the study is completed (Ellis, 1995), was a stern reminder for me to assume that
whatever is written has the potential to be read by those within the community I am writing
about. I concur with Coffey (1999, p.57) citing Hochschild (1983), who suggests ethnographic
fieldwork requires emotional commitment and is a form of managed ‘emotional labour’,
interactions understood as work, where I, the (auto)ethnographer, needed to have
emotional control and balance the dual role of researcher and headteacher with those
within the research setting. Soon after I began recording fieldnotes I became conscious of
how my autoethnographic fieldwork changed the dynamic in my interactions with parents.
In much the same way as ethnographer Carolyn Ellis (1995) viewed her exchanges with the
Fisherneck community (Ellis, 1986) as ‘coming for data’ and wanting to know ‘what really
went on’ rather than being cozy chats and entertaining tales as may have been perceived by
the Fisherneckers (Ellis, 1995, p.93), I began to see my parental meetings and
 correspondences as opportunities for data collection (Shuler, 2007): While one part of me
was dealing with the issue at hand, another part of me was thinking how the encounter was
fulfilling an academic end.

Ellis (1995, p.71) writes of feelings of guilt in playing the dual role of researcher and friend
to those within her research community, and the difficulty in compartmentalizing these roles
and emotions (p.81). Despite being accustomed to the typical daily school leadership work
of dealing with a myriad of events, multi-tasking, and making both micro- and meso-level
school decisions (Dimmock, 2015), I also found it challenging to be both headteacher and
researcher, aware that being a researcher caused a change in my identity (Coffey, 1999). As
I began taking and writing up fieldnotes, it became apparent that many of my interactions
with parents were on topics of a confidential nature which raised ethical issues.
Autoethnographers openly emphasize their own presence and positionality within the
research process; however, as ‘writing about yourself always involves writing about others’
(Ellis, 2009 cited in Tullis, 2016, p.247), significant ethical consideration is required when including others in autoethnographic accounts.

The degree to which others will feature within an autoethnographic study needs to be settled at the planning stage of the research (Chang, 2016, p.69). In this study, the concern is on how my headteacher role is shaped by situations involving parents. I am the primary focus of the research as I attempt to answer research questions through my documented interactions with this stakeholder group: how do critical incidents specific to governmental policy involving parents shape a principal’s strategic thinking and planning?; how does this policy context impact on my role identity? Therefore, the others mentioned here play an essential but background role. Events, incidents and interactions involving parents are written up as stories and autoethnographic reflections. However, in the re-telling I recognise the degree to which stories are co-authored which surfaces issues of narrative ownership within autoethnographic practice and 'the extent to which a researcher can discover and represent the experiences of others' (Lapadat, 2017, p.596).

Despite this I fully acknowledge, consenting participants, or, as in this study, non-participant others included in the writing, must be afforded confidentiality and protection from harm; however, although anonymisation techniques are important protective measures, pseudonyms offer little solution for researchers working in their own communities (Nikkanen, 2019, p.383), or when autoethnographers use their own name (Lapadat, 2017, p.593). By disclosing their own identity in the research, the autoethnographer makes it possible for readers to recognise themselves or others, even in anonymised texts. Therefore, researchers need to take responsibility for their work (Sikes, 2012).

There is much debate within autoethnographic literature on whether autoethnography requires the same level of ethical supervision as other forms of research inquiry. Tolich (2010) argues that others mentioned in autoethnographic accounts should be afforded the right of informed consent, believing this should be done prior to starting research, as attempts to gain consent retrospectively are unrealistic. However, there is a perception that autoethnographic researchers can 'side-step' ethics committees (Tullis, 2016, p.244), and a larger question of whether review boards assist (or fully understand) those doing autoethnographic work (Lapadat, 2017). Autoethnographers are reminded that it is not only
issues of identity but that participants can be ‘affected by the intimate and often emotive disclosures revealed’ in autoethnographic studies (Haynes, 2018, p.27). In autoethnographies of challenging lived events, such as bereavement, suffering, or abuse, when the ‘other’ is without opportunity to consent, accusations of unethical uses of power by the researcher persist (Gorichanaz, 2021, p.81). Therefore, I justify using amalgamated persons and incidents, acknowledging the need to be responsible and reflexive in my representation of others.

A common criticism of autoethnography, made by more traditionalist ethnographers, is how the 'other' is inherently more interesting than the 'self' (Coffey, 1999; Atkinson, 2006; Delamont, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Delamont, 2009). This evaluation is largely directed towards evocative autoethnography, identified with first-person narrative (autobiographical) inquiry in which the researcher explores lived cultural experiences through reflexive creative writing styles, often with the aim of connecting empathically with the reader (Ellis 2008; Bolen, 2017). Celebrating its resistance to ‘othering’ (Shuler, 2007, p.281), evocative autoethnography’s proponents value Postmodernism’s plurality and questioning of power relations, knowledge creation and contest the propensity to generalize from findings (Anderson, 2006). Autoethnography is associated with a postcolonial awareness and as such is a methodological approach often used by researchers from marginalized groups and under-represented communities: a method allowing the 'other' to find their own voice. The epistemological disposition of autoethnography, valuing subjectivity and unconventional approaches to research writing, sets it apart from other modes of qualitative inquiry and consequently autoethnography faces challenges of acceptance within academe (Holt, 2003). Owing to the essence of autoethnography being personal experience, sceptics question how autoethnography contributes to a systematic contribution to knowledge that is open to critique (Walford, 2021). However, Learmonth and Humphreys (2011, pp.112-113) suggest autoethnography provides a justifiable contribution by creating empirical research for identity scholars and by giving insight into unseen practices.
3.2 Memory

Whilst memory is seen as an essential data source in life histories, it can be ‘fragmentary, elusive, and sometimes “altered” by experience’ (Muncey, 2005, p.69). Most traditional ethnographers acknowledge the ‘limitations of memory’ and highlight the importance of extensive ethnographic data gathering to inform analysis and writing (Walford, 2009, p.127). Autoethnography, however, legitimizes memory as a rich data source although it is advisable to support views with evidence as a form of triangulation (Chang, 2016). I also support Chang's (2016, p.71) claim of legitimation of researcher's use of personal memory as being similar to a traditional ethnographer’s use of a participant’s use of recalled memory. For instance, Charmaz and Bryant (2016, ch.21) see interview responses as 'retrospective accounts' which suggests autoethnographies are no less valid than narrative versions (Rapley, 2001) derived from qualitative interviews. Muncey (2005) recommends using multiple techniques: photographs, artefacts (documents), as well as creative writing, the use of metaphor and journey, as devices to elicit memory, and provide credibility (p.70). However, while some autoethnographers advocate multiple data sources and explicit collecting protocols (Duncan, 2004), others see the need to provide evidence in work as an 'illusion' that betrays autoethnography's fundamental principles (Winkler, 2018, p.238). While I considered drawing on memories of previous incidents, I felt this method did not fit with the evidence-based analytic model of autoethnography I was seeking to use.

3.3 Document analysis

Document analysis seemed to be the most appropriate data collection method for addressing the second research question. Firstly, as a school leader, I have access to ministry governance policies for independent schools, accreditation inspection checklist criteria, and other organisational documents. Secondly, autoethnography's reliance on ‘self’ as the sole data source presents challenges of validity, reliability and objectivity (Holt, 2003). I suggest document analysis compliments an autobiographical approach by providing an academic counter-balance to personal narratives (Bowen, 2009, p.31): a claim validated by Bryman (2018, p.543) as secondary documents, existing prior to the research, are understood as 'non-reactive'. I further suggest ‘autoethnography’ and ‘document analysis’ share methodological similarity in the sense they both do not directly involve participants in the research. Finally, a systematic and sensitive selection of minutes from weekly senior
management meetings, and other relevant documents (see Appendix C), evaluated using 'discourse analysis', an approach exploring dynamics of power, and 'thematic analysis', to uncover the most notable themes (Maydell, 2010), assisted understanding of societal and organisational norms (Coffey, 2014, p.367). As well as, contextually grounding the research and supporting autoethnography with background information (Bowen, 2009, p.29).

Documents provide a way of balancing and supporting an autoethnographer’s subjective writings (Duncan, 2004). The two key documents I analysed were the Ministry of Education policy document for international school governance and its related inspection checklist: both potentially offered a lot of data and could have become their own research projects. Bryman (2018) warns of documents' intertextuality to further documents, issues and events, seeing documents ‘implicated in chains of action that are a potential focus of attention in their own right’ (p.543). Document analysis could possibly result in an excess of contextual data that leads away from the more immediate research focus. Therefore, after an initial analysis, I set limitations on which parts of these documents were examined, prioritising those that covered parent-related issues and addressed the research questions.

Coffey (2014, p.370) sees document analysis operating on a number of levels: The interrogation of the document itself, how this relates to the immediate context of operations regarding people, actions and events, as well as wider societal meanings. Another challenge was maintaining an unbiased position when analysing documents. I attempted to do this by trying to understand the documents from the perspective of different stakeholders. How documents are used and analysed has implications for the type of data generated. For example, through a historical lens, critical discourse analysis or thematic analysis. As Coffey (2014, pp.370-371) points out, for many qualitative researchers, documents are used in terms of their content and subsequent effects and to provide important background to events, rather than evolutionary studies of document creation.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest documents and artefacts are an overlooked data source as many ethnographers prefer collecting data through observations and interviews. Documents are an 'integral feature' (p.122) of school organisational life. They provide contextual meanings, 'construct[ing] ‘facts’, ‘records’, ‘diagnoses’, ‘decisions’, and ‘rules’ that are crucially involved in social activities' (p.121). All forms of document; informal,
formal, and official contribute to school culture. Communication via instant messaging through social media applications forms much of my daily activity. This messaging creates innumerable informal documents that often transgress the boundaries of more formal documents as the content and purposes vary. I use instant messaging with teachers to check attendance, arrange online meetings, share minutes, give notification of deadlines, as well as chat, joke, delegate and ‘listen’ to individuals. Instant messaging is also used to communicate with parents by sharing school circulars, and promoting events and activities through online chat groups, and since the pandemic has become the default method, superseding email, of communicating directly with parents and students. All of these modes of document served as aide-memoires to my autoethnographic writing.

3.4 Fieldnotes and reflections

I attempted to follow Rodriguez and Ryave’s (2002) strategy of Systematic Self-Observation; a set of procedures to assist the observation and record keeping of identified phenomena by a self-researcher during their everyday experiences. Contemporaneous fieldnotes, recording ‘a descriptive construction of (a) the situation in which the activity occurred; (b) the relationships of the participants (using social roles and fictitious names); and (c) a careful reconstruction of the words spoken, and the informants’ thoughts and feelings.’ (Rodriguez and Ryave, 2002, pp.17-18), were jotted down in a pocket-sized notebook following each parent encounter or correspondence. However, as many interactions were through email and instant messaging, I soon found it more efficient to type these notes directly into my laptop, reserving the notebook for face-to-face encounters.

Using an event-driven technique like Systematic Self-Observation was important in staying focused to parent-related issues and avoiding the temptation of documenting broader experiences. However, reflecting on Rodriguez and Ryave’s abc criteria, I found the physical environment of interactions changed very little as most face-to-face meetings took place in my office. Although there were notable changes in each individual, or set of parent’s dress code, body language, demeanour, and purpose for the meeting. Due to the sheer volume of weekly parent interactions and reoccurring parents, I resorted to making my own short-hand code of parent names, deciding that in the final write-up parents and families would be anonymised as ‘parent’.
Drawing on ethnographic techniques (Delamont, 2009): ‘immediate’ fieldnotes written in situ (in school) were more fully written up on a daily basis (at home). Most of the time this expansion process produced more descriptive notes; however, at the end of each week I attempted to write more meaningful accounts of the week’s key events. Delamont methodically dates field entries, settings are recorded by making simple maps, and events are summarized with key words, and verbal instructions in her observed situations are quoted as precisely as possible (Walford, 2009). I attempted to incorporate these techniques and to follow Delamont’s disciplined approach to writing up, fieldnotes expanded to ‘out-of-the-field-notes’ as soon as possible, usually the same day (Walford, 2009, p.126). I understood the prompt expansion of fieldnotes into more detailed accounts within a reasonable timeframe to be important in preserving the accuracy of events.

However, whereas Delamont (2009, p.53) believes in a clear separation of field observations and personal reflections, particularly in the presentation of data, the autoethnographic approach emphasizes writing the personal, subjective experiences albeit with reflexivity. The key difference between a reflexive ethnographic account and an autoethnographic text is autoethnography’s use of ‘self’ as the main data source. Thus, in recording and then writing up thoughts and feelings, *Systematic Self-Observation* encourages self-observers to address ‘covert, elusive, and/or personal experiences like cognitive processes, emotions, motives, concealed actions, omitted actions, and socially restricted activities’ (Rodriguez and Ryave, 2002, p.3). The writing up process introduced a further degree of subjectivity (see Delamont in Walford, 2009, p.126), to guide me in writing up fieldnotes as reflections I used a set of prompting questions developed by piloting fieldnotes for one week prior to starting research (Appendix D).

### 3.5 Summary

Hammersley (2006) points to challenges and ‘dangers’ in misreading situations owing to a trend of shortened ethnographic fieldwork. Indeed, keeping an autoethnographic journal for the twelve-week duration did not yield the types of government policy-parental related incidents I had originally envisaged. In the next chapter a selection of the 199 parental interactions, are presented as vignettes in layered accounts (Adams et al., 2015; Bolen, 2017) as personal writing is juxtaposed with commentary and theoretical analysis with document
analysis playing a ‘supporting role’ to autoethnographic data to provide academic rigour and counter bias.
This chapter explains how a corpus of $N=199$ parental interactions, recorded during the twelve weeks of this investigation, were summarized into a more manageable data set, and how thematic patterns in the data provided possibilities for further analysis.

Initially, content analysis was used to organize data under four general headings. These were (1) daily operations, for example, parent messages about a child's lateness or absence, curriculum queries, or requests for administrative documents; (2) new student admissions, face-to-face or video-conferenced interviews with parent and child; (3) international examination administration issues, queries related to the current examinations series; and (4) government/pandemic issues, issues related to government mandates regarding the closure/opening of face-to-face learning in schools. The frequency of all interactions is presented in Table 1.

Seven of the interactions I would term 'critical incidents' (CI), interpreted as significant events (Tripp, 1993 cited in Spencer-Oatey, 2013, p.3), when I was acutely aware of my rising stress levels due to my perception of parents' expectations of me. Each critical incident is represented as a single ★ in Table 1. These incidents were difficult to write up as they exposed personal vulnerabilities. Autoethnography was used to self-analyse my behavior and resulting actions. Thematic analysis, a widely used and flexible ‘method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns’ Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) was further applied to this autoethnographic data set (Appendix F) in an attempt to address the research questions, and fulfill the mandate of analytic autoethnography by seeking to improve theoretical understandings of social phenomena (Anderson, 2006, p.375). By reading and re-reading through these critical incidents then colour-highlighting patterns, then placing these text extracts into sets, I identified the following initial overlapping themes of: 1) Time, the struggle with a work-life balance, as well as school schedules; 2) Power, imbalances in power relations, and accountability to authority, whether this be government, school owner, or the external curriculum organisation; and 3) Conflicts, how the discontent of parents was a 'trigger point' for my own stress levels.
The significant incidents are presented, chronologically in pairs, in layered accounts that bring together selected fieldnotes with reflections and analysis (Adams et al., 2015), in an attempt to meet the key features of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). Following Ronai (1995), asterisks, and italicized text, are used to signify changes between data and analysis.

Table 1: Parental Interactions: Category of Interaction Versus Method of Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Interaction</th>
<th>Instant message</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Face-to-face</th>
<th>Video-conference</th>
<th>Phone call</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily operations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New student admissions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International examination administration issues</td>
<td>13★</td>
<td>16★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1★</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/pandemic-related issues</td>
<td>4★</td>
<td>10★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N = 199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

★ = a Critical Incident

***

CI.1

Its 6.00pm, I'm being forwarded instant messages from a parent who's clearly upset about children being asked not to use school uniform if they're coming to school tomorrow. Earlier in the day another parent voiced the same concerns.

I have the feeling of being 'caught in the middle' between parents happy and content their children are studying online and those parents desperate for us to reopen…

…Our school wants to keep everyone happy but it’s challenging! We've opted for a voluntary reopening, calling it "support classes" and asking students to use non-uniform - in case there
should be an inspection from authorities. There’s an element of risk in going against government protocols and it’s my name at the bottom of the circular.

Now it seems even the request for non-uniform attendance is an issue for some parents - thinking they have to buy new clothing for their children.

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Monday, 21 March 2022)

***

CI.2

Officially, schools remain closed for face-to-face learning due to last month’s spike in Omicron cases. The local authorities have yet to officially announce any reopening. However, in response to parental demands many schools in the province, including ours, have opened voluntary ‘support classes’. This loop-hole allows those students who wish to attend to do so while other students remain studying online. It is a blended learning approach with teachers in classrooms with students while simultaneously broadcasting and interacting with students at home.

I’ve just taken part in the group photograph with all forty-six graduating students. They were specifically asked to come into school today for this event as the deadline is approaching for their graduation yearbook. It’s nice to have them in school and feels almost pre-pandemic albeit we’re all wearing face masks.

A group of seniors is in the office collecting certificates from the secretary. As I leave the office, I call out cheerily, “Nice to see you all today - I hope you’re all in for lessons tomorrow.”

At 7.30pm I receive the first of eight emails from senior students’ parents on my smart phone politely informing me that they are staying with the online classes. The last email arrives at 11.30pm. Some messages mention the fact that local authorities haven’t asked students to go back to school yet. It feels orchestrated, the format of each email is very similar, and I’m left wondering if my cheery comment earlier has been misunderstood as a demand.

Early next morning, in the office, I politely reply to each email, stating that we respect the parents’ decisions.

Around mid-morning, the head office calls to report another parent’s criticism: why aren’t we demanding that all students return for face-to-face learning?

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Tuesday, 29 March 2022)

***

The fieldnotes above highlight the difficulty in responding to competing stakeholder demands and the power of the stakeholder collective. Lareau and Muñoz (2012) suggest parent positions in parent-school conflicts are more powerful when parents act as a
collective, apparent in the emails in (CI.2). However, the power of a coalition is only evident if stakeholders are aware of their shared aspirations (Ackermann and Eden, 2011, p.190) which was not the case in (CI.1). Nevertheless, both events occurred after office hours and led me to have stressful evenings. The differing opinions of parents on whether they wished their children to attend school during a government-sanctioned closure posed leadership challenges. Increasing numbers of parents questioned why the school was not reopened when other sections of society, notably tourism, were ‘opening up’. I found myself in a dilemma between parent requests to restart classes and the local government regulations, however, as (CI.2) demonstrates, some parents also preferred to follow government instructions.

***

CI.3

Today was a national holiday, however, an important email from our international examination body arrived in the early hours of the morning informing us actual examinations will be going ahead, and I had to email out to all 130 exam candidates’ parents.

It’s now midnight and I can’t sleep. I get up, open my laptop and begin to type a lengthy explanation about why international examinations must go ahead.

Earlier, there was a flurry of parent email replies and instant messages requesting me to use the portfolio of evidence assessments we had accumulated over the past six weeks. But this was only ever a back-up plan if examinations were unable to proceed - I conveyed this clearly to everyone in previous correspondences.

Now, parents are saying their children are exhausted from the back-up assessments. I sympathize. However, there are many reasons why it’s better to proceed with actual examinations...

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Friday, 15 April 2022)

***

CI.4

A teacher informs me that a parent has messaged that her daughter will only come to school for today’s scheduled assessment with another subject teacher. I’m momentarily confused because since the announcement that actual international examinations are going ahead, I’ve made it very clear to all teachers that we cease doing the back-up measure assessments. Students and parents had emailed passionately that students were feeling 'burnt out' with
testing which was required if exams couldn’t go ahead. Now they can, there’s really no need for more assessments.

I open Zoom in preparation for the (virtual) daily teacher briefing. All teachers are working from school but it’s simply easier and safer for us all to meet online. The teacher who is having the assessment is the first to join. In a slightly heated conversation, I inform the teacher that there’s really no reason to be doing more assessments. Other teachers join and the conversation quickly moves on to the business of the day.

After the briefing, I check that teacher’s international exam subject schedule. The subject exams will be completed in the next fortnight. Surely, the teacher doesn’t think there’s going to be school closures again?

Around midday, an IGCSE candidate’s parent contacts me to say their child is experiencing Covid symptoms. I reply that I haven’t heard of any other child who’s currently positive and request that he takes the child for testing.

For the rest of the day, I’m worried we’re going to have a Covid outbreak just before the actual exam series begins. That evening, the parent messages me with the child’s clinic test result… Negative!

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Wednesday, 27 April 2022)

***

The COVID-19 pandemic created uniquely challenging and unpredictable situations. Schools in the country were closed for face-to-face learning by the government in March 2020 and suddenly required to switch to online teaching and learning. This transition intensified the use of instant chat messaging as a form of communication between teachers and from teachers to parents. Mandatory online teaching and learning remained in place for twenty months resulting in new patterns of organisational behavior. As indicated in several of the critical incidents, messages can arrive at all times of the day, and have become a comparable method of communication to email. Pollock and Hauseman (2019) suggest as much as digital technologies have assisted school leaders, they have also intensified workloads and extended working hours, resulting in principals being on permanent duty. Technology has also changed the form of communication as messages replace meetings and ‘talk becomes text’ (p.384): this is evidenced by the number of indirect parent interactions in Table 1.

The almost unconscious, accepted and unquestioned use of technology to communicate in contemporary work lives of school leaders could be understood as an example of the power of the system (Hardy, 1996), where those within the organisation have no other option than
to conform to its organisational norms. At the start of the pandemic, to help distinguish between important announcements and general messages, I created new chat groups for general teacher discussion, important announcements, and form teachers’ news, and secondary international-curriculum teachers and I established 6.00am until 6.00pm as acceptable hours for weekday messaging, and weekends as personal time. However, this etiquette was harder to enforce with parents, and school leaders from the national sections of our school where late evening and weekend messages are the norm.

Face-to-face international examinations were cancelled for two years, meaning schools, more precisely teachers, were required to award grades based on evidenced assessments. This placed tremendous pressure on teachers and myself as academic coordinator. During this period, parents were acutely aware of what other schools and other international examining bodies were doing and were not hesitant in giving me their opinions. Understanding how stakeholders may seek to influence the organisation is something managers need to recognise (Frooman, 1999, p.203). The transition back to actual examinations was a change that needed to be carefully managed. Yet, the timing of the examination body’s announcement came on a public holiday and had to be communicated to parents out of school hours.

***

CI.5

It is the last three days of Ramadan. I’m sitting at my desk, at home, idling my time on my laptop thinking about today's parent meetings, two new student interviews and a consultation meeting with a family about IGCSE subject options. I know in 45 minutes I will break today’s fast with an iced drink and an evening meal. I feel tired. I have been up since 4.30am, getting into work today at 5.30am. It’s now 5.30pm on this Friday evening, I've been home an hour and a half. We're about to start a long holiday weekend for the Islamic celebration of Eid al-fitr.

A steady flow of instant messages from the school owner 'ping' and break the silence in the on-screen message group. It seems a parent (possibly from our national school) has questioned why our schools are only giving two days holiday and not the full week as announced (recently) by the President.

This had been discussed in three previous school management meetings and a decision had been made to keep to the original two prescribed holidays.
Now, the school owner is sharing messages from a parent, and questioning what do the regional educational authorities have to say on the matter.

Minutes pass…

Our national school principals reply with mixed messages: some independent schools are giving two days holiday, others the full week…

I remind everyone, senior candidates in our international school have international examinations scheduled next week.

Minutes pass…

The owner announces we too shall give a full week’s holiday for all students except staff, a handful of duty teachers, (and me) with exam invigilation.

I break my fast… Then, type the announcement circular, which is shared by instant message to teachers, then to all parents.

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Friday, 30 April 2022)

***

The issue of whether our schools were going to give two days or a full week’s holiday was discussed in three consecutive senior management meetings. A decision was made that as the vast majority of our students/parents and teaching staff are not Muslim we would simply give the two official national holidays and not the extended week as recently announced by the President. However, Muslim students would be permitted the option of taking additional time off school (see Document 3 below). This incident demonstrates the salience of a single parental stakeholder with connections to local authorities and school ownership, demonstrating strong power, legitimacy and urgency to influence (Mitchell et al., 1997).

***

Document 3: Senior Leadership Team Meeting Minutes

Agenda: Thursday, 14 April 2022
Item 10: Additional holidays, 29 April, 4,5,6 May 2022

Agenda: Thursday, 21 April 2022
Item 9: Additional holidays, 29 April, 4,5,6 May 2022?

Agenda: Thursday, 28 April 2022
Item 4: No additional holidays, facultative holiday for Moslem student
In contextualising international school leadership, Blandford and Shaw (2001 cited in Lee et al., 2012, p.294) point to leaders needing to address competing demands 'between local and global curriculum standards and expectations' and ‘the need for compliance with host country education laws and policies' whilst simultaneously fulfilling international education requirements. The data suggests mismatches of scheduling between globalized and local education, not only with time differences and delays in correspondences, but also a mutual lack of sensitivity between the host country and international exam body in understanding each other’s schedules of international exams and national, cultural and religious holidays. This results in school leadership seemingly operating in a middle ground between agendas from the national Ministry of Education and the international-curriculum organisation.

In practical terms, my own leadership planning tries to take into account both national and international agendas, requiring me to communicate clearly with staff and parents that the independent international-curriculum school follows a dual schedule. However, as (Cl.5) shows, it can be challenging to judge unexpected announcements from the host country. The president’s decision to announce further public holidays shows a fluidity in leadership decision-making which has a knock-on effect to other decision-makers and illustrates how leadership is influenced by context (Wallace and Tomlinson, 2010, p.22). Additionally, when decisions and communications have to be made late in the day, as was also the case when I was ‘about to start a long holiday weekend’ (Cl.5), this impacts on personal time, making it difficult for school leaders to maintain boundaries of a work life balance (Pollock and Hauseman, 2019).

Cl.6

A 'suspected malpractice' incident has occurred. An A-level candidate has been found in possession of a mobile phone in an international examination. The candidate claims to have inadvertently forgotten to hand it in. This is despite two posters inside the exam room and one outside the room displaying 'No phones' text and graphics, and a verbal reminder by the teacher invigilator at the exam start.
I am duty-bound to send a report to the international examination body. The candidate, who has been tipped for a high grade, is in tears, discussion moves to university placements and requirements. Parents are called. Parents ask if there is anything that can be done. The candidate is adamant that the phone was off throughout the exam duration.

Covid-19 regulations allow candidates to withdraw and defer to the November series. I suggest this as an alternative to making the 'suspected malpractice' report as I know from experience this usually results in disqualification... The matter needs to be decided by midday tomorrow.

I feel disappointment this has happened. I do not want to judge whether this candidate has cheated or not, nor do I have to. However, the fact of the matter is regulations have been broken and this needs to be appropriately reported. I do not want to jeopardize the student’s university chances.

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Friday, 06 May 2022)

***

Experience tells me that parents will often be in denial when it is suggested their child may have contravened regulations, even when presented with evidence or testimony from a teacher. MacLure and Walker (2000, p.7) compare forms of dialogue between parents and schools with other professions, noting similarities in ‘asymmetries of power and status [that] are both reflected, and enacted, in consultation-type situations.’ Recognising parents do not enjoy receiving bad news about their children and being reflexively aware how certain situations can diminish a stakeholder’s power, I used language that was informative whilst attempting to sound impartial which surfaces a performatve dimension of my headteacher role. Drawing comparisons between paediatric consultancy and parent-teacher meetings, MacLure and Walker (2000, p.7) suggest ‘the maintenance of a moral identity and the avoidance of blame’ as characteristics common with parents and professionals in both types of organisational cultures.

While parental involvement literature emphasizes building closer relations between home and school, it should be noted that the authoritative nature of my role as headteacher can have a distancing effect as I am seen as the one who upholds rules and regulations, and makes decisions on discipline. This can be a ‘double-edged sword’ as at times parents will want me to show leniency, while at other times they expect me to act firm and decisively, as the next critical incident illustrates.

***
This is very serious. I need to take immediate action. A small group of middle school students leaves my office after bravely informing me they feel uncomfortable that a staff member has been asking to borrow money. Apparently, a number of students have been asked. I’m shown screen shots from a mobile phone showing an instant message conversation. One of the students said that their parent is wondering why the school hasn’t taken action against the member of staff.

I call the school owner to discuss the issue. I’m advised to hold an immediate senior management meeting. The same staff member was warned about this six months ago. Back then it had been parents directly asked for money. It’s now apparent the habit has spread to asking students. We are three weeks away from the end of this school year; however, it is unanimously agreed the member of staff can’t be renewed for the new academic year.

I ask to meet with the concerned parent and within an hour we a meeting in my office. I thank the parent for coming and praise their child for stepping forward and informing me. I talk frankly with the parent. I am upset to hear this has happened and reassure the parent action is being taken. The parent says they initially felt angry and wanted to come to school to protest but after listening and understanding that the matter was immediately discussed at the senior level, the parent says they are relieved and thank me.

I cannot fault the staff member’s work. In fact, the staff member will be irreplaceable.

(Autoethnographic fieldnote: Thursday, 19 May 2022)

***

Several critical incidents surfaced omnipresent forms of authoritative power. The most obvious of these were mandated school closures for face-to-face learning. However, the introduction of ‘support classes’ for struggling students (or those whose families were really just fed up with online learning) demonstrates a form of agency in manipulating the system (Wallace and Tomlinson, 2010); although, as the autoethnographic fieldnotes show this was not without risk and anxiety. Evidenced in the Ministry of Education’s governance policy document’s repetitive use of rules and sanctions (Gibbs, 2015, 25:55) was a dominant discourse establishing government as the authority over all schools in the country, independent or national.

Authority came in other forms: For example, my authority of position in setting policy over teachers in ‘a slightly heated conversation’ (CI.4) based on my interpretation of the situation of over-tested students; disciplining the staff member and needing ‘to take immediate action’
and the many new student and parent interviews. In these new admissions, critical reflection assisted my seeing how I was in a position of power by setting the agenda and making a judgement to whether the child could join our school. Then there were examples of how authority, working through my role, influenced me as I was ‘duty-bound’ (CI.6) to follow the regulations of the role set, however, even here I was able to act with some agency in offering the withdrawal option.

Parental conflict was the area that caused me the most stress. Part of the reason for this was that messages of discontent arrived after work hours and it can often be difficult to judge the tone of electronic correspondences (Natale and Lubniewski, 2018, p.378). Volume was an additional factor, numerous parents complaining, or the potential for numerous parents to complain multiplied my anxiety. This prompted a form of strategic defense, causing me to respond to incidents immediately, as I tried to avert a larger crisis knowing ‘another parent voiced the same concerns’ (CI.1). Additionally, I would assess that several of the email correspondences from parents in the broader corpus of data are actually written by students in ‘a flurry of email replies and instant messages’ (CI.3), as the English seems better than I recollect from parents which perhaps begs the question of how closely interwoven are student and parents as stakeholder groups. However, evident in (CI.2) is how students could use their parents to complain.

The analysis of these vignettes surfaces leadership challenges of: navigating power and authority; operating within differing time schedules; the correspondence, management and engagement of parental stakeholders; and balancing stakeholder needs. In the final chapter, using data from this study, I make recommendations on ways in which my leadership practice could be improved.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

[1095 words]

This study’s underlying concern, and impetus for the research questions, was to investigate how parental influence shapes strategic educational leadership decision-making and role within a specific policy environment of an independent school in Southeast Asia, and the challenges of appeasing sometimes contradictory stakeholder demands. Initially, these dilemmas were framed around perceived differences in national governmental and international-curriculum policies, and how this created tensions for parents and role conflict for me. However, data emerging from this study indicates a more complex range of tension points: the assessment of which, using a stakeholder management perspective, reveals a set of parents with a higher power to influence from the core parent group, parents operating as a coalition, and important subsets of parents with specific needs. Drawing upon issues surfaced by the vignettes and the broader corpus of data, I make the following suggestions for improving leadership practices within my school:

1). With much of the ‘cultural network’, a complex web of communications within organisations (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, p.85), now residing in a cyberspace of digital technologies, emails and instant messages, and evidenced in the vignettes, is a need for clearly defined boundaries between work and non-work time. I will propose to management, a school-based email system that is detached from personal accounts and devices, enabling clear and effective two-way communication with parents, at times that are convenient and acceptable to all. This communication must function to build rapport and allow reciprocity with parents (Natale and Lubniewski, 2018). I will also propose a schools-wide etiquette for the use of instant messages, to be agreed upon and followed by all school stakeholders.

2). In my leadership role, representing the international section of our schools, at senior leadership team meetings, I will propose a more proactive and decisive approach to the planning of the academic calendar that is shared and clearly communicated with parents. Parents would be expected to follow the calendar and not to take holidays during school days or request changes to test schedules. Should sudden holiday announcements from government occur, the school could have an understood policy of always adhering to government.
3). With issues arising from conflicts with the international examination schedule, I will provide feedback to the international examination body detailing the challenges faced when working with two schedules. I will also recommend to the exam organisation to provide webinar support for private candidates and their parents who are new to international examinations. To further reduce complicated issues arising from the international examination series, I will host information sessions for the specific stakeholder group of exam candidates’ parents before an international examination series to explain the intricacies of exam regulations.

4). Thirty percent of my parent meetings during the twelve weeks of this study were for new student admissions. There are a number of recommendations I would make to the school about this important subgroup of stakeholders: Firstly, the school does very little advertising so it would be useful to collect data on how new parents are learning about our school. Several of the parents I met said an older sibling had passed through the school or they had heard positive things about us from relatives or children of family friends. This sometimes starts an ‘avalanche’, a flow of students moving from one school to ours, as parents are influenced by what other parents are doing. Other potential parents said we were one of the only schools with a senior international examination programme, or they had learned about us through their child having private tuitions from one of our teachers. Having statistics on this would be helpful for the part of my role that strategically tries to maintain a flow of new students and expand the international section. Secondly, information sheets are needed for students of mixed nationality or students with gaps in formal education, explaining their options regarding their eligibility for national graduation certificates and how these documents determine whether they can join national universities, or not, would mean a more efficient use of my interviewing time. Thirdly, further information, perhaps in the national language, is required for parents whose children are moving from a national school to our international system: a clear understanding with parents about the differences in the two marking and grading systems, and the expectations of the international programme could alleviate potential conflicts arising from common misunderstandings regarding student academic performance.
Conclusion

By definition, autoethnographies are personal forms of research (Adams et al., 2015). Keeping a reflective journal provided empirical evidence on the needs and demands of an important stakeholder group. Recurrent themes within the vignettes suggest my headteacher role is affected by: issues of communication, balancing stakeholder needs, as well as emotional impacts on leadership. While much of the actual work of school heads comprises administrative and managerial tasks (Craig, 2021), space is needed for the distinctive leader task of goal and vision setting. Although tending to school-parent relations is a key aspect of school leadership work (Leithwood, 2013), this study has highlighted a number of minor day-to-day issues that may be preventing a broader reflection and setting of a leadership vision that seeks to deliver longer-term stakeholder needs.

Autoethnography provided a unique way for me to document, reflect on and analyse my leadership practices and organisational culture. The process of data collection, recording and then writing up interactions, although challenging at times, required a level of reflexivity that actually moderated some of the more stressful situations. However, this study has only focused on one aspect of my leadership work, that of parents, and the limited duration of the study can only provide a 'snapshot' of issues and challenges for school leadership. Additionally, I acknowledge that the study's findings are context-specific. Consequently, any conclusions in this chapter may not be generalizable: generalizability, defined as how a study's findings are applicable to other cases, although the rigour of an autoethnography is often determined by how a story relates to the reader's own experiences (Gorichanaz, 2021, p.83). The work of school leaders administering international-curricula in independent Southeast Asian school contexts remains an under-examined area of research. School leaders need to understand the environments in which they work to successfully implement strategies for increasing value (Davies and Davies, 2004). Further research, carried out over a longer period, could utilize stakeholder identification techniques to position stakeholders and map patterns of influence. A future study could include collaborative research with other school leaders working in similar settings, involving embedding autoethnographic approaches within reflective practice, to assist in understanding the complex relationships and dynamics of influence among school stakeholders.
Early discussions with my E822 tutor on the ethics of involving other school leaders in my study were essential in determining a suitable methodology. In the previous module's (EE812) EMA pilot study, I had thoroughly enjoyed developing research skills through reading about, conducting, and analyzing semi-structured interviews. I gained confidence in charting my progress through the PDP Skills Audit table, from 'new' to 'confident', and therefore I was intent on the small-scale investigation option in the dissertation module. However, E822 introduced a heightened consciousness of research ethics leading to a rethinking of my research design.

Tutor feedback on the draft chapter submissions included helpful reminders about 'signposting' through the text, allowing a first-time reader to have a clearer understanding of the research, and the need for a 'flow' through the dissertation. In response to this advice, the order of paragraphs was changed and introduction paragraphs included in each chapter.

In EE812, a key summary of critical incident definitions by Spencer-Oatey (2013) and the Open University’s podcast on interpreting critical incidents to frame practice towards understanding and developing policy assisted my understanding of incidents as sources for reflection. This led to an important change of mindset in my leadership practice. I now respond and view challenging incidents as learning opportunities or areas for research inquiry, demonstrating a behavioural change resulting from this Masters course, and one which shaped the research questions for the dissertation.

Choosing autoethnography and document analysis meant extensive reading beyond module articles. The process of researching new topics heightened my literature searching, and reviewing skills of comparing, contrasting, and criticality. This had been identified as an area for improvement in TMA01 tutor feedback and subsequently I had marked it as a personal development target.

Initially I was sceptical about using autoethnography owing to the persuasive criticisms of this methodology made by established qualitative researchers. That was until I read a text that resonated with me: Sparkes (1996), an article balancing personal narrative and academic analysis, about a former athlete turned academic suffering from chronic back pain.
Further extensive reading of arguments and counter-arguments broadened my understanding allowing me to acknowledge the paradigmatic debates around autoethnography yet develop my own views: I now have an appreciation for all forms of autoethnography. Conducting an autoethnographic study was an invaluable experience. I learned (1) the process of ethnographic notetaking, documenting events as they happened, or soon after, and then expanding and writing up these experiences; (2) an awareness of the role of being a researcher; (3) to be reflexive in research by thinking through events and considering the disposition of others, and how something could have been done differently; (4) to avoid being presumptive and to allow results to emerge from the data; and (5) an acknowledgment of how different forms of research contribute to knowledge creation. I am already planning how I can use similar data gathering methods, cataloguing events then reflecting on them, for example, with teachers in my workplace, to improve leadership practice.
References


Parmar, B. L., Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Purnell, L., and De Colle, S. (2010) 'Stakeholder theory: The state of the art'. Academy of Management Annals, 4(1), pp.403-


Walford, G. (2021) 'What is worthwhile auto-ethnography? Research in the age of the selfie.' *Ethnography and Education*, 16(1), pp.31-43.


# Appendices

## Appendix A – Research Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Deadline TMA02</strong></th>
<th><strong>Research Schedule: E822 Dissertation</strong></th>
<th><strong>Deadline Dissertation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>16-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>23-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-26</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>30-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-1</td>
<td>6-11</td>
<td>11-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>16-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>23-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-26</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>30-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-1</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>9-14</td>
<td>16-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>18-23</td>
<td>23-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-26</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>30-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-1</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Sept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>8-13</td>
<td>8-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>22-27</td>
<td>22-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-26</td>
<td>29-1</td>
<td>29-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pilot
- Pilot study
  - Fieldnotes and autoethnographic write ups
  - Refine reflexive prompts

### Data collection
- TMA02 tutor feedback
  - Start data collection (after tutor approval)
  - Document collection (items 4)
- Fieldnotes and autoethnographic reflections (12 weeks)
- Document collection (item 3)

### Organising and analysing data
- Document analysis (item 1)
- Document analysis (item 2)
- Review whether Document (items 5) are needed
- Organising and analysing autoethnographic data
- Document analysis (item 3)

### Findings and writing up
- Review 1: Is everything going to plan?
- Review 2: Is everything going to plan?
- Review of literature
- Research design
- Data presentation and analysis
- Conclusions and implications
- Introduction
- Abstract
### Appendix B – OneNote sample

#### Pilot Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Field notes</th>
<th>Daily reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 14 March 2022</td>
<td><strong>Situation 1:</strong> responding to a parent's WA message for assistance from the previous evening.</td>
<td>It's Monday morning and online examinations are underway. At 8:30 am, in response to a request for help, I send a 'Good morning' instant message to (Parent A) and a few lines asking for further details regarding the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a familiar expat parent who's third child is soon to graduate</td>
<td>I am messaging with a familiar expatriate parent, who is married to a local, and whose third child will graduate this year. Two previous children have passed through our school. The eldest is currently taking Masters study at a prestigious overseas university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>polite WA conversation</td>
<td>The parent has explained in previous late evening messages that their daughter is having difficulty enrolling at a local university. Because the student did not take national examinations and therefore didn’t receive primary and middle school leaving certificates - a requirement for matriculation to local universities. The institution is insisting the student takes the alternative set of school completion tests offered by government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>daughter having difficulties applying to 'Universitas Ciputra' Surabaya as doesn't have the necessary school leaving certificates</td>
<td>The problem is the registration period for these tests has passed and it will mean delaying university for one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Um is asking for student to have <em>Kerja Pekerjaan</em> - which she doesn’t have and would involve taking a 'gap' year.</td>
<td>I sympathize, it is a familiar problem faced by children of different nationalities. Either the family considers the child's language skills are not strong enough for the national examinations, or the original plan was to send the child to an overseas English-language university and apply using international examination certificates. Then, either for financial reasons, or the student is unable to pass international examinations, the family considers a local university. In this case, I suggest:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Thoughts and feelings:</strong></td>
<td>I want to help, as I know changing schools at this grade level can be difficult due to the norm of completing middle school years. I agree to interview the student again although I am skeptical as to whether the language progress would have been made in the year and a half since first being with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a familiar situation for mixed nationality children not taking national examinations</td>
<td>The parent thanks me for the advice and asks if I can support this negotiation with a reference letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What role is being expected of me?</td>
<td>An email arrives at the end of the school day from another familiar expatriate parent who is asking for re-admission for their local nephew. This parent has a child previously graduated and another currently in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to provide a supporting reference letter</td>
<td>The student initially tried for one semester at our school and left due to English language difficulties.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Tuesday, 15 March 2022 | **Situation 2:** email at the end of the day asking for readmission for a 'nephew' student | **Thoughts and feelings:** |
| | a familiar expat parent, one child previous graduated, another currently enrolled in school | I want to help, as I know changing schools at this grade level can be difficult due to the norm of completing middle school years. I agree to interview the student again although I am skeptical as to whether the language progress would have been made in the year and a half since first being with us. |
| | Words spoken: short polite email asking for readmission for next school year (year 9) | **Thoughts and feelings:** |
| | **Thoughts and feelings:** | I want to help, as I know changing schools at this grade level can be difficult due to the norm of completing middle school years. I agree to interview the student again although I am skeptical as to whether the language progress would have been made in the year and a half since first being with us. |
| | **Thoughts and feelings:** | An email arrives at the end of the school day from another familiar expatriate parent who is asking for re-admission for their local nephew. This parent has a child previously graduated and another currently in school. |

| Wednesday, 16 March 2022 | **Situation 3:** email at the end of school day asking after a decision regarding son's assessment | A local parent sends a WA message at the of the day with an attached completed indicating his child's selected A-level subjects for the next academic year. The form is also complete but the parent hasn’t indicated which subjects will be taken as exam subjects. |
| | a friendly local parent | I’ve known the parent for a number of years. Several children in school and one who has already graduated. |
| | Words spoken | The message is polite, short and direct, and I reply requesting the missing information. |
| | should have been to HRT or office | This could have been passed directly to the office staff but I assume the parent thought it easier to send it directly to me. Perhaps, they wanted me to check it over. |
| | **Thoughts and feelings:** | An email arrives at the of day from a private candidate's parent who I don’t know but spoke on the phone with on Friday. |
| | What role is being expected of me? | The child is taking international examinations at our centre. The international examination board has asked all schools in the country to collect these assessments from each candidate per exam subject as a back-up plan in case international exams can go ahead due to Covis-19 restrictions from national or local authorities. |
| | approval or administration | The private candidate mistakenly sent two online assessments in the wrong order and our teacher is refusing to accept one as evidence because the candidate used 20mins more time than other candidates. |
| | **Situation 4:** WA message from local parent returning form | Both parent and teacher are expecting me to make a fair judgement (in their favour) |
| | friendly local parent | A local parent emails to ask if we can reschedule their son’s missed school assessment. |
| | Words spoken | I know the students: he’s very hardworking and honest. I’ve known the parents for some time: the elder sibling passed through our school. |
## Appendix C – Document list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Description of documents</th>
<th>Approach to analysis</th>
<th>Data protection plans/ Secure storage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ministry of Education (2014) Regulations for the governance of international-curriculum schools (60 pages) (Available online)</td>
<td>Translated to English Critical discourse analysis</td>
<td>Password-protected personal laptop People, places and events will be anonymised and changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ministry of Education (2019) Checklist for the accreditation inspection of international-curriculum schools (39 instruments / Available online)</td>
<td>Translated to English Critical discourse analysis</td>
<td>Password-protected personal laptop People, places and events will be anonymised and changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senior Management Team (SMT) weekly meeting agendas/minutes</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Lockable desk in personal office People, places and events will be anonymised and changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Campus photographs (including school mission statements)</td>
<td>Critical discourse analysis</td>
<td>Password-protected personal laptop No photographs of actual people References to places will be edited/ blurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Email / Social Messaging (Critical incidents involving parents / MoE regulations)</td>
<td>Used to support autoethnographic reflections</td>
<td>Password-protected personal laptop If used this data will be fictionalized through amalgamating persons / fictionalizing places and events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will be using both thematic and discourse analysis of government policy documents to support my autoethnography and to provide contextual information. I believe these methods complement each other: Document analysis providing academic rigour, helping to ground the study closer to analytic autoethnography.
Appendix D – Reflexive grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture/context</th>
<th>Parent/teacher/student /government</th>
<th>Researcher (Self)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my view, to what extent has culture or context lead to this issue? Can I evidence this?</td>
<td>Can I identify the individual’s concern(s)? Can I empathize with the individual’s concern(s)?</td>
<td>How do these issues impact my current role? How might these issues effect my future decision-making?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there linguistic challenges related to this issue? How do I know this?</td>
<td>Is the mode of communication effective in relaying the issue(s) or concern(s)? What other factors may have contributed to this mode of communication?</td>
<td>How has the mode of communication affected me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I aware if this issue has occurred in other school contexts? How do I know this?</td>
<td>How and by whom is this issue understood as a critical incident?</td>
<td>Does this issue relate to previous issues? Where do I identify similarities or differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do I understand my own organisation’s position towards this issue? Where does this understanding come from?</td>
<td>What are others’ views or understandings on this issue? Are all views unanimous?</td>
<td>How do other people’s opinions impact my own thinking on this issue? Whose opinions weigh heaviest with me, and why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E – Corpus of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Instant message</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Face-to-face</th>
<th>Video-conference</th>
<th>Phone call</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily operations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>18★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New student admissions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International examination administration issues</td>
<td>13★</td>
<td>16★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1★</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/pandemic-related issues</td>
<td>4★</td>
<td>10★</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N = 199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

★ = a Critical Incident
### Thematic Analysis Applied to Critical Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/Boundaries (Communications)</th>
<th>Parent distress</th>
<th>Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's 6.00pm, I'm being forwarded instant messages</td>
<td>a parent who's clearly upset, in case there should be an inspection from authorities. There's an element of risk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 7.30pm I receive the first of eight emails</td>
<td>another parent voiced the same concerns, Officially, schools remain closed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The last email arrives at 11.30pm.</td>
<td>an issue for some parents, local authorities have yet to officially announce any reopening.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today was a national holiday.</td>
<td>informing me that they are staying with the online classes, local authorities haven't asked students to go back to school yet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's now midnight.</td>
<td>why aren't we demanding that all students return for face-to-face learning? to the international examination body.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily teacher briefing.</td>
<td>there was a flurry of parent email replies and instant messages requesting me school owner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around midday</td>
<td>Now, parents are saying their children are exhausted, senior management meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That evening.</td>
<td>a parent has requested that her daughter will only come to school for today's scheduled assessment,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the last three days of Ramadan.</td>
<td>Students and parents had emailed passionately that students were feeling 'burnt out'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home.</td>
<td>parent contacts me to say their child is experiencing Covid symptoms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been up since 4.30am.</td>
<td>the parent messages me with the child's clinic test result.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work today at 5.30am.</td>
<td>parent (possibly from our national school) has questioned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's now 5.30pm.</td>
<td>Parents ask if there is anything that can be done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday evening, I've been home an hour and a half about to start a long holiday weekend.</td>
<td>parent is wondering why the school hasn't taken action, reassure the parent action is being taken.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking ‘in-person’ data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research. For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor-supervisor can assess the proposed research.

### Section 1: Project details

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Student name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Project title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Supervisor/tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>MA pathway (where applicable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### g. Intended start date for fieldwork
Mid-March 2022

### h. Intended end date for fieldwork
Mid-June 2022

### i. Country fieldwork will be conducted in
X to be referred to in the SSI as ‘a Southeast Asian country’

---

**Section 2: Ethics Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)? I have written permission from my school owner/employer to:</td>
<td>![Yes]</td>
<td>![No]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• take photographs of school premises (these photographs will not include actual people). Any identifying features, logos or addresses, will be blurred.</td>
<td>![Yes]</td>
<td>![No]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyse confidential minutes from senior management meetings</td>
<td>![Yes]</td>
<td>![No]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?¹</td>
<td>![Yes]</td>
<td>![No]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A ‘police check’ is <strong>not required</strong> for this research investigation. However, all foreigner employees have a ‘police check’ and an ‘immigration check’ as part of the process in obtaining a ‘residency permit’ and a ‘work permit.’</td>
<td>![Yes]</td>
<td>![No]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.²</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This SSI will use autoethnography and document analysis and will not involve other participants</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures?³</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This SSI will use autoethnography and document analysis and will not involve other participants</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
<td>![N/A]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure (‘police check’) can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

² This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

³ Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. **Deception**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This SSI will use autoethnography and document analysis and will not involve other participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This SSI will use autoethnography and document analysis and will not involve other participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will pilot making fieldnotes and autoethnographic write-ups for one week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants’ confidentiality?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any written analysis of government education policy will be treated with cultural sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a ‘risk analysis’ and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. If written up with cultural sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered ‘yes’ to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee ([http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/](http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/)).

or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

*Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.*