Riding the Roller Coaster. Teaching: The Highs and Lows

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Many thanks to the participants who made this research possible. My gratitude to Penny Fogg, my research supervisor, for your endless patience and assistance in the fruition of this research.

Dedication

In dedication to Joan, Sean and John. You are my guiding lights and inspiration. I wouldn’t have got this far without the support you provide and the belief which you have in me.

Thank you.
Riding the Roller Coaster. Teaching: The Highs and Lows

Abstract

Research indicates that teaching is consistently listed in the top three professions which experience the highest levels of occupational stress (NUT, 2012). A survey (Teachers Assurance, 2013) found that teachers’ reported stress levels were impacting their ability to teach. This survey found teachers were more likely to experience the consequences of stress, compared to staff in management roles. The Teacher Wellbeing Index (ESP, 2018) found an overwhelming majority (74%) of the 1502 respondents considered the inability to ‘switch off’ from work to be the major contributing factor to a negative work-life balance. This most recent survey indicates the current pressure on staff within education.

In this research, I aim to reveal how teachers experience their role and how they manage the daily demands on them. The review revealed limited research which focused on the factors that support and undermine the wellbeing of teachers with reference to the systems in which they function. I hope this research offers an insight into the factors that support and hinder wellbeing, as well as further developing knowledge of what retains some teachers in this stressful profession. In this study, I intend to do this by examining how teachers view their role, what empowers and stresses them, and how systems support or hinder their daily practice.

I applied a narrative approach from a critical realist perspective to hear the stories teachers told about their careers, as well as what supports and undermines their wellbeing. Participants were three full-time teachers, with at least five years teaching
experience, who had taught in a minimum of two schools (at least one was required to be a UK state school). Semi-structured, narrative interviews were undertaken using an ‘episodic’ approach (adapted from McAdams, 1993) which highlighted changes over time. This approach allowed me to hear each individual’s story about their role on a daily basis, as well as across their career, with regards to systems in which they were required to work. It also meant participants were able to identify and speak about key events, such as the factors which initially brought them to the profession and which factors continued to motivate them as teachers. Stories were analysed using The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982).

Findings across all three narratives indicate that teachers identify as having multiple roles. These varied roles related to personal values they associated with teaching, as well as systemic-led responsibilities. The roles which closely aligned to their values generally supported their wellbeing. However, at times there were differences between what they felt they should be doing as teachers and what they were being asked to do, and these instances undermined their wellbeing. Tensions within the narratives often related to professional judgements being questioned despite high levels of training; a disregard for the holistic vision of pupils, and increasing workloads which ultimately encroach on personal time. The language within the stories generally align themselves to narratives which are becoming more publicly widespread.

**Key Terms:** wellbeing, stress, socio-psychological wellbeing, environmental influences/factors, protective factors
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Chapter One: Introduction

In this study, I aim to explore class teachers’ experiences of teaching and how they manage their wellbeing. This research area has been influenced by my own teaching experience and mental health issues affecting my colleagues. It has been further influenced by my attempts to understand which processes and systems best support teachers’ wellbeing in light of government legislation, which results in changes to national expectations and expected targets within education. Additional influences include mixed messages, which result from government guidance aimed at supporting the social, emotional and mental health of education staff and young people (DoH 2011; DoH, 2015).

1.1: Interest in Teacher Wellbeing

My main interest in class teachers’ wellbeing stems from my belief that teachers need to be able to model positive wellbeing to the children and young people that they teach. Therefore, the systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) around class teachers need to assist them effectively in prioritising their own wellbeing, before expecting them to be capable of nurturing the wellbeing of others. When I initially began this research, I considered running a mindfulness intervention with teachers to measure its effectiveness, if any, on their wellbeing and ability to manage stress. I became conscious that at the start of this research project, I was aligning myself with a narrative about teacher stress that was focused on the ‘within’ person view and disregarded the context in which they were working. Rather than problematising the system in which they were working, this initial perspective implied that stress is about the individual, and it is their responsibility to reduce it. I began to question whether
supporting teacher wellbeing is best done through interventions, which add additional workload, or whether this simply puts the responsibility on practitioners to manage their own wellbeing. My thinking has developed further because I believe that it is the systems in place which need to change. This is necessary in order to address the underlying issues which cause the teaching profession to be continuously listed as one of the top three most stressful professions (NUT, 2012). I believe these systemic issues contribute to many teachers leaving the profession within the first year five years of qualifying (Bachkirova, 2005; Gibbs and Miller, 2013).

1.2: Influences

I am aware that my beliefs will have influenced this research. This includes my belief that wellbeing, also referred to as social, emotional and mental health, is an important influence on teachers’ capacity to teach well. When I was teaching, I noticed that teachers’ careers and their ability to teach seemed to be impacted by their wellbeing. This is supported by educational research, which indicates that experiences in teachers’ personal lives are closely associated with their ability and performance in a professional capacity (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Acker, 1999). Within my practice, I was aware of education systems which seemed to nurture and protect the wellbeing of staff; countries outside of England appear to be investing in ways to prioritise and protect staff wellbeing (Aelterman, Engels, Van Petegem and Verhaeghe, 2007). Within my own local authority and nationally, I have observed staff whose social, emotional and mental health appear to be suffering. I would argue that this is due to conflicting messages from the government. Consequently, a
number of experienced teachers I knew were signed off sick from work as a result of occupational stress. There appears to be an ever-increasing rhetoric within teaching communities on social media which indicate the unsurmountable stress they are experiencing. This type of narrative is beginning to gain more exposure within some media outlets and there have been petitions made to the UK Government and Parliament website in relation to reducing teacher workload.

The National Children’s Bureau indicates that the number of children and young people suffering from poor social, emotional and mental health is increasing (NCB, 2017). NUT surveys (2012; 2014) indicate the same pattern for teaching staff. However, record numbers of children, young people and adults are waiting an increasingly long time to access help. Following an international review on teacher stress and burnout, Kyriacou (1987) highlighted one of the reasons that teachers’ wellbeing should be a global concern is due to concerns that it may affect their ability to provide quality first teaching and build positive relationships with their pupils. While interest in class teacher wellbeing is starting to gather momentum, the focus tends to be on ‘firefighting’ highly escalated situations through the use of initiatives or strategies, rather than addressing underlying SEMH issues. I hope this research will contribute to the current literature on teacher wellbeing by offering a direct and detailed expression of the lived experience of practitioners and how they manage their social, emotional and mental health.

1.3: The Role of a Teacher and Their Identity
When I was a teacher, I would discuss with colleagues the need to juggle the multiple ‘roles’ of a teacher. Now, as a trainee educational psychologist, my area of research interest is met with enthusiastic nods from teachers, due to the fact that someone outside of their profession is acknowledging their daily plight. As a teacher, I felt I was acting out different roles on a daily basis. This included as a performer for my class, an administrator for senior leadership, as a listening ear to contain concerns, and as someone who could boost morale in colleagues. These ideas about needing to perform different roles and have multiple identities resonate with Goffman’s theory on identity (1963, 1959) which highlights the constructions an individual makes within the current social situation, that then allows them to adjust their behaviour so the most believable and relevant performance can be seen by others. This can lead to questions about authenticity and which version of the ‘self’ is visible at any one time. I was interested to discover if and how teachers’ experiences of the various pressures within the role influence their career.

1.4: Synopsis

In summary, I had a personal interest in the subject area of teacher wellbeing. The literature briefly outlined above indicates that this is an international issue of importance, because teacher stress is something which is experienced worldwide and is a focus of international research. Some examples of international research included in the literature review were carried out in Australia (Cross, Lester and Barnes, 2014), Finland (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010), America (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg, 2011), Norway (Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2006) and Canada (Cooper and Olson, 1996). As well as being important on a global
scale, I felt that listening to the stories of teachers would be valuable in several ways. Firstly, they would have the opportunity to reflect and share their own particular story. Secondly, it would be valuable because their individual story would be heard on a larger platform. Consequently, this may give hope to other teachers and it may help shape systemic educational policies and practices of the future.

1.5: Positionality

I had a very positive teaching experience and was curious about others within the same school system who did not.

1.5.1: My Experience of Wellbeing

I trained as a primary school practitioner and started out as a teacher in the Early Years of a school which took pupils from the age of 3 to 11 years old. My own wellbeing, although I did not know it by that name at that time, was supported by working hard during term-time balanced with travelling during school holidays. This involved working long hours which extended well beyond the school day and also into my weekends. I unthinkingly gave my own personal time because I wanted to do the best I could for my class. I worked long hours during term-time but used the holidays to regenerate by educating myself through travel experiences.

During the school term, my focus was dedicated to the children in my class and seeing them develop as little people with personalities, not just as numbers on a spreadsheet. Whilst I used the school holidays to rejuvenate myself by travelling.
Throughout my teaching career, I visited over fifty countries. I was able to travel because of my teaching career but I also used travelling to enable me to teach. I balanced work and travel opportunities throughout the ten years that I was a teacher, which enabled me to maintain my wellbeing.

As a class teacher, particularly within the Early Years, I felt incredibly fulfilled. I loved seeing my class learn and their accomplishments seemed almost palpable by the time spring term arrived. I learnt something new every year. In fact, when I began teaching my intention was to later train as an educational psychologist; at that time two years teaching experience was a pre-requisite. What actually happened was that I fell in love with teaching. It offered me a framework, the school day, but it also provided excitement and variation because no day was ever the same.

1.5.2: Colleagues

My initial partner teacher, who was also the Early Years Coordinator and my mentor during my first year of teaching, was someone who I found to be an enthusiastic teacher. As a partner teacher and mentor she was engaging and supportive towards me. As an Early Years Coordinator, she had good ideas but seemed to find the additional responsibilities filled with tensions. These related to expectations, with regards the curriculum, leadership of people within the team as well as their continual professional development (CPD).

1.5.3: Nurturing My Professional Development
My attention was drawn to the wellbeing of teachers when the Early Years Coordinator, who was no longer my partner teacher, was signed off on work-related sick leave. I recognise that my identity as a teacher was multifaceted, depending on who I was interacting with (e.g. peers, class or parents) and what role was required of me at the time (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004; Cooper and Olson, 1996) but I would not describe myself as a natural-born leader. However, I embraced the opportunity by taking on the interim role of Early Years Coordinator. As time passed, I recognised that I had begun to flourish in this role. I realised that I had a particular leadership style to offer as Early Years Coordinator and I took on the role on a permanent basis. I was able to be democratic and supportive. I wanted to work as a team and the group of staff in the Early Years, who I was now responsible for, generally engaged with my collaborative leadership style (Kanter, 2003). For me, the role of coordinator developed me, both professionally and personally, in ways I had not expected. Due to the confidence I had discovered, taking on a leadership role alongside my teaching, I later became Literacy Coordinator and even considered moving towards becoming a Deputy Head. After being supported by my school to attend training in this area, I realised that I did not feel I had the attributes and qualities needed to be a long-term Deputy Head.

1.6: Summary

I loved teaching. It offered me opportunities to develop myself on a personal and professional level. I taught for far longer than the two years required because every year offered me something new to learn. I would have probably stayed as a teacher, and never fulfilled my earlier goal to become an educational psychologist, if I had not
found the system in which I was expected to teach be so stifling towards the holistic development of each child within my care.

1.7: Guide to How This Research Should Be Evaluated

Yardley (2007) offers a framework which can be used to evaluate the validity of this qualitative research.

1.8: Enhancing Validity in This Qualitative Research

In order to enhance the validity of this research I kept a paper trail and undertook participant feedback (Yardley, 2007). The paper trail of my analysis and analytic decisions were contained within my research diary and allowed me to document the judgements which influenced the research from the start of my journey, when I initially had a research interest in the area of teacher wellbeing, to the final draft of this thesis. Part way between a paper trail and detailed analysis was a trail of meaning offered in each transcription in the column on the right-hand side of each transcript. These comments noted my initial responses to the narrative. Participant feedback was obtained through member checks with each individual when they were asked to comment on the analysis of their story using their individual I-Poems taken from the Listening Guide (Yardley, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Gilligan, 1982).

Yardley’s framework for evaluating qualitative research is not prescriptive, as she acknowledges all research studies vary, therefore they can be ratified in different ways. This research is valid because it meets the essential criteria in the framework
as advocated by Yardley, thereby making it trustworthy. As indicated in this introduction to my research, I believe that I have inevitably influenced the knowledge which has resulted from this research (Yardley, 2007). In transparently acknowledging my beliefs and assumptions, and continuing to do so in my research diary, this research has rigour which connects to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data generated (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; 1985).

Narrative inquiry allows the stories shared to be interpreted from multiple viewpoints. For instance, myself as a researcher first listening to the story; the participant hearing the analysis; you, the current reader of this research will be making your own interpretations and judgements. Multiple realities need to be studied holistically because each piece of information is interconnected; furthermore, they are effected by the current context (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; 1985). In illuminating the complexities within the powerful stories which were shared, the insights from this study will hopefully show themselves to be useful in other situations which have similarities to the narratives revealed in this research (Yardley, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

1.9: Framework for Evaluating the Validity of This Research

The core principles necessary to evaluate the validity of qualitative research in accordance with Yardley’s (2007) framework are: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; coherence and transparency; impact and importance.
1.9.1: Sensitivity to Context:

Qualitative methods, such as narrative inquiry, allow meaning to emerge from the research which have not been predetermined. Complexities and subtle interactions can be considered from a perspective of curiosity and develop new understandings and meanings (Bruner, 1991). Sensitivity to context was established in this study through the literature review which indicated a gap in research on teacher wellbeing which I hoped this research would inform. Formulating open-ended questions allowed the participants to tell their story as freely as possible with an emphasis on what was important to them. To facilitate their story-telling, participants were offered a choice on their preferred location for each interview to take place.

1.9.2: Commitment and Rigour:

I chose the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982) to analyse each narrative interview, which aligned closely to the purpose of my research, because I wanted to hear the story each teacher was telling. Using an episodic approach, which McAdams (1997) uses in life story interviews, allowed me to frame my questions across time periods and to highlight the highs and lows across the day and career of each teacher. The insights I developed through the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982) were facilitated by the person-centred approach I took within the interviews and had a foundation in my personal experience of being a teacher.

1.9.3: Coherence and Transparency:
The paper trail which I kept throughout the research process recorded my interpretations, judgements and decisions throughout the process. My intention was to ensure the reader would be able to follow how I had conducted this research and analysed the resulting data. Reflexivity was utilised in this research so the reader would be aware of what experiences had influenced me as a researcher. Hence, my reasons for sharing my background, reasons for interest in teacher wellbeing and my assumptions with you, the reader.

1.9.4: Impact and Importance:

This research is important because it has given a voice to the stories of the participants who made this research possible. The research has impact because it informs how systems have influenced the wellbeing of these three teachers. Finally, the research expands the existing research on teacher wellbeing and it alludes to the complexities of this subject area.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

The overall themes which shaped my literature search were: the role of the class teacher; stress experienced by and influencing teachers; environmental factors; and strategies used to alleviate stress and nurture wellbeing. Whilst not a stand-alone theme in itself, individual factors was a re-occurring subject area in the literature. My initial literature search used the term ‘wellbeing’ and ‘class teacher’, which produced numerous articles focused on coping strategies and the use of interventions to support the wellbeing of the students. Using the synonym ‘pressure’ along with ‘teacher’ yielded articles which focused on how class teachers spend their time and address their excessive workload. The first material I found which directly linked teacher wellbeing to student outcomes was research from the University of Western Australia (Cross, Lester and Barnes, 2014), which found teacher stress to have a negative impact on pupils. This paper indicated a gap in UK research and published literature regarding a possible link between class teacher wellbeing, student wellbeing and academic attainment. This link is an important factor to consider, since the mental health of children and young people is currently high on government and societal agendas. The systems supporting class teachers’ wellbeing is a gap in current literature. I wondered if this would be overtly expressed by class teachers’ when they spoke about their experiences.

2.2: Wellbeing; What is it?

There are multiple definitions and even multiple ways to spell and phrase the term ‘wellbeing’. Generally speaking, wellbeing has been described in terms of a person’s
psychological wellness or mental health, separate from physical fitness and affected by environmental circumstances (Crosby, 2015; Antonovsky, 1979; Warr, 1987). Within this thesis the term mental health is viewed as the same as wellbeing and both terms are used interchangeably due to the relational aspects which impact them. The World Health Organisation defines mental health as being “a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2018). Mental health, or wellbeing, impacts our internal thoughts, how we engage with others and everyday life. It can be influenced, positively or negatively, by social, psychological and biological elements (WHO, 2018). Thus, in this research wellbeing and mental health are understood as the same construct.

A term which repeatedly occurred in the literature was ‘socio-psychological wellbeing’ (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010; Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999). Within a school environment, socio-psychological wellbeing may be viewed as “an active, collaborative, and situated process in which the relationship between individuals and their environment is constantly constructed and modified” (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010, p.737). This definition of wellbeing highlights that each individual’s wellbeing within a school community is influenced by their interactions with the different systems which exist within their environment. This “can affect the ability to concentrate and observe the environment, perceive audiences and interpret received feedback” (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010, p.737). Thus, class teachers’ level of engagement and their perception of autonomy within the workplace are functionally linked to how they experience their professional relationships (i.e.
with colleagues, pupils and parents or carers), as well as their sense of belonging within the school community. Their wellbeing is impacted by their competence and their beliefs about their role. The wellbeing of each class teacher is commonly a product “of pedagogical processes and school practices” (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010, p.737). Thus, this research will refer to the combination of social and psychological factors which are incorporated into socio-psychological wellbeing when referring to the wellbeing of class teachers.

2.3: The Role of the Class Teacher

An area of interest which was highlighted during the literature search was the various roles of the class teacher within their teaching role as well as their additional responsibilities. A quotation from a teacher speaking about their wellbeing eloquently summarised their role as being more than just teaching: “In one day we not only teach, we manage behaviour, plan lessons, assess learning, counsel students, carry out first aid, reply to a long list of emails, write reports, tidy classrooms, create resources, mark books and create displays – the list is endless” (The Secret Teacher, 2013). This list indicates the increasing expectations being placed on teachers with regards to their role and highlights the complex nature of the school day.

In Canada, researchers have investigated the multiple elements of teacher identity. These multiple versions of the ‘self’ suggest teacher identity is continuously regenerated as a result of the environmental influences which interact and shape what it means to be a teacher (Cooper and Olson, 1996; Reynolds, 1996). The role
of the teacher is intrinsically linked to performance and identity, because practitioners perform different functions during the school day. A different version of their ‘self’ may be required at any one time (Goffman, 1959). For teachers, there are interactions with colleagues in staff meetings, rapport built with their class and communication with parents and carers. Interaction and communication, both verbal and non-verbal, help construct social identities which both the individual and others around them recognise as important in relation to the person (Goffman, 1981). Teachers are constantly responding to the current situation and attuning their behaviour to best fit this (Goffman, 1963). The role the teacher is ‘performing’ at any one time depends on the message they are delivering, and with whom they are interacting.

Due to the nature of schools and number of daily interactions which occur, teachers are required to use their skills in reflection to consider which role is most appropriate, at any given time. Whilst this may initially appear manipulative, these types of formulations are instantaneously occurring in most human interactions all the time: “Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilise his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (Goffman, 1959, p.3) Due to the numerous roles a teacher performs in one day, they often have to quickly attune themselves to a situation so that they respond in an appropriate manner. This indicates a working day which is filled with variability or instability.
Teachers’ role is also connected to what they value as important within their professional identity. The values they hold in high esteem, with regards to the type of teacher they aspire to be, are informed by their previous and current personal experiences, as well as frequently fluctuating social, occupational and political contexts (Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons, 2006). Sometimes external (political or institutional) and internal values may be in conflict with each other and this can create an incongruence between what a teacher values and what they are expected to do, such as statutory testing. Thus, teacher identity and how they view their role “may be more or less stable, and more or less fragmented, at different times and in different ways according to a number of life, career and situational factors” (Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons, 2006, p. 601).

2.4: Stress

Teachers Assurance a financial services provider surveyed teachers in 2013. The survey found that the levels of stress being experienced by teachers was affecting their ability to perform their roles effectively. The same survey found that 76% of teachers felt that their level of stress was having negative implications on their health. Over half (56%) revealed that if they were less stressed, they would be better at their job. 64% of respondents indicated an increase in their stress levels because of the threat of Performance Related Pay. Moreover, the survey found that it was class teachers who were more likely to experience the consequences of stress, rather than staff in senior or middle management roles. The Office for National Statistics stated that there was an 80% increase in the number of teachers dying by suicide between 2008 and 2009 (NUT, 2012). These figures indicated that the
number of teachers dying by suicide were between 30% and 40% higher than the national average for all occupations. It should be acknowledged that it is not usually possible to establish a direct causal connection between teacher stress and teacher suicide.

A significant proportion of teachers describe their job as stressful (ESP, 2018; Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999; Borg, 1990; Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978). Even so, like the term ‘wellbeing’, there is little consensus over the precise definition of the term ‘stress’. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), a national regulator for work related health, safety and welfare, describes stress on their website as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them” (HSE, 2013). Kyriacou (2001) does offer a definition of teacher stress as being “unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher” (page 28). Excessive workload and working hours are two of the most commonly reported stressors by teachers (ESP, 2018). These are exacerbated by a plethora of government initiatives, or changes to the taught and assessed curriculum, as well as the pressure associated with assessment targets, data analysis and inspections (HC, 2017). Further stressors include: systemic concerns within a school including the ethos and unsatisfactory professional relationships with colleagues; worry related to appraisal and performance related pay; difficulty managing pupil behaviour compounded by class sizes; insufficient resources; and a lack of professional development opportunities (HC, 2017). The House of Commons Education Committee produced a report on the recruitment and retention of teachers (HC, 2017) which recognised the necessity for training opportunities as an area of need,
which must change in order to retain teachers once they are trained. The threat or
initiation of capability proceedings was another area classed as a stressor by
teachers (NUT, 2012; 2014). The social and emotional demands required of
teachers can negatively affect their socio-psychological wellbeing (Bricheno, Brown
and Lubansky, 2009). It has been recognised that these stressors, experienced in
excess or for prolonged periods, have been associated with a negative impact upon
the physical and mental health of teachers. Stress can lead to further problems, such
as depression (Schonfeld, 1992), psychological distress (Punch and Tuettemann,
1991), burnout (Kyriacou, 1987) and absenteeism (Chambers and Belcher, 1992).
These complicating factors have consequences for the teacher suffering as well as
those around them.

When a class teacher returns to work following a stress-related absence, there
continue to be repercussions (ESP, 2018). The levels of engagement and
empowerment experienced by the returning class teacher may be different as a
result of their absence. As well as their belief in their own professional capabilities,
the returning teacher may perceive their belonging or acceptance among their
colleagues as different (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010). In this paper, the
researchers referred to a term called ‘pedagogical wellbeing’. This term referred to
teachers’ occupational wellbeing being formed through teaching and learning
practices within the school environment. The pedagogical wellbeing perceived by the
returning class teacher could be viewed as a vital resource with regards to their
occupational resilience (Masten and Reed, 2005). The way in which the returning
class teacher approaches their return, and the support they receive from the systems
around them, will adversely or positively impact how they resume their duties, how
they perceive the situation and thus the feedback they receive from others. Consequently, these factors will influence their own self-image as a teacher. One strategy, with regards to returning to work after a period of absence, which is considered good practice is facilitating a phased return to work (NEU, 2019). The guidance provided by the National Education Union (NEU) on phased returns to work recognises that coming back to the workplace after a period of leave can be overwhelming and can impact morale.

2.5: Environmental Influences

Factors which help support wellbeing include: social support at work; a harmonious work atmosphere; distracting behaviours outside work, such as watching television or engaging in other activities; and avoidant coping strategies, for instance daydreaming (Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999). Whilst disengagement from and suppression of completing required work activities may have a positive impact, thereby reducing stress in the short term, it may lead to further complications in the longer term if distraction activities mean that there is an insufficient amount of time or energy to complete compulsory work.

Coping with change has been identified (Kryiacou, 2001) as an issue which can impact on class teacher wellbeing. This may include the absence of a colleague. Absenteeism in connection to poor wellbeing is relevant to the theme of environmental influences due to the impact it has on the remaining members of staff, who may be expected to take the reins or ‘step up’ into the class teacher’s role. In addition to their teaching duties, the regularity of changes to the curriculum and an
increase in administrative tasks have been shown to have increased the working hours of class teachers considerably in recent years (HC, 2017; DfE, 2014). Teachers indicate that they spend an unnecessary amount of time on tasks which are connected to their accountability for pupil progression and Ofsted inspections (ESP, 2018; HC, 2017; DfE, 2014). A survey on teachers working in local authority and academy settings, which was conducted by the NEU in 2017, yielded responses from 8,173 practitioners (NEU, 2018). Whilst teachers are allocated a proportion of their timetable out of class for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, the NEU survey found that this is insufficient when considering the level of detail required for planning, marking, paperwork and data analysis (NEU, 2018). The majority of teachers, when asked to respond to this and other surveys on workload, stated that some of these tasks are far removed from their daily job of teaching a class and from the initial teacher training which they received (NEU, 2018; DfE, 2015b). Teachers are currently required to adapt to a considerable number of changes during their daily working lives. It is likely that individual teachers have varying ability to adjust to and cope with these constant changes.

The recruitment and retention of teachers is recognised to be a continuing challenge across England (HC, 2017). Figures from the Department of Education indicate that 30% of teachers leave within the first five years of qualifying (DfE, 2015b). Over 10% of qualified teachers leave within the first year of qualifying (DfE, 2015b). While the reasons for this are complicated and vary according to personal circumstances, if this becomes an ongoing trend, it will create a crisis. Teacher shortages are currently recognised as a government priority which needs to be remedied (HC, 2017). In October 2016, Jack Worth from the National Foundation for Educational Research
(Worth, 2016) shared with the House of Commons Education Committee that “the proportion of teachers leaving, not retiring, has increased from 6% five years ago to 8%” (HC, 2017, pg. 15). Whilst the explanations for these figures are not fully known and likely to be complex, it is probable that they are connected to the stress of teaching.

Educational settings are complex contexts with various levels and practices, some of which are contradictory (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010). Environmental factors which interact to create a class teacher’s pedagogical wellbeing are their everyday relations in their workplace. In Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen’s study (2010), these interactions are defined as: firstly, teacher-pupil interactions; secondly, peer interaction with colleagues; and thirdly, teacher-parent interactions. Teacher-pupil interactions may negatively affect wellbeing if the teacher believes they are unable to meet the needs of their students. On the other hand, the teacher may experience an improvement in wellbeing when they feel they and their class are working together for a shared outcome. An example might be a class assembly. Peer interactions with colleagues may be detrimental to wellbeing if a teacher experiences bullying from peers. However, wellbeing may be upheld if they are involved in a supportive forum, such as support groups for professionals (Stringer et al., 1992; Hanko, 1999). Teacher-parent interactions may negatively impact wellbeing if, for example, there is a parent who constantly requires their time at the end of each school day. Teachers may experience uplifted wellbeing if they receive positive feedback about their teaching from a parent during a parent-teacher consultation. School environments offer “opportunities for agency, avoidance, opposition, and resistance, and as a consequence there is inevitable tension in interactions between different actors in
the context” (Lahelma, 2002 in Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010, pg. 378). Thus, there are numerous interlinked relationships within the school environment which can impact on the wellbeing of the class teacher; these may vary and be context dependent, which means it depends on whom they are interacting with. Thus, teachers can be both challenged and uplifted by their daily working practices (Hakanen, Bakker, and Schaufeli, 2006).

The environmental factors which influence teacher wellbeing are varied and complex. These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Individual protective factors will be reviewed in further detail in a later section, but it is evident that personal and exterior systems interact and consequently impact teachers’ sense of wellbeing.

2.6: Strategies Which May Promote Wellbeing

There are numerous existing programs to support the wellbeing of students. For instance, Public Health England (2015) commissioned the development of a toolkit for schools and colleges to measure, support and monitor the wellbeing of children and young people. Another example is the Keys to Happier Living Toolkit, which is an evidence-based program for children between the ages of seven and eleven based on ‘Action for Happiness: Ten Keys to Happier Living framework’ (King, 2016). While it is positive that the importance of wellbeing is becoming a more prominent narrative, these approaches focus on the individualisation of pupil mental health. This is parallel to the ideas which are beginning to be explored in relation to teacher wellbeing in public discourses.
The ‘.B Mindfulness in Schools Project’ advocates for the use of mindfulness with school staff as an effective strategy to alleviate stress. The term mindfulness means the capacity to guide attention to experience as it happens, to be present to each moment with wonder and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). There is a growing evidence base which demonstrates that mindfulness is effective at improving the social, emotional and mental health of adults (Baer, 2006). Studies have shown that mindfulness can be useful for addressing a variety of social, emotional and mental health problems, such as stress, depression and anxiety, which are commonly reported teacher stressors (Kuyken, Weare, Ulcomunne, Vicary, Molton, Burnett, Cullen, Hennelly and Huppert, 2013). Mindfulness can assist users to feel an improvement in their sense of wellbeing and how they interact with others (Baer, 2006). A point worth noting is that many of the systemic reviews of mindfulness being undertaken are written by advocates for the approach, for instance, Weare and Nind (2011). Despite this potential vested interest, the language used in conclusions is generally tentative in nature and indicates that the use of mindfulness in adult populations shows some promise in differing contexts (Baer, 2006). However, studies on the use of mindfulness in teaching populations are currently a limited but growing research area. An example of where teacher wellbeing is being studied is at the University of Western Australia (Cross, Lester and Barnes, 2014). Programs which positively impact on teacher wellbeing with an evidence base are limited to research in America.
One particular mindfulness-based professional development program which has been designed to nurture teachers’ social and emotional capabilities is Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE for Teachers). It also aims to improve the nature of classroom interactions by cultivating the skills required to create and sustain a nurturing classroom. The CARE for Teachers curriculum originated in 2007 at the Garrison Institute, New York. Randomised research trials into its effectiveness have examined the impact of the program on elementary class teachers, classroom and student outcomes. When compared to control groups, the program has been found to improve teachers’ wellbeing, as well as their ability to effectively support the emotional wellbeing of their students. (Jennings, Brown, Frank, Doyle, Oh, Davis and Greenberg, 2017; Weare, 2013; Jennings, 2011, Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg, 2011; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). When compared to control groups, both qualitative and quantitative research using CARE has positively impacted classroom behaviour and learning as well as teacher-pupil interactions, and has fostered a positive classroom climate at a statistically significant level (Jennings, Brown, Frank, Doyle, Oh, Davis and Greenberg, 2017; Weare, 2013; Jennings, 2011, Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg, 2011; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). The evaluative data arising from studies of CARE are significant because they have been replicated to show that it is an effective programme for improving teacher wellbeing. The studies have used relatively large samples. The study with the smallest number of participants had 31 (Jennings et al., 2011) which included individuals who had been involved with piloting CARE. There were 224 participants in the most recent study (Jennings et al., 2017). This study, using a large sample, examined the effectiveness of the program for teachers in New York city and the impact it had on their classroom practice. It is important to note that
two of the researchers, Patricia Jennings and Richard Brown, were part of the team who originally developed CARE and therefore they may have a vested interest in the research promoting the benefits of the program. Nonetheless, the studies have been completed with large samples of teachers and had positive findings. The approach within the CARE program, as well as the general findings, may have something to offer educational policy and practice in England. The key point is that cultivating a culture with lower teacher stress will benefit students socially, academically and emotionally, as well as practitioners who continue to find enjoyment in their work.

In the UK, some teachers and schools apply ‘human givens’ to their work. The ‘human givens’ approach (Griffin and Tyrrell, 2015) is a holistic framework which emphasises the need for humans who are healthy in both mind and body, in order to be able to nurture the next generation successfully. The approach encourages meeting both physical and emotional needs so that we are able to survive, adapt and evolve individually and as a collective. The principles are based on ideas from humanistic psychology and draw on the influence of psychologists such as Maslow (1971), who promote the idea that our basic needs must be met before we are able to progress to higher order levels of self-actualisation and intrinsic values (BPS, 2014). Teachers and schools which use the ‘human givens’ approach claim that it empowers them by providing ways of attaining and preserving a ‘good’ state of wellbeing (HGJ, 2010). The effectiveness of ‘human givens’ on adolescents’ wellbeing has been suggested in a small case study (Yates and Atkinson, 2011). A limitation of the study was that findings could not be generalised as there were only three participants. Whilst the effectiveness of ‘human givens’ as an approach appears promising, no study has yet been conducted with class teachers as the
subjects. Part of the framework which ‘human givens’ advocates involves rapport-building and goal-setting. Having whole school systems adopt principles which hold rapport-building and goal-setting in high regard may be useful for creating a culture of genuine autonomy amongst staff. It may also create an ethos where teachers and students feel valued as individuals.

Between the basic needs and self-fulfilment needs of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1987) lie psychological needs. Psychological needs include belonging and esteem. Having a strong sense of belonging is associated with a range of positive outcomes for physical and mental health (Sayer, Beaven, Stringer and Hermena, 2013). Self-determination theory explains that the need for relating with others, as well as competence and autonomy, is essential for wellbeing (Roffey, 2013, 2012; Deci et al., 1991). Teaching staff who were offered group consultation (usually fortnightly) to discuss particular cases of difficulty in their work reported that the consultation group made a direct positive contribution, leading to a reduction in stress and fewer feelings of segregation between them and their peers (Stringer et al., 1992). They also reported that they found the group was supportive on a practical and psychological level (Stringer et al., 1992). The teacher feedback indicated that having the opportunity to reflect on problems, being able to share experience, expertise and ideas, as well as planning alternative ways to approach the situation, were some of the main positive effects of participating in a group consultation with peers. Group consultation for staff in this manner was facilitated by an educational psychologist or a staff member who had received training. The inclusion of an educational psychologist as an external consultant was felt by participants to be beneficial to the group. Either way, having the opportunity to gather as a group to
discuss and problem-solve issues benefited participants by reducing their sense of isolation and the degree of self-blame which they burdened themselves with (Bozic and Carter, 2002). Similar findings have come from studies involving the use of reflecting teams for peer support, in which teachers reported the importance of valuing collaboration, unity and reflection time (Ohlsson, 2013).

While it is clear that strategies to improve and promote the wellbeing of teachers are currently being developed and implemented in certain areas, this is yet to become a widespread practice. It is noteworthy to acknowledge the emphasis put on the importance of teachers’ wellbeing, by some training providers who aim to empower trainees with strategies for managing stress and improving their wellbeing in relation to their work, and to other areas in their life (Jennings, 2011). Similarly, there are ongoing professional development opportunities offered which assist in the development of teaching practice and managing wellbeing through supportive colleague forums. These highlight the importance of reflection time, receiving recognition for the work done in difficult circumstances, and the acknowledgement that others are in a similar situation (Jennings, Brown, Frank, Doyle, Oh, Davis and Greenberg, 2017; Weare, 2013; Jennings, 2011; Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg, 2011; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

2.7: Protective Factors

The literature indicates that there are many challenges facing teachers when managing their roles. For example, it is cited that “Teaching stress is not a simple function of exposure to the sources of difficulty, but may be modulated by
psychological and social resources” (Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999, pg. 518). Given the indications, it may be fair to assume that at some point across their teaching career, educators may struggle to maintain a balanced sense of wellbeing. Coping strategies which are used to alleviate the impact of stress, such as smoking, alcohol and medication, influence mental and physical health (Steptoe, 1991). There are numerous resources which teachers may utilise in order to manage their wellbeing and reduce their stress. The chosen approaches may also influence their perception of their own wellbeing. Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley (1999) found teachers’ perception of stress was most influenced by social support and coping methods for stressors. This includes actively engaging with the problem or choosing to avoid and disengage from the issue. Due to the fact that we are all individuals, and that we respond to different levels of stress in a range of ways, there is no universal approach to alleviating stress and promoting wellbeing which is effective for all people. However, some of the individual strategies which teachers use to manage their stress levels and promote their wellbeing which the literature highlighted will now be outlined.

Cooper and Kelly (1993) found in their study on occupational stress that head teachers who used coping strategies described as palliative including the use of alcohol, smoking and medication to reduce stress) reported higher levels of stress resulting from excessive workload and interactions with staff. Whilst using these strategies may have helped to alleviate stress initially, consistent use in the longer term increased stress levels. A survey of 335 Norfolk primary school teachers found that there were six strategies which teachers viewed as being most effective in
reducing their stress levels; these can be viewed in Table 1 (courtesy of Cockburn, 1996, pg. 403).

One of the most effective strategies which teachers felt reduced their stress was ‘discussing your concerns with teachers’. This is a strategy which was referred to earlier with regards to utilising group consultation and other networking forums for problem solving. Being able to rely on social support from others has consistently been found to reduce stress and improve wellbeing, along with providing additional positive outcomes (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Shumaker and Czajkowski, 1994). Secondary school teachers with high levels of burnout reported receiving lower levels of social support than their colleagues who experience lower levels of burnout (Pierce and Molloy, 1996). In other studies investigating the connection between social support and levels of burnout, it was found that the support provided by colleagues was more significant in safeguarding against the stress leading to burnout than other sources of social support, such as family and friends (Greenglass, Burke, and Konarski 1997; Greenglass, Fiksenbaum and Burke, 1996). These differences between social networks may be explained by the additional

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**Table 1. The six most effective strategies in reducing teacher stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Thought of and . . . tried but generally ineffective</th>
<th>tried and generally effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring that you understand the work you are about to teach</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorough lesson preparation</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the humour in the situation</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoning sessions which are not going well</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing your concerns with teachers</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting priorities</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
understanding that teachers feel their colleagues can offer because they are in the same profession. It may also be connected to the appreciation and recognition of difficulties that colleagues can offer due to having shared or similar experiences.

Being able to reflect and be self-aware are important skills within teaching. Being self-aware is essential in order to reflect on events, thoughts, feelings and actions so that a teacher can try and improve in case they are in a similar situation in the future (Jennings, 2014). This ‘pro-social’ theoretical model proposes that the teacher-pupil relationships, classroom management style, and the social and emotional learning are intrinsically connected to developing a positive and nurturing classroom climate (Jennings, 2014). ‘Pro-social’ theory suggests that class teachers who are socially and emotionally competent can maintain more empathetic relationships with pupils, can utilise successful classroom management strategies and are more able to effectively teach elements of the curriculum which include social and emotional elements (Jennings, 2014). These teachers are more aware of students’ engagement in their learning, and engage in positive reinforcement rather than reprimanding strategies to influence pupil behaviour (Jennings, 2014). Teachers who are socially and emotionally competent can act as role models in pro-social interactions, moving from simple theory to applying the model in practice. In a cyclical nature, the positive classroom environment is proposed to directly impact on the pupils' social, emotional wellbeing and their academic outcomes (Jennings, 2014). Thus, improvements in the classroom climate and the school system as a whole and in the classroom climate may strengthen the enjoyment a class teacher experiences when teaching, empowering them in their role and developing their dedication to the profession. Receiving positive reinforcement from different
elements of the teaching role may, in turn, create an affirmative ‘feedback loop’
strong enough to preclude teacher burnout (Jennings, 2014). Skilled, motivated class
teachers are likely to encourage practical learning strategies which can be applied in
different contexts. This would lead to achieving the best levels of engagement and
learning outcomes in their students (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010).

2.8: Moving Forward

School environments are complex settings due to their multiple levels of organisation
and practice. Some of these practices are contradictory, for instance, attainment and
pastoral agendas. There are some examples of whole school approaches, such as
‘human givens’ which focus on a holistic view of children, young people and adults
within the setting (HGJ, 2010). Despite aspiring to incorporate principles such as
‘human givens’ in school environments, the attainment agenda for local and national
government generally takes precedent when decisions need to be made. Using
humanistic approaches means recognising that individuals’ basic needs should be
met before higher-order ones can be successfully fulfilled (Maslow, 1943, 1954,
1987). This is the case with children and young people (Bennathan and Boxall,
2000) as well as the adults who support them. If research indicates that basic needs
must be met before higher level ones can be successfully achieved, then it is
essential that the systems on which schools are founded, and which they implement
into their daily practices, should be evaluated and made fit for purpose. This
argument is proposed by Robinson and Aronica (2015), who draw attention to the
fact that schooling was created for industrial purposes; these principles are now
outdated. Rather than continuing with mass production exam factories, it is proposed
that having a more creative education system which celebrates individual talents (Robinson and Aronica, 2015). They argue that having a broad and balanced curriculum would prepare young people today to enter the workforce of tomorrow. This is an important point because many jobs of the future have yet to exist. Whilst slightly outside the direct area of this thesis, this is a pertinent point when one considers that young people can sometimes flourish in systems which are classed as ‘alternative’ provisions, due to the curriculum and nurturing they receive. The literature demonstrates that schools are complex systems and it begins to explain some of the constraints which exist within the systems. It has also illustrated some of the conflicts between the aspirations of teachers and powerful forces which influence educational contexts. These tensions may be central to the currently limited interventions available to teachers.

According to the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) wellbeing tables, pupils in the UK are among the least happy pupils when compared to students in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD, 2017). PISA currently rates class teachers in Singapore, South Korea and Finland as amongst the best trained, highly motivated and well-compensated (OECD, 2017; Robinson and Aronica, 2015). Students rating at the lower end of the ‘happiness scale’, as well as teachers rating at the lower end of the ‘scale for motivated and respected teachers’ seems to indicate that there are issues within the English education system which need addressing for the benefit of all. The current system may work effectively for some teachers and students. However, if both teachers and students are unhappy within the existing education
system, this may indicate the need to gain an understanding of teachers’ views on the profession which could inform systemic practice on a wider scale.

2.9: Gaps in the Literature

There is very little known about how class teachers perceive the principle sources of motivation and burden in their daily work (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010). The literature indicates that the role of the class teacher incorporates both highs and lows daily (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010; Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006; Kryiacou, 2001). The emerging research, listed within the cited literature in this review, have been mainly quantitative in nature. The emergent findings have indicated the less stressed teachers have better outcomes for their own wellbeing and their classes (Jennings, Brown, Frank, Doyle, Oh, Davis and Greenberg, 2017). Self-reported surveys (ESP, 2018) provide the opportunity for large scale studies to be conducted. Generally, surveys offer closed questions which lack flexibility and adaption to individual contexts. A qualitative study would give the opportunity to further explore the details and underlying reasons that teaching seems to be such a stressful profession. While many teachers may manage their stress or maintain their wellbeing, there is a point at which an increasing number of class teachers are unable to manage the challenges which daily teaching and additional role adopting roles create. The literature search did not uncover research which gathered teachers’ views on their role, such as what empowered them, what stressed them (both in and out of the school environment) and how systems (related to the school and government legislation) supported or hindered their daily classroom practice. It would be useful if this piece of research could inform this gap in the literature.
Accessing teachers’ views using a narrative methodology will enable me to explore these in more depth. Hopefully, this will lead to richer and more complex explanations of what supports and undermines teachers’ wellbeing, whilst taking into account individual and environmental contexts.

2.10: Conclusion

In this literature review, I have presented some existing research which focuses on the factors which support and maintain wellbeing of class teachers with an emphasis on systemic and ecological frameworks. The literature also explores what undermines teachers’ wellbeing, what causes them stress and how they respond to these pressures. The literature highlights the impact that a teacher’s role and identity have on their daily work and interactions, and this seems to be closely linked to their wellbeing. The evidence suggests that their role and identity can have further influence on the classroom climate and the students. However, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding exploring teachers’ views and experiences in depth. Thus, this research will focus on teachers’ experiences of teaching in the hope of uncovering what can best support their wellbeing across a time span, or across their career. The literature, and the gaps I have identified within it, lead me to the following two research questions:

1) What are teachers’ experiences of the daily demands of their role across their career?

2) What supports and undermines the wellbeing of teachers?
Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I justify the approach used within my research, explain why I chose the participants, outline how I addressed ethical issues, explain the use of data gathering tools and choice of analytical tools, and clarify the procedure used within my study.

3.1: Design

My research questions stemmed from wanting to uncover the existing tensions in the systems in which teachers work. I also wanted to try to understand the personal meaning and value teachers associate with their career. As my ideas progressed, I realised that narrative research would allow me to explore with participants how they experienced their careers and wellbeing. Narrative also allowed for each participant's experience to evolve as they shared their story, because the agenda was open and led by the narrator's experiences (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This was important because it would allow me to provide an original contribution to existing literature on teacher wellbeing through the use of narrative research. I wanted to add to the current literature on teacher wellbeing and stress by exploring the subject matter in a deeper, richer way than would be possible with a more quantitative method.

3.2: Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning the Research

“Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations”

(Reissman, 1993)
Having an understanding of the philosophical assumptions of a researcher is important because these inevitably influence what is being studied and how it is being studied, as well as the findings and outcomes. Ontology refers to what is being studied and the different ways of viewing the world. It concerns the types of things which we assume to exist in the world. Epistemology focuses on how these things should be viewed and studied. Sharing my assumptions and influences will assist the reader in understanding how I positioned myself as a researcher.

3.2.1: Critical Realism

There are some clear assumptions with which I approached the research which should be highlighted at this point. I took a critical realist stance because I felt that there was something ‘real’ which I was attempting to make tangible through my interactions with each participant. For this research, myself, the participant, or both of us together were attempting to ‘know’ about their experience of being a teacher with regards to the systems at play within their workplace. However, as a researcher, I understood that this ‘knowing’ which we were trying to uncover was not a concrete and fixed piece of information. There was a plasticity to the knowledge I gained through the research because the meaning was fluid and contextual.

“Critical realism (e.g. Bhaskar, 1978, 1986) offers a set of criteria for evaluating claims about reality as well as a methodology for investigating the social world …events are generally co-determined by multiple mechanisms. Thus, the objective of critical realist science is not to predict outcomes but explain events and processes” (Willig, 1998, pg. 101).
This view of critical realism supports my use of a narrative methodology because of my focus on explaining events. I consider these events to be situations which can be observed or experienced. They come to be understood through the results that arise from them. With regards to the teacher interviews in this research, I expected to see links between the value each participant associated with the role and how they managed the different aspects of their profession.

Reflection Box:

I believe there is a ‘real world’ that exists outside of us and as Collier (1998) purports, pre-dates us (e.g. societal values). Moreover, there is the existence in which we exist and how our perceived experiences construct our reality within the world. For me, our reality exists within our particular social context. Critical realism aims to reveal the ‘truth’ within the world as we perceive it. On an epistemological level, it is the quest for the real whilst acknowledging that this will be different depending on how we perceive it (Brown et al., 1998 page 79)

Critical realism “recognises that each discipline may uncover real and distinct structures, mutually irreducible; yet that in explaining the open system of social life we need to appeal to all these structures and so draw on all these disciplines” (Collier, 1998, pg. 49). This highlights the importance of remembering that the same experience can be perceived in differing ways by different people. For instance, a sunny day may be experience by one person as a joy-filled day because they can wear their flip-flops. For someone else, they may find the exact same weather bothersome because they have to dress in formal attire for work, thus feeling uncomfortably hot. The context shapes how we each experience situations and events.
3.2.2: The Influence of Postmodernism

Postmodernism questions whether a single version of ‘truth’ exists; it allows for various interpretations to be taken from an experience. Making use of different methods is an approach to knowledge and inquiry which can be described as postmodernism. This study uses a mixture of techniques, which included semi-structured, narrative interviews using an ‘episodic’ approach (adapted from McAdams, 1993) and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982), in order to better approximate ‘truth’. Therefore, I identified with postmodernism as an approach for my gathering of data and interpreting it to create new knowledge.

Multiple voices, perspectives or ‘truths’ can be described as dialogism. Dialogical work allows for each ‘voice’ to be heard in its own right before collectively hearing what the multiple ‘voices’ say together (Bakhtin, 1981). This postmodern philosophy also influenced this research because I used a narrative approach to allow the ‘voice’ of each participant to be heard separately, before putting these ‘voices’ together and examining what they said collectively. When analysing the narratives in this research, the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003) was utilised. During the third step, I listened for contrapuntal voices (more detailed explanation will be referred to in ‘3.7: Procedure’), which allowed for a choral quality to be heard when listening to the interviews. This is because the different ‘voices’ were heard simultaneously and in relation to each other, which fits well with dialogical research.

3.2.3: ‘Truths’
This narrative inquiry attempted to identify a certain degree of ‘truth’. It is possible for something to exist as true or a ‘truth’ in a particular moment within a given context, but as previously alluded to, I believe that this is a provisional understanding. Therefore, multiple perspectives can co-exist. A situation or event may be viewed through many different lenses. What is displayed through each lens is irrefutably real, but the fullness of reality is not available through any single lens (Bhaskar, 1986). The ‘truths’ which resulted from the analysis and findings in this research were co-constructed through what was said in the interviews and how my own experiences and values influenced my interpretation of what I heard, read and saw. Creating these ‘truths’ or realities was important for being able to advocate a particular view or give ‘voice’ to teachers, either individually or collectively.

3.2.4: Institutional Power

Foucault (1997) wrote about the naivety or dangerousness of accepting one idea or ‘truth’. He proposed that upholding one idea or ‘truth’ could be used for social control. Foucault advocated that accepted ‘truths’ within a society relate to the prevalent and accepted discourses and in this way, they become truth. For this reason, accepting a ‘truth’ as true without questioning or critiquing it could be seen as dangerous or naïve. This would silence other ‘truths’, causing vulnerable or powerless groups to inevitably lose to more dominant groups. Foucault's writings are pertinent to the social justice aspect of this research.

Foucault’s work within institutions (Foucault, 1997) lends itself to this research when considering the education system as an institution in its own right. Within teaching
there are culturally constructed discourses which are viewed by teachers and others in education as commonplace and regular practice. There are also common discourses about education and teachers which are maintained by those outside of education. Foucault discusses the impact of discourse in education:

"Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every education system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it" (Foucault, 1972, pg 227).

I was hoping that this research would begin to deconstruct some of the established discourses about education and teachers. Discourses are established through what is spoken and in what remains unsaid. Thus, there are complex layers to establishing a particular discourse, which involves what the speaker says and the practices “involving the relationship of knowledge and power” (Madigan, 2011, page 41). I wanted to discover whether teachers would talk about systems in schools which support and undermine their wellbeing in a direct way, or whether talk of systems would remain unspoken. I hoped that the findings would challenge some of the accepted discourses about practitioners and education, which would hopefully be empowering for teachers. For instance, I hoped to find an alternative narrative which would problematise the system, rather than the individual teacher.

3.2.5: Reflexivity in Qualitative Research:
Narrative research is interested in human action, storytelling and experience. Being reflective was important within the study because as a human, I can reflect on my behaviour and can partake “in second-level reflection on those reflections” (Parker, 2005, page 137). The research diary was an important component of my research. It offered me a place to record and consider how I was shaping the process and also to consider how I was implicated in the research. It allowed me to be transparent about my awareness of the meanings I was constructing throughout the research process. The research diary encouraged me to explore how my involvement influenced and informed the research (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999).

I kept a research diary so that I could track my thoughts, observations and evolving understanding of what the participants shared. This allowed for my subjective experience to move from a “merely subjective’ into a self-consciously and deliberately-assumed position” (Parker, 2005, pg. 26). In doing so, I was able to draw upon my subjective experience as a source and associated position throughout the research process (Parker, 2005). The research diary gave me space to reflect on the research. It meant that I had a place to note down my involvement with the research and its findings (Willig, 2008). On a practical level, the research diary meant that I could keep notes in one place, which helped me track my reactions to the data gathered and the evolution of these over time.

3.2.6: Interpretivism

“Narratives are interpretive and, in turn, require interpretation” (Reissman, 1993, page 22). Interpretivism allows all kinds of information to be valid knowledge. The
world around us is not straightforward because it is perceived by each of us in different ways, at different times. Words and events carry distinct meanings in every case. An interpretive view acknowledges that “our analytic interpretations are partial, alternative truths that aim for believability not certitude, for enlargement of understanding rather than control” (Stivers, 1993, page 424). We each use a range of skills, which include knowing the current context and information from our past experiences, when interpreting a situation or event. Interpretation is subjective and there are multiple methods which we can utilise to help us interpret (Bruner, 1990).

3.2.7: Other Assumptions

As previously discussed, narrative research is concerned with human stories. With this method of research, it is important to reflect upon how I am impacting it. I am aware that I will have brought some beliefs and assumptions about teachers and teacher wellbeing to the analysis within this research. These assumptions are closely connected to my hopes and the potential value of this research.

Due to my own lived experience, I believe that wellbeing and stress exist. I believe that everyone has their own perspective because of their own lived experience. Therefore, each person has their personal understanding of what wellbeing and stress means to them. Another assumption which I uphold is that I believe the ability to teach is impacted by a teacher’s wellbeing. I also feel that certain systems can nurture and protect ‘good’ social, emotional, mental health. These assumptions influence my ontological viewpoint as a critical realist, as previously outlined. The literature which I reviewed acknowledges the role of class teachers as stressful, so I
began my research with this assumption. The aim of this research was to further contribute to the literature on teacher wellbeing, by exploring teachers’ experiences of teaching and how they manage their wellbeing.

3.3: Rationale for Narrative Methodology

Adopting a postmodernist approach to the research meant that narrative methodology was a good fit for my work. The stories shared with me came to be understood through multiple lens. Meaning was construed from inside and outside. The storyteller had a relationship with the story they were sharing and as the listener to the narrative I made sense of the story using my own experience and perspective (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). I contextualised meaning within each story not just through spoken words but also the non-verbal clues which they shared. This information helped to develop my interpretation of what each storyteller said.

I focused on teachers’ experiences of teaching in the hope of trying to uncover what best supports their wellbeing. Using a narrative method allowed me to illuminate what their experience of teaching was, how it made sense to them and how they responded to their experiences. Personal stories are complex and the purpose of
them is not merely to share details about the person’s life; “they are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992, page 1). This explanation about the use of narrative was particularly important in relation to my first research question. This is because I wanted to try to discover how teachers constructed their values, aspirations, roles and identities through the stories they would share.

3.3.1: Why Storytelling?

Storytelling allows for storytellers’ experiences to become the experiences of the listener or reader. “There is an important sense in which a story speaks uniquely to each listener” (Merttens, 1998, page 65). The listener, or reader, is also afforded the luxury of interpreting the story for themselves (Merttens, 1998). Narrative research aims to discover how someone makes sense of an event or events that they have experienced (Parker, 2005; Willig, 2008).

3.3.1(i): Changing the Story

One of my intentions of using narrative inquiry was to give a stronger voice to teachers and consequently, provide the opportunity for policy makers to reflect upon and analyse these stories after publication of this thesis. Merttens (1998, page 71) suggests:

“Stories enable those who are embedded in professional practice to ‘go on from here’, not only in the sense of being able to continue with their professional activity
but, importantly, in terms of being able to generalise and subsequently prescribe or advise, to theorise and then transform the practice."

Generally, teachers tend to get negative press coverage because of the ‘thin’ narratives which are portrayed about them when they are featured in the media, such as during teacher strikes. I wanted to give each participant the opportunity to present a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), a space to be able to share the things which give them delight in their work, as well as highlight the trickier aspects of their job which are the ‘unseen’ parts of their role, such as planner, administrator.

3.3.1(ii): Storying the ‘Un-storied’

Narrative inquiry recognises that individual lives are constructed from numerous events. Many of these are not acknowledged by the person as important and therefore are not shared with anyone (Béres, 2014). When these ‘un-storied’ events are verbalised, they may initially seem to be very ‘thin’ (Geertz, 1973). It might be that ‘un-storied’ events seem ‘thin’ because they are relatively simple. This may be due to possibly not being considered, or integrated meaningfully, within more familiar and ‘well-told’ stories. As the listener hears the story being told, they can assist the speaker to ‘thicken’ the story by eliciting more details (Geertz, 1973) from them. I attempted to do this by asking questions of the teachers about their experiences which they may not have previously had time to reflect upon. As stories are further shared, they become thickened and more robust (Béres, 2014). White and Epston (1990) propose that only a small proportion of an individual’s life events can be storied during any particular time and that much of the lived experience exists outside of the dominant narratives in that person’s life. Thus, offering an occasion to
uncover experiences which may not have been previously storied can offer the opportunity of growth and development (White and Epston, 1990).

3.3.1(iii): Deconstructing the Dominant Narratives

I hope this research will have an impact by contributing to cultural narratives about class teachers and education more generally. With this in mind, I have sought to uncover the cultural discourse surrounding class teachers and how they see themselves. A narrative approach allowed me to look at both the ‘big’ and the personal stories which are highlighted (Freeman, 2006; Squire et al., 2014). I felt that narrative would be a valuable approach as “respondents narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (Reissman, 1993, page 3). ‘Narrative breach’ in this instance occurs when there is an incongruence between what is constructed as the ‘ideal’ and as the ‘reality’. This breach within a narrative can be heard through language and linguistic choices when describing events (Bruner, 1991).

I also hope that the use of narrative will allow potential discrepancies to emerge between the value each storyteller places upon being a teacher and the expectations of them as a result of the systems within which they work, as well as how this impacts their wellbeing. Step three of the Listening Guide, listening for contrapuntal voices (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003), highlights the tensions which exist between different voices within their narrative. It also indicates the journey that each storyteller has come on to bring them to a place where they accept they are ‘good enough’, be that at home or at work. I am interested in tensions
between the systems in which teachers work and the personal meaning and value which they attribute to their work. Therefore, Reissman’s (1993) reasoning validated the case for the use of narrative within my research, due to the possible narrative breach between personal values and system expectations when considering the literature on teacher stress and wellbeing. More importantly, I felt that narrative inquiry had the potential to provide the teachers I spoke to with the opportunity of empowerment through sharing their stories. I felt narrative inquiry had benefits for the personal stories as well as the ‘big’ ones because a “primary way individuals make sense of experience is by casting it in narrative form” (Bruner, 1990, page 4).

3.3.2: Narrowing the Lens: The Twists and Turns within Storytelling

Using narrative inquiry allowed each participant to be a storyteller; they were able to tell their own story. This allowed for richer details to be shared rather than being limited to pre-defined, more closed questions. This meant each participant had the scope to respond in an open-ended way.

I adopted an ‘episodic’ approach in the narrative interviews, which involved participants recalling events or situations from throughout the course of their career. By using an ‘episodic’ approach, I was able to focus on changes over time in the stories which were shared. This meant that I was able to hear each individual’s story about the everyday highs and lows of their role, as well as across their career, with regards to systems in which they were required to work. This was my reasoning behind using an adaption of McAdams (1993) interview schedule, which involved key
events in each participant’s teaching career. The questions used are included in Appendix One (pg. 160).

Using an episodic technique within the narrative interviews allowed participants to identify and speak about key events and turning points. This included how they first began their career and an exploration of the factors which continue to keep them in the profession. It offered the focus I was searching for in what would have otherwise have been a very broad research question. Using a ‘key events’ questioning approach within the narrative interview allowed for free association across the themes. This means that questions were kept as open as possible to allow each participant’s story to emerge in their own words whilst also retaining the lens which illuminated changes over time and daily ups and downs, with regards to systems which I wanted to emphasise in the research.

3.3.3: Insider or Outsider?

During the research, I felt as though I was partly an insider and partly an outsider, as a researcher. This was due to my previous experience of teaching, making me an insider, but now no longer working as a teacher, making me an outsider. Inviting stories through narrative interviews (Reissman, 1993) highlighted the changing language within schools. For instance, wellbeing was not something which was a consideration when I began my teacher training, but by the time I left full-time teaching it was a prevalent term. For me, this clarified my distance from my previous ‘insider’ position. Using a broad focus on the experience of the teacher, but also using key events to shape the questioning, lent itself to gathering information with a
focus on structures and systems. This allowed participants to explore current situations within their work, for example whether they had experienced a recent Ofsted inspection during any of their identified key events, and if there had been a change in the school’s rating which was relevant to their wellbeing. As an insider, I was aware of these systems and privy to some of the culturally constructed discourses within teaching communities.

3.4: Quality Issues

3.4.1: Generalisability

While the data gathered through the use of this narrative inquiry is not generalisable, it informs the reader about each individual teacher. However, wider meaning may come out of each individual’s story. This is because a story may be transferable to another class teacher who recognises a ‘truth’ within the research which resonates with their own experience; “even though qualitative projects are locally focused, they nonetheless contribute to knowledge in more general ways” (Marecek, 2007, page 63).

3.4.2: Social Justice and Unintended Consequences

One of my aims of this research is for it to serve as research for social justice. Social justice has long been associated with both philosophy and politics since the writings of Aristotle (Rackham 1926, Kraut, 1997). Social justice is concerned with the interests of both individuals and general society. Social justice acknowledges that individuals and general society are interdependent; it also relates to a balanced distribution of benefits and accountability (Griffiths, 1998).
In this research, social justice is relevant as it uncovers the stories of teachers who had not previously shared them as coherent narrative; it also takes account how systems or authority affect their wellbeing, as well as conflict and consensus (Griffiths, 1998; Ball, 1987). It acknowledges both the individual (teacher) and the collective group (students, colleagues, society more generally) as being dependent on the wellbeing of the storyteller to either teach them, support them or help educate the workforce of tomorrow. I hope that the research highlights the tensions that exist within the teaching profession, both internally and externally. I also hope that it offers an alternative and more well-rounded version of the experience of the teacher, as opposed to the more negative current discourses about teachers. The aim of the research was to give a voice to the individual participants, a space for them to share their thoughts and feelings on their role and wellbeing, and a platform upon which their voices can be heard.

The theory behind using narrative inquiry as a research method is to hear and interpret what participants share (Reissman, 1993). One possible benefit of the research is that it may have been therapeutic in nature. I use this term tentatively, as the aim of the research was not to be therapeutic. However, there was an element of the interviews which was “therapeutically inspired” (Kvale, 2007, page 283) with regards to considering the individual and teacher-culture. Having a personal relationship with participants is a feature of psychoanalytic research or interviews (Kvale, 2007). This relationship was established between the participants and myself prior to the interviews because we already knew each other. The personal
relationship was further strengthened during the interviews through informal conversation, creating a warm, empathetic rapport, active listening and being attentive. These were the only elements inspired by analytical research which featured in the interviews. The main aim of therapeutic work is to change or transform the person receiving the intervention (Kvale, 2007); the aim of this research was to create further knowledge about teacher wellbeing.

By being given a space to vocalise their thoughts, feelings and opinions, participants may have found that after the interviews, they continued to reflect on their narrative. Participating in the research may have made the teachers reconsider their current thoughts and feelings. It may have impacted their beliefs to reflect on their views which they would be unlikely to have much time to consider in everyday life.

Prior to the research, I did consider that the interviews may have unintentional consequences as a result of the depth of reflection each participant engaged in for the study. I thought that this may be due to teachers recognising the key roles they play in difficult circumstances and identifying more clearly the reasons that keep them in their teaching career. Reflecting on this potentially emotive topic had the possibility to trigger various consequences and outcomes for participants. I was mindful of these potential consequences during the research project and raised these within my university ethics application, when I highlighted the potential harm of the research and how I was going to manage appropriate protection and wellbeing of the participants. I also shared the potential risks and benefits of taking part in the
research in the information sheet (see Appendix One) which was shared with participants prior to taking part in the research.

The narrative interviews allowed participants a platform to share their story and this offered the opportunity of recognition for each teacher. It also offered them containment, in line with Bion’s idea of containment (1962) “where emotions are constantly passed between people” (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000, pg. 46). This allowed for the acknowledgement of painful memories which were shared. It also allowed me to offer empathetic containment, which permitted the affected participant to explore the discomfort further within a safe environment, if they chose to.

3.4.3: Rigour

To maintain rigour and keep track of how my thoughts about the research and data changed over time, I kept a research diary. The reasons for this were to develop my skills of reflexivity, to maintain a transparent and unbiased approach as much as possible, and to demonstrate how I interpreted the data.

The data and analysis was trustworthy, rather than having validity or reliability. Trustworthiness is about establishing four criteria: namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Credibility refers to how confident I am that the findings are true and accurate, as understood by my interpretations and generally agreed with by the participants’. Transferability means that the findings are applicable in other contexts. Dependability means providing enough information that
the study could be replicated. Confirmability relates to the neutrality of the research findings, including being transparent about any biases so that my interpretations do not distort the findings. The accuracy and rigour of this trustworthiness was facilitated through the reflexivity recorded in my research diary. It was also facilitated through my awareness of my biases because these could be transparently identified and shared with the reader. I aimed to be aware of my biases by rereading, reflecting on and updating the notes made in my research diary as the research progressed. See the section titled ‘Reflexivity in Qualitative Research’ for a more comprehensive discussion of the value of reflexivity in this research.

Once I analysed the interviews and interpreted the data, I completed a member check (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This involved me arranging another meeting with each participant and talking through my research after I had analysed the interviews. This offered each participant the opportunity to hear about how their stories had helped to create the research. It also allowed them to share their thoughts on my interpretations of their stories. The feedback gathered from each participant was an integral element in my final analysis because it helped me to create a comprehensive account of the research (Marecek, 2007).

‘Authenticity’ within research can be described as giving “direct expression to the ‘genuine voice’, which ‘really belongs to’ those whose life-worlds are being described” (Winter, 2002, page 146). The authenticity of this narrative research resulted from empathic inter-subjectivity and reflexivity (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006). Reflexivity and authenticity were present for the participants and myself as the
researcher, not just in our relationship but also in our reflections during and after the interviews.

3.4.4: Participants

I used purposive sampling and intentionally chose teachers who I already knew; I will discuss my reasons and the potential implications within ‘Ethical Considerations’. I wanted to bring cohesion to the research by having participants who shared some common factors. Therefore, participants met the following criteria:

Each participant was a full-time teacher, because I felt practitioners working part-time or as supply teachers may have differing narratives and I wanted to bring cohesion to the stories. I am aware that there are staff in schools taking classes who may not be fully qualified teachers. Again, while I considered that these would have had valuable narratives to offer, I felt that it was important to restrict the study, in relation to the job description and responsibilities which participants are expected to undertake as full-time class teachers. I believe that there are distinct aspects to full-time teachers’ working lives which may not be experienced by the previously mentioned groups.

I thought there might be cohesiveness between the narratives which full-time qualified teachers could offer because they work in school five days a week. Teachers working part-time may be in school three days a week and complete work outside of school on the additional two days. Full-time teachers need to manage their
workload by using evenings and weekends to try to get everything done and I thought this was likely to be particularly stressful. Even so, having this as a criterion would allow for different types of training routes prior to qualifying as a teacher. It would also allow for different types of additional responsibilities which many teachers have alongside their class-based teaching. The parameters of working five days a week in school would give each teacher a similar baseline with regards to the number of hours remaining each week outside of contracted time during a week.

Each participant had at least five years of teaching experience. I chose this so that change over time could be heard within the stories that they told. I felt that this amount of time meant that the teachers would have experienced curriculum changes. Government research (HC, 2017) indicates that almost a third of teachers leave within the first five years of qualifying, so I wanted to hear why these particular teachers had stayed in the profession.

Each teacher had taught in a minimum of two different schools and at least one was a UK state school. I hoped this would mean that they could draw on the experiences which different school systems offered them which positively or negatively affected their wellbeing. The three participants had spent at least five years teaching in UK schools, and two of the participants had worked in international schools. While I did not add a caveat that participants were required to have taught abroad, I felt that the experiences of teaching overseas would potentially enrich the details shared about comparisons between different systems.
I identified the individuals to participate in the research because they met the outlined criteria. I felt that they had knowledge and experience relevant to the study which would be valuable to the topics being discussed (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). As I already knew the participants, I was aware that they were willing to participate in the research, were articulate when communicating their experiences aloud and had a reflective manner which I felt would benefit the narrative approach (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Having criteria each participant needed to meet meant that there was a unity between the participants who had varied experiences of teaching.

3.5: Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of the research involved making considerable deliberations. The approval letter from the university ethics board can be viewed in Appendix Twelve.

3.5.1: Working with participants who I already knew

Knowing the participants meant that I employed “sensitive and ethical negotiation of rapport” (Willig, 2008, pg. 25) between myself and participants. As I was asking questions and stories of a personal nature, I thought that it was essential for a good rapport to exist prior to the narrative interviews. This was because I wanted participants to feel comfortable describing their personal stories.
I felt that knowing each person was also important for the participant to feel assured that I would be sensitive in relaying my interpretations of their story during the member check. Discussing my interpretations with each participant at the member check, which involves seeking alternative and similar responses, is a method utilised in ethnographical studies to thicken analysis (Miller, Hengst and Wang, 2007). Having a background knowledge of the participants was important for me as a researcher, as it influenced how I was interpreting their story. It was also important for them to have background knowledge of me when preparing to tell their story and deciding how it should be told, (Bruner, 1991) because it contributed towards the inter-subjectivity and rapport. This meant that each interview was set in a context in which both the storyteller and listener had prior encounters with each other’s “life-world” as teachers (Spadley, 1979).

I was aware that working with participants I knew could cause particular biases. However, I felt that the use of a narrative methodology allowed me the transparency to reflectively consider how I was interacting with the data and the participants. For the purposes of transparency, I will now detail how well I knew each participant prior to the interviews. Una and I trained as teachers at the same time, but at different establishments. Following our studies, we kept in contact. Saoirse and I previously taught together, but she did not refer to me in her narrative. We also continue to be friends. Luke was introduced to me by a mutual friend shortly before I began my research. The three participants were enthusiastic about the research topic.
I was aware that my research had the potential to be emotive for the participants. Having an existing rapport with each interviewee meant that they felt comfortable in sharing with me because of our pre-established relationship. Knowing that I had previously been a teacher meant that the participants felt I understood the demands of their role. However, as I had no professional links to them, they could feel safe and speak frankly in response to the questions raised.

3.5.2: Ethical Principles and Application

The study followed ethical principles (BPS, 2018) to protect both the participants and myself as the researcher. This meant protecting the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants, such as through the use of pseudonyms. I followed ethical standards with respect to storing and recording data. With regards to narrative research, in particular, I focused on several key issues. These issues were: ownership; intellectual property rights and interpretation; confidentiality; honesty and reflecting the truth; deception (which means how to avoid it); exploitation of the participants; informed consent; and hurt and harm (Plummer, 2001).

In practice, following ethical guidelines meant ensuring that I gained and retained informed consent from each participant. I also completed a member check with participants to ensure that I interpreted their story in the way which was closest to their ‘truth’. I also wanted to recognise any differences between these ‘truths’ and my interpretations. This was done by giving participants space and time between interviews to reflect on what they have shared. It was important that I allowed them
to own their views. Therefore, I did not verbally challenge their perspective of how they experienced their role and wellbeing.

**3.5.3: Emotional Impact**

The topic of wellbeing and how class teachers told the story of their career was a potentially sensitive topic. I wanted to ensure that I was empathic so that each participant felt understood and at ease when sharing. I did not want them to feel that they had somehow exposed too much about themselves or their story. Allowing space and time between interviews gave each participant processing time to settle their thoughts about the topic being discussed. I endeavoured to ensure that each participant felt comfortable when reflecting on their past and current career, but I was also aware that the conversations we were having had the potential to stir up sensitive feelings in the participants.

In order to do no harm, I was transparent with each participant about how and why I was conducting this particular research. I also made them aware of the interview questions and the topics for discussion prior to each interview (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). When gaining written consent from each participant, I provided them with a written copy of the interview questions, so that they could start to compile their thoughts and reflections beforehand. This meant that each interview felt like a smooth and easy storytelling, with very little need for additional prompts.

**3.5.4: Limitations**
I realised that using a narrative approach and analysis could come with limitations. This regarded the need to be attentive to the social discourses that shape what the participants would say. More importantly, I knew that it was important to be attentive to the aspects of their careers which they felt unable to speak about. Personally knowing each participant, but not having professional relationships with them, hopefully helped to remove this obstacle.

3.6: Data Gathering and Materials Used

I wanted to hear the story of a teacher’s struggle through their everyday work life and to illuminate the rich detail of what supports and undermines their wellbeing daily. I was interested in uncovering the factors which originally drew these teachers to teaching and whether this changed or remained the same over time. I wanted to hear their stories of the highs and lows (Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006), and the reasons why they continue to teach.

The data I collected was qualitative in nature. I used narrative interviews to explore the key events during the teachers’ careers, including changing schools and their evaluations of these experiences. These stories were interpreted and made sense of by me as a researcher. I did this by listening to the recordings of the narrative interviews which encouraged participants to share the ups and downs of their career over time. Having analysed the recordings, I completed a member check with the participants to seek their views on my interpretation of their stories and to query certain aspects further; as Reissman, (1993, pg. 2) has written, “interpretations are inevitable because narratives are representation.” The use of narrative and “the story
metaphor emphasises that we create order, construct texts, in particular contexts” (Reissman, 1993, pg. 1). It was therefore important that, if the participant disagreed with my interpretation, I would differentiate between my own view and theirs where possible (Stivers, 1993).

### 3.7: Procedure

I initially spoke informally to teachers about the research I was proposing to do. I noted their interest, and with their permission, contacted them with an information sheet (Appendix One) and consent form (Appendix Two) via email. Each participant responded by agreeing to a date for the initial interview. On the date of the interview, they completed and signed a consent form.

Two of the interviews took place in person and one was conducted using FaceTime because that teacher works abroad. Each participant was provided with a copy of the questions in the information sheet and was encouraged to consider these prior to the interview. The narrative interviews were recorded using audio recording devices. The first interview lasted 38 minutes, the second 90 minutes and the third 91 minutes. At the end of each interview, the participant was reminded that if they felt they had further material to add, a follow up interview could be arranged. I also shared that I might have further questions for them after I had analysed the data, which would require me to contact them again. Even if neither of these scenarios happened, the participants were aware that I would make future contact with them to do a member check once their interview had been transcribed and analysed.
3.7.1: Eliciting Stories

Each participant was asked the same set of questions and was probed further, where appropriate for their particular story. Each was asked to give some background about their teaching career. Full transcriptions can be viewed in Appendices Five (Una), Eight (Saoirse) and Eleven (Luke), and a brief introduction of each participant is given at the beginning of the Analysis chapter. I used ‘episodic’ interviews which were adapted from McAdams work (1993) and offered an “organising narrative framework” (McAdams, 1993, pg. 257). McAdams’ (1993) version involves asking about ‘life chapters’ and ‘key events’. Within this research, the ‘life chapters’ referred to the background of the participants’ teaching career and the factors which initially drew them to teaching. The ‘key events’ in McAdams work (1993) refers to ‘high’ and ‘low’ points in the life story and any ‘turning points’. In the narratives shared in this research, ‘key events’ were incorporated by asking about ‘best’ and ‘worst’ moments, as well as the impact of changing curriculums and schools.

The following questions framed the storytelling within each interview:

- What made you want to become a teacher?
- What is your best moment since being a teacher?
- What is your worst moment since being a teacher?
- Have there been any turning points in your career?
- Have there been any significant people influencing your career?
- Have there been any curriculum changes which have been implemented during your teaching career? How did these affect you?
- How did changing schools impact you?
How does being a teacher make you feel?

What would the title of your story be?

3.7.2: Next Steps

Following the narrative interviews, the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2007) was applied to analyse the transcriptions. This involved three steps of successive ‘listenings’, each with a particular focus. The Analysis chapter will cover each step in more detail. Following the analysis, I emailed each participant their own personal ‘I’ poem with a short summary of its purpose. I sent this email prior to the member check, so they would have some time to reflect on the ‘I’ poem before we spoke.

In the email I explained that an ‘I’ poem was a personal poem for each participant that had been created by listening out for the ‘I’ statements within their interview. Each line within an ‘I’ poem consists of the I pronoun, associated verb and sometimes a few additional words. I divided each ‘I’ poem into stanzas and used the questions I had posed as the dividing point between each stanza. Each phrase in an ‘I’ poem is recorded in the chronological order spoken.

I used the ‘I’ poem as a visual resource to be shared with each participant prior to the member check so that they would have a short, written record in relation to the research. This meant that they had the opportunity to read through the ‘I’ poem before we spoke during the member check. Having access to the ‘I’ poem before the member check meant that each participant had time to process their thoughts after reading through the poem. This allowed us to have a discussion about the voices
which I felt were prevalent and for me to learn whether they shared a similar or differing opinion.

After I had emailed the 'I' poems, I spoke to each participant individually over the phone for the member check. During these, I shared an overview of my analysis which focused on the voices I had identified in their story. I asked each participant for their opinion about the analyses and whether these voices resonated with them or not.
Chapter Four: Analysis

4.1: The Listening Guide

Using the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982) involved repeatedly listening to the narratives of the interviews with a different intention in mind each time, followed by carrying out an interpretative summary after each listening (Woodcock, 2016). The Listening Guide lent itself well to this narrative research. This is because it is a psychological method which involves listening for multiple voices and how they resonate with each other, and is attentive to what is spoken and what may be unspoken (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2007). The guide is a systematic framework but also encourages the user to engage with the framework in a dynamic way:

“The Guide resembles other qualitative methods in incorporating aspects of thematic and narrative analysis as well as elements of a grounded theory approach, but it differs in specifying a series of ‘listenings’, including the innovative Listening for the ‘I’ (the first person voice of the speaker) and Listening for Contrapuntal Voices (the counterpoint of voices that speak to the researcher’s question)” (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017, pg. 76).

The Listening Guide (Brown and Gilligan, 1992) allowed me to analyse the interview transcripts, whilst also being able to place an emphasis on voice and human relationships. The guide allows participants who have previously been voiceless or at the margins to be given a voice and an opportunity to be heard.
4.2: Step One - Listening for the Plot

During the first listening of the interview and reading through the transcript, the focus was on listening for the plot and background information. This involved listening for the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ within each story. During this listening, I listened for themes, repetitions and images, as well as the contradictions which may have been present and whether there were any absences. I noted down my responses to the recording and reflected on things the narrator said which made me feel connected to them, and parts of the narrative which did not resonate with me. I considered what my thoughts and feelings were towards the speaker and to what they were saying, and I tried to identify my responses to the narrator. Whilst being aware of the subjectivity of this analysis, I aimed to explore the various connections and interpretations which I made as a listener, so that I could discuss them when carrying out the member check with the participant.

4.3: Step Two – ‘I’ Poems

I re-familiarised myself with the research questions before the second listening. This listening focused on the voice of the participant, or the ‘I’ within the story. This listening identifies the first-person pronouns within the narrative which are used to create ‘I’ poems (Debold, 1990). This allowed me to listen to the storyteller’s voice and how they spoke about themselves. The ‘I’ poems allowed the musicality (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) and rhythm of the participant’s voice and story to be heard. This is because by focusing on the ‘I’, a free-fall of association or associative logic (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) can be created. Emphasising the first-person voice in this way allows the stream of consciousness throughout the narrative to be heard, but without
the restrictions that complete sentences provide. ‘I’ poems can encapsulate something which the speaker does not directly state but which is essential to understanding the intended meaning of what is said (Gilligan et al, 2007).

The ‘I’ poems were created by identifying every first-person pronoun, as well as the verb that followed, and additional words of importance (Gilligan et al., 2007). These are each highlighted in yellow on the transcripts. I opted not to include ‘I’ statements from responses to supplementary questions due to the length of each poem. Maintaining the same order, these phrases were copied from the transcript into a new document (see Appendices Three [Una], Six [Saoirse] and Nine [Luke] for individual ‘I’ poems). Each phrase was inserted on a new line in the order they were written in the transcript. I created stanzas by separating the lines with headings which related to the questions I had asked. These included: Background, Why Teaching? Best Moments, Worst Moments, Turning Points, Significant People, Curriculum Changes, Changing Schools, As a Teacher I feel…, and A Title. . These headings were the same for each participant.

4.4: Step Three - Contrapuntal Voices

Finally, I listened for the contrapuntal voices within the narrative. This allowed me to further examine each voice and how it related to each previous listening (Woodcock, 2016). The initial two steps of the Listening Guide involved ascertaining the landscape of each story and the plotlines, and incorporating the first-person language of the narrator. The third step of the Listening Guide built on these
previous two stages. This final step, which consisted of several 'listenings', allowed me to notice and distinguish between the aspects of the transcript which spoke to the initial research questions (Gilligan et. al., 2007). This involved being attuned to what was spoken and what was said differently at different times, and being attentive to what was unspoken or silenced by other voices. It involved listening for the ways that different voices interacted.

4.5: Member Checking

Having completed the three steps of the Listening Guide, I emailed each participant to share their personal ‘I’ poem. I included a brief explanation of an ‘I’ poem within the main body of the email. Prior to this contact, I had confirmed with them the arrangements of when we would speak on the phone for the member check. Please see a copy of Appendix Thirteen for a copy of this email.

During the member check, I shared some of the analysis from the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2007). I focused this on the relevant ‘I’ poem and included the voices which seemed prevalent to me within their narratives. During the member checks, there was confirmation from each participant that I had encaptured their personal story which reflected how they identified as teachers and to their profession. I did not change my interpretation of the stories as a result of the member check; instead each member check confirmed my understanding and analyses.
4.6: Transcriptions

After each interview was complete, I transcribed the interview verbatim. Once the transcription was complete, I numbered each line, indicated each time there was a new speaker and added a reflection column on the right-hand side. I also included symbols in the transcriptions.

The following symbols were used to alert readers of the transcripts to non-verbal communication:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(( ))</td>
<td>((laughing))</td>
<td>Non-verbal action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A brief pause in the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(digit)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>Longer pause, with number of seconds inside the brackets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>R: Is it hard to [park up at school</td>
<td>To indicate speech overlap, when the participant and researcher spoke at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L: It’s very]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, I printed a hard copy of each transcript and listened to each interview a minimum of five times. Initially, I listened for the plot, and then for the creation of ‘I’ poems, and finally for the contrapuntal voices (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2007). With the relevant interview in front of me, I listened repeatedly to the interview and used a different colour highlighter to identify the particular aspect I was focusing on. Plot themes were highlighted in red, ‘I’ poems in yellow and
contrapuntal voices in either pink, green, teal, light blue or light grey, depending on the voice they represented. Once I was satisfied with this, I transferred this information to my electronic version of the transcript by changing the colour of the text, editing the font and adding further notes and reflections. After these steps, I completed a member check with each participant before writing up the analysis.

4.7: Applying the Listening Guide

4.7.1: Introducing Una

Una is currently a drama teacher with additional responsibilities. She trained and taught in London and the South-East of England before emigrating to teach abroad in Turkey and Egypt. She has now settled in Singapore in her ideal job. Following maternity leave, Una has recently returned to her school in Singapore. She wanted to be a teacher from a young age and initially thought that she would be a primary school practitioner, before realising that she could combine her love of drama with her desire to be a teacher, if she chose to teach at secondary school level. Una’s interview was conducted at the start of the academic year using FaceTime, due to distance restraints. During the interview, we were both in a room on our own at home. She describes herself as a thirty-five-year-old, middle-class, Caucasian female who is based in Singapore and has been influenced by European and African cultures.

4.7.2: Una - Step One

During the first listening, I felt that the terrain of Una’s narrative sounded optimistic and came from a place of security. The plot seemed to focus on independence,
exploration and ambition. Her independence was conveyed through the absence of any reference to a supportive partner or family network. People who featured in Una’s story were students, parents of students, colleagues as well as mentors, her current principal and her daughter. Her young daughter is the only family member of whom she spoke. Exploration arose as she listed the countries in which she had taught. Una described herself as “ambitious” (Appendix Five, pg. 211, line 461) and this is a theme which was quietly present as she took on new roles in different places. Her ambition is evident when she speaks about students’ achievements (Appendix Five, pg. 186, lines 43-50), new additional responsibilities (Appendix Five, pg. 195, lines 191-193), working alongside inspiring staff (Appendix Five, pg. 199, line 258) and being a learner herself (Appendix Five, pg. 211, lines 460-465 and lines 470-474). This latter storyline, which focused on ambition, was later replaced by a sense of contentment and enjoying the present. This was apparent when Una said “Then very recently I realised that actually I’m okay with not progressing in my career at the moment because I’m learning lots of different stuff” (Appendix Five, pg. 211, lines 466-468). This sense of contentment was reinforced when she said, “Maybe I’m just happy to do what I am doing and just learn what I am learning and enjoy this time rather than pushing forwards and learning and growing” (Appendix Five, pg. 212, lines 474-477).

There were multiple changes of location which arose as Una shared her movement from country to country. Despite this potential for disruption or tension, it seemed to be a harmonious story. The changes in location created a momentum in the shared story. The images which stood out for me related to her whole life constantly moving; this seemed to culminate in her moving towards her ‘ideal’ job where she is currently
able to focus on her teaching practice and her role as a learner. Throughout the story, even when the storyline moved from ambition to contentment, it was embedded in a context of assurance; she knew that she was meant to be a teacher and that remains a staunch truth for her.

Throughout Una’s storytelling, there did not appear to be any emotional hotspots as her responses were very measured. Her passion for and enjoyment of teaching was obvious. While there were times of challenge across her career (Appendix Five, pg. 188, lines 79; 84-85; pg. 188, lines 237-238), her description of these incidents did not indicate that she saw these as times of distinct difficulty which needed to be overcome. The story she shared was practical and concise yet comprehensive. It seemed that she had prepared for the questions in advance. At the same time, she also had a reflective nature during the interview when she recalled a curriculum change she was unhappy about (Appendix Five, pg. 202, lines 319-321). I recorded the reader response to the narrative in the right-hand column in Una’s transcription, under ‘Comments on Transcription’, as well as in my research diary.

4.7.3: Una - Step Two

Una’s ‘I’ poem can be read in full in Appendix Three (Pg. 165). In it, there are harmonious blends of activity, reflectiveness and agency. During our discussion in the member check, Una shared that she felt I had summarised her teaching story in an accurate way. She requested a written summary of the interview to add to her reflective record for the school year. This request demonstrated the personal value she attributed to taking part in the research.
Activity was present in Una’s story throughout her ‘I’ poem. The verbs which followed the ‘I’ made Una sound both active and purposeful: “I qualified, I moved, I taught, I went.” These appeared to reflect the movement associated with teaching in different countries as well as the leaving, departures and arrivals related to beginning in a new place. The purposefulness of these verbs seemed to have led Una on a journey of progression from one teaching role to the next. This ended with transporting her to her ideal job in a supportive school with fantastic resources.

The action which was apparent in Una’s ‘I’ poem contrasted with the amount of time she spent reflecting. Reflexivity and emotional embodiments of reflection were demonstrated in every stanza through the term “I thought”, which was a repeated phrase. This was further ratified during the member check, when Una shared that she had been discussing her reflective nature in school earlier in the week, and also through her request for a written account which summarised the voices heard in her narrative.

Agency was apparent in ‘Changing Schools’ (Appendix Three, pg. 175-176) and ‘A Title’ (Appendix Three, pg. 177-179) due to the terms “I choose” and “I can.” This agency connected to Una’s independence, which was conveyed by the choices she has made as she has progressed her career and moved between countries. Her agency was also conveyed through absences. While she mentioned significant people to the development of her career, Una did not speak of a supportive network outside of work. Whilst this does not mean that she has no strong support network,
instead it may suggest that she views her decisions about her career independently.

It may also imply that Una intentionally has tried to compartmentalise her work as separate from her home life due to working internationally, where the boundaries between home and work may be blurred. For instance, the family doctor is on the school site. Thus, the agency coming through her ‘I’ poem may relate to a conscious attempt to separate home from school.

Consistency came across in the ‘I’ poem when Una stated, “I always, always” (Appendix Three, pg. 165). There seemed to be an unwavering certainty that she knows what she is doing as a teacher. Una is secure in her knowledge that she is meant to be a teacher. She believes that there is no preferable career for her. Una’s passion for teaching also appears consistent through the repetitions of “I love”, as well as “I absolutely love” and “I really, really love”, when talking about being a teacher. Within the ‘I’ poem, there was some conflict with regards to consistency within the stanza ‘Turning Points’ (Appendix Three, pg. 168-173), when Una expressed, “I knew” and “I didn’t know.” However, when the apparently negative “I don’t” was expressed, it was in the form of a double negative and was utilised with a rhetorical effect. For instance, “I don’t know many other people who do” (Appendix Three, pg.177) was a comparative statement stating that Una is unaware of many people who love their job as much as she does.

A sense of change over time came across in the ‘Significant People’ (Appendix Three, pg. 173-174), ‘Curriculum Changes’ (Appendix Three, pg. 174-175) and ‘A Title…’ (Appendix Three, pg. 177-179) stanzas through the following phrases: “I had,
I became, I have, I think, I was, I am, I realise, I can.” The language was optimistic, reflective and positive. Something which may slightly contradict my earlier point about Una’s use of language indicating that she compartmentalises her personal and professional life arises within ‘Turning Points’. She spoke of previously compartmentalising, but since having her daughter reflected:

“Now I look

On the flipside I see all the things” (Appendix Three, pg. 173)

This indicates that she felt an overlap between her personal, home experiences and her role as a teacher; her teaching and mothering roles impact one another.

Una’s ‘I’ poem spoke of the importance of “making a difference” (Appendix Three, pg. 172). Reference to making a difference was repeated several times in the ‘I’ poem. It seemed that she saw an intrinsic link between being an educator and helping young people to make a difference in their own lives and in the future.

4.7.4: Una - Step Three

As I listened to and read Una’s narrative, I identified the following distinct voices which I have named: Accomplishment, Challenge, Pastoral, Protection and Realisation. At times, these voices were interwoven. A collection of quotes representing each voice can be seen in Appendix Four (pg. 180). Further examples are available in Una’s full transcript in Appendix Five (pg. 184).

I felt that the voice of Accomplishment was focused on Una’s success as a teacher and this was intertwined with how she viewed her role. Una revealed the value of
teaching to her was holistic in nature. She spoke about making a difference to young people’s lives, not just giving them an academic education. When the opportunity to make a difference was not apparent, it seemed to influence how she perceived the value of her role:

“I felt like I was making a difference again with children not just teaching them but actually making a difference to their lives” (Appendix Five, pg. 195, Line 196-198).

Within this statement, the voices of Accomplishment and Pastoral were interconnected because this statement indicates how incredibly important making a general impact on students’ lives is to Una, with regards how she sees her role as a teacher.

The Accomplishment voice was present when Una spoke with passion about her current school and available resources:

“And my current school is… Incredible. And I absolutely love it … it is a very wealthy school and they have a lot of resources, not just physical resources, people resources as well, and so a lot of the admin stuff was taken off of me and I could just focus in on my teaching” (Appendix Five, pg. 195, lines 200-205).

Within Una’s narrative, there is a sense that taking on multiple roles as a teacher has a positive outcome. The roles she emphasises are pastoral in nature, rather than being linked to administrative tasks. Una’s voice of Accomplishment is strongly interlinked to her Pastoral voice within her narrative. At one point when Una spoke about the more pastoral roles of a teacher, there was some tension between Accomplishment and the voice of Challenge:
“It also does still make me sad that those children, like in England, you know, obviously not all of them but that they do need that, sort of social worker type aspect as well” (Appendix Five, pg. 193, lines 160-163).

Although she appreciates making a difference to young people’s lives, she is aware that some of these roles are necessary due to undesirable circumstances. It appears that Una recognises that a pastoral role can become a necessary ‘social work’ type role when children and young people experience greater adversity. This pastoral role seems valuable to Una because to her it means she is making a difference to the young person and this is associated with her voice of Accomplishment. While this is an important aspect of her role, it also links to tension because it saddens her to think that young people are in situations where such a role is necessary. Therefore, it also links to her voice of Challenge.

The voice of Accomplishment was again present when Una spoke about experienced colleagues whom she found to be inspiring:

“At my current school, I work with another drama teacher and he’s really inspirational in terms of, my actual drama teaching, like all of the strategies that he uses, he’s given me more innovative approaches” (Appendix Five, pg. 199, lines 254-258).

These positive influences appear to have an impact on her daily practice. This was connected to her voice of Realisation because she recognised that she has ample time to further her ambitious nature, but for now she is content in her present learning environment:

“And then very recently I realised that actually I’m okay with not progressing in my career at the moment because I’m learning lots of different stuff, and then a slight
different focus on now that I’ve got family of my own to think about, and that’s okay”

(Appendix Five, pg.211, lines 466-470).

She repeated similar sentiments later:

“Maybe I’m just happy to do what I am doing and just learn what I am learning and enjoy this time rather than pushing forwards and learning and growing” (Appendix Five, pg. 212, lines 474-477).

There is security within Una’s narrative. She is secure in knowing that teaching is her ideal profession. She is currently working in a system which is a supportive learning environment for herself as well as for her students. This again links back to the Pastoral voice, when she shared the importance of role modelling learning and failing:

“It’s about showing the kids, that it’s okay being in that place of not knowing and it’s okay to try something out and it’s okay to fail. And I think that is a really important message for children to see” (Appendix Five, pg. 199, lines 262-265).

4.7.5: Concluding Thoughts on Una’s Narrative

Una must feel like she is in a privileged position, to be able to feel fulfilment in each of the optimistic voices in her narrative. Her whole narrative was generally cohesive, with the voices of Protection and Challenge playing minor roles. Una gave one example of being protected by the school system when she spoke of the strong approach the school used when addressing parents. This voice of Protection indicated that her school use an empathetic yet firm approach so that all parties
concerned, parents and carers, young people and staff, understand their decision making. It also seemed that these situations were an exception and I got the impression that there was a feeling of unity between students and staff within her current school, due to the clear guidelines and code of conduct which all parties are expected to abide by. The prevalent voices present in Una’s narrative were positive and mainly focused on Accomplishment and Pastoral, with Realisation being apparent towards the end of the interview. I was left with the impression that Una believed the systems in which she works, and the expectations placed on her as a teacher, result in Una having a thoroughly supported and nurtured wellbeing.

4.7.6: Introducing Saoirse

Saoirse trained as a teacher in Canada, before moving to England for work opportunities. Her earliest memories relate to her aspiration to be a teacher. Saoirse’s initial supply teaching job in London led to her to securing a full-time role in an inner-city school. She handed in her notice when Saoirse recognised she needed a break from full-time teaching to review her career options. Another period of supply teaching led her to a full-time class position in a school which appeared to hold wellbeing in high esteem. Following an Ofsted inspection, the focus on teacher wellbeing appears to have been reduced. Saoirse has additional responsibilities as well as being a class teacher. Her interview took place at the beginning of the school year in the lounge of my flat and we were alone throughout. She describes herself as being a female in her early thirties, who has been influenced by her Canadian upbringing and has recently become a British citizen.

4.7.7: Saoirse - Step One
During the initial listening of Saoirse’s story, I felt that it was set within a frame of wanting to make a difference to the lives of children. Her own educational experience as a child in school was described as a generally positive experience and featured inspiring role models for her future teacher identity. Even when she experienced a teacher who she did not have a positive experience of, Saoirse used this experience to inform herself about how she would go on to teach.

Saoirse’s story had two main settings. Initially, the geographical base was Canada, where autonomy and professional discretion were prevalent in her description of being a teacher. The school environment had a collaborative ethos. Saoirse described colleagues and students working in co-production to create a personalised education for the pupils in her class. While this positive partnership created a sense of reward for her, there was an issue: there were no available full-time teaching positions on offer in Canada. The second scene was based in England. Saoirse found that teaching work was readily available. However, there were multiple compromises within the second setting, which was located in south-east England. The trust and positive attributes which had been dominant in the Canadian setting were replaced by pressure (both national and school-based) and a prescriptiveness which created an internal tension with regards to how Saoirse viewed her role as a teacher. There was a sense of struggle and suffering in Saoirse’s narrative because she felt, at times, like she was not doing the best she could for the children in her class. This was because of the expectations the senior leadership within the school had of Saoirse, as a Year Two practitioner who was preparing her class for SATS. Within Saoirse’s narrative, it was apparent that she felt that local and national
systems lacked flexibility with regards to considering staff and pupils in a holistic manner.

The clearest difference between the first and second scene was how professional judgements seemed to be constantly questioned in England. In Canada, Saoirse described teacher observations and feedback as being helpful for professional development (Appendix Eight, pg. 273, lines 723-728). Rather than being critical, an appreciative approach was adopted, which seems to be missing from her experience in England (Appendix Eight, pg. 273, lines 726-732). Despite the constant internal struggle of being forced to choose between different priorities, the highs (for Saoirse, these were mostly connected to relationships) associated with her role whilst teaching the Year Two SATS group in London made the experience worthwhile for her.

4.7.8: Saoirse - Step Two

Saoirse’s ‘I’ poem can be read in full in Appendix Six (pg. 214). Her ‘I’ poem highlighted her struggle between the role of teacher she was required to take on due to educational systems and the value she has associated with her role. The language in the poem is emotive and has elements of physical embodiment through the repeated use of terms like “I felt” and “I remember.” Her delight in teaching is apparent through the repeated use of the term “love” – “I absolutely loved it! I really loved” in the ‘Background’ (Appendix Six, pg. 214-219) and ‘Turning Points’ (Appendix Six, pg. 224-228) stanzas.
A thread running through the whole poem, and the first stanza (Background, Appendix Six, pg. 214-219) in particular, relates to memories. These had a longitudinal element through the repeated refrain: "I remember." These appear to have positive associations with her view of teaching: "I was, I played, I could, I knew." This stanza also epitomises how Saoirse has envisioned her role as a teacher since her childhood. The phrase "I think" is reiterated throughout the poem repeatedly, and demonstrates her reflective nature. In the second stanza (Why Teaching? Appendix Six, pg. 220-221), the memory of wanting to be a teacher is imprinted since an early age: "I always knew, I wanted to work with children, I had some absolutely amazing teachers." The 'I' poem highlights how being a teacher has been a long-term aspiration for Saoirse.

There is a shift in the language within ‘Worst moments’ (Appendix Six, pg. 222-224) and ‘Turning Points’ (Appendix Six, pg. 224-228); the vocabulary and energy within the stanzas become more mixed. The previous positive language is replaced by uncertainty. Internal tension becomes more apparent, as the internal conflict arises between what school required her to do and what she felt was best for the children in her care. This sense of helplessness is carried over into the ‘Significant People’ stanza (Appendix Six, pg. 228-231), where there is a focus on interaction with her line manager. The language used, “I was stripped, If I’m allowed, I don’t, I didn’t, I lost, I was worrying, I couldn’t, I’m overtired, I’m stressed, I am constantly worried and anxious”, is in stark contrast to the original optimistic language at the start of the ‘I’ poem. There appears to be frustration, anger and sadness in the language used in this section. Despite Saoirse’s identity being linked to her being a teacher, she seems to be reflecting on whether she can carry on this role. There is a turning point
within this stanza, when Saoirse says, “They knew I was a good teacher” (Appendix Six, pg. 230). This woman, who had spent most of her childhood preparing to be a teacher and was now an experienced, reflective teacher, could no longer see the skill set she had to offer. Saoirse rediscovers herself through the belief that others have in her. She describes the support and belief her family offered her particularly during her year of teaching Year Two: “My parents have always been extremely supportive and have always built up my confidence ((laugh)) even when I have not been confident in myself” (Appendix Eight, pg. 268, lines 614-616). This is both a heart-warming point and an incredibly sad one. The reassuring element is that Saoirse has people who were able to give her this encouragement. The poignant aspect of this statement relates to the fact that, at that time, she was no longer able to see this for herself. It raises the question of how much she had endured to bring her to such a hopeless place. When Saoirse talks about the support her parents offered she says “They said and reaffirmed that they knew I was a good teacher and it was what I was always meant to do” (Appendix Eight, pg. 268, lines 617-619). She goes onto say, “My family have really built up my confidence to want to carry on in my teaching career. And my husband is a fantastic influence on me because he reminds me that wellbeing is really important” (Appendix Eight, pg. 269 lines 631-634).

The stanza titled ‘As a teacher I feel…’ (Appendix Six, pg. 237-238) includes mixed language. “I can’t leave” is a repeated refrain which seems rather hopeless because she does not appear to have a choice. Then, there is a shift to more hopeful statements: “I still remember them, I think teaching is amazing.” The fluctuating
language within this ‘I’ poem seems to epitomise the changeable emotional experiences, ranging from inspiring to saddening, which teachers face.

4.7.9: Saoirse - Step Three

Within Saoirse’s narrative, I identified the following distinct voices: Optimism, Struggle, Nurturer, Relationships and Recognition. At times, the voices were intertwined with each other. A collection of quotes representing each voice can be seen in Appendix Seven. Further examples are available in Saoirse’s full transcript in Appendix Eight.

There were four elements in Saoirse’s narrative which connected to her Optimistic voice. These were: having professional discretion, working collaboratively, recognising the importance of wellbeing and the positive moments of teaching. Having professional discretion was referred to on a number of occasions. Saoirse shared that observations within the Canadian system were associated with appreciative inquiry and productive, constructive feedback:

“Obviously I was observed throughout my career as well and they had these positive observations and constructive feedback to give back to, you know, do better in certain areas. But I felt like I was given the discretion, the ability and opportunity to judge for myself what was best for the children that I was teaching. I didn’t have to evidence every little thing because my (2) professional judgement was seen to be accurate because I have done all this training and I feel like this is what’s different in this country.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 273, lines 724-731).
This was a sentiment that was repeated later in the interview and Saoirse spoke about the positive impact this had on her environment and her ability to teach:

“You’re just trusted that you know what you are doing (3) and having that sense of trust and feeling like you are given that opportunity and responsibility to just do what you feel is best, is really (. ) amazing and (. ) it makes the environment and the whole idea of teaching so much more positive because it makes you feel like, you know, you are in control, you know what you are doing, you’ve been given the trust that you deserve after all the training that you have put into your career and that you continue to put in and you know what’s best for your children” (Appendix Eight, pg. 286, lines 1048-1057).

The next element of Saoirse’s Optimistic voice related to working in a co-productive nature with colleagues and pupils:

“I was working with my teaching partner who did the other half-days and we worked really well together and we had the same sort of ideas of what we wanted to do in the classroom, various investigative type learning where the children were guiding their own learning and they weren’t being ‘taught at’ but they were participants in their learning” (Appendix Eight, pg. 248, lines 101-107).

Relationships appear to have influenced Saoirse’s awareness of the importance of wellbeing:
“I have obviously learned from that experience in London that wellbeing is important, and I’ve made it a bigger priority for myself and I’ve learned that I can say no”  
(Appendix Eight, pg. 279, lines 875-878).

Saoirse aims to prioritise her wellbeing when considering new jobs, even though this would not have previously been in her job searching criteria. She talks about the reassurance she received in the interview for her current role:

“There was a very big push for wellbeing because that was actually part of my interview when I originally interviewed for this position. One of the questions was ‘How do you look after your wellbeing as a teacher?’ which made me feel confident in that they recognised as a school that wellbeing was important” (Appendix Eight, pg. 278, lines 863-867).

At a later stage, she goes on to speak about the impact that Ofsted had on this crucial element of wellbeing. This quote above highlights the importance she now places on her own wellbeing.

Saoirse’s final element of Optimism reveals how the positive moments impact her. These moments include going on a journey of discovery with pupils, when a difficult concept suddenly makes sense to them:

“I think in teaching you have so many amazing moments” (Appendix Eight, pg. 243, lines 229-230).

“I think those are the absolute best moments that I (2) it just keeps me going is a teacher” (Appendix Eight, pg.253, lines 241-243).
In the quotes above and the one below, Saoirse indicates that a tension exists. It seems like she has, at times, questioned whether she wants to continue being a teacher when she mentions being brought back and ‘feeling okay again’:

“The rollercoaster shoots up in the air, you know, it brings you back on this high of feeling okay again and brings you back and it’s brilliant and exciting and thrilling and rewarding because, you know, you’re back where you want to be” (Appendix Eight, pg. 285, lines 1023-1026).

The use of ‘again’ seems to imply that there is a cyclical nature to teaching. This reoccurring nature of ‘highs’ implies that there is a counterpoint ‘low’ to balance it out.

The changeable nature of teaching is referred to multiple times throughout Saoirse’s narrative: “there were some ups and downs, highs and lows” (Appendix Eight, pg. 249, lines 130-131). And again in:

“I was thoroughly enjoying it until we had Ofsted. Since then, it has significantly got worse the school environment and (2) we went from being a ‘good’ school to ‘needing improvement’” (Appendix Eight, pg. 278, lines 852-858).

There seems to be a common element within Saoirse’s narrative of trying to balance out the good with the bad:

“It’s a very different environment to what it was. I feel like it was originally quite a positive influence for me but (.) I feel like that might be changing. However, one thing that is quite positive where I am at now is that I enjoy very much working with most of my colleagues” (Appendix Eight, pg. 279, lines 871-875).
Her frustration finally pushes into the foreground when she speaks of her frustration with the fact that her department in her current school were classed as ‘good’ by Ofsted; despite Ofsted not requiring any improvements in the report for her department, staff within the Early Years setting did not receive any recognition for what they had done well. In fact:

“Although we were rated ‘good’ we are still part of those learning walks and still part of all the additional training that is being put into the rest of the school, so it hasn’t been noted that (.) by the school in the sense that we actually have done well and we should carry on doing what we’re doing because we’re doing something really right” (Appendix Eight, pg. 280, lines 906-911).

As Saoirse continues her narrative, it becomes apparent that rather than the lack of recognition being central to her frustration, it is the time being wasted:

“So, it doesn’t really make sense to waste our valuable time that could be spend on our particular curriculum and environment and how to make it better at these staff meetings and training sessions that have nothing to do with us” (Appendix Eight, pg. 281, lines 920-924).

The point about a lack of efficiency and time-wasting is reiterated:

“That’s not thought about in this system ((laughs)) it’s not thought about the best use of teachers’ time and I think that’s why a lot of time gets wasted and isn’t efficient. And when there is that lack of efficiency, that’s when teachers become stressed because they feel they don’t have the time to do things that would best benefit the children” (Appendix Eight, pg. 282, lines 945-950).

The frustrations which Saoirse experiences on a daily basis are exacerbated further when her narrative broaches areas of pressure. An example of this is with SATS:
“I think my worst (3) I don’t want to say moment but I’d say time as a teacher was when I was in Year Two teaching in St Teresa’s and (2) because of the pressure of SATS, Year Two SATS, and because of pressure from the school to (2) achieve targets that were set at the beginning of the year” (Appendix Eight, pg. 254, lines 250-254).

She goes on to say:

“And these targets are set and not based on, or flexible in a sense that they are human beings, they’re not just, you know, numbers or (.) points on a piece of paper they have a life and it means that because they are human beings things happen. And they’re going to have highs in their life and they’re going to have lows in their life, and throughout their life. And I think it’s really unfair that they have these expectations that they’ll achieve a certain target and that the rest of their life and what is affecting their day-to-day ability to be successful in education is not taken into account (.) and I also think it’s really unfair that (2) children of such young age feel such (.) intense pressure in their education that they need to strive to do well, that they’re being tested on (.) a lot of material that is really difficult for seven year olds” (Appendix Eight, pg. 254, lines 265-278).

The SATS testing also created a discrepancy between what she was expected to do by the school and what she wanted to do as a teacher:

“I feel like that was really, I don’t know the word, but sort of, stifled out of them in that time (2) and I felt like it was really unfair and it made me feel like I was a really bad teacher, and I know that I’m not a bad teacher and that is probably the worst moment for me. It was the worst time for me because I felt like I wasn’t doing my job which (.) was (2) the job that I originally wanted to which was to inspire them and help them
grow and feel excited and happy to be at school. And I felt horrible coming into work every day because I felt like I didn’t know what to do, how to handle that year whether I should (.) just try and ignore the pressure from above that felt like it was on a daily basis, coming to me, asking me results and when I was doing the next tests and practice for SATS. Or if I should do what was in my heart which was actually to teach them properly and give them a well-rounded education and (.) and not have so much pressure on a group of seven-year-olds. But I’m not sure if I was experienced enough at that time (.) or maybe I was actually just too sort of (.) engrossed in the situation I couldn’t look at it objectively to do what I feel like I do now, which is just to ignore the system as much as possible. But (2) yeah I feel like that I constantly felt (.) in a bad place during that time and (.) I felt like I wasn’t happy with myself and I didn’t feel good about myself and it really made me hate teaching and made me not want to, I didn’t know how I would carry on a teaching career if it was going to carry on like that. Which made really sad because, as I’ve already said I wanted to be a teacher since I was four years” (Appendix Eight, pg. 256, lines 317-342).

This section of the narrative highlights the pain and inner turmoil Saoirse experienced as a teacher at this particular point in her career. There is a critical self-awareness, as well as a sense of regret towards those pupils doing SATs and her involvement in those tests. There is also a heaviness, loss and sadness about how the situation was making Saoirse feel. Through the narrative, she indicates that she was aware of the impact this time period had on her. However, it is difficult to know if Saoirse realised the extent of the impact the experience was having on her during her time in Year Two
4.7.10: Concluding Thoughts on Saoirse’s Narrative

Saoirse’s narrative clearly demonstrated that being a teacher has been a long-held ambition for her. During her own time as a pupil, she used her own experiences with teachers to develop her knowledge about the type of teacher she would like to become.

Although her narrative about teaching is optimistic, there is a sense of struggle within it as she reflects on her experience in the profession. Saoirse portrays teaching as being a professional role as well as a vocation. Despite the repeated struggles, the children bring her much joy. Saoirse’s narrative indicates that if she could focus on planning, in the way most beneficial to her, that she would be better able to teach and meet the multiple needs of the children within her care. Within her story, Saoirse creates the impression that she would like to plan and teach informative and fun lessons. However, it seems that local and national policies require her to dedicate a lot of her time to other, non-teaching related tasks. This leaves her with little time or energy left to focus on what she views as the more important aspects of her role.

Saoirse’s narrative suggests that she generally feels that systems, related to national expectations on children, do not allow for staff or pupils to be human. It also indicates that there is a precarious element within teaching, because things can change instantaneously. She compares these sudden changes to the experience of riding on a rollercoaster. It seems that Saoirse has reached a state of acceptance
about the systems in which she works and recognises that she needs to maintain her own wellbeing in order to be more available to her class.

4.7.11: Introducing Luke

Luke comes from a family of educators and decided to join the teaching profession after completing his undergraduate degree. He is secondary school trained and has worked in several different inner-city schools, teaching English. Luke has also taught supplementary subjects and led other departments, as well as being the Head of the English. After taking redundancy from a teaching and middle leadership post, Luke considered alternative options and considered retraining rather than returning to teaching. During this period, Luke realised he missed classroom teaching too much to leave the career permanently. If he does leave in the future, it is likely that he will move into something which is still linked to education. At Luke’s current school, he teaches English to Year Eight, Eleven, Twelve and Thirteen students and is on the senior leadership team as an Assistant Head of Sixth Form. My interview with him place towards the end of the autumn term in his own home and we were alone in the kitchen throughout. He describes himself as a lower-middle class, middle-aged, British man from London.

4.7.12: Luke - Step One

Within the first listening, I identified multiple landscapes, tensions and contradictions in Luke’s narrative. It was apparent that he had taught a range of subjects and maintained a role within the senior leadership team in different schools. Pressure within academy systems, as well as the possibility of his current school being
changed into an academy, created a tension within the narrative, due to the precariousness which seemed to be illustrated within Luke’s narrative.

Luke presented himself as a strong, competent leader who fundamentally views the needs of the young people he is working with as central to his role as a teacher. Luke has experienced disappointment in the system, with regards to decisions taken by schools which he has not agreed with. The positive and negative experiences Luke shared indicate that he sees teaching as more of a vocation than solely a job. This means that it can be difficult to balance family relationships with wanting to commit his physical, emotional and mental energy to helping his students. Balancing home and school is a repeated site of conflict within Luke’s narrative because while he is attempting to prioritise family life, work responsibilities also encroach on his personal time if he does not set appropriate boundaries. This leads to inner unease because despite wanting to help his pupils as much as possible, he never feels as though he is doing enough.

As Luke’s narrative unfolds, he reveals that when he reflects on his role, he is concerned by what he is teaching students. He questions whether the skills they develop in school will prepare them for being independent when they leave school education. His person-centred beliefs, which are based on the right pedagogy for students, are at odds with the system in which he finds himself teaching. However, Luke feels the need to be inside the system to try and instigate change. Luke remains optimistic that positive transformations will occur.
4.7.13: Luke - Step Two

Luke’s ‘I’ poem can be read in full in Appendix Nine (pg. 290). Tension and contradiction were evident throughout the ‘I’ poem through phrases such as “I turned,” “I know that sounds” and “If I’m going to be really honest.” The poem revealed a sense of pressure, which seemed to arise from the role of the teacher and the precariousness of systems. There also seemed to be internal pressure, which appeared to originate from wanting the best for young people, as well as trying to have quality time with and be reliable for his family.

In the ‘Background’ stanza (Appendix Nine, pg. 290), Luke comes across as competent, ambitious and willing to take on a challenge. In the ‘Why Teaching?’ stanza (Appendix Nine, pg. 290-291), there appears to be an openness and reflectiveness developing apparent in the following statement: “If I’m going to be really honest.” Luke’s ‘Best Moments’ (Appendix Nine, pg. 291) within the ‘I’ poem were linked to his achievements and roles: “When I became Head of English” and “I improved results.” However, this differed from the full narrative transcript, in which his person-centred natured was far more apparent.

The ‘Worst Moments’ stanza (Appendix Nine, pg. 291-294) felt heavier in content. There was a smattering of the phrase “I had” throughout, which indicated a lack of choice about his actions or what was being expected of him. There was a sense of disappointment in this stanza: “I wanted, I saw those members of staff, I just think that’s a bit of a disgrace, I think that’s wrong.” The use of time was also prevalent in this stanza: “I mean at the minute, I’m working ten to twelve hour days, What I do at
work, What I take at work, What I take home, What I don’t take home.” These sombre points contrasted to the simplicity of the statement, “I care” which was present in this stanza. The statement “I care” seemed to signify a change in this stanza, as “I’m very lucky” was a repeated phrase following the “I care” statement. However, there was still uncertainty in his language. When reading this stanza, I felt that the words indicated some alteration between knowing and uncertainty.

‘Turning Points’ (Appendix Nine, pg. 294-297) brought a sense of anguish and desperation to the ‘I’ poem; “I very nearly left” and “I left” were repeated refrains. This stanza brought with it many differing voices. Luke self-identifies as previously having been arrogant, before later indicating a different side to him when he mentions nervousness and anxiety. The stanza has a transparent and authentic feeling which is perhaps created by the short statements. When talking about turning points in his career, Luke shares when he worked in Phoenix, which was one of his schools, he was close to leaving teaching behind. There is a sense of him being disorientated and drifting away from his sense of self: “I took redundancy, I’m good at what I do, I took the cheque, I wasn’t being treated like that, I took the deal, I was the only one, I took the money, I left, I was very close to stopping.” When Luke speaks of retraining, there is a deep sense of loss regarding his wellbeing and close relationships: “I was definitely drinking more, My wife and I’s relationship changed, I was always stressed.” There is also a deep sense of loss in the statements which highlighted how much he missed teaching: “I missed it massively, I really missed it.” Luke also indicates empathy for senior leaders in the final line of this stanza, when he says, “I wouldn’t want to be a head teacher trying to get the balance right.” This statement
seems to indicate that Luke appreciates that there are numerous elements which need to be taken into account when leading a school.

Within ‘Significant People’ (Appendix Nine, pg. 297-299), Luke demonstrates that his self-awareness has developed over time. Luke expressed that he has received opportunities to develop and that he wants to offer similar chances to others, including both colleagues and students. ‘Curriculum Changes’ (Appendix Nine, pg. 299-301) includes multiple reflective statements, as the term ‘why’ is used repeatedly. Towards the end of this stanza, Luke’s love of teaching becomes apparent once again.

‘Changing Schools’ (Appendix Nine, pg.301-303) establishes how much Luke ‘wants’ to achieve in his teaching career. He comes across as a proactive person and the stanza feels very active. This stanza feels very active and he comes across as a proactive person. For instance, “I wanted to change whole school systems.” This stanza, along with others, constructs a character who is larger than life through phrases such as, “I was a little too big for my boots, I would be quite aggressive, I would be quite bullish.” These statements make him seem like a purposeful and determined character. It is possible that in these statements, Luke is trying to create a particular image of himself which matches how he thinks he should be viewed. As the stanza continues, Luke demonstrates his reflectiveness: “Looking back, I’ve had to change, I had to learn, I made loads of adjustments, If I were to look back, If I really look, If I look at the way.” He shows how he has applied his learning when he says, “I’ve calmed down.” I imagine that these qualities have developed in Luke over
time and with experience. As well as acquiring these qualities, Luke seems to be saying that it is likely that he has developed his understanding of the situation and of the limitations of the system, as well as experiencing various disappointments over time.

The stanza, ‘As a teacher…’ (Appendix Nine, pg.303-305) features adjectives such as “privileged” and “lucky.” As this stanza unfolds, a sense of pressure becomes evident in the choices Luke has had to make regarding the quantity of his work and his family responsibilities. The statement “I’m not willing” is repeated, which shows his determination to prioritise his family above his work. Previously, before having a child, Luke would have completed work in the holidays to catch up on marking; which is no longer feasible due to his family duties. The 'I' poem includes numerous pressure points. There are tensions between what Luke is expected to do, the spontaneous nature of his job, being the teacher, worker and colleague he wants to be as well, and balancing all this with his family commitments.


As I listened to and read Luke’s narrative, I identified the following voices: Highs, Lows, Cultivation, Awareness and Balance. At times, these voices were interlinked with each other. A collection of quotes representing each voice can be seen in Appendix Ten (pg. 307). Further examples are available in Luke’s full transcript in Appendix Eleven (pg. 311).
Luke’s narrative begins with a positive statement, which has negative connotations intertwined: “The reason why I like the job, for all the difficulties it’s got, is the kids” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 314, lines 85-86). Regardless of the different voices present in his narrative, such as being ambitious and a strong leader, young people are central to Luke’s role and they keep him in the profession through the difficult times. Luke has felt a strong association with education from an early age because of how prevalent the profession was in his family: “It was kind of entrenched within us” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 315, lines 107-108). Whilst external motivators may have initially encouraged him in his choice of career, Luke is enthusiastic about being, and feels privileged to be, a teacher. This was clear in his interview through the use of statements such as: “I do love the job. I’m very lucky to have the job” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 316, line 116). A dominant voice throughout Luke’s narrative, and again at the member check, was that education should be child-centred: “Adults mess schools up, kids don’t, so when you can just focus on the kids it’s alright” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 317, lines 146-147).

There was a great deal of pain and ethical turmoil within Luke’s Low voice when he spoke about some of his worst moments in teaching. Interestingly, these were not directly related to teaching but to his other roles as an educator. They had physical, mental and emotional repercussions:

“...I guess they could fall into two categories. One would be being attacked by students. I’ve had that happen 8, 9, times now. So, from being spat in the face to being hit with tables, I had knives pulled on me in my school in Goats Bush. It was
one of the reasons I left is that we were thinking of having a baby and Trudie was like ‘that has to stop’

Researcher: Yeah

Luke: (. ) going outside the school in Brookfields, in Bright City, and seeing, so I’d go and do bus stop duty and you’d see (. ) blacked out windows and Porsche 4x4s pull up just out of the estate, right in one of the roughest estates around and you’d see all your little Year Sevens lining up and then someone inside the car would hand them their first package of the evening, their first delivery because they’d used Year Sevens to deliver drugs on the estate because they’re too young to get arrested

Researcher: Okay

Luke: That was a pretty dark ((uncomfortable laugh)), pretty dark week that one. And there was nothing you could do. These people have so much power and such a threat that we were told as staff ‘don’t do anything’. So to be a member of staff standing 100 metres away from a kid being handed a package of drugs and not being able to do something that went against everything that feels natural to me with regards to looking after young people. That was pretty horrible. With regards to adults, taking staff through capability measures” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 317, lines 151-174).

In a short extract, Luke describes a number of issues which would not immediately be associated with the role of a teacher. These experiences had a negative effect on Luke. From my experience of teacher training, it seems unlikely that Luke would have been formally prepared for these events. These situations had an impact on Luke outside of work. The following extract demonstrates how the lines between work and home life can blur for him:
Luke: It's very difficult not to take things home

R: Yeah

Luke: I mean at the minute I'm working (.) 10 to 12 hour days. You come home (.) you're exhausted

R: Yeah

Luke: But actually having Carys (.) my 20-month year old daughter (.) she's kind of (.) made me turn things off and a little bit better, a little bit more regimented about what I do at work and what I take at work (.) what I take home and what I don't take home

R: Okay

Luke: It's (.) it's (.) not easy mentality thing to do because (.) because you care ((laughing))

R: Yeah

Luke: It's very difficult not to do something extra if you care. While I care about the students, the people I work with and manage etcetera etcetera (2) it's always that "crossover between vocation and the job" (Appendix Eleven, pg. 321, lines 230-249).

When Luke uses the term 'crossover' he indicates that being a teacher is more than a job. It seems to exist in a 'between space'; it is not quite a vocation and yet it is more than a job. This extract also demonstrates his awareness of the protective factors which are present in his life when he talks about his daughter and how he attempts to compartmentalise home and work. Luke later refers to the importance of getting the balance right (Appendix Eleven, pg. 322, line 256) and it sounds as
though this is a constant battle. The battle is trying to balance home and work so that he can be meet his own self-imposed standards in both areas.

The Low voice, which encapsulates the negative experiences in Luke’s narrative, continues as he details the personal consequences he experienced when his previous school was taken over by an academy chain:

“And at that stage (.) I was very close to (.) stopping. I thought I’d retrain as an electrician. I would have gone and learned a trade somehow. (4) They were (.) they were pretty dark days actually (2) And when you look back on it you can see the things that were going on at that time. So, I was definitely drinking more, the idea of just coming home and just drinking to just turn off

R: Yeah

Luke: Didn’t have a child at that stage so wasn’t abusive ((laughs)) Our relationship, my wife and I’s relationship, changed quite significantly. We didn’t really spend any positive time together. I was always stressed. Most of the grey hair you can see now came at that time ((smiles)) So it was borderline whether to continue to be honest”

(Appendix Eleven, pg. 327, lines 366-377).

This extract illustrates how close Luke came to leaving the profession. However, despite these negative experiences, Luke does not dwell on the lows:

“So yeah, there have definitely been some unpleasant times. But those unpleasant times (.) For the first 10 years of my career they were challenging yeah

R: Yeah
Luke: But no thoughts about stopping or concerns about stopping at all. I have been happy for the last two years.” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 329, lines 404-409).

Relationships are an area of Luke’s narrative which appear to be meaningful. Colleagues and family have at different times being protective factors in helping Luke to manage his wellbeing and, at times, these have been transformative. Here, he speaks about the influence his mentor had on him when Luke was a newly qualified teacher:

“He showed me an awful lot (. ) very calm (. ) very peaceful (. ) didn’t take any crap (. ) stood up for his department, defended his department openly in front of the head teacher (. ) who was a bit of bullish (. ) a bull of a head teacher but she was very good at what she did (2) Yeah, he was a big help (. ) told me I couldn’t say yes to everything” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 337, lines 588-593).

Luke explained that he and his mentor continue to stay in contact long after that first job. As well as the other positive and significant colleagues he has known during his career, Luke goes on to share that his first mentor, who he described as “amazing (. ) he was absolutely amazing. Kids under control, engaging, thoughtful, really passionate about what he did” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 340, lines 650-652), left teaching due to the curriculum changes being implemented during his career. Luke describes his reaction to the profession losing such a skilled teacher as “disturbing” (Appendix Eleven, pg.340, line 665).

Luke’s voice of Cultivation spoke about his experiences of professional development throughout his career and how he had implemented this into his style of leadership:
“So people all helped me out and made sure I got CPD [continuing professional development] and I was given the right opportunities and I think it’s really important that I do that to other people. One for the health of the profession, two because it’s how people should be treated (.) and if you are managing somebody (.) in quite a lot of areas I’ve seen managers (.) almost keep a lid on those members of staff. Which is completely the wrong way round to do it. You need to give them all the opportunities you can (.); particularly if you’re looking to recruit and recycle staff into more senior positions in your own school. You don’t want your best staff going to another school. You want to keep your staff in your school. When they stay it means they’re being developed” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 342, lines 704-715).

This quotation sounds like it may have altruistic undertones but it also demonstrates Luke’s systemic thinking. He describes the benefit of investing in staff by providing them with professional development opportunities. This segment of text demonstrates that Luke is thinking about the long-term impact of having healthy staff who want to remain in a school. His focus is on providing teachers with further skills, so that they choose to remain in the school which they are invested in and in which they are valued as valuable resources.

The Low voice can be heard again when Luke talks about the grading system in exam year groups, the content within the new English curriculum and the pressure of targets and predicted grades on staff. There is additional content within the English curriculum, which puts pressure on pupils to be doing extra work. Luke explains that it is impractical to expect teachers to be able to cover the extra work in classroom taught sessions. Luke describes the issues:
"It’s no longer about just what you deliver in the classroom. They have to do independent stuff as well. Now you can get past it a little bit at GCSE by cramming very much an exam factory instead of more creative, free teaching but you can’t do that at A-Level. There’s just so much they have to have under control. So that spoon-feeding at GCSE to maintain the GCSE scores does do damage at A-Level. So, I refer to it as double jumping. We made this student jump as far as they can at GCSE. Literally squeeze everything out of them but when they get that GCSE result that’s used to set their targets for Key Stage 5. So, if they’ve managed to get an eight then all of a sudden their targets are A* at A-level but they don’t then have that ability to work independently and autonomously and they don’t have that drive sometimes at Key Stage 5 to do really well. And therefore the Key Stage 5 results regards progress drop off all the way. Then the school is labelled as an underperforming school" (Appendix Eleven, pg. 344, lines 740-754).

Therefore, the consequence of teaching students to pass exams is that they are later less capable of having the required skills to achieve independently. Luke questions the content in the curriculum: "But is it actually helping those students to be something? I don’t really know anymore" (Appendix Eleven, pg. 351, lines 909-910). The question he poses reflects his internal struggle – an ethical debate he encounters when he reflects on teaching.

Predicted grades represent another arena of discontent. Currently, grade boundaries are only set in the summer holidays when papers are being marked. This creates difficulties for teachers who have to make predictions at the start of the academic
year without clear criteria. Later, they will have their performance management assessed against their predicted targets:

“So, to be judged on your predictions (.) and to be setting students’ predictions for UCAS (.) or for sixth form entries, for a new course, for a new curriculum that they don’t give much exemplar writing on, they don’t give you much CPD on (.) it’s all kind of flapping around in the dark a little bit and you really don’t know (.) what’s going to happen on the third Thursday of August when the results comes out. Well, that creates an awful lot of pressure (.) it creates an awful lot of stress” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 346, lines 803-810).

He continues:

“You don’t quite know the level (.) there’s no level playing field. And what seems to be is that you could have a year group that is particularly strong (2) in comparison from one student from one year to the year before. One student could be much stronger because they moved the grade boundaries to fit that cohort” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 347, lines 812-816).

And finally:

“It’s not student-centric, it’s not balanced, it’s not fair, it’s not equal. It just undermines everything” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 347, lines 824-826).

Luke believes that the welfare of students, which he strongly feels is being overlooked, should be at the heart of the education system. The lack of focus on student welfare has implications for teaching staff:

“But you apply all those elements of the ambiguity of what the grades are, the lack of support, increased pressures, the class sizes, judgements on your pay, you’re not
going to be getting pay rise or a promotion because your class results weren’t good enough” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 348, lines 832-836). All of that, if you accumulate it all, plus the hours, the marking, the expectations, all of it, put all of that together (.).

those additional add-ons of (. ) lack of clarity or a lack of knowledge or a lack of knowing what the outcomes are going to be within a certain window, I think that’s pushed a lot of people a step too far and they’ve disengaged completely” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 348, lines 840-845).

The implications are that teaching staff are expected to give more. As Luke has illustrated, because teachers tend to care about the young people they teach, they will give more. In some cases, teachers will keep on giving until there is nothing left for their own personal life. Luke spoke at one point about a particular head teacher, who uses teachers in this way and then replaces them when they can no longer function within the system.

Luke’s narrative moves in a transient way between his High voice and his Low voice. This creates a feeling of momentum with regards to being a teacher. Luke reflects on this see-sawing nature:

“But then that does have its flip side. So even if you have a really bad year, come September, you have a whole new set of kids. So, whether you’ve been successful or whether you’ve failed, you’re always going to have a fresh set of kids. So, I find that quite refreshing. You’re never down for too long. You’ve just got to go again, go again, go again” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 367, lines 1283-1289).

“It’s still really exciting, you still don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow. So, while I have my day set up per period (. ) anything could happen (4) drugs, knives,
joy, could be sadness, kid going mental, kid coming in and giving you a Christmas present and you didn't even think that they liked you” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 370, lines 1358-1362).

“To connect it to rollercoaster, it’s a real sense of momentum. It’s really exciting sometimes. Sometimes your stomach does turn over because you don’t know how you’re going to deal with the next day or the next two days. You have parents coming in and trying to take you apart. You’ve got to stand really firm, you’ve got to hold on tight. You get all that done. You get off the rollercoaster and September comes round again and you get back on again” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 372, lines 1404-1411). “You just keep going on and on and on. Yeah, it’s overwhelmingly positive ((smiling)). With the challenges and hiccups along the way” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 372, lines 1413-1414).

These quotations indicate the uncertainty and frequently changing contexts in which teachers work.

4.7.15: Concluding Thoughts on Luke’s Narrative

Luke’s narrative gave him a space to reflect on his role. Despite the awareness Luke has developed about himself, particularly as a colleague over time, he reflected that he rarely allows himself to think about his role and what it means to teach. This seemed to extend further when Luke shared that he does not reflect on how well his vision of teaching matches what is expected of him as a professional. Perhaps this is the reason that so many tensions arise in his narrative, because they are stories and thoughts which he has not repeatedly shared. Luke’s narrative appears to have developed a richness and ‘thickness’ that narrative inquiry aspires to find and
develop. Narrative can be used to develop a deeper understanding of how someone constructs meaning from situations and events. In Luke’s case, one of the outcomes of the narrative research seems to have been taking the opportunity to reflect on his career, role and wellbeing. During Luke’s narrative interview, it became clearer that he is kept in teaching because of his enjoyment of working with young people and helping them to achieve. Despite this enjoyment, his overall narrative had an almost teetering feel which suggests that he might be on the brink of leaving the profession. This feeling was due to the discrepancies between his view of his role and the expectations on him.

During the member check, Luke shared that since Christmas, he had been reflecting on giving up his senior leadership role. He wanted to do this in order to focus on teaching. He had recently shared this decision with his school, who were supportive of his decision because they recognise him as a competent, confident teacher who has a positive influence on the school environment. The main reason for his decision was that he wanted to be more available and reliable at home, for example being able to pick up his daughter from the childminder’s. He also wanted to be able to provide for his pupils better, including staying on top of his marking. Lastly, he wanted to be a role model to his colleagues by being the best teacher he could be. Luke feels confident that he will go back into senior leadership in the future when his daughter is older because he believes he is capable of doing the role.
4.8: What is Working Well and What Could Be Even Better

This section will consider what is working well within current educational systems and what could be changed to benefit teacher wellbeing.

4.8.1: The Role of the Teacher

In the literature review, the multi-element nature of the role of a teacher was introduced. This connected to workload and expectations, and was found to correlate with occupational stress. Within the narratives shared in this thesis, the teachers seemed to find satisfaction in the multiple roles they were required to undertake each day when these roles related to pastoral needs of pupils. However, they did not include administrative tasks when talking about which parts of teaching they found most fulfilling.

Funding is related to expectations of teachers. Teaching unions advocate that teachers should not routinely undertake administrative tasks, deeming anything which is agreed to once as at risk of become a routine undertaking. However, the teachers involved in this research indicate that they want the best for the young people in their care. If something is within their capacity, they are likely to do it so that their pupils do not miss out. Thus, the implication is that teachers will be required to say ‘no’ more often. This in turn will impact their own wellbeing and how they view themselves as a teacher. This may lead to disillusionment because of differences between their own expectations of themselves, what the system is able to provide and a desire to meet the needs of young people.
4.8.2: Undermining Wellbeing

The teachers within the study spoke about difficult situations within schools. Even when pupil behaviour was particularly challenging, none of the teachers identified children as being a stressor for them personally. Perhaps this was because they felt it was an unspeakable acknowledgement. I think it is more likely that these teachers understand that pupil behaviour is a form of communication. Each participant understood the need for consistency in their manner when working with young people. They also acknowledged the difficult home situations their students may come from; these teachers felt that they may be the only reliable, nurturing adult offering guidance to these young people.

The two teachers currently teaching in England spoke at length about the systems in place which were stressful. This included inadequate teaching staff receiving positive references in order to quickly move them on from their current school. Consequently, their positive references meant they secured teaching jobs in other local schools. Both Saoirse and Luke also referred to the amount of work required to maintain the status of a successful teacher. Assessments and resulting action to ensure good grades seemed to be a considerable stress factor, as well as bringing culpable staff through capability measures. However, this final point related to management responsibilities rather being a class-based stressor.

It is clear from the stress which teachers experience that the education system needs to change. Ofsted seem to be responding and listening to teachers. The newest Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2019) aims to alleviate some of the frustration
teachers feel regarding workload, in relation to administration and data collection. For instance, Ofsted (2019, pg. 17) states that “Teachers and leaders use assessment well, for example to help learners embed and use knowledge fluently or to check understanding and inform teaching. Leaders understand the limitations of assessment and do not use it in a way that creates unnecessary burdens for staff or learners.” These amendments are aimed at giving teachers more freedom to focus on teaching, which is something all three participants said that they wanted. In reality, it still remains to be seen how this will impact teachers.

4.8.3: Interactions with Others

Schools are complicated systems in which to work. Teachers interact with pupils, other practitioners and parents. As previously stated, working with students was recognised to be a positive, uplifting and privileged position for the participants. Interactions with parents were occasional challenging, although these were exceptional incidents. Something which could be detrimental to or positively influence socio-psychological wellbeing was interactions with colleagues. When these were supportive and collaborative, wellbeing seemed to be more positive. When there were difficulties in staff relationships, these appeared to have a severely negative impact on wellbeing. In the narratives shared, this was particularly the case when there was a negative experience resulting from an interaction with a more senior member of staff who had been dismissive or disrespectful. The importance of relationships was one of the main findings in a study by Harris (2002), which investigated effective leadership in schools which were in challenging situations. The research found that the most effective type of leadership involved working
collaboratively and empowering others to act. These senior leaders viewed the school as part of the community and fostered positive relationships with those studying and working inside, as well as other community members.

Negative staff interactions can lead to teachers feeling disillusioned about their teaching and how valued they feel as a staff member. It can also lead to a disparity between their ideal and actual ‘selves’ (Cooper and Olson, 1996; Reynolds, 1996) as teachers because of what may be inadvertently modelled to young people about relationships and how to interact with other people. Constant negative interactions with colleagues can result in a sense of poor wellbeing due to feeling worried, anxious and stressed on a long-term basis. Thus, the physical and emotional availability of resources can positively or negatively influence the environment in which teachers work. Having supportive and authentic relationships with colleagues can add to morale even when working conditions are not ideal.

4.8.4: What Protects Wellbeing?

Relationships with colleagues featured as a significant protective factor when teachers felt they could rely upon and talk to them. A supportive network of family and friends outside of work was also found to be a protective factor. Within this research, support from home and inside work was a prevalent feature in each narrative. The implications for the workplace are that the best people in the right positions can nurture others to develop as practitioners. These supportive networks, along with improved and more efficient school systems, were reported to increase
the enjoyment of teaching. This is because teachers felt that they would have more time to plan interesting lessons if their time was used more efficiently.
Chapter Five: Discussion

The research began by posing two questions. These were:

1) What are teachers' experiences of the daily demands of their role across their career?

2) What supports and undermines the wellbeing of teachers?

With regards to the first research question, the narratives illuminated the ups and downs of each system in which each participant was working. The narrative interview questions, adapted from McAdams (1993), meant each storyteller was able to share their experience of the daily demands of teaching. The analogy of a roller coaster highlighted these highs and lows. The narratives also illustrated these across the course of their career. There was an uncertainty and precariousness about teaching within the English education system on a daily basis and across time. A thread which ran across each narrative was the significance of the children and young people who were in the care of each participant. In this discussion, I will explore the implications of this finding by highlighting the places where there was overlap in the narratives which were shared.

In answer to the second research question, the narratives highlighted the importance of relationships. Children and young people were a central aspect in each story; they are the reason the participants in this research are teaching. It was important to each storyteller to be able to holistically nurture their students because that is how the teachers, within this study, saw their role. Within each narrative, perceptions and values related to each participants' view of their role and identity as a teacher and these were closely linked to wellbeing. Relationships outside of the classroom also
impacted on wellbeing; colleagues, especially peers and mentors, as well as family. When negative experiences were shared within the narratives, relationships supported wellbeing by reassuring and reaffirming the storyteller. The narratives, within this research, indicate the systems and structures in the English education system have a tendency to undermine teacher wellbeing. Within my daily practice, as a trainee educational psychologist, I believe the environments in which children and young people exist have a significant impact on their whole being. In the same way, it is the systems which teachers are part of which can support or undermine their wellbeing. Therefore, there is a need to be attentive to the environment in which teachers work and teach. In this discussion I will explore in some depth what supports and undermines the wellbeing of teachers and the implications for educational policy and practice.

5.1: Setting the scene

Having looked at the three accounts shared, I am going to structure this discussion in answer to the research questions by grouping the individual voices together into the following overarching voices:

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I have grouped the individual voices together because them seem to cohesively fit together within these overarching voices. The Positive voice sounded like the high points in each participant’s career or connected to positive parts of their role. The Negative voice in each narrative seemed to relate to the challenges which they faced. These challenges were professional and were also sometimes associated with difficulties at home caused by the demands of the job. The Role of a Teacher voice resonated in each account as the participants shared their views on the purpose of their role. The Protective Factors voice ran throughout each story, as factors inside and outside of work which helped each individual to manage their wellbeing. The Transformation voice in each narrative signalled a change. This was personal to each participant and seemed to signify an internal change in their understanding and acceptance of where they are in their careers. Each participant identified with Transformation when they vocalised their awareness that they were moving forward in a way which they valued but which may not necessarily be appreciated by others. The voice of Transformation seemed to be connected to experience, contentment and acceptance.

I will draw out voices which were evident across each of the participant’s interviews and highlight similarities. Initially, I will illustrate where the overarching voices were present in all three narratives. Then, I will highlight overarching voices which were present in more than one account. Next, I will summarise my main findings. Finally, I
will consider the implications which the research may have for educational policy and practice.

5.2: Harmony Across All Three Narratives

There were a number of similarities across each of the narratives. Una, Saoirse and Luke each had a background story which explained their connection to teaching. I wonder if these long-term links are part of the reason they have remained in teaching. This is because teaching seems to be an embedded part of their identity and therefore it is more difficult to give up, even at times when they might seriously consider this as an option. Even though being a teacher is an established part of their identity, two of the participants gave serious consideration to leaving the profession. Saoirse felt unskilled for alternative roles and Luke believed he would retrain, if he left teaching. Luke also acknowledged that if he left teaching in the future, he would transfer to something connected to education. The primary factor which kept each of them in teaching was their enjoyment of teaching. However, this is only one aspect of their role.

5.2.1: The Role of a Teacher

Each participant alluded to the role of the teacher as a multi-functional one. This ranged from including aspects of social work, with regards to safeguarding responsibilities and pastoral needs, to meeting basic medical needs when children in class are unwell, particularly in the Early Years. It also included a nurturing, encouraging, parental type role, due to the amount of time spent with their students.
Luke summarised this by using the term ‘loco parentis’ which indicates how many roles a teacher needs to juggle to meet the needs of students in their care.

The Role of a Teacher voice was present in all three narratives. As the narratives unfolded, it became apparent that each teacher was concerned about and wanted to develop young people in a holistic way, as opposed to merely moving students onto the next curriculum level. In Una and Saoirse’s narratives, this holistic view of the student was identified early in the interview. Within Luke’s narrative, this person-centred nature of his teacher identity evolved more slowly, because initially, he seemed competency and leadership focused. As Luke spoke, he revealed more about the different roles required of him at any one time. At the centre of the different roles he takes on as a teacher, is pedagogy and young people. The holistic way each participant understands pupils is informed by the environments they are being educated in, having knowledge about their home situations, and understanding students as people with their own views and priorities. Each participant illustrated that they meet young people where they currently are so they can challenge them gently and offer a different perspective to help move their learning forward. In my view, these are values intrinsically tied to the role of a teacher, because they help to develop a young person’s sense of self. As securely as the participants hold the view that this is important, these are not the measures of what makes successful teaching and learning within the current English education system. Systems attempt to put individuals into boxes which are not uniquely sculpted to them. The participants critiqued current educational practice for lacking a person-centred approach in practice.
In the literature review, Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen (2010) touched on the number of roles a teacher undertakes and the difficulties this can create. However, in the narratives shared in this current research, maintaining multiple roles appeared to be a positive feature of a teacher’s role. The caveat is that these roles were focused on the pastoral side of teaching, rather than additional roles seen to be separate from being a teacher, such as being a data administrator. This corresponds to the workplace factors highlighted by Aelterman, Engels, Van Petegem and Verhaeghe, (2007) which impact on wellbeing and stress. They stated that job description, conflict within the role and ambiguity about job role as some of the most frequently cited workplace factors which influence teacher wellbeing. Without additional assistance to complete non-teaching roles, which costs money, teachers are expected to complete these tasks outside of teaching hours. With all the other demands on them, these tasks produce unnecessary, additional pressure on teachers (The Secret Teacher, 2013).

5.2.2: Best Moments

Another commonality across the narratives related to the type of Best Moments each teacher shared. These related to how students are learning as whole beings rather than a focus on academic grades. Each participant presented themselves as holding the best interests of young people central to their beliefs as teachers through the narratives they shared. Young people are, and should be, at the heart of all decisions which are made on their behalf and which will impact them (Appendix Eleven, pg. 360, line 1118; DfE, 2015a). Una, Saoirse and Luke all spoke about their
pupils’ achievements as important. However, they each also seemed to experience a deep satisfaction with the relationships and rapport they build with young people. The importance of relationships was highlighted in research by Jennings (2014) which studied psychosocial factors and impact on students. It is these relationships which may keep them in their jobs and keep them motivated.

5.2.3: Significant People

Significant people and relationships within school were areas which each teacher identified with as important to their wellbeing (Sayer, Beaven, Stringer and Hermena, 2013). These were largely positive influences. However, there were some cases in which negative experiences led to learning points about characteristics these teachers did not want to identify as, either as teachers or colleagues. Each teacher spoke about the significance of a mentor at the start of their career. Una and Luke also spoke about the impact of another staff member as they were developing their leadership skills outside of the classroom. These reflections indicate the importance of mentors and colleagues as influencing factors for developing the future workforce of teachers.

With teachers leaving the profession, the need to fill mentor roles exerts further pressure on remaining staff to fill positions when they may feel unable to dedicate the required and necessary time. Recruitment problems may also lead to less skilled people taking on these positions because of a need to fill them. In the narratives shared, the negative experiences have been formative, and the participants have been able to reflect on the attributes they want to incorporate into their role as
teachers. However, more newly qualified teachers may not necessarily have the time to reflect on what is being asked of them by middle and senior management. In certain circumstances, this may leave them vulnerable to burnout (Kyriacou, 1987) before they have developed the skills or experience to recognise how best to deal with these situations.

The lack of time and heavy work demands on a teacher may be compounded by their responsibilities at home. Consequently, this may lead professionals at the start of their career to leave the profession early. Each participant reflected on significant people outside of their work life. For Una, this was her daughter. Whilst she found it difficult to pinpoint the difference becoming a mother had had on her teaching, she reflected that it had subtly changed her as a practitioner. Saoirse spoke of the impact her parents had had on her belief in herself as a teacher when she was questioning her career choices. She also elaborated on how her husband helps and encourages her to recognise the need to put her health first, before her class and job. Saoirse’s narrative demonstrated the continual internal dilemma she experiences when trying to put her health before the needs of her class. Luke’s story revealed the impact his wife had on his career choices, with regards to safety concerns for him as they planned to have children. The birth of Luke’s daughter and his family commitments indicate that he now has firmer boundaries regarding this than prior to being a parent. His narrative indicated an underlying, subtle dissatisfaction with being unable to give everything to work and the same amount of energy to his responsibilities at home.
Luke also spoke about the impact of significant people in his career. He particularly praised his mentor, who had educated Luke on the need to be able to say “No.” Despite his awareness of being unable to do everything, there was still a sense that Luke experiences some discontent with this. Luke is clearly happy with his choice to put his family first. However, Luke’s caring attitude towards young people gives an impression that he wants to help them even further.

5.2.4: Acceptance

Finally, a sentiment that was present in all three narratives was the choice to focus on teaching, although in Luke’s this only came to the fore during the member check. I wonder how much impact, if any, Luke’s involvement in this research had on him starting to think about leaving his senior leadership position to focus on teaching. Although that might be giving too much credit to the narrative process, I think it is a point worth considering. This is because personal stories “are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992, pg. 1) and it was the first time Luke had shared his as a coherent narrative. Each participant had experienced either middle or senior leadership roles. Una, Saoirse and Luke were each in a position to decide to focus their efforts on classroom teaching. Each seemed to experience greater fulfilment as teachers at this time in their career due to some type of transformation.

Each narrative clearly held a voice of Transformation. For Una, it related directly to a Realisation that she has time to develop as a teacher and leader. In Saoirse’s account, it connected to a Recognition of needing to meet her own needs in order to be present and attuned to the needs of her class. Within Luke’s narrative, this
Transformation revealed itself as Balance. Having family responsibilities outside of work can create difficulties in terms of prioritising all that is important to him. In each narrative, children or partners led to a transformation for each participant, which appears to have had a positive impact on their wellbeing. Relationships outside of the workplace have created a shift in focus in each narrative. While working with young people remains a priority, parental and partner roles outside of work have changed the perspectives of each participant with regards to how they use their time. This choice needs to be made because the teaching experiences shared demonstrate that teachers could give endlessly and yet there would still be more to do.

I think that part of the voice of Transformation is connected to acceptance. Each participant seemed to be at a point in their career where they had reached acceptance. Perhaps this is connected to an internal recognition that they believe they are good at what they do, despite the tensions and uncertainties in their day to day experience of teaching. This connection between experience and competence is likely to make them skilled practitioners. I imagine that they are each skilled at taking on the required roles expected of them at any given time, due to their self-awareness. Their ability to reflect on how they manage young people, as well as knowing the impact that interactions around their pupils have on their long-term emotional outcomes (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010), are embedded skills which may have been refined over time.
As experienced practitioners, the participants seem to have reached a level of competence and awareness that they are currently in the right place for them. Una and Luke both spoke of feeling capable of taking on more senior roles again in the future. Saoirse indicated that her aspirations have always been to be the best teacher she could possibly be. For Una and Luke, perhaps the shift to focus solely on teaching again has occurred partly because of the commitment required to do a management role ‘well’. This would, of course, relate to how they each interpret what it means to do a role ‘well’. Perhaps more significantly, this shift has occurred because of how much they each enjoy teaching, a point which clearly came across in each of their narratives.

5.3: A Harmonious Duet

Beyond these overarching connections, Saoirse and Luke both had further similarities in the voices which echoed across both their narratives. Perhaps this relates to them both currently teaching in English state schools. Una has moved on to a school where her wellbeing is supported by the systems in place, in particular by her colleagues. Feeling a sense of belonging and autonomy in the workplace is significant to wellbeing (Sayer, Beaven, Stringer and Hermena, 2013; Roffey, 2013, 2012). There were very few tensions across her narrative and this may be because she is working in her ideal school, with a variety of resources on hand to support her in developing her teaching. By comparison, Saoirse and Luke were more united, in ways which will now be outlined.
5.3.1: Overcoming Turbulent Times

Overcoming adversity featured in the prevalent Negative voices within Saoirse’s and Luke’s narratives. They each indicated that these resulted from adults they work with and systems they work within. Despite these Negative voices, their narratives still promoted the positive attributes of being a teacher: the rewarding and privileged experience of working with children and young people (Appendix Eight, pg. 283, lines 984-985; Appendix Eleven, pg. 364, line 1221). This led them both to identify the title of their experiences as closely resonating with riding on a roller-coaster, due to the fast-paced momentum that each day, term and academic year can include for a teacher.

There was a real sense in Saoirse and Luke’s narratives that they could each keep giving to school and their students endlessly. Even when they would have expended all their energy, skill and ability, they seem to believe that their pupils would still need more. This is perhaps a consequence of working in systems that involve people because Saoirse and Luke’s own needs and those of their pupils change on a regular basis. This is not simply due to educational expectations, but also because of the micro, meso and exosystems in which students and practitioners exist (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Both Saoirse and Luke have found through experience that they can say ‘no’ and they are confident to question what is being asked of them and their students. Their difficulties in saying ‘no’ appear to relate to wanting the best for the young people in their care. Therefore, this is a continual, internal compromise they must make because they are aware that student needs are greater than their capacity to meet them all consistently.
The negative experiences described by Saoirse and Luke included: bullying tactics by colleagues, as well as physical and verbal threats and actions by pupils. During the interviews, neither participant was solely focused on the challenges within their work; they both had a Positive voice, as well as a Negative one. They were open about the challenging experiences, but they were also keen to highlight how delightful they found it at times to work with young people. This was apparent in their vocabulary, manner, tone and body language.

Something else which was similar between Saoirse and Luke’s narratives was that they did not identify a worst moment in their teaching career. Instead, they each focused on a time span. This indicated that it was the constant pressure and build-up of events which finally wore down their resilience and ability to bounce back from a situation. It was at these times that Saoirse and Luke both needed to rely on their external resources to support them and give them perspective on the situation. These external resources, combined with the participants’ reflective nature, seem to be what ultimately has kept them in the teaching profession. Not all teachers would have access to similar external resources when they find themselves in these types of situations. Unlike Saoirse and Luke, they may not have access to external social support, resources and tools when they find themselves at the lowest point in their careers.

5.3.2: ‘Spoon-feeding’

Another area which resonated between Saoirse’s and Luke’s narrative was ‘spoon-feeding’. This directly related to guaranteeing that curriculum content was covered to
ensure students could successfully sit their formal exams. It is interesting to note that this occurred in both primary and secondary settings. Whilst this was missing from Una’s narrative, this may be due to her taught subject being Drama and the fact that she no longer teaches within an English state school setting.

Saoirse spoke of the untenable pressure on Year Two pupils to prepare them to take SATS, and the resultant restricted curriculum. This lack of creativity develops as children move from the Early Years, which encourages investigation, to more formal Key Stage One environments which prepare them to take their first set of exams at the age of seven (Robinson and Aronica, 2015). However, new statutory baseline assessments are due to be introduced in Reception classes from September 2019 (OFSTED, 2017). The Analysis chapter included extracts from both Saoirse’s and Luke’s narratives about the unrealistic expectations of curriculum content to be covered in exam year groups. Their full transcriptions further detailed the expectations and impact these have on students and staff, which negatively influenced wellbeing.

Linked to narrow curriculums was an element of ‘fakeness’ which Saoirse and Luke both articulated when they spoke of preparing pupils to take and achieve results in exams. This was centred on the falseness of what was being achieved. It did not stem from wanting to hold pupils back, but rather it focused on what pupils were not being taught, due to ensuring they had what was required to pass the given assessments. Both teachers alluded to a feeling of inadequacy, which related to the absence of a broad and balanced curriculum, when preparing students for statutory
exams. In preparing pupils to pass a test, Saoirse and Luke, recognised what their pupils were missing out on. There was also a recognition that because a test had been passed did not necessarily mean the pupil had fully understood what they had been taught; the skill they were excelling at was passing the test. The negative impact of high-stakes testing has been found in previous research. Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) interviewed teachers who spoke about the negative effects of these types of exam on pupil learning. One teacher used the term “educational malpractice” (Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas, 2000, pg. 392) to describe the impact of high-stakes testing on knowledge and learning.

The concerns which Saoirse and Luke have with the current examination system relates to the skills they are teaching. Pupils are achieving if they can memorise and apply what they have learnt, rather than developing independent problem-solving skills. There is pressure within the education system to learn the set content and pass an exam on it within a given timeframe. Acquiring independent exploration and problem-solving skills takes a considerable amount of time to master. Carroll (1963) wrote about a model of learning based on a mastery learning approach. He argued that all students can learn if they are given a sufficient amount of time. An additional benefit of a mastery learning approach is the development of perseverance (Zimmerman and Dibenedetto, 2008). Current assessments do not allow teachers or students the luxury of developing these skills in line with their developmental stage, adding and removing supporting scaffolds as required. Consequently, this results in a rush to cover content and spoon-feed information to pass tests within the required time-frame. For Saoirse and Luke, the narrative interviews highlighted how they
grapple with understanding the purpose of what they are teaching students and how they are preparing them for the next phase of school or life after education.

5.3.3: Cutbacks

The final area where Saoirse and Luke overlapped was in mentioning funding. Una spoke about her current school being well-resourced. Saoirse and Luke spoke about the tensions which exist regarding funding.

Saoirse shared that a lack of teaching assistants means that she has to take on additional tasks outside of school hours. While these tasks are not direct teaching activities, they influence the environment created for children to learn in. Examples of these activities include cutting and sticking, as well as creating displays or learning walls, which children can independently refer to in relation to their current learning. Saoirse has found a reduction in teaching assistants means that classes have to share these valuable human resources. As teaching assistants are paid to work school hours, whatever does not get completed in this time is left to be finished by the teacher, on top of planning, marking, setting and reviewing targets.

Luke also referred to funding with regards to the money generated by sixth forms and how these finances are spread across whole secondary schools. Additionally, he spoke about the struggle to maintain smaller class sizes with a focus on the benefit for pupils rather than the teachers. This point also included the practical elements of what happens when additional pupils are added to a classroom which is already at
capacity. Again, in current widespread media narratives, the details behind the headlines about ‘funding cuts’ are not always explored.

5.4: Composing an Arrangement

The narratives shared in this research highlighted different voices existing in relation to the current demand of the job. The current context informs each teacher of what is needed of them in a particular moment; this connects to Goffman’s theory on identity (1963, 1959). This changing landscape is something which these teachers indicate that they are able to adjust to through the narratives they have shared. This is likely to be a skill which has developed over time whilst being a teacher. Constantly changing landscapes presented in the narratives give a sense of teachers having to juggle different ‘masks’ or identities depending on how they need to present at any given moment (Goffman, 1959). Within the space of a day, a teacher may need to shift from a playful, engaging performer in front of their class, to a listening, attentive support for a colleague, to admonishing a pupil in a constructive and nurturing way, to formally giving feedback to parents. How quickly the changes between different aspects of being a teacher are required cannot be predicted. This is because the teacher is responding to the current context and information, then adapting accordingly.

While each narrative engaged with different voices, Una’s and Saoirse’s narratives seemed to be more at ease, even during the challenging parts, when compared to Luke’s story. I found points of comparison between Saoirse’s and Luke’s stories which I did not recognise in Una’s. I wondered if the difference originated from Una’s
and Saoirse’s narratives already having been ‘thicker’, or more familiar stories, because they had previously shared them (Geertz, 1973). If this is the case, perhaps Luke’s narrative was less familiar to him because he may not have previously spoken it aloud as a whole, coherent story.

While the experience of sharing each narrative seemed to be held in positive regard by each participant, it seemed the most valuable to Luke, and he acknowledged that he rarely reflects in this depth about teaching. The final thing I felt may have made a difference to the narratives was the time of year I spoke to each teacher. Una and Saoirse were interviewed at the start of the academic year. Due to work commitments, Luke was unable to meet with me until the end of the autumn term. This is a term which teachers may identify as being the hardest, due to the number of weeks, the baseline data and assessments which need to be completed and the change in the season, which results in fewer hours of daylight.

The member checks were completed following the spring half term break. When I spoke to Luke at this later date, he sounded different. In the narrative interview, he was articulate in his speech, but the tensions within his narrative gave the impression that he might be inclined to leave if he had enough of classroom teaching. At the member check, this no longer seemed to be the case, he sounded positive about his planned move to classroom teaching without additional responsibilities.
5.5: What About Wellbeing?

At the outset, reference was made to socio-psychological wellbeing (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010; Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999). The teachers in this research identified the young people they are working with as the main element, within work, which allows their socio-psychological wellbeing to be met. Other sources which help socio-psychological wellbeing in school are connected to the professional relationships and sense of belonging which these teachers experience in their daily working life (Soini, Pyhalto and Pietarinen, 2010).

In Una’s narrative, she described times when her relationships with students’ parents can be difficult, although she acknowledged that these were exceptional cases. Saoirse detailed the impact that negative working relations can have on wellbeing and a teacher’s autonomy. In comparison, in Saoirse’s current school, she has developed bonds with the people she is working with, which are supportive of her socio-psychological wellbeing, despite the consequences of their most recent Ofsted visit. The support networks these three teachers have within and outside of work contribute to their current socio-psychological wellbeing in a positive way.

The narratives explored in this research indicated that the systems the teachers in England must work within do not support positive socio-psychological wellbeing as well as they could. This is predominantly the case when the teacher is based in exam year groups, due to the lack of autonomy teachers have over what they teach in these year groups. This lack of autonomy and the negative impact on wellbeing, as well as job satisfaction, was evident in Saoirse’s account when she spoke about
preparing her class for Year Two SATS. This was also apparent in Luke’s narrative, when he spoke about preparing students to take GCSEs and A-Levels. From the narratives shared, it would seem that systems outside of England are more successful in supporting the socio-psychological wellbeing of teachers. However, clearly this is based upon a very small sample of international schools, further research with more participants would be required before this could be ascertained for certain. Each of the narrators experience positive socio-psychological wellbeing to some degree. However, the narratives Saoirse and Luke shared give the impression that their wellbeing is more likely to fluctuate.

Saoirse expressed a more appreciative view of how schools are managed and the professional development which teachers receive in Canada; however, it is difficult to secure a full-time teaching role. Una indicated that she has the resources needed to focus on improving her teaching. She is able to access support, which allows her to focus on improving her teaching skills, and can experience growth as a learner herself in her current setting. Luke is appreciative of the individual nature of his school, as opposed to the conglomerate nature of an academy, which he has previously experienced. Even so, his socio-psychological wellbeing needs are not fully met because of the continual threat of being taken over by an academy if results drop. With shifting boundary grades only being confirmed during the summer holidays, this exerts continual pressure because of the precariousness of the situation.
The stories shared within this research indicate that teaching can be challenging and rewarding. There appears to be a continual battle between experiences which challenge and reward teachers. The stressors identified within the narratives seemed to be linked to aspects of the education system. The consistent change between stress and reward which participants experience in their work influence how they judge their wellbeing to be at any one time.

5.6: Interventions

The literature review focused on mindfulness and ‘human givens’ as new interventions which help teachers to manage their wellbeing in a positive manner. Mindfulness aims to bring attention to the present moment and to ‘empty’ the mind with an emphasis on relaxation and an acceptance of thoughts and feelings. ‘Human givens’, developed from humanistic psychology, focuses on the need to have a healthy mind as well as a healthy body, so that the whole person functions holistically. The teachers in the narrative interviews spoke a great deal about attempting to create a balance between their work and home life commitments. Therefore, approaches such as mindfulness and ‘human givens’ may be beneficial to help manage and create better, more positive wellbeing. However, none of the participants spoke about the use of formal interventions to help with their wellbeing. Instead, their focus was on other resources, such as relationships, which seemed to help improve their wellbeing.

I am unconvinced that additional interventions are what teachers need to improve their wellbeing. Approaches such as mindfulness may be useful in education, but
they are unlikely to ‘solve’ all the issues which have been raised in the narratives. However, if the systems were supportive and based on appreciative procedures rather than critical ones, it is likely that teachers would have less need for interventions.

Whilst interventions may be unable to ‘solve’ the highlighted issues within the current education system, I do think it would be beneficial for trainee teachers to be introduced to approaches such as mindfulness and ‘human givens’ during their training period. The skills advocated by these, including attention, awareness and empathy, could then be used for personal or work purposes and to disseminate to pupils, providing that the practitioner has had enough training and practice.

With regards to implications for practice where the wellbeing of teachers is concerned, there may be a place for interventions to maintain positive wellbeing. However, narratives in this research clarifies that, rather than introducing additional work in the form of interventions, less precarious working environments, which is linked to the roller-coaster metaphor used by two of the participants, would significantly support these teachers in having a better sense of wellbeing. For me, having interventions to improve teachers’ wellbeing puts the onus on practitioners to adjust to stressful environments, rather than reducing the factors which cause stress.

As an educational psychologist, when working directly with a young person or collaboratively with their network, from a systemic perspective, the problem-solving in my practice results from attempting to offer a different perspective and seeking ways in which the systems around the young person can be adapted. Therefore, it is
logical to make the assertion that if the systems around teachers were more efficient, providing them with autonomy and allowing them to be more creative in their practice, that the impact on their wellbeing would be increasingly positive. The teacher who is currently working abroad spoke about the systems in place which support her wellbeing effectively. This included: having access to resources, a sense of feeling valued and having autonomy over her teaching.

5.7: The Headline News

Having read the literature and completed my own research, I will summarise my main findings and then make recommendations which would benefit teachers’ wellbeing.

There were four main findings from this research. Firstly, teachers take pride in their role as educators of children and young people. Secondly, teaching as a career is both positive and challenging. Thirdly, the various pressures in the system regarding performance, target-setting and curriculum restriction have a negative impact on wellbeing. Fourthly, teachers want to experience professional discretion and continuing professional development. Feeling proud to be a teacher and enjoying aspects of the role are areas which are working well and which help practitioners to maintain positive wellbeing. However, this is precarious as evidenced in the ‘roller-coaster’ metaphor. The challenging parts of the role are areas which could be improved, which would have a positive impact on teacher wellbeing. Strategies for improving this in practice will be addressed in the next section.
5.8: Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

5.8.1: The Role of the Teacher

Teacher’s positive sense of identity seems to be linked to their capacity to meet the holistic needs of children and young people in their care. They are happy with multiple roles in this respect. However, to do this they need time, energy and emotional capacity. They feel bad when they feel they are neglecting this aspect of their role. Therefore, relationships and pastoral care need to be more valued by the educational system.

5.8.2: Support at Challenging Times

Teachers would benefit from supportive networks in school through access to supervision, which would support them during challenging experiences. There are a variety of supervision models which may be useful to teachers (Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell and Louw, 1992). Peer supervision would be helpful because it connects to the importance that supportive professional relationships had within the narratives shared in this research. This would require an open, trusting, communicative culture without judgement. It would also require practitioners to receive training so that they could alternate between taking the role of ‘problem-holder’ and ‘facilitator’. A drawback to peer supervision may be arranging a time suitable for all parties. An alternative to peer supervision, which may have other positive benefits, would be supervision facilitated by an educational psychologist. Having an educational psychologist as a facilitator for supervision may allow an alternative perspective on the presenting situation which may not be possible when all parties are from within the school system.
5.8.3: Trust and Professional Discretion

The value of the role of a teacher could be increased by replacing statutory testing with teacher assessments. This would demonstrate trust in teachers knowing their students’ strengths and needs. By giving teachers professional discretion in how they implement the curriculum, they would be able to personalise learning to the cohort they are teaching. Using teacher assessment instead of current statutory testing would help shift the focus of teachers and students away from a testing culture, where the emphasis is on passing exams, to a knowledge culture. A knowledge culture would be one where students focus on developing understanding and independence. This is something which narrow curriculums in a testing culture do not have the time to encourage. Arguably, the trusting use of teacher assessments would help to reduce pressure on students and teachers, particularly within exam year groups. Consequently, this would result in improved wellbeing for both practitioners and students.

5.8.4: Continuing Professional Development

Continuing professional development should begin with initial teacher training and be maintained for the duration of teachers’ careers. Initially, teachers need thorough training for the role which they are undertaking. Once qualified, teachers should be offered ongoing opportunities, so they can continue to learn and grow as educators. Having continuing professional development is helpful for their professional identities and competence, both of which impact on their wellbeing. Investing in teachers has benefits for the practitioner personally and the education system in which they
practice. Teachers should experience ongoing learning and development opportunities, so they can feel valued as practitioners. Providing continuing professional development would heed the recommendations to provide support at challenging times and to trust in the professional discretion of teachers.

5.9: Aims

The aims of this research were to highlight how teachers view their role, what empowers and stresses them, and what systems help and hinder their wellbeing. This thesis is important because evidence within the literature indicates that if teachers have healthy wellbeing, this will have positive consequences on their students. Central to each teacher in this research was the pupil-centricness of their role. They see pupils as key to their teaching and role. When students were mentioned as a stressor, this was in an empathic manner as the teachers expected to find pupils challenging at times. When the teachers spoke of other adults and systems in place regarding assessment, predicted grades and administrative tasks, which they did not see as connected to their role, these were the issues which were at the pinnacle of stressful or worst moments during their career.

5.10: Reflections on How I Conducted the Narrative Interviews

Simply following the steps to the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982) did not ensure the interviews I conducted would yield rich data or good research. By applying a person-centred approach (Rogers, 1980) my focus in each interview was on establishing a rapport based on compassion, empathy and active listening. I offered a non-judgmental stance by using curiosity as an approach to clarify, where necessary,
points to help with my interpretations of their story. It was in that attentive space that each participant was encouraged to allow their story to emerge. It is also the approach which I utilise within my daily practice as a trainee educational psychologist when speaking with young people, care-givers and staff in a bid to triangulate viewpoints.

Created within each interview was relationship characterised by a climate in which the participant recognised the importance of the story which they had to share with me. On reflection, these elements were conveyed to each participant mainly through non-verbal communication. My bodily position, and facial expressions, communicated a genuine willingness to relate to the participant and conveyed a range of emotions. Experience has taught me that there is a candidness in these types of interactions which is recognised by the person I am interacting with in that moment. My way of being present with each participant communicated to them an attitude of wanting to be authentically engaged with them in a relational manner. Congruence, acceptance and empathetic understanding (Rogers, 1980) provided an environment which allowed each participant to share stories which consequently were powerful and rich in detail.

Within the research, I adhered to the ethical principles of protecting the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of each participant within the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018). In addition, because I was conducting Narrative Research I also focused on several key issues related to ethical considerations. Namely: ownership, intellectual property rights and
interpretation, confidentiality, informed consent, honesty, as well as how to avoid deception, harm and exploitation of participants (Plummer 2001). In my preparation for the research I was focussed on following ethical guidelines, and this included ensuring that I gained and retained informed consent from each participant.

Within the narrative interviews, I used a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions. This meant each participant had freedom to tell their story in the way they preferred. I listened as each participant told their story and asked other open-ended questions, based on what they said, when there was a natural pause after they had answered my primary question. I believe this allowed each participant to tell their story and to direct it in the way they wanted because they had time, as well as space, to talk. By applying the British Psychological Society’s ethical principles (BPS, 2018 and 2014), and addressing Plummer’s (2001) guidance with specific regard to Narrative Research, I took reasonable steps to prevent harm and minimise distress through, securing informed consent, provision of a sensitive interview context, delegating decisions to participants; for instance, the venue of the interview was chosen by participants. Following analysis of the interviews, I offered each participant a member check. This gave them the opportunity to ensure I had understood the meanings which they had intended to communicate.

5.11: Limitations

Having used a narrative approach and analysis, a limitation of this type of study is the number of participants it is possible to work with. Due to the large amount of data generated, only three participants were interviewed. Their narratives are specific to
the social discourses prevalent with teaching. Their narratives are open to interpretation and in order to demonstrate how I developed my interpretations, I maintained a research diary and added detailed comments in the right-hand column of each transcript. The comments included in the transcriptions were included to create a thought trail and explanation for the conclusions which I reached, in order to assist readers in understanding my judgements. Finally, to make the research more robust, I completed a member check with each participant to share my findings. Reassuringly, each participant felt that I had summarised the essence of how they experienced teaching.

The small number of participants could be viewed as a limitation, because the shared narratives are specific to each teacher and therefore are not generalisable. However, as stated at the outset, a wider meaning may be taken from each teacher’s story. Whilst the focus is on the individual, the narrative shared may “contribute to knowledge in more general ways” (Marecek, 2007, pg. 63). This would be particularly true, if the narratives shared resonate with other teaching professionals.

A potential limitation is the potential bias of knowing the participants in this study. As I was transparent about my knowledge of the participants, I feel that knowing them, but not working with them in a professional capacity, helped each participant to feel safe and comfortable to give a frank account of their experiences as a teacher.

A final limitation which may be identified relates to the assumptions I outlined at the start of the research. I listed my personal assumptions, including a belief that
teachers’ careers and their ability to teach are influenced by their wellbeing. I also acknowledged that I felt that, in some education systems, teachers’ wellbeing is protected. Finally, I was conscious of my belief that at a national level in England, there are government documents which lead to conflicted ideas about teacher wellbeing. The findings from my research would, to a degree, appear to validate these beliefs. Thus, a limitation could be identified that I found evidence to support my assumptions because I was looking for evidence to reinforce my viewpoint, and this may have clouded my judgements and interpretations. To this assertion, I would respond that I aimed to be fully authentic in the recordings kept in my research diary, so that I would be aware of how my thoughts were developing, as well as to allow readers to analyse my thought processes. Thus, I believe that the conclusions I have drawn are trustworthy (Guba, 1981) and reliable. In addition, I would add that each participant spoke about both positive and negative experiences during their teaching careers. The narratives and analysis highlight both the positive and negative experiences.

5.12: Concluding Thoughts

In this study, I explored the experiences which teachers encounter on a daily basis during their career. In addition, I also explored what supports and undermines the wellbeing of teachers. The findings revealed that teachers are proud of being educators because they find their role both valuable and challenging. I made recommendations which were based on the findings from within the research.
I identified limitations within the study. However, choosing a narrative methodology, the use of an ‘episodic’ approach (adapted from McAdams, 1993) and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982), appears to have been a sound decision because each element has highlighted the individual story, as well as hearing the collective narratives. Further research, which I would be interested in carrying out, would be to repeat this study with teachers from one school and to use it as an appreciative inquiry, to see what is working well within their particular setting and what could be further improved.

I hope that, by exploring the daily experiences of teachers, as well as what supports and undermines their wellbeing, this research will help to inform educational policy and practice at a systemic level. My intention, following my submission and viva, is to send this research to the Department for Education in the hope that they might consider adopting the recommendations identified in this research for the benefit of teacher wellbeing.
References


Bernard, HR. (2002). Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (3rd edition). Alta Mira Press; Walnut Creek, CA.


Appendix One

Information Sheet

My name is Ann-Marie Faughey and I am on a three-year Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy) at the University of Sheffield. Part of my course and resulting qualification requires me to complete a thesis which will be supervised by Penny Fogg. If you require further information about my thesis after reading this information sheet, please contact me via email: Afaughey1@sheffield.ac.uk or phone: 07958480638, or you can contact my supervisor, Penny on her email address: P.Fogg@sheffield.ac.uk.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

If you decide you would like to be involved in the research you will receive a consent form prior to becoming a participant with further details about the project. This is so you can make a fully informed decision about whether you would like to take part in the research or not. If after signing the consent form, or at any point during the research up until the date on which I submit my daft thesis (estimated to be March 2019), you change your mind about being a participant you can withdraw without needing to give a reason and without there being any negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact myself, or my supervisor Penny on the phone number or email addresses listed in the above paragraph.

I’m planning to conduct a study which will aim to explore class teachers’ experience of teaching and how they manage their wellbeing and/or struggle with the daily demands of their role. This is an area of personal interest to me due to my previous experience of being a primary school teacher. There are three criteria which participants must meet if they are to be involved in the study. Participants must be:

✔ A full-time class teacher
✔ Have at least five years teaching experience
✔ Have taught in at least two different schools, at least one of these must have been a UK state school

My main interest in class teachers’ wellbeing stems from my understanding that positive wellbeing needs to be modelled. Therefore, the systems around class teachers need to support them in managing their own wellbeing prior to them being capable of nurturing the wellbeing of others.
I want to highlight the daily ups and downs that is life as a teacher; how teachers story their careers, as well as what supports and undermines their wellbeing. I’m aiming to do this through narrative interviews so as to highlight the current culture in which teachers see themselves and to give a voice to each individual’s story. Narrative interviews aim to give a voice to participants because it allows them to be storyteller rather than a respondent as within the framework of a traditional question and answer interview.

Generally, teachers tend to get negative press because of the ‘thin’ narratives which are portrayed about them when they tend to make it into the media. These ‘thin’ narratives do not adequately reflect the long hours, dedication and resourcefulness which so many teachers I know willingly commit to because they are in teaching for the children and young people they work with. I want to give a space for teachers to be able to share the things which give them delight in their work as well as highlight the trickier aspects of the job which are the ‘unseen’ parts of the role. The objective is to provide richer, more informative narratives about teachers. I hope that by exploring teachers’ experiences of what assists them in maintaining their wellbeing that this research will build on previous studies to highlight what helps teachers remain committed to this stressful career. In addition, I hope that it will remind participants, and those that read it, about the key roles teachers are playing in difficult circumstances.

In order to do this, the types of questions I will be asking are:

- What made you want to become a teacher?
- What is your best moment since being a teacher?
- What is your worse moment since being a teacher?
- Have there been any turning points in your career?
- Have there been any significant people influencing your career?
- Have there been any curriculum changes which have been implemented during your teaching career? How did these affect you?
- How did changing schools impact you?
- How does being a teacher make you feel?
- What would the title of this/your story be?

If you would be interested in being a participant, please contact me using my details at the bottom of the page by 21st July 2018:
Possible Benefits of Taking Part in this Research:

The narrative interviews will allow participants a platform to share their story about being a teacher, what supports and undermines their wellbeing. I hope that this research will offer an alternative and more rounded vision of teachers to counter the negative views portrayed in the media.

Possible benefits of being involved in this research may be therapeutic in nature. I use this term tentatively as the aim of the research is not to be therapeutic. However, by been given a space to vocalise thoughts, feelings and opinions, participants may find that after the interviews they continue to reflect on our discussion. Participating in the research may make the teachers re-consider their current thoughts and feelings and may impact on their beliefs as they lift the lid on views which they are unlikely to have much time to consider in everyday life. Therefore, the research may have the additional benefit of some therapeutic type consequences as teachers recognise the key roles they are playing in difficult circumstances and recognise more clearly the reasons that are currently keeping them in their teaching career.

Possible Risks of Taking Part in this Research:

The topic of wellbeing and how class teachers story their career is a potentially sensitive topic. Reflecting on this potentially emotive topic may have various consequences and outcomes for participants.

Confidentiality:

All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this.

Legal Basis for Processing my Personal Data:

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis we are applying in order to process your personal data is that ‘processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest’ (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University’s Privacy Notice https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general

What Will Happen to the Data Collected and the Results of the Research Project?

Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.
The Data Controller:

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has Ethically Reviewed the Project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield’s Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the education department.

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint about the research project, please contact Penny Fogg on P.Fogg@sheffield.ac.uk.

If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please contact Dr Martin Hughes, co-director of the DEdCPsy course on m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, information about how to raise a complaint can be found in the University’s Privacy Notice: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general.

Will I be Recorded and How Will the Recorded Media be Used?

The audio and/or visual recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Please ask myself or Penny if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information about anything related to the project.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being involved in this research project.
Appendix Two
Consent Form

Title of Research Project: The Roller Coaster Career that Is Teaching

Name of Researcher: Ann-Marie Faughey Afaughey1@sheffield.ac.uk
Name of Supervisor: Penny Fogg P.Fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

Participant Identification Number for this project: Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 4th July 2018 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. (Please contact Ann-Marie on 07958480683 or email above)

3. I give permission to audio record all interviews

4. I give permission for photographs to be taken of any visual work created during all interviews

5. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to the audio recordings of all interviews

6. I give permission for my name/a pseudonym [delete as appropriate] to be used in all printed reports connected with the research

7. I understand that audio recordings and any photographs taken will be stored on the researcher’s personal laptop and a USB (both of which will be locked inside her home when not in use), as a back-up in case one copy is damaged before the end of the research. In addition, I understand that the researcher will permanently delete all data (audio and visual) from the laptop and USB once her thesis has been completed

8. I agree to take part in the above research project

_______________________________  __________________________  __________________________
Name of Participant (or legal representative)  Date  Signature

_______________________________  __________________________  __________________________
Lead Researcher  Date  Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies: Participant and research file
Appendix Three

Una’s ‘I Poem’

**Background**

I qualified to teach

I was 21

I did my PGCE year

I did three years of teaching in a comprehensive

I moved to Turkey

I taught there for two years

I taught 11 to 18-year-olds

I moved to Cairo

I did 11 to 18-year-olds

I teach 11 to 16-year-olds again

I teach drama

I also have other responsibilities

**Why Teaching?**

I always always thought

I’d be a teacher

I was in any role-play

I got to thinking
I was going to train (to be a primary teacher)

I thought

I would want to do

I was really enjoying (doing my drama)

I didn’t want to give that up

I had some advice

I got a degree

If I decided

I went (and did my three-year BA honours)

I did (my teaching qualification)

I, I was pretty young

I’m pleased

I did it

I did

I think

I know

I think that at 18

I would have been a bit too young

I think

Had I gone into it at that point
I would be

**Best Moments**

I think

I think

I think

I count

I teach

I get some satisfaction

I care for them individually

I have helped

impact I have had on their life

I think it’s those kinds of things

I had a child

I have taught him

I am teaching him

I have always

I would not

I have ever had in my life

I had told

I did
I inspired

I will be

I hope he does

**Worst Moments**

I notice

I have experienced

I left

I was working

since I have

I think

I would say

I worked

I guess

I don’t think

I would say

I think

I think that this makes a difference

**Turning Points...**

I would say

I was working in
I was going

I just found

I was getting through

I was getting through

I was delivering the curriculum

I was engaging with the children

I felt

I think

when I first moved

I… Was a little bit stunned

when I left

when I was leaving

when I left

I really felt

I had made a difference

I went

I thought

I don’t think

I knew

but I didn’t know
I think
when I was in the UK
I was perhaps teacher/social worker
Whereas, when I went
I was just teacher
I think
I would say that that was a big turning point for me
I would say…
I had a dream
I went
I did
I would
I went
I was so
maybe I should go
I had a friend
I thought
I will go
I'll apply for that
I can go
I saw
I thought
I would
I went along
I thought why not have an adventure
I was head of drama
as I said
I was
I was
Felt I was
I think
I have always been very pastorally minded
I applied
I had some experience
I really felt
I was
I felt
I did not make a difference

When I first

But I felt

I was

I was

I felt like

I was making a difference again

when I left there

I absolutely love it

I think

I came

I could just focus in on my teaching

I think

I became a parent year and a half ago

Before I became a parent

I never really thought

I think that it really has

I couldn’t tell you

what I’m doing differently

but I know it’s changed a lot of things
I think

I think

I worry a lot more now

I've always dealt with that

I've always sort of compartmentalised

Now I look

When I was

On the flipside I see all the things

I talk to them

I think that may be

**Significant People**

I had

I became

I was

I think

I got

I have remained true to

I am not going to

I am somebody

I'm not when I'm teaching
When I got

I started

I was

I work

when I started

I think that is a really important message for children to see

I think that is important

I think

I actually think that that has a really negative impact

**Curriculum Changes**

I've had

I have never

I have chosen

I have changed

I have taught

I have taught

I have taught

I have had changes

I say

I think
I was

I am

I went

**Changing Schools**

I think

I went

I went there by myself

I lived

I lived

I got

I socialised

I would say

I did

I would say

I think

since I have

I have moved

I have moved

if you know I mean

I choose how
I choose to

I say

I guess

I would not

I don’t necessarily

I don’t necessarily

But I think

I was

I had

I say

When I moved

**As a teacher I feel…**

I am always proud to be a teacher

I love my job

I love

I get to work with individuals

I think that

I think that it is hard being a teacher as well

I think

I think proud
I do feel

I like the impact

I have on a day-to-day basis

I enjoy the work

I do

Have I been

I would say

I would say

I love my job

I don’t know many other people who do

I always

I really really love my job

I think that

I think that

I actually do

I think

A Title...

I think

I think it would be growth mindset actually

I have been
I should have probably said this earlier

As I said

I went into teaching

I have always been very ambitious

then I have got

I am still

I have been like teach me teach me teach me

I want to learn

I realise that actually

I am okay

I am learning lots of different stuff

Now I have

I was thinking

I need to

I thought

Then I thought

I am not that interested in

I am just happy to do what I am doing

what I am learning

35 years before I retire
Before I retire!

I think

I genuinely don’t think there is another career for me

I think

I want

I can slow down

I can

I don’t

I can wait

I am feeling fulfilled

When I say that growth mindset

I am happy
Appendix Four

This is a sample of quotations that demonstrates each of the identified voices in Una’s narrative. Further examples are available in Una’s full transcript (Appendix Five, pg.184-213) and each voice is colour coded. Accomplishment is pink, Challenge is green, Pastoral is teal, Protection is blue, Realisation is grey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice of…</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>“I think (.) very little of what I think, what I count as success, is actually what I teach. Which is kind of a little bit weird. So kids achievement in drama is actually (.) like, obviously I get some satisfaction out of that. But actually it is more the bigger lessons in life that they walk away with, that mean a lot more to me. Yeah and just when they talk about, reflected on how much I care for them individually and how I have helped them become more confident and the actual impact I have had on their life. That actually has more of an impact on me than going from a B to an A in drama” (Appendix Five, pg. 186, lines 41-50). “He told my parents that I did and that I inspired from him and it was just so cute. It was a really, lovely moment for me” (Appendix Five, pg. 187, lines 62-64). “A lot of the admin stuff was taken off of me and I could just focus in on my teaching” (Appendix Five, pg. 196, lines 204-205).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“There’s a big push on mindfulness in our school, coping with stress and talking about relationships and all those sorts of things” (Appendix Five, pg. 197, lines 221-223).

“I’m always proud to be a teacher. And I love my job.”
(Appendix Five, pg. 208, line 418).

**Challenge**

“**The worst moments are always to do with parents**”
(Appendix Five, pg. 188, line 79).

“But there is always a small minority of those parents who are quite nasty and they stick with you” (Appendix Five, pg. 188, lines 84-86).

“So if ever you tried to sort of help that child out, you would be accused of, like, interfering and “stupid school, does not need anyway, does not need this that or the other” (Appendix Five, pg. 189, lines 92-95).

“On the flipside since I have come international you get parents who think they are personally paying your wages and so therefore you are their slave and that you are indebted to them lines” (Appendix Five, pg. 189, lines 95-98).

“Obviously not all of them but that they do need that, sort of social worker type aspect as well lines” (Appendix Five, pg. 193, lines 161-163).

“And I actually think that that has a really negative impact on children and on children’s learning and that actually (2) children do learn at different points lines” (Appendix Five, pg. 200, lines 278-280).
| Pastoral | “And I think, that, when I was in the UK, that I was perhaps teacher slash social worker. Whereas, when I went to Turkey I was just teacher. And that made me need to improve my teaching practice and adapt it and change it.” (Appendix Five, pg. 193, lines 154-157).

“I was a bit like a social worker (.) and I think I have always been very pastorally minded” (Appendix Five, pg. 195, lines 188-190).

“It’s about showing the kids, that it’s okay being in that place of not knowing and it’s okay to try something out and it’s okay to fail. And I think that is a really important message for children to see. Often (2) we tell children all the time that is okay to fail and I think that’s a really important message for children to see and that often we tell children “It’s okay to fail” but we don’t actually often show that to children, that we fail too.” (Appendix Five, pg. 199, lines 262-269). |
| Protection | “Ethos of the school that has that impact because the school is, it is oversubscribed and parents have a strict code, that they have to adhere to as well. And if they, like obviously if they are unhappy with things, of course they’re listened to and there’s compromise and stuff like that, but just a very different type” (Appendix Five, pg. 190, lines 113-118).

“These are the reasons why this is happening and perhaps if you don’t agree with the policies of the school, perhaps this
| **Realisation** | “Before I became a parent I never really thought that that would change my teaching practice but I think that it really has” (Appendix Five, pg. 196, lines 208-210).  
“Like maybe (.) the subtle things about me and I think that, I think that I worry a lot more now” (Appendix Five, pg. 196, lines 212-213).  
“Then very recently I realised that actually I’m okay with not progressing in my career at the moment because I’m learning lots of different stuff, and then a slight different focus on now that I’ve got family of my own to think about, and that’s okay” (Appendix Five, pg. 211, lines 466-470).  
“And if I’ve got another 35 years to work in this career, then I can slow down my progression” (Appendix Five, pg. 212, lines 485-487).  
“I am happy way at the moment and the knowledge that that growth might come a later stage for me” (Appendix Five, pg. 213, lines 492-494). |
| --- | --- |


 isn’t the right place for you” (Appendix Five, pg. 191, lines 122-124).  
“I think that this makes a difference” (Appendix Five, pg. 191, lines 124-125). |
Appendix Five

Researcher (R): Can you tell me a little bit about your teaching career so far? Like where you’ve taught, what age group you teach, a little bit of background

Una (U): Okay, so I qualified to teach when I was 21 and I did my PGCE year in the UK and I did three years of teaching in a comprehensive in the UK and that was for 11 to 16-year-olds. Then, I moved to Turkey, and I taught there for two years and I taught 11 to 18-year-olds. Then I moved to Cairo and taught there for four years and I did 11 to 18-year-olds and now this is the start of my fifth year in Singapore and I teach 11 to 16-year-olds again, I teach drama and I also have other responsibilities, like mentor and PSE programme.

R: So a real variety of experience. What actually made you want to become a teacher in the beginning?

U: So, I’d always always thought that I’d be a teacher right from a young age whenever I was doing any role-play or anything like that it was always about teaching. And then when I got to

184
thinking about University I was going to train to be a primary
teacher, that is what I thought I would want to do, and then I
was really enjoying doing my drama outside of school and I
really didn’t want to give that up and I had some advice from
the careers adviser that rather than going straight into getting a
qualification that would just enable me to only do teaching, that
if I got a degree and then did a PGCE afterwards it would give
me (2) other options if I decided at any point that teaching was
not right for me. And so I went and did my three year BA
honours and then I did my teaching qualification straight after
that and I was pretty young to go into teaching but ( ) it was
definitely the right decision for me. But I am pleased that I did it
the way that I did. I think (2) obviously I know a lot of people
who did go straight into doing their teaching qualification but
actually in retrospect I think that at 18 I probably would have
been a little bit too young. And I think that had I gone into it at
that point in time then I would be a primary teacher rather than
Appendix Five

a secondary drama teacher and secondary drama definitely suits me better

R: That’s fabulous. What has been your best moment since you’ve become a teacher?

U: So, I think it is just sort of focusing in on the kids’ achievements and some of the really nice things the kids have said to me or done for me. I think very little of what I think, what I count as success, is actually what I teach. Which is kind of a little bit weird. So kids achievement in drama is actually like, obviously I get some satisfaction out of that. But actually it is more the bigger lessons in life that they walk away with, that mean a lot more to me. Yeah and just when they talk about, reflected on how much I care for them individually and how I have helped them become more confident and the actual impact I have had on their life. That actually has more of an impact on me than going from a B to an A in drama I think it is those kinds of things. Recently, I had a child who has been
an absolute superstar, he is really lovely, and I have taught
him, I am teaching him now for the fourth year and (2) I have
always sent home letters to his parents and staff, like emails to
his parents and stuff, when he has done very well. And at the
end of last year, he thought I would not be teaching him this
year and he wrote me this, the most gorgeous email that I have
ever had in my life. And in it he had written, he said to me “Oh,
you always write my parents so I have written to your parents,
can you forward it on please?” And he had written this email to
my mum and my dad, and like some of the things that I had
told his parents that he did, he told my parents that I did and
that I inspired from him and it was just so cute. It was a really,
lovely moment for me. So,
R: That sounds really really thoughtful of him
U: Yeah, he is a smashing kid. He is the kind of, like if Niamh
dends up being like him I will be a happy mummy. He is
gorgeous. And he’s going to rule the world.
Appendix Five

69  R: What was that? Rule…?

70  U: Rule the world. And I hope he does. Because it would be a

71  lovely place if he did ((laughing))

72  R: Ah, I think that is really indicative of the kind of impact

73  you’ve had on him, and how great the world would be, if he

74  does rule it, with all the backing of you behind him ((both

75  nodding))

76  U: ((laughing)) Thank you

77  R: What about, at the other end of the scale, what is the worst

78  moments since been a teacher?

79  U: (. . .) so the worst moments are always to do with parents

80  actually. (. . .) and it’s funny (. . .) Because I notice a difference

81  between the parents in the UK to the parents that I have

82  experienced since I left the UK (4) and it is always, like,

83  obviously you get a wonderful set of parents and the vast

84  majority of parents are wonderful but there is always a small

85  minority of those parents who are quite nasty and they stick
with you. Like, in the UK, I was working in quite a, like a school that had a lot of ( ) deprived children like socio economically it was very ( ) like it was a struggling area, and a lot of the parents of the children that we had were from the Traveller community and had not attended secondary school themselves, and their ( ) understanding of what education was, and the importance of it was quite different, and so if ever you tried to sort of help that child out, you would be accused of like, interfering and “stupid school, does not need anyway, does not need this that or the other” and then on the flipside since I have come international you get parents who think they are personally paying your wages and so therefore you are their slave and that you are indebted to them and that whatever they want for their child, you need to provide. So, I think that without a shadow of a doubt, it is parents. And it is a small minority but it’s a significant minority, I would say.
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102 R: And is it worth saying that the school that you are currently
in (.) while it is a fee paying school, it is a not-for-profit
organisation?

105 U: Yes. Yes. Yeah so actually (.) officially only one of the

106 schools I worked in, the Turkish school, was a, like, for profit.

107 But actually when it comes to (.) parents they don’t necessarily
know whether it is a, I guess they do know whether it’s a fee
paying, or rather whether it’s a profit-making school or not. But

110 I don’t think that that necessarily impacts on it, like the parents
attitudes towards you. I would say (.) at my current school, the

112 parents are very positive and there is very, very little

113 interference from the parents but I think that’s the ethos of the

114 school that has that impact because the school is, it is
oversubscribed and parents have a strict code, that they have
to adhere to as well. And if they, like obviously if they are
unhappy with things, of course they’re listened to and there’s

118 compromise and stuff like that, but just a very different type of
Appendix Five

() like in Cairo you had to change something just to make them happy even if that was not necessarily the right thing for the child or the school or for anything. Whereas here, the parents are told okay, these are the reasons why this is happening and perhaps if you don’t agree with the policies of the school perhaps this isn’t the right place for you. And I think that this makes a difference. Mmm.

R: Okay. Have there been any turning points in your career?

U: Yes.

R: I’m imagining that there might be lots because you’ve had, you have changed from lots of different places

U: Yeah. So, I would say my first sort of turning point was leaving the UK (.) and going to my first international school (.) you know, having been educated in a state school, in the UK, not too dissimilar to the school I was working in (.) going to, the school in Turkey was a massive culture shock. I was going from having 30 children in my class to having eight children in
Appendix Five

my class and the children were there and they wanted to learn
and they were thirsty for knowledge and I just found that I was
getting through something that would have taken six weeks to
teach. I was getting through and one lesson ((laugh)). So, that
was a real change in sort of (3) the way I was delivering the
curriculum, and the way in which I was engaging with the
children and I felt (.) I think when I first moved to Turkey I (.)
was a little bit stunned ( ) having been (.) a popular teacher like
in the UK, like caring about children and being nice to them
and supportive and stuff like that. When I left the UK, like,
children were very, very upset to see me going and they were
worried and they were saying, “They’re going to get somebody
that does not do this, they’re going to get somebody that
doesn’t do that.” Like, children were crying when I was leaving,
when I left, and stuff like that, and I really felt I had made a
difference there. Then when I went to my Turkish school, I
thought, I do not think these children need me. They like me.
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And I knew that they liked me but I did not know that they necessarily needed me. And I think that, when I was in the UK, that I was perhaps teacher slash social worker. Whereas, when I went to Turkey I was just teacher. And that made me need to improve my teaching practice and adapt it and change it. But also I think it took me a little while to (...) understand that it was just different (...) and it was great that those children didn’t need me in that same way (...) but it also does still make me sad that those children, like in England, you know, obviously not all of them but that they do need that, sort of social worker type aspect as well. So, I would say that that was a big turning point for me, a big takeaway for me. Then I would say...

R: Sorry, I just wondered, before you moved on, whether that was that (...) What was the reason that made you go for teaching abroad? Like on that very first...

U: So. This sounds really, really stupid but I had a dream that I went to go to the leaning tower of Pisa. And I went to, and I
Appendix Five

went to go and spend the summer travelling and I went to see

the leaning tower of Pisa is one of the things I did ( ) and from

there, so had this dream that I would go do this travelling. So I

went, did the travelling and I was so my God, there is so much

in this world that is not in England and there’s so much culture

to explore, maybe I should go and live somewhere for a little

while. And I had a friend who was American who was living in

the UK and I thought I will go with the same system that she is

working on, and I’ll apply for that and see if I can go away. And

while applying for that, I saw the job interview for Turkey and I

thought I would apply just get some interview practice before

the real thing and I went along to the interview and absolutely

fell in love with the people that were there interviewing. And I

thought why not have an adventure? So, that is the reason why

I went abroad.

R: Sorry, I sidetracked and kind of cut into what you say
Appendix Five

U: So, then the next turning point in my career was in Egypt.

And I was ahead of drama. And the head of Key Stage 3 came up. (...) As I said, when I was the UK I was, felt was a bit like a social worker (...) and I think I have always been very pastorally minded (...) and always interested in that. So when, the post in Key Stage 3 came up, I applied for that and I had some experience doing that. And it was quite a big turning point in my career, like there was (2) I really felt, like going full circle to what I was saying where I felt I didn’t make a difference when I first went to Turkey and it was just different but I felt when I was in Egypt and I was being head of Key Stage 3, I felt like I was making a difference again with children not just teaching them but actually making a difference to their lives. So that was a significant moment. Another significant moment was when I left there and started at my current school. And my current school is... incredible. And I absolutely love it. And (...) I think that when I came, it is a very wealthy school and they have a
Appendix Five

lot of resources, not just physical resources, people resources

as well, and so a lot of the admin stuff was taken off of me and

I could just focus in on my teaching. And, so that has been a

really significant moment. And I think that the final significant

moment in my teaching is that I became a parent year and a

half ago and ( ) before I became a parent I never really thought

that that would change my teaching practice but I think that it

really has (laughing) and ( ) I couldn’t tell you what I’m doing
differently but I know that it has changed a lot of things. Like

maybe ( ) the subtle things about me and I think that, I think

that I worry a lot more now, being a parent, like hearing all

these things teenagers are going through and I’ve always dealt

with that and I’ve always sort of compartmentalised that,

whereas now I look at all these teenagers going through this

and this didn’t exist when I was a teenager and what’s going to

happen when my child becomes a teenager, and you know, but

then on the flipside I see all the things that they are doing. Like

"Flipside" demonstrates the ups and downs of teaching
Appendix Five

all of the positive things. Like there's a big push on mindfulness in our school, coping with stress and talking about relationships and all those sorts of things. Like PSE is a massive part of our curriculum and (.) I talk to them about and I think that may be (.) it is not such a terrible thing, like by the time Niamh gets to that age, maybe she will have all of those resources available to her and maybe it's not such a scary thing. So (.) mmm

R: Thank you for sharing that. Have there been any significant people who influenced your career over the time that you have been a teacher?

U: Mmmhum. Yep, so in my first school I had like the head of drama and head of music, they were both like, like really key people in shaping my teaching practice and who I was as a teacher when I was in the UK. Obviously you know when you do your PGCE, you do your PGCE and then I think you spend 14 weeks in school and so you don't really (.) So, my school-based tutor, particularly at my first placement, was very intent
Appendix Five

on you becoming a mini version of her. Whereas, when I got

my school in England, the head of music and head of drama

were very intent on you being yourself in front of the children

and letting them see that you are a person too and finding your

own style. And that’s something that I have remained true to

this day. The irony of being a drama teacher but I’m not going
to act it and be somebody that I’m not when I’m teaching. Like

that was very, very important to me.

When I got to my school in Egypt and I started as the head of
drama, and eventually became the head of Key Stage 3, but

the person who I was working with at the time who was the

head of Key Stage 3 and also worked in the drama department

and she just really gave me a lot of understanding of a lot of
different leadership styles. And how to work with children and

how to look after them pastorally and to work with parents and

to encourage them to be little bit open-minded. So that was a

significant thing. At my current school I work with another
Appendix Five

drama teacher and he’s really inspirational in terms of, my actual drama teaching, like all of the strategies that he uses, he’s given me more innovative approaches. But when I started at my current school, principal is so inspiring and he is really into growth mindset. And every year he sets a challenge in front of the children, he is going to learn something that he’s not done before, so he’s learnt tango dancing, juggling and all these different sorts of things (2) and it’s about showing the kids, that it’s okay being in that place of not knowing and it’s okay to try something out and it’s okay to fail. And I think that is a really important message for children to see. Often (2) we tell children all the time that is okay to fail and I think that’s a really important message for children to see and that often we tell children "it’s okay to fail" but we don’t actually often show that to children, that we fail too. They just think that we’re successful because we are, where they perceive where we want to be, in our career and I think that’s important. But also
Appendix Five

going back to what the saying about the growth mindset (.)

that's such an important thing, you know giving (.) not, I think

that a lot of schools that follow the British system, have (.) this

whole idea that you've got these grades (.) that you'll get and

that impacts what you're going to achieve in the future (.) and

your value-added and things like that and you've got to push

kids to get to there and I actually think that that has a really

negative impact on children and on children's learning and that

actually (2) children do learn at different points you know. At

one grade level they might make three points progress, in the

next grade level they might only make one point of progress.

But if actually we understand that over the period of time that

they're there they're going to make the progress (2) and they're

going to become better, that's what's more important, than the

actual current data here and now. It is about the end and

where you could possibly get to. So, yeah

I agree with the comment in lines 286-287. It indicates plasticity and that potential exists—young people aren't the full product now. At the same time, I question how that sits with accountability and if a child is not receiving quality education, what can be done to change that if there isn't any ways of measuring progress. Targets and progress is one system for measuring but what other factors could be assessed instead?
Appendix Five

287 R: Thank you for sharing that. What about then, I am aware that you have taught different types of curriculum, so you have mentioned the English curriculum

290 U: Mmmm

291 R: (.) And in thinking about next question you might sort of say which curriculum you're referring to or you might want to just focus on the one that you are currently in now. But have there been any curriculum changes which have been implemented during your teaching career and how did these affect you? So I am aware that you've made changes, were you ever in teaching a curriculum that then changed, like they change what was getting taught

299 U: Yeah, so, with my subject (.) it is not a required curriculum anywhere in the world so it is an optional choice. So, schools can choose to teach drama or choose not to. And so therefore when schools choose to accept it they create the curriculum and so the curriculum that I've had has always been something
Appendix Five

that has been created by me. I have never had a you know
change of circumstances where they like, the government has
said, out with that and in with this (. . ) because it has always
been about what we have been teaching, what I’ve chosen to
taught. So, with my middle school program that has obviously
changed and adapted as I’ve changed and adapted and as I’ve
developed my stuff but (. . ) with like GCSE and with (. . ) A-levels
or IB, I’ve taught (. . ) One (. . ) Two (. . ) I’ve taught three different
GCSE boards and within that time one of the boards had a
curriculum change. And then I’ve taught IB and A-levels as well
and so I’ve had changes to the curriculum but in all honestly
they’ve not been major it’s just a slightly different way of doing
things or a slightly different terminology there’s not really that
much (. . ) different about it to be honest with you. Yeah, (. . )
actually I say I’ve never been that unhappy with the curriculum
change but two years ago we were doing one exam board and
they were changing their curriculum, and we didn’t like what
they were going to change it to, so then we changed board so

that we do like what we're teaching. Yeah ((nodding))

R: Okay. It is great to be able to have the flexibility to...

U: Absolutely

R: And if maybe you'd been in a different school that wouldn't

have been the outcome. I don't know, if maybe the

management team hadn't been supportive...

U: Yeah, it's absolutely true. (...) I think that when you're in the

international system (...) like so my first school that I was in, the

GCSE board that you picked from, you had to do Cambridge

like international GCSEs and you didn't have any other

choices, like you couldn't just go, I am going to Edexcel or AQA

because we weren't approved by those boards. And then when

I went to Egypt we were only approved on the Edexcel board

so we were only able to do that. My current school, we're

approved by Edexcel and Cambridge so we can pick between

those two choices.
Appendix Five

R: Ah, okay. How did changing schools affect you? Or how did it impact you? Like, what kind of impact did it have?

U: (. ) I think again, this is probably one of the things that is quite different about changing schools internationally, then it is changing schools within England, in that when (2) when you move school in England like you might get a day or so to learn what this system is like and then you are sort of thrown in at the deep end, sort of sink or swim, hopefully your colleagues will help sort you out and that you’ll have an interesting time. And you know, you’ll get there eventually. Whereas, when you move internationally you lose a little bit of control over your life and everything becomes different. So when I went to Turkey I went there by myself, my school was responsible for finding my accommodation and deciding which area I lived in, which flat I lived in. They were responsible for how I got to school because we had a school bus. They were responsible for who I socialised with and they were responsible for organising my
Appendix Five

health insurance, my flights home and you kind of lost that little bit of control over your life a little bit. And so school becomes, I would say school became a real focus (.) the focus of everything I did. And I would say that was the same in Egypt and in Turkey it was all very encompassing and I think that because they were, are, hardship posts in that the language is different, when you are out within the community you’ve not got the access to language so then therefore like if you had (2) like an electrician problem or something like that which if you had that back at home, you’d sort it out and your work wouldn’t even know there was a problem. But when you’re in an international environment you’re dealing with somebody at school to go and sort that out for you at home and so it all becomes very all-encompassing. But since I’ve moved back to (2) since I moved to Singapore, it is not hardship posting, the common language is English. The school is so big that not everything is anchored around the school and so therefore
we’ve got that little bit of privacy and (. ) it feels a bit more like

(. ) like normal living, if you know I mean. School is my job and I

go there but I’ve got control over where I live, I choose how I

get to school. I choose to socialise with some people from

school but now my network of friends is not my colleagues

anymore. So that’s quite interesting that full-circle transition

going from school being my work to school being my life and

then going back to school being my work again. But I say

school going back to my work again but they are actually

responsible for a lot of other things. So (. ) you know, like even

our doctor’s at school and so even if you are sick you’re going

to school and things like that and I guess as my daughter

grows up and as she comes to school that is going to feel a bit

more intense as well because I would probably never be in that

situation in the UK because most teachers tend to send their

children to a school that isn’t theirs. Whereas my daughter will
Appendix Five

come to the same school as me from the age of 4 to 18 so that
will be different.

R: I just wanted to clarify what exactly hardship school
placement is? Is it a place where the mother tongue is
different?

U: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah it’s like a less desirable location

R: Okay

U: Where things are [

R: There is] a particular rating system or something?

U: (.) I don’t necessarily know that there’s a particular rating
system but if you’re looking (2) you’re looking at like ()
basically hardship postings are, tend to be related to the
language spoken (.) and the complexity of communicating

within that so (.) yeah. Yeah, it’s funny because now you ask
that question I don’t necessarily know what factors there are
that define it like that but I think that’s mostly related to the
language
Appendix Five

R: And those two countries using Arabic and totally different letters

U: Yep, when I was in Turkey like I had quite good conversational Turkish and when I (.) I say that the reason for that is that they use the alphabet, like the English alphabet, so you can read stuff as well. Whereas, when I moved to Egypt you’ve got the Arabic script and you can’t read anything and therefore you can’t learn anything or you know it’s more challenging to learn so (.) Yeah…

R: Okay. So, super. So how does (.) being a teacher make you feel? And I guess in your role that feeling might have changed at different times and in different places but…

U: I’m always proud to be a teacher. And I love my job. And I love (.) that I get to work with individuals who are very (.) they’re going through a transition. Like when they’re at secondary school they’re going from being miniature versions of their parents, essentially, to being who they want to be as an
adult. And they go through, you know, they will try out all sorts
of different hats and you know some of those transitions are
not particularly nice and others are a bit more pleasant and
stuff like that. But you know it’s really interesting watching that
stage of development for them and so, I think that is as well
(·) I think that it is hard being a teacher as well and (2) remind
the question again

R: How does being a teacher make you feel?

U: Yeah, I think that yeah I think proud is something that I do
feel. I like the impact that I have on a day-to-day basis and I
enjoy the work I do so that’s important to me as well (·) yep. Is
anything else you want to ask about that? Have I been a bit too
vague? ((Laughing))

R: no, that is totally fine, that’s very succinct. That is great. And
that is a lovely word to sum up with really so (·) no, that’s
perfect.
Appendix Five

U: Oh, so the other thing I would say. Sorry Ann-Marie. The other thing I would say is that [ ]

R: Yeah?]

U: I love my job. And I don’t know many other people who do.

Like I always talk to anybody who, any my friends, anybody like that and I really really love my job and I think that (.) I think that a lot of that is what I actually do and a lot of that is where I actually am. But I think a lot of it is that every day is different and you never have the same day there is never a dull day when you are working so many individuals so that is something. Sorry you were going to say…?

R: I was just can say what would the title of your story be? So the things that we have spoken about, thinking about your career overall, like, if you were to give this, what we’ve been discussing, like your story about teaching what would you call it, to give it a title?

Lines 446-449: This really resonates with me because I loved knowing essentially what I would be doing for the week, or day. But I loved that there could be spontaneity within my day that could be used as teaching points. For instance, if there was snow to use that opportunity or if we were looking at shadows and the sun was out, we’d take the lesson outside. I loved having the structure of the day but at the same time I also loved the unknown of what the day would bring because more often than not the day had happy surprises rather than negative ones
Appendix Five

454 U: Mmmm, I think (2) funny enough (.) I think it would be
growth mindset actually because I've been going through like
456 (.) quite a (.) I should probably have said this earlier but it didn't
occur to me till just now (.) but as I said I went into teaching
458 from a very young age and was something that I always knew I
wanted to do. And throughout my career I've always been very
460 ambitious and then I've got to my current school (.) and was
461 still overawed and overwhelmed (.) by the experience in the
462 school, despite having 14 years of experience I am still one of
463 the most inexperienced members of staff at our school. And I
464 have been “Like teach me, teach me, teach me, I want to learn”
465 (.) And then very recently I realised that actually I’m okay with
466 not progressing in my career at the moment because I'm
467 learning lots of different stuff, and then a slight different focus
468 on now that I've got family of my own to think about, and that's
469 okay. I was thinking that maybe I need to, I thought about
470 doing a Masters because maybe that would help to prepare me
for the next promotion and then I thought actually I’m doing the Masters because it’s something I am not that interested in it but it might possibly help in the future, but it might not. Maybe I’m just happy to do what I am doing and just learn what I am learning and enjoy this time rather than pushing forwards and learning and growing. I opened up my tax thing the other day and saw () this was before my birthday and I thought, “You know you’re nearly 35. There’s only another 35 years before I retire.” I thought, “Oh my God, there’s 35 more years before I retire!!!” It is just crazy and I think about the statistics that is currently going round that by the time the average person retires now, they will have gone through three different careers. And I genuinely do not think there is another career for me, like this is the career that I want to be in. And if I’ve got another 35 years to work in this career, then I can slow down my progression. I don’t have to become an assistant head in the next five years, I can wait for another (.) 25 years until I do that.
provided that I am feeling fulfilled within my job. So when I say

that growth mindset is kind of bringing that in, it’s that perhaps,

perhaps in 35 years I’ll be ready for it, maybe I’ll want it, maybe

I won’t but maybe I’ll still be working towards something and I

am happy way at the moment and the knowledge that that

growth might come a later stage for me. Does that make

sense?

R: Yes, that does make sense. Definitely. Brilliant, thank you.

Is there anything else that you wanted to add at the minute?

U: No, I do not think so

R: Okay. Thank you so much Una
Appendix Six

Saoirse’s ‘I Poem’

Background

I have to tell you

I was four

I remember

I never

I used to play

I had lots of cousins

I had my sister

I didn’t have my sister yet

I had my cousins

I used to

I used to ask

I could be teacher

I was so much enjoying

I could use

I was playing teacher

I had

I got a little bit older
I couldn’t write when

I was four!

I played teacher

I could

I loved

I was seven

I must

I was

I knew

I still wanted

I knew that

I am from

I had thought

I went

I said

I wanted

I went

I absolutely loved it!

I started

I did
I could
I did lots
I was younger
I started volunteering
I also
I ended up working
I ended up being
I really loved
I also worked
I had experience
I still loved
So I knew
Whatever I did
I knew
I wanted
I did everything
I could
I said
I did
I applied
I was really excited
I got into all of them
I was really proud
I got into all five
I decided to stay
I absolutely loved it
I went
I thought it was fantastic
I just felt like
I was in the right place
What I was meant
I graduated
I decided
I would
I started
I worked
I really loved
I definitely
I ended up applying
I’d done that
I applied
I got the job part-time
I started working
I was volunteering
I absolutely loved
I just felt
I loved it
I felt
I had control
I was working with
I really enjoyed
I thought
I really wanted to be full-time
I wasn’t getting anywhere
I decided
I also thought
I applied
I came
I did
I’d not experienced
I was teaching

I hadn’t had

I don’t think

I had

I applied

I managed

I worked

I worked two years

I really enjoyed

I left

I was there

After I left

I did a year

I needed a break

I was supply

I thought

I wanted

I wanted

I’ve been working there

I am still
Why Teaching?

I always knew

I wanted to work with children

As I said

I think

I had some absolutely amazing teachers

Who I remember

I still

I remember my grade two

I remember my grade three

I hadn’t been

I had never

I just remember

I think

Teachers I had were more than just teachers

I had

I was

I was always

I needed

I had
I really didn’t understand

I was really struggling

I kept going

I couldn’t

I knew

I wasn’t

I was doing really well

I just couldn’t

I went for extra help

I felt

I ended up

I was allowed

I needed to

It wasn’t that I was

I just needed

I had quite

I had

I want to be that teacher

**Best Moments**

I think
I can’t

I think

I think

I think

I was

I said

I think

I look forward

When I get to see that

I don’t

I really

**Worst Moments**

I think

I’d say

I was

I think

I think

I also think

I think

I was asked
I felt under a lot of pressure

I’m not sure

I think

I felt

I wanted

I didn’t want

I also felt

I wasn’t doing right by the children

I feel

I don’t know

I felt

I was a really bad teacher

I know

I’m not

I felt

I wasn’t doing my job

I originally wanted

I felt horrible

I felt

I didn’t know what to do
Whether I should

When I was doing the next

If I should do what was in my heart

I'm not sure

If I was experienced

I was

I couldn’t

I feel

I do now

I feel

I constantly felt

I felt

I wasn’t happy with myself

I didn’t feel good about myself

I didn’t know

How I would carry on

As I’ve already said

I wanted to be a teacher since I was four years

**Turning Points...**

I think
I’ve sort of

I felt

I needed

When I was

Who I felt

I didn’t have professional discretion

I felt very helpless

I thought

I had

I think

I felt

I, as a class teacher

I knew my class

I remember thinking

I thought

I think

I love

I didn’t

I wanted

When I went
I felt

So I had

What I felt

I had

I had

I knew

I just felt really helpless again

How I have felt

I didn’t feel

I could do

What I felt was best as a teacher

I didn’t feel

I could think for myself

I thought

I think

I was expected

But I went

Explained how I was feeling

I thought

I needed
I really enjoyed

I couldn't believe

I felt

I felt

I'm not sure

I was

Like I said

I wanted them to do well

Because I knew

I wanted them to do well

I knew

I decided

I needed a break

I never thought

I’d want to leave classroom teaching

I knew

I needed a break

I thought

I would have to do supply

While I decided
I was going to be able

**Significant People**

I have

I have

I have

I have

If we can

I think

As far as I'm concerned

I had

I was

I said

I felt

I was stripped of my ability

I don't know

If I'm allowed to say this

I don't think

I think that

I didn’t feel

I did try speaking

I constantly felt on edge
When I was at work

When I was at home

I could

I lost a lot of sleep

I was worrying

I felt

I couldn’t

I think

I again

I didn’t feel

I was doing my best job

While I was working essentially under her

I’m a human being

So if I’m overtired

I’m stressed

I am constantly worried and anxious

Not what I would want

I felt

I felt

I went
I went
I wanted
I wanted
Where I wanted
I have not
They knew I was a good teacher
I was always meant
I guess
I came
I’m where I’m meant to be
I’m meant to be teaching
I was
I remember
I never felt
I could
I always felt
I would be missing
I’d be creating more work
If I took a day off
Even if I felt
I needed
I can
Sometimes I forget
I have been better
I do know

Curriculum Changes

I wasn’t
I started
I think
I was
So I don’t know
I’m really
When I first came
I was used to
I felt
I felt
I felt
I felt
I felt
I felt
I’ve just felt
I feel

I was

I felt

I had the professional discretion

I went

I trained to be a teacher

I was observed

I trained to be a teacher

I was observed

I felt

I was given

I was teaching

I didn’t

I have done all this training

I feel

I feel like there is no professional discretion

I feel

I never look

I think

I am
I like
I give
I can
I've got
I think
I am
I feel
I feel
I think
I start
I feel
I could
If I could
I was actually trained
I was
I feel
Like I had
I feel
I'm also

So I have additional teaching and learning responsibilities
I don’t have

I do that after school

**Changing Schools**

I’ve had a few changes

I think

I learnt

I was teaching

I learned

I was thrown in the deep

I feel like

I learned a lot from that experience

I think

I questioned

I’d made the right choice

I didn’t realise

I thought

I’m meant

I didn’t know

Whether I was good at this job

I questioned my ability
Wheat I’d been trained
I felt
I thought
I had
I thought
I didn’t know the system
I didn’t know
I was obviously
I changed schools hoping
I would
I wanted
I did question
I was I think
I left
I left
I don’t
I also
I should
I felt
I started
I’m at
I originally felt amazing
I felt
I had more control
I say
I think
I was
I originally
I feel
I feel
I am
I enjoy
I’ve made it
I’ve learned
I can say no
I make sure
I am setting
I believe
I do have professional discretion
What I think is best
As long as I'm doing that

I am teaching

The best that I can

I'm ready

Until I have the time

I feel

I started

As a teacher I feel...

I'm definitely passionate

I think

I also think

I've got

I know

I think

I think it’s so incredibly rewarding

Like I said

I do think

I can’t leave

I feel

I can’t leave
I got married this summer

I had children

I taught

I still remember them

I obviously

I think teaching is amazing

**A Title...**

I have thought about this

I’ve spoken a lot about highs and about lows

I think

I had

I think

I had
Appendix Seven

This is a sample of quotations that demonstrates each of the identified voices in Saoirse’s narrative. Further examples are available in Saoirse’s full transcription (Appendix Eight, pg. 244-289) and each voice is colour coded. Optimism is pink, Struggle is green, Nurture is teal, Relationship is blue, Recognition is grey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice of …</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Optimism** | “It was a fantastic opportunity to just set the bar for them, and set standards for their education and make it so that they enjoyed school and enjoyed coming to school and what they could get out of schooling” (Appendix Eight, pg. 247, lines 95-99).  
“We had professional discretion to be able to take it in whatever direction it needed to go” (Appendix Eight, pg. 248, lines 101-102).  
“I think in teaching you have so many amazing moments. But I think (2) I think the amazing moments that you have, well for me, maybe they’re all related to maybe a child struggling a little bit, like I was. You know, not understanding something and finding it really difficult to grasp the concept or a skill at you’ve been trying to teach them…. And when the child finally gets there and it clicks for them, like I said, it makes sense and they even see the confidence spread across their face and then all they want to do is practice that skill because they know how to do it now and they’re excited to show it to everybody, I |
think those are the absolute best moments that I (2) it just keeps me going is a teacher.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 253, lines 229-243).

"Which is what I love about Foundation Stage” (Appendix Eight, pg. 260, lines 415-416).

“My (2) professional judgement was seen to be accurate because I have done all this training” (Appendix Eight, pg. 273, lines 729-730).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggle</th>
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| “These targets are set and not based on, or flexible in a sense that they are human beings, they’re not just, you know, numbers or (.) points on a piece of paper they are have a life and it means that because they are human beings things happen” (Appendix Eight, pg. 254, lines 265-269).

“As a teacher I felt between a rock and a hard place” (Appendix Eight, pg. 256, lines 300-301).

“It was the worse time for me because I felt like I wasn’t doing my job which (.) was (2) the job that I originally wanted to which was to inspire them and help them grow and feel excited and happy to be at school.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 256, lines 321-324).

“Early Years coordinator (.) who I felt was really unsupportive (.) and (.) made me feel like I didn’t have any professional discretion (2) over what happened in my own classroom … she didn’t understand the needs of my class because she
wasn’t teaching them every day” (Appendix Eight, pg. 259, lines 395-426).

“Teaching to the test is really what they do, teaching to the test. You teach children how to take tests, you teach children in this country how to how to answer questions in the right way” (Appendix Eight, pg. 261, lines 447-450).

“But the same time I knew that their education was suffering because they weren’t getting the well-rounded education that they should have and the fun and engaging and practical and exciting education that they should have.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 263, lines 478-482).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurturer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“They were there for more than to teach you, they wanted to be there for every aspect of your growth and development, they wanted to help nurture you and support your emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing and (2) they showed a genuine passion and care for the children in their class and that genuinely inspired me to want to become a teacher.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 251, lines 175-181). I want to be that teacher that gives children the time and takes the time to explain things in different ways so that they do get it and it does click” (Appendix Eight, pg. 252, lines 214-216). “I didn’t want to take that away from them, of course, but I wanted to prepare them for what was to come” (Appendix Eight, pg. 260, lines 418-421).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“The opportunity to actually have a voice in what they were interested in and what they wanted to learn and then you tailor that to what actually needs to be covered within the curriculum … it’s a way that ensures that children actually remember what they learn” (Appendix Eight, pg. 264, lines 516-522).

“I think that a teacher’s wellbeing is so incredibly important because you are teaching little people how to be healthy little people, which means that they have a healthy wellbeing and you can’t teach that if you can’t model that yourself” (Appendix Eight, pg. 267, lines 577-581).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We were (.) both on the same page and she was a positive influence on me” (Appendix Eight, pg. 264, lines 507-508).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She helps me to relax” (Appendix Eight, pg.268, line 601).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The actual relationships with my colleagues was exactly where I wanted it to be” (Appendix Eight, pg. 268, lines 606-607).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My family and my husband ((smiling)) who have been an absolute (.) amazing influence in my teaching career.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 268, lines 612-614).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My family have really built up my confidence to want to carry on in my teaching career” (Appendix Eight, pg. 269, lines 631-632).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When you make those connections with the children, they want to do their best for you and they want to learn and they”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Recognition** | “I think I have got the (. ) skill set now to know and because of that experience I feel like I got the confidence to say to senior leaders, “No actually I don’t think that’s relevant” or “I don’t think that’s going to benefit the children” or “How is that going to benefit the children?”” (Appendix Eight, pg. 258, lines 361-365).  
“I feel like I’ve got more knowledge and more skills set to be able to understand the system a little bit better” (Appendix Eight, pg. 259, lines 375-377).  
“I have obviously learned from that experience in London that wellbeing is important and I’ve made it a bigger priority for myself and I’ve learned that I can say no” (Appendix Eight, pg. 279, lines 875-878).  
“I am setting the standards when they’re going to receive certain things and how they are done because I believe as a teacher I do have professional discretion over what I think is best for the children and as long as I am doing that and I am teaching the children to the best that I can, paperwork and evidence and anything else that is asked of me can wait until I’m ready to give it, until I have the time to do it” (Appendix Eight, pg. 279, lines 880-886).  
“I have developed awareness of what I think is really important” (Appendix Eight, pg. 299, lines 888-889). |
Appendix Eight

Researcher (R): Happy?

Saoirse (S): Ready

R: Super, so can you tell me about the background of your teaching career so far

S: Yes, so to tell you about my background of my teaching career, I have to tell you how it started a little bit because it's what sort of drew me into teaching. So when I was four, I remember that's as far back as it goes preparing to be teacher, I never wanted to do anything different. I used to play, I had lots of cousins and most of them were older than me and I had my sister, well not yet I didn't have my sister yet but I had my cousins who were older than me and I used to spend a lot of time at my grandparents house and I used to ask if I could be teacher and because I was so much enjoying being the teacher and using the chalkboard and my parents, my grandparents would get these books from the shop that we'd print off, we would print off and copy different worksheets and stuff I could use for when I was playing teacher with my cousins and yeah so my parents get me little plastic yellow briefcase and I had one of those white sticky labels and put Miss Fitzpatrick on it, when I got a little bit older, I couldn't write when I was four! I played teacher as much as I could. I loved giving people homework and once my sister came along, I was seven when she was born and so I must have been about 10, 11, 12 and (.) I was still playing by what teacher at my grandparents house and
Appendix Eight

giving my sister homework and (...) and that's where it all began and
then from there I knew that I still wanted to be a teacher. So I knew
that to be a teacher in Canada, which is where I am from, you need
a lot of experience working with children. So I had thought from a
very young age probably 12 or 13 years of age about what that
would entail, and when I went into secondary, which is year nine in
Canada, we have to think about whether not we want to do a bit of
an apprentice type program so I said that I wanted to do and
apprenticeship in a school. So I went into school and I absolutely
loved it! I started a reading program and my was only in year 9 or
10 at the time and I did lots of volunteering in schools when when I
could and I did lots of extracurricular activities and I was younger
and baseball was one of them. So, I started volunteering to coach a
baseball team as well at the same time and to get more experience
in different situations working with children and then in secondary I
also during summers was a camp counsellor, and I ended up
working with different types of children with special needs and
behaviour type problems and then from there after several
summers doing camp counselling I ended up being a resource
camp counsellor which was somebody who specifically trained to
work with children with autism and Down syndrome and
developmental delay, which I really loved and enjoyed. And I also
worked in a daycare nursery as well. So, I had experience of
working with children of all different ages and I still loved working
with children so I knew that whatever I did had to be working with
Appendix Eight

children. My favourite thing was helping the children to learn a new skill so I knew that I wanted to go into teaching. So I did everything I could in secondary school as I said to apply to a school that had a specific childhood studies program, which is a limited programme at East University in Canada. And then I did that for four years and got my honours bachelor in that and that’s a four year program and then I applied from there for lots of teacher colleges. And I was really excited when I got into all of them because it’s quite difficult in Canada to get into teachers college because the government is trying to start to deter teachers from going into teaching because you get a lot of teachers and we didn’t have as many jobs. So they were making the criteria really hard to get in. So, I was really proud of myself when I got into all five universities that I applied to for teaching. But I decided to stay at Eastern to do my teaching degree and I absolutely loved it when I went to do my placement, I thought it was fantastic and I just felt like I was in the right place and it was exactly what I was meant to do. And when I graduated and from teachers college it was quite difficult to get a job so what I decided to do is continue to do is much work with children as possible and to carry on that sort of experience to put on my CV and then hopefully I would get a job later on so I started working at a group home which is for children who are (.) they call them in Canada ‘wards of the state’ which means that they’re basically orphans and not necessarily because parents have them passed away or are no longer around but it’s because potentially that they’ve been
Appendix Eight

removed from their home and they put into the state’s care because of social (. ) service type concerns. And that was really difficult because there’s children of all ages from three, four years old, up until 18, that lived in the three houses that I worked at. They all had varying issues and you know some of them were academic and others were social and emotional and I really loved being able to give them the time that they needed to grow and develop as little people and it just reaffirmed as well for me (a.) that I definitely wanted to go into teaching to be able to make a difference for children. And I ended up applying, after I’ d done that, I applied to a few schools nearby and one of them was a private school and they do private kindergarten which is reception age in the UK. I got the job part-time so I started working part-time there and doing volunteer work in another school hoping, because in Canada the way that it worked at the time for hiring in the public system was that the more you are sort of a volunteering and making your presence known, the more likely you were to get a job if something came up. So, I was volunteering two days a week and then working two half-day’s a week at private school and I absolutely loved kindergarten ((smiling)) so much because it was the first year of school for them and it was my first year teaching and I just felt like it was a fantastic opportunity to just set the bar for them, and set standards for their education and make it so that they enjoyed school and enjoyed coming to school and what they could get out of schooling. And I loved it and I felt like I had control of my classroom...

My preferred teaching range was the Early Years
Appendix Eight

and that, you know, we had a curriculum to follow that we had

professional discretion to be able to take it in whatever direction it

needed to go. I was working with my teaching partner who did the

other half-days and we worked really well together and we had the

same sort of ideas of what we wanted to do the classroom, various

investigative type learning where the children were guiding their

own learning and they weren’t being ‘taught at’ but they were

participants in their learning and I really enjoyed that. Then I

thought that I really wanted to be full-time and I wasn’t getting

anywhere volunteering and working at the private school, they

didn’t have anything full-time (. So that’s when I decided to apply to

come to the UK because I also thought that’d be a fantastic

opportunity to travel and work at the same time. So, I applied to the

UK and through a teaching agency in London and I came over in

January 2012 and I did a little bit of supply in inner-city London

which was a very big eye-opener for me and because I’d not

experienced the type of situations that arose when I was teaching in

London during supply months. So, behaviour and social and

emotional concerns of children in such large groups rather than sort

of one or two in a class and it was really difficult because I (. I

hadn’t had the experience you have to have to be a supply

teaching, as you have to be very flexible and very (2) very

adaptable and you have to have very good behaviour management.

Because of my lack of experience I don’t think I had very good

behaviour management at that stage in my career. But it was a
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great learning experience for me and then I applied to some positions for part-time and long-term work covering maternity leave in London. And I managed to get a position at St Theresa’s school in London and I worked there and that was in the nursery. I worked two years in the nursery and then two years in reception and a year doing Year Two. I really enjoyed my experience there, there were some ups and downs, highs and lows, but after I left, so I was there for five years, after I left St Teresa’s I did a year of supply teaching in and around Suffolk because I needed a break from classroom teaching. And then I found a school while I was supply teaching in Suffolk that I thought sort of embraced the type of (.) the type (.) of teaching and learning that I wanted in my career and what I wanted to pursue and then I’ve been working there for the last year and that brings me to date and I am still working in reception. That is my teaching career.

R: Thank you that is very extensive experience that you’ve got behind you. So, I was gonna follow that by asking what made you want to become a teacher but I feel that perhaps that has been wrapped up in what you have already said. Is anything that you wanted to add to that, what made you want to become a teacher?

S: Well I always knew that I wanted to work with children as I said but there were situations in my own (3) experience of primary and secondary education that definitely made me want to become a teacher as well, inspired me to become a teacher even further than how I, you know (.) I think that I had some absolutely amazing
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teachers in my primary education who I remember the names of. I still remember my first grade teacher, Mrs Honey and she was an older lady who was really warm and loving and nurturing, which is fantastic for year one, we call it grade one in Canada. I remember my grade two teacher Mrs Costa, she was really crazy and outgoing and always did these really fun and exciting things and that just made me always want to go to school because you never know what she was going to do next and it was just really exciting.

And I remember my grade three teacher, we had two teachers Mrs Tomlin and Mrs Pence, who shared the role and it was really interesting to have two teachers working together because they both brought something different to the role and they were both really lovely. And my grade four teacher Mrs Varley was amazing. She really challenged me in a way that I hadn't been challenged before and she taught me some really interesting (...) sort of things in maths and science and I had never really been interested in those subjects before. So she really brought that interest and curiosity out in me. And my fifth-grade teacher was probably my absolute favourite, Mrs Edgar and she got married the year that she was teaching us so her name changed but I just remember her talking about her wedding and she was so fantastic and so warm and nurturing and she was always a teacher that was there that at break times if you wanted to go in and talk to her about something that was upsetting you or were worried about. She was more than a teacher. I think that was my experience of primary education, that...
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the teachers I had were more than just teachers. They were there for more than to teach you, they wanted to be there for every aspect of your growth and development, they wanted to help nurture you and support your emotional wellbeing and social wellbeing and (2) they showed a genuine passion and care for the children in their class and that genuinely inspired me to want to become a teacher. However, I had some quite negative experiences as well that inspired me to be teacher. When I was in secondary school I had never been good at maths, I was always sort of more English minded and I needed to take grade 12 maths to get into my bachelor programme in university and in 12 grade, which is the last grade of secondary school before you go to university, I had to take calculus and statistics and I really didn’t understand the calculus aspect of the course and I was really struggling and I kept going to my teacher to ask for help during break times and after school and asking him to explain it in a different way because the way that he was explaining it to me didn’t make sense to me and I couldn’t wrap my head around it and he was really negative and he made me feel really ( ) for lack of a better word, stupid. And I knew that I wasn’t stupid, I was doing really well in all my other subjects but I just couldn’t grasp the maths side of things and (2) when I went for extra help to him, he would explain things in the exact same way that he had explained it originally in class to everybody and obviously however he was explaining it to me wasn’t making sense to me. And I felt like he
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never really had the time to help me and that was a really horrible experience for me and I ended up and taking that maths course on the weekends at a private school, which I was allowed to do to contribute to my (.) my University maths course (.) to apply to university. The person at the private school was so amazing and took the time to explain things in as many ways as possible, it wasn’t just one way that he explained it, he explained it in so many ways possible for it to make sense to me and gave me the practice and encouragement that I needed to make me feel like actually it wasn’t that I was bad at maths, it was that I just needed to understand it and come at it from a different angle and he was able to give me that. So although I had quite a horrible experience with that one teacher, I had a really positive experience to, sort of, correct that with another teacher. And that made me, as well, think that actually I want to be that teacher that gives children the time and takes the time to explain things in different ways so that they do get it and it does click. Because when it clicks, it’s amazing. So, that has also contributed to me becoming a teacher.

R: Oh wow, it sounds like you’ve had some really inspiring role models

S: I definitely have, yes, I’ve been lucky

R: I just wanted to check, is a private school in Canada the same as in the UK, or is it different?

S: Where parents have to pay?
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R: Yeah

S: Yes, where parents have to pay for their tuition rate

R: Thank you. What has been your best moment since becoming a class teacher?

S: I think that’s tricky because I can’t actually say that there was one best moment because I think in teaching you have so many amazing moments. But I think (2) I think the amazing moments that you have, well for me, maybe they’re all related to maybe a child struggling a little bit, like I was. You know, not understanding something and finding it really difficult to grasp the concept or a skill at you’ve been trying to teach them. Then, you know, however you’re able to get them there, whether you’re explaining things in a different way or just giving them the extra time they need to practice and build on their background knowledge of things. And when the child finally gets there and it clicks for them, like I said, it makes sense and they even see the confidence spread across their face and then all they want to do is practice that skill because they know how to do it now and they’re excited to show it to everybody. I think those are the absolute best moments that I (2) it just keeps me going as a teacher. I look forward to those moments when I get to see that. So, I don’t think I really can say there’s been a best moment in my career. Since the beginning those have been the best moments for me and they do come often (.). and they’re what keeps me going as a teacher

“They’re what keeps me going as a teacher”
This indicates both the struggle of what it is to be a teacher as well as the ultimate motivating factor for her to continue as a teacher
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R: (2) Thank you. What about, what’s been you’re worse moment.

So, since you’ve been a teacher, what’s your worse moment?

S: Hmm, I think my worst (3) I don’t want to say moment but I’d say time as a teacher was when I was in Year Two teaching in St Teresa’s and (2) because of the pressure of SATS, Year Two SATS, and because of pressure from the school to (2) achieve targets that were set at the beginning of the year when you know (2) I think the problem with SATS in Year Two, or year six, is targets are set for the children at the beginning of the year based on obviously (.) what they have been doing academically up until that point, which for Year Two there’s not much to sort of go on.

There’s just reception and their Year One year (2) and so many things happen to children in the course of the year, so many things happen to people in the course of the year, so you’ve got, things can come up in their home life or things can come up with their health or the health of somebody that they really care about or they could have trouble with friendship groups or (.) you know, anything can happen in their life in the course of a year. And these targets are set and not based on, or flexible in a sense that they are human beings, they’re not just, you know, numbers or (.) points on a piece of paper they have a life and it means that because they are human beings things happen. And they’re going to have highs in their life and they’re going to have lows in their life, and throughout their life. And I think it’s really unfair that they have these expectations that they’ll achieve a certain target and that the rest of their life and what
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is affecting their day-to-day ability to be successful in education is not taken into account. I also think it’s really unfair that children of such young age feel such intense pressure in their education that they need to strive to do well, that they’re being tested on a lot of material that is really difficult for seven year olds. And unfortunately I think some schools are a bit naive in thinking that in Year Two they don’t really know what SATS is and they don’t, they’re not really affected by the tests and actually it’s more the teachers that are affected by the test. However, from my experience, and it could be different at other schools, that was very much not the case. The children in Year Two knew they were doing (3) I was asked as a teacher to give them practice tests, practice SATS tests and reading tests and comprehension tests and maths tests all the way back from January of the Year Two year and SATS isn’t until May. Which meant that for nearly 6 months of their Year Two education they were doing much more English and maths, and being tested much more frequently than other year groups, at a very young age. And they knew that the reason for this testing and this emphasis on English and maths was because they were preparing for something and they knew they were preparing for something, a test that was coming, and it was called SATS. And different schools might handle it in different ways but (.) I felt under a lot of pressure as a teacher because (2) I’m not sure when it actually came into place, but it was in place at the time, where teachers are now, their pay is reflected in their performance. So
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whether or not their children achieve the targets that they are
supposed to achieve their set at the beginning of the year. And so I
think as a teacher I felt between a rock and a hard place because I
wanted my pay to continue to increase I didn’t want my ( . ) career
and my growth as a teacher to be affected by ( 2 ) the data that was
going to be produced at the end of the year. But I also felt like I
wasn’t doing right by the children. And that actually it was really
unfair everything that was being asked of them and being asked of
me as a teacher in that year. And there was no understanding that
they still need all those other components of their education
because they are in primary school so things like art and even
science in some regards ( . ) and history and geography and PE and
fun trips and exciting outings and exciting activities really ( . ) did not
happen for that whole six months. Because, you know, we had
days we were just doing maths all day, or we were doing, sort of
like a whole morning of English and then maths in the afternoon.
And ( . ) it ( . ) those don’t tend to be the subjects that children
gravitate to, most children, a lot of children in their primary
education gravitate to things that are more practical and hands-on
and where they’re able to show their creativity. And I feel like that
was really, I don’t know the word, but sort of, stifled out of them in
that time ( 2 ) and I felt like it was really unfair and it made me feel
like I was a really bad teacher, and I know that I’m not a bad
teacher and that is probably the worst moment for me. It was the
worst time for me because I felt like I wasn’t doing my job which ( . )
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was (2) the job that I originally wanted to which was to inspire them
and help them grow and feel excited and happy to be at school.
And I felt horrible coming into work every day because I felt like I
didn’t know what to do, how to handle that year, whether I should (.)
just try and ignore the pressure from above that felt like it was on a
daily basis, coming to me, asking me results and when I was doing
the next tests and practice for SATS. Or if I should do what was in
my heart which was actually to teach them properly and give them
a well-rounded education and (.) and not have so much pressure
on a group of seven-year-olds. But I’m not sure if I was
experienced enough at that time (.) or maybe I was actually just too
sort of (.) engrossed in the situation I couldn’t look at it objectively
to do what I feel like I do now, which is just to ignore the system as
much as possible. But (2) yeah I feel like that I constantly felt (.) in
a bad place during that time and (. ) I felt like I wasn’t happy with
myself and I didn’t feel good about myself and it really made me
hate teaching and made me not want to, I didn’t know how I would
carry on a teaching career if it was going to carry on like that.
Which made really sad because as I’ve already said I wanted to be
a teacher since I was four years. There’ve been so many things
that I’ve done leading up to now that have been priming me for
teaching and to think about not teaching for the rest of my life I (2)
didn’t (.) it was difficult to ( .) picture

R: I was just wondering about something that you said there. You
said that now you ignore the system

Self-reflective point: she considers that her
inexperience or possibly the
difficulty in having time to
reflect and process may
have impacted her actions
at that time. She recognises
that now she feels in a more
experienced position which
allows her to try and
"ignore the system as much
as possible" and be
objective in her decision
making.

Lines 338-345. These words
feel incredibly heavy. When
she spoke it made me feel
sad that she had
experienced such sadness in
relation to role which she
been so enthusiastic about
for so long. The presence of
so many negative
descriptors in regards to the
posed question made me
wonder about the impact on
her wellbeing. Within
schools, do members of
nenior leadership have any
idea about the impact daily
work is having on particular
teachers and how can this
trend be changed whilst
maintaining accountability
to ensure quality first
teaching for all students?
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S: Mmmm

R: And I just wonder what’s different or what’s changed to make you feel that you’re in a position where you can ignore the system now.

S: I (.) think (.) that I (.) have recognised that you have to play the game a little bit (.) meaning (.) that there are some things that you are asked to do as a teacher and maybe there are certain things that you can potentially get away with not doing (.) and although (.) you (.) may not as a teacher (.) be liked in the school by senior management and you potentially not might not even get promoted or given higher positions in the school because of that attitude (.) it’s okay with me because all I’ve ever wanted to do is be a classroom teacher. I don’t want to go any further, I just want to be a really good classroom teacher. I think I have got the (.) skill set now to know and because of that experience I feel like I got the confidence to say to senior leaders, “No actually I don’t think that’s relevant” or “I don’t think that’s going to benefit the children” or “How is that going to benefit the children?” So actually asking those questions, whereas before I think because I didn’t have the confidence in my career, I think I was slightly more passive in just doing as I was told because really that’s how I’ve always been in school, and I suppose in my teaching career, I’ve always been (2) a model student, I suppose. So, I feel like I’ve got more confidence and more knowledge of the curriculum and what children need to say, “Actually that’s not going to work” or “Actually that will work.”
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There are of course lots of things that I do as a teacher that I don’t agree with or I don’t believe is going to make the impact, that I suppose senior leaders expect it to make them, but I feel like I’ve got more knowledge and more skills set to be able to understand the system a little bit better and how to play the game that way. I also think because I am teaching in Early Years, right now in reception, I think that you have more leeway to be flexible with the curriculum. Because it’s not the national curriculum, because it is the Foundation Stage curriculum, I believe you have a bit more leeway to (2) develop the curriculum the way you see fit as opposed to the pressures of the national curriculum. I think the national curriculum falls short in a lot of ways and I think that for as long as I am teaching in this country (.) I want to be teaching in Early Years because I do not think that I would go back to the national curriculum from what I’ve experienced.

R: (.) Right, thank you. Have there been any turning points in your career?

S: Yes (.) there have. I think I’ve sort of explained my main turning point but just to sort of reflect on it further. So, that time in Year Two at St Teresa’s (.) actually going back before that there’s a turning point in a sense that I felt like I needed a significant change. So, when I was in reception at St Teresa’s we had (.) a coordinator, the Early Years coordinator (.) who I felt was really unsupportive (.) and (.) made me feel like I didn’t have any professional discretion (2) over what happened in my own classroom. I felt very helpless to be
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able to do anything that I thought would benefit and reflect the
cohort of children that I had. Because as a good teacher, I think you
need to be very aware of the cohort of children that you have;
there’s going to be times where, you know, certain cohorts of
children can do certain things and others can’t do the same things.
And it could be based on the majority of the children, the needs of
the children’s behaviour in the class, the social and emotional
issues that might be (.) be relevant at the time. And I felt like I, as a
class teacher, I knew my class really well and at the time I
remember thinking that that particular group of children needed
structure, they needed to be prepared for what was to come, which
was the Year One national curriculum, they were ready for it, they
were ready to sit down and do a bit more, sort of, structured work in
a still a fun way and (2) she (.) And I thought it would really help
with their transition into Year One because I think that can be quite
big transition for children at such a young age; they go from having
this free choice to being able to choose what they want to do and
really guide their own learning, which is what I love about
Foundation Stage, to being very much been told what to do, being
sat in a chair at a desk for five, six hours a day and maybe not
having as much (.) ability to actually think for themselves as they go
into the national curriculum. I didn’t want to take that away from
them, of course, but I wanted to prepare them for what was to
come. And when I went to our coordinator about this (.), saying that I
felt that my class was ready for some different things, you know,
different environment and structure in the class and she was (.)
she said, "No" and (.) she was very against any sort of change
within the classroom. And she didn’t understand the needs of my
class because she wasn’t teaching them every day. And so I had
to do to do what I felt was best for my class. I had to do it sneakily,
for lack of a better word, I had to do things when I knew that she
wouldn’t be walking around looking at what is happening in the
classroom. And it worked really really well. And the class were
shown to be successful. But I just felt really (3) helpless again
which is how I have felt over parts of my teaching career in this
country (.) in a sense that I didn’t feel like I could do what I felt was
best as a teacher. I didn’t feel I could think for myself and (.) and
go with what I knew was best for my class (.) and that felt really
unfair to me. So, I thought that maybe with the change of
leadership and year group that would help so that was quite a
turning point in my career in the sense that (.) I think I was
expected in the school to carry on in Foundation Stage but I went
to our head teacher and explained how I was feeling and that I
thought I needed a change and (.) she allowed me to go up to
Year Two the following year. And I really enjoyed Year Two in the
autumn term. I couldn’t believe the independence that they had and
the still the excitement to come and learn and (.) you know how
much they enjoyed school in that first term in Year Two (.) but then
the next sort of turning point in my career happened when the
onset, of sort of, practising (.) teaching to the test is really what they
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do, teaching to the test. You teach children how to take tests, you
teach children in this country how to how to answer questions in the
right way and the actual (. ) curriculum, the knowledge and skills that
they learn is not always necessarily what is sort of best for them or
what is following the curriculum but in Year Two I felt it was really
what was going to be found on the tests, types of questions that
were going to be in the test which generally follow the curriculum (.)
but in some ways they didn’t and (. ) I felt that that wasn’t the best
way to teach, not by any standards and (. ) it made it quite boring
the lessons because there are very (4) I’m not sure the word I’m
looking for (3)

R: Repetitive?

S: Not really repetitive but very (7) prescriptive and (4) if you’re
going to prepare children, for example, for the reading
comprehension part of SATS (. ) there’s not any fun way that you’re
able to do that. You literally have got two sets of tests, you’ve got a
reading comprehension element where you have a little paragraph
text and then you answer some questions about that paragraph and
then you’ve got another paragraph and then you answer questions.
There’s no interesting way to teach those elements if you are trying
to teach it very solely based on the test (. ) which was at the school.
that I was at, essentially giving practice papers so that they could
see what it was about. There’s interesting ways to teach inference
and reading comprehension skills but (. ) those teaching methods
were tossed out the window because the focus was on making sure
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that they could answer questions in the format of a test. And (2) like I said before just felt completely helpless. I wanted them to do well on the test because I knew that obviously the school wanted them to do well and their families and their parents wanted them to do well and obviously for their own confidence I wanted them to do well. But the same time I knew that their education was suffering because they weren’t getting the (2) they weren’t getting the well-rounded education that they should have and the fun and engaging and practical and exciting education that they should have. And they didn’t have the independence to guide their own learning in ways that were interesting to them because so much was prescribed for them and it just made me feel really bad about myself as a teacher. And that is when I decided that I needed a break from classroom teaching which was quite (.) was the biggest turning point in my career because I never thought that I’d want to leave classroom teaching but I knew that I needed a break and wasn’t qualified for anything else ((laugh)) so I thought I would have to do supply while I decided whether not I was going to be able to physically and mentally carry on teaching career in this country.

R: ((nodding)) Have there been any significant people influencing (.) that have influenced your career? So that might be in school, that might be out of school but have there been any significant people that have influenced how you’ve ended up at this point in your career?

S: Erm (2)
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498 R: You’ve already touched a little on that with what you were
499 referring to earlier about the Early Years coordinator
500 S: So these can be negative influences as well?
501 R: Yeah, negative, [positive]
502 S: Yes] [(smiling)]. I have had. I have had some negative influences
503 and I have had some positive influences and some of them have
504 been in school and some of them have been out of school so let me
505 think. Well if I can go back to my teaching in Canada
506 R: Mmhmm
507 S: My teaching partner Rachel was fantastic. We were (. .) both on
508 the same page and she was a positive influence on me because
509 we both bounced off each other and (. .) we both had the same
510 thinking when it came to education which was that children
511 shouldn’t be passive in their learning; they should be proactive.
512 And to create that proactivity and those really positive learning
513 behaviours you had to give them the opportunity to do that, which
514 meant, you know, a lot of open-ended activities and then you know
515 starting off that way and then coming back and actually finding out
516 what was learned from those activities and (. .) the opportunity to
517 actually have a voice in what they were interested in and what they
518 wanted to learn and then you tailor that to what actually needs to be
519 covered within the curriculum. So, the children are very much
520 partners with the teacher in their learning. And I think that’s the best
521 way to be teaching within the classroom and (. .) it’s a way that
ensures that children actually remember what they learn as well because if they're not engaged and not interested and they're not active in their learning then they're not going to remember what they have learned anyway so (.) it is a waste of their time as far as I'm concerned. And me and Rachel were really on the same page with that and we got some fantastic (.) teaching and learning experiences out of that kind of way of looking at classroom teaching. So, she was a really positive influence in my career. And (3) my Early Years Coordinator that I had, when I was in the two years of reception and one year of nursery, was a really negative influence on my career because as I said I felt like I was stripped of my ability to make my own professional judgements about how to deliver (.) the curriculum and my teaching and learning within the classroom, my classroom, and I felt like my (2) views and my opinions were dismissed really quickly. So, rather than, you know, we'd have phase meetings, for example, and rather than listening to what people had to say and, you know, taking that into account and trying to work out a way around things, while still following in the curriculum in the way that the school wanted to be run by sort of people senior to her, and she was just very dismissive and I don't know if I'm allowed to say this (2)

R: Say whatever you want. It's your story

S: But she came across slightly like a dictator in a sense that it just felt like we were told what to do and that was the end of it and we didn't have a say in it and (.) and it was her way or the highway
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basically. And it also felt like if you did have a problem or you had a concern about something that was going on in the classroom or with children in their home life or whatever it felt like she really didn’t have (.) any time to give to you to, you know, brainstorm with to find a solution to the problem. And it also felt like if you did something that maybe the school would not necessarily (.) be happy with and something that you did in your class in the way that certain teaching and learning activities ran, she was very happy to sort of throw (.) her colleagues under the bus, for lack of a better phrase, and even if potentially the mistake or, you know, the misunderstanding originally came from her because she was very goal oriented. And I feel like her goal was to eventually maybe be a head teacher, or somewhere higher up in the school, and you kind of did feel working with her that she would step on anybody to get to where she wanted to be. And I don’t think that there are room for people like that in a positive education environment. I think that to have a positive environment in education people need to be working collaboratively together, you need to be a cooperative individual, you need to and be able to listen and respectfully hear what other people have to say and come to a collective agreement of how things are going to work out, there needs to be compromise and flexibility and I didn’t feel (.) that (.) my coordinator provided any of that. And then there was that feeling of helplessness, of not knowing what to do or how to make it better. I did try speaking to her a few times and it was met with very stern, negative reactions.
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So, my wellbeing was extremely low while working with her because (. . . I constantly felt on edge and distressed when I was at work and when I was at home thinking about work and (. . . it meant that I could (. . . I lost a lot of sleep and (. . . over sort of, you know, issues and things I was worrying about that I felt like I couldn't speak to her about. And I think that a teacher's wellbeing is so incredibly important because you are you are teaching little people how to be healthy little people, which means that they have a healthy wellbeing and you can't teach that if you can't model that yourself and (. . . I again, I didn't feel like I was doing my best job as a teacher for them while I was working essentially under her (. . . because my wellbeing was extremely compromised which meant that, I'm a human being so if I am over tired and I'm stressed and I am constantly worried and anxious in my working environment then that is going to be subconsciously or consciously displaced accidentally onto the children and (. . . and the way that our interactions with each other were potentially even sometimes in front of the children was not what I would want them to understand as healthy relationships. So, again there was that aspect of, you know, you hope to model relationships with your colleagues that you want the children to then model and their relationships and friendships with each other. And if that positive aspect isn't there then that is not an element of something that you really want to teach children and I felt like that was happening in a really negative way. Other influences (d) I worked with a teacher in Year Two (. . .

Lines 572-577 indicate the difficulty of being able to compartmentalise work to working hours to try and achieve a healthy work-life balance. The lack of support she found in her colleague led her to identify her wellbeing as being jeopardised and she goes onto say in lines 582-590 how that had other repercussions.

This seems to connect to teaching and learning as well as how she views her role as a teacher.
who was a really positive influence on me. Although we had very
stressful times together (.) and she felt the same as me in regards
to SATS and the pressure from the school she has a very laid-back
personality. And it was fantastic working with her because I felt like
she helps me to relax and I went from one environment in reception
where working with colleagues it just didn’t work, and we didn’t get
along, and we had very conflicting views, and I went from that
experience to working with her and working in that Key Stage One
corridor with some really lovely TA’s and teachers including herself
who, although ([laugh]) the actual element of teaching was not
where I wanted it to be. the actual relationships with my colleagues
was exactly where I wanted it to be. Which was friendly, in wanting
to find about each other’s lives, in encouraging each other to leave
earlier on some days, to, you know, take care of our wellbeing and
that was a really positive experience for me that year. And the last
influence that I would like to talk about is the influence of my family
and my husband ([smiling]) who have been an absolute (.) amazing
influence in my teaching career. My parents have always been
extremely supportive and have always built up my confidence
([laugh]) even when I have not been confident in myself, you know,
particularly during that year in Year Two, where they said and
reaffirmed that they knew I was a good teacher and it was what I
was always meant to be (.) and it’s things like them my granddad
([laugh]) doesn’t really know how to use computers and certain up-
to-date things properly and my cousins show him (.) and I guess
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don’t have much patience for showing somebody who doesn’t quite
understand what they are doing on how to work things and use
things, and my mum always brings up the story of just me spending
hours with my granddad on the computer and showing him how to
work his phone when I came home to visit a few years ago and (.)
the patience that I had in helping him (. ) achieve what he wanted to
achieve and learn what he wanted to learn. And she said that when
she sees things like that she knows that I’m where I’m meant to be.
That I’m meant to be teaching because that’s what I was meant to
do. So that really (. ) my family have really built up my confidence to
want to carry on in my teaching career. And my husband and is a
fantastic influence on me because he reminds me that wellbeing is
really important. He is also a teacher and when we first met he was
teaching at a really difficult school for behaviour children and he
was having difficult days where he was having to put children in
restraints and deal with really difficult behaviours in the classroom,
and out of the classroom, and there were days where he would just
take a day off because he felt like he needed it for his personal and
mental wellbeing. And I remember always thinking that was strange
because (2) I never felt I could take a day off as a teacher, I always
felt like I would be missing and I’d be creating more work for myself
if I took a day off, even if I felt like I needed it due to, sort of,
becoming ill or being overtired or overstressed, and usually due to
work. And he is just such a positive influence because he, although
he is fantastic at what he does and he’s an amazing teacher, he
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has found that balance where he is able to understand that he can’t
do his best for the children that he works with unless he takes care
of himself. And he has managed (.) to be that positive influence on
me so that I can, although sometimes I forget, I have been better at
taking care of my wellbeing as a teacher because I do know that it’s
really really important to model as a teacher to the children and for
me to be at my utmost best so that I can do my best for them. So,
he has been a positive influence in my career as well

R: It sounds like very clearly in those last two questions, or
responses, that relationships and working in participation or co-
production with the children that you’re working with and the adults
that you’re working alongside and that kind of stems out into your
relationships outside of work as well. It sounds like a very clear
thread that the importance of relationships, that that is really
important to you

S: Relationships, like with my colleagues [and

R: Yeah

S: relationships of the [children

R: Yeah]

S: Definitely, yeah

R: So it sounds like it’s really added to the twists and turns of the
different turning points and what’s influenced your career
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S: Certainly, I think I’ve always been one that has been influenced by my environment; and obviously people are part of your environment (3) I (. ) yeah I think that relationships are really important. I think your relationship the children is really important because if they don’t like you, if they feel like you’re not there for the reason that you should be there, which is for them to, you know, make their time at school exciting and happy and nurturing and, you know, make them feel safe and happy and loving environment, then they can’t then go on to learn what they need to learn and I think that’s really important. When you make those connections with the children, they want to do their best for you and they want to learn and they want to be there and (. ) I think the same goes for, you know, colleagues at work. If you are showing an interest in people’s lives, and you are wanting to support each other, and work collaboratively with one another, you are all there for the same reason because you want to do it is best for the children and I think that creates a really positive working environment. And amongst other stresses that will come up in any working environment, I feel like if there is that positive relationship with your colleagues then you can get through it together thing sort of thing (2) yeah.

R: That makes lots of sense to me ((smiling)). Okay, so have there been any curriculum which have been implemented during your teaching career and how did these affect you? I’m aware that you’ve worked in lots of different (. ) systems and I don’t know if you
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want to pick one particular one or if you want to make references
across the different ones

S: They’re weren’t any changes when I was teaching in Canada
because I wasn’t there for long enough. But there were changes
from when I started teaching in the UK to now. Now, I think it’s
difficult for me to say specifically what those changes are because I
was only really growing to know the system and then things
changed sort of the thing so I don’t know that I’m really confident in
saying specific changes. However, when Michael Gove came in to
education and (.) he was the director of education wasn’t he? Or
the Minister of Education, we call it Director of Education in
Canada. The system when I first came to the UK was difficult!

There was a lot of paperwork, it was run very different to what I was
used to. I felt the national curriculum had a lot of flaws within it, it
created very passive children that were unable to really think for
themselves generally (.) but I felt like when Michael Gove came in
as Minister of Education things got even worse, I felt like the
paperwork increased, I felt like (.) professional discretion was
completely stripped from teaching (.) I felt like there was more of a
(.) push for evidencing absolutely everything you do as a teacher.

So, you know, every conversation you have with children and (.)
every piece of work that they do being evidenced and analysed and
annotated and written on (2) and any intervention that you want to
do, anything additional that you feel like as a teacher you know that
certain children need had to be documented in certain formats and
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performas and templates. And I've just felt like the paperwork and
the evidence has just skyrocketed in teaching. The teaching
profession, and I feel like that (.) has (2) just created such a

negative impact on teachers because (.) when I was in Canada

felt like I had the professional discretion. I went to school and I

trained to be teacher and, you know, obviously I was observed

throughout my career as well and they had these positive

observations and constructive feedback to give back to, you know,

do better in certain areas. But I felt like I was given the discretion,

the ability and opportunity to judge for myself what was best for the

children that I was teaching. I didn’t have to evidence every little

thing because my (2) professional judgement was seen to be

accurate because I have done all this training and I feel like this is

what's different in this country. I feel like there is no professional

discretion, you're expected to prove everything as a teacher and I

feel that takes away, you know, you only have so many hours in the
day, obviously six of them (.) six and a half are spent with the

children. So you’ve also got time to sleep, and you want to have
time with your family and your friends and, you know, to do

extracurricular activities that may interest you, so fitting all that in

plus having to do lots and lots of paperwork to show planning and

evidence of specific things that you’re doing and it’s, you know, it’s

not sort of one line things that you can fill out, paperwork in the

education system, what I’ve seen across schools, so not just

individual schools that I’ve worked at, is pages and pages of very
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detailed notes that I never look at as a teacher because (2) I think that as a teacher when you make your own plan, and so many people work in so many different ways. So, for me, what benefits me, is even if I am doing practical activities with the children, I like to put things on a flipchart and I give myself prompts in the flipchart so that it can be in the background. I can be doing something in the classroom with them but it’s prompted me or I’ve got key questions that I think that I am going to focus on and that ideally would be my planning. So just a flipchart. Other people would work in different ways. Some people prefer mind maps, some people prefer post-its, some people prefer a day diaries type thing. And I feel like the prescriptive element of paperwork in the education system is really difficult for teachers to manage because by the time you put all your effort into typing up and writing out planning and interventions and all these detailed reports of everything that you’re doing, you don’t actually get time to put into planning amazing lessons that the children are going to benefit from and gathering up the resources and making the resources that it takes to have an amazing lesson And I feel like that is where the education system really falls short because there’s so much time put into paperwork and evidencing everything. And on top of that funding for TAs has decreased significantly which means that you know having to do a lot of sticking in your books, displays (. . .) things that could be easily handed off or to delegated to somebody else but we don’t have TAs that work past the hours of when children are actually in school.
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You know, in schools there’s a lot of situations where TAs are being shared between many classes. So teachers are having to do a lot of paperwork and sticking and gluing and photocopying and displaying on their own, as well as everything else they do, and there’s just not physically enough hours in the day. I think that’s where you (...) well that’s where I start to feel really quite negative about teaching because I feel like if I could put all the time and energy that it takes me to do evidencing of things and paperwork, if I could put that into buying supplies for really exciting activities and making resources that are really going to engage the children and thinking about really interesting ways to, like stimulating starts to units of work, and fantastic finishes and things like that, you know, that the way that I was actually trained when I was in teachers college, I feel like the children would not only learn more but they would have experiences like I had with my second grade teacher who always made things extravagant and amazing and exciting. It’s unfortunate as teachers, or I feel as teachers we don’t have time to think about those kinds of things because there’s just too much other stuff to do. When you also take into account that generally, well in my school now and at previous schools, you have at least an hour and a half staff CPD training after school and you have potentially responsibilities, so at my school I’m also the art coordinator with a colleague so I have additional teaching and learning responsibilities. And I don’t have additional PPA time during the day to support the teaching and learning responsibilities.
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It’s expected that I do that after school in my own time. When you factor all those additional responsibilities in data collection and we’re meant to analyse data to the nth degree now. So, sort of analysing children who are pupil premium, analysing children who are SEN, analysing data of children who have traveller backgrounds or difficult home life or boys or girls and there’s so much you’re expected to do as a class teacher that you feel like you’re a juggler, juggling like a million balls in the air. Really the most important thing is teaching the children and making it fun and it feels like that is really sucked right out of it and (2) I feel like over time since I have been here it has got worse.

R: Alright, thank you for that reflection. I think (.) that is very well put. You said you weren’t so sure about answering that one at the beginning, I think you can be very confident in your answer ((smiling)). Are you okay or did you need a break?

S: No, I’m okay

R: So how did, or how has, changing schools impacted on you?

S: How did changing schools impact me? Well I’ve had a few changes. Going from Canada to the UK, the change impacted me in both positive and negative ways. So positively, I think I learnt a lot more strategies for behaviour management because it’s (.) something that was never really a concern or a problem at the school where I was teaching in Canada. So, I learned a lot of things, I was thrown in the deep end and although it was really
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scary but reflecting upon it I feel like I learned a lot from that experience. Negatively, I think it really it (.) made me feel like it like if questioned whether I’d made the right choice going into teaching. Because I didn’t realise that something that I thought and did at one point made me so incredibly happy that it didn’t feel like work to me, it just felt like this is where I’m meant to be, it went from feeling that was to feeling like I didn’t know whether I was good at this job, I questioned my ability to do what I’d been trained and working my whole life to do and (.) I (.) I felt like that was quite a negative impact. I thought that maybe it would get easier after I had spent a few months or even a few years in this system, so I thought originally it could be because I didn’t know the system well enough, I didn’t know how things work but that has proven to not be the case. I was obviously at a very low point in my career at the end of Year Two at St Theresa’s in London and I changed schools hoping that I would have bit more clarity onto or into what I wanted to do with my life. I did question quite a bit whether or not I was in the right career path. I think supply teaching (.) for that year after I left London (.) brought with it many highs and lows as well because supply teaching itself is an amazing experience but I don’t know how people make a career out of that because I also find it not very rewarding. So, as a teacher you have so many rewarding moments where you get to see the children blossom and grow and progress and move through their education and through their lives and you develop those relationships and those connections with them and in
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helping them get there, and as a supply teacher you see them for a
day and then you might not see them again. You might not even
know what their names are and to me that’s not what teaching is
about. So, that was quite a difficult point as well. And it made me
reflect on whether or not I should go back into classroom teaching
and seeing if I felt differently at a different school, in a different
county and in a different area. So, when I started at the current
school that I’m at, I originally felt amazing. I felt like I had more
control, more say over things, like I say I think a lot of that is to do
with teaching the Foundation Stage curriculum and not the national
curriculum, and I feel like to an extent a lot of Head Teachers don’t
understand the Foundation Stage curriculum so they tend to not
put too much scrutiny on teachers working in the Foundation Stage
because they don’t understand it so they probably feel they can’t
scrutinise. I was thoroughly enjoying it until we had Ofsted. Since
then it has significantly got worse the school environment and (2)
we went from being a ‘good’ school to ‘needs improvement’. We
gone from seeing the Head Teacher all the time, him coming into
talk to us about how things were going with our children weekly, on
a weekly basis he would come and talk to us and say “How are
things going? Is there anything I should know? How are you getting
on?” There was a very big push for wellbeing because that was
actually part of my interview when I originally interviewed for this
position. One of the questions was ‘How do you look after your
wellbeing as a teacher?’ Which made me feel confident in that they

There was a real sense of turmoil as she spoke. During
that time in her career she was reflecting on whether
she should continue doing what she felt she was meant
to do but the systems appeared to be stifling what
she felt her role was. Unlike
me, when I felt restricted by
systems I spent some time
thinking about what else I
could do which I felt would
help children realise their
full potential and be able to
help those in need better.
I’ve come to realise that the
role of the EP is at times
restricted by systems too.
But when I was making my
decision, while I loved
teaching and the children, I
unlike Saoirse, had only
invested ten years of my life
to it. For her, she had been
preparing since her earliest
years. That really drives
home the impact which the
systems within education
can have on adults working
within it. Consequently, it
must also impact the young
people who are
experiencing it.
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Recognised as a school that wellbeing was important. But since OFSTED and since we’ve moved down in the criteria and we’ve not seen the Head Teacher, if you go into his office to ask something or discuss a child protection issue, you get a hand in your face ((holding up hand to demonstrate)) that he’s too busy. It’s a very different environment to what it was. I feel like it was originally quite a positive influence for me but (.) I feel like that might be changing.

However, one thing that is quite positive where I am at now is that I enjoy very much working with most of my colleagues and (.) I have obviously learned from that experience in London that wellbeing is important and I’ve made it a bigger priority for myself and I’ve learned that I can say no. So if somebody tells me something at school, tells me to do something or (.) tells me they need something from me, I make sure that I am setting the standards when they’re going to receive certain things and how they are done because I believe as a teacher I do have professional discretion over what I think is best for the children and as long as I am doing that and I am teaching the children to the best that I can, paperwork and evidence and anything else that is asked of me can wait until I’m ready to give it, until I have the time to do it. So, I feel like although the environment at school is becoming more negative and is not as positive as when I started out in this school, I feel like because I have developed awareness of what I think is really important, I have tried to make that impact of the environment, I feel like it is less because I am more aware of certain things.
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R: Mmm, and am I right in thinking that even though the overall thing from Ofsted was 'requires improvement' that wasn't reflective of the Early Years area ((S nodding)) but even so you're feeling an impact of that within your…

S: Definitely. Definitely, so we were rated as 'good' and we actually were not given any targets in the Ofsted report of how to do better. So, I was surprised that we didn't get 'outstanding'. But (.) although it wasn't us that went below 'good' into 'needs improvement' we have been (.) the governors have been relieved of duty and we have been given an interim education board I think it's called, which is basically governors are appointed by the council to come in and do the role of previous governors of the school in managing the school and supporting the Head. And the council have sent as an adviser that comes in once every two weeks to do learning walks and although we were rated 'good' we are still part of those learning walks and still part of all the additional training that is being put into the rest of the school so it hasn't been noted that (.) by the school in the sense that we actually have done well and we should carry on doing what we're doing because we're doing something really right. And in fact, we are being brought into training that really has nothing to do with us, the relevancy is not there. So, although there is this idea in schools and with Head Teachers that 'well everybody needs to part of the training because you can move year groups any time' I don't understand that process because although I agree, you could move any time, the thing about education it
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changes so rapidly and even within a school ( ) systems and things
that are in place change so rapidly, one year you could be talking
about, you know, a certain thing that you’re putting in place for
reading, and that could be changing the next year. So, it doesn’t
really make sense to waste our valuable time that could be spend
on our particular curriculum and environment and how to make it
better at these staff meetings and training sessions that have
nothing to do with. And instead that is not acknowledged and we
are part of something that has, is not relevant to us. And I think it’s
really unfortunate because I think that there are things that we
could do that, like work on outdoor classroom and we’ve got goals
other goals within the setting that we want to work on, observations
and things ( ) and we do not have, there’s only so much time in a
week that we have to be able to do that and with additional, like I
say, staff training and meetings that are not relevant to our Key
Stage or curriculum and ( ) I ( ) I also think there is an element of
learning on the job in teaching there is a huge element of that
actually. So, if you are, if I’m having a training on reading
comprehension, which I did this week so that’s why it’s in my head,
and actually it’s only applied from Years 3 to 6, the woman said at
the very end of the session ((laugh)). Unless I’m actually physically
doing that intervention every day, I’m not going to remember them
anyway. So, I’m sitting there listening to something that hasn’t got
anything to do with the relevancy of what I do now. And even if I did
move year groups I’d have to re-do it; I’d either have to be re-
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trained or re-informed of what's actually happening because, you
know, it's like a skill in maths, if you're not using something, you're
not going to remember it, you're going to have to re-teach yourself.

That's not thought about in this system ((laughs)) it's not thought
about the best use of teachers’ time and I think that's why a lot of
time gets wasted and isn't efficient. And when there is that lack of
efficiency that's when teachers become stressed because they feel
they don't have the time to do things that would best benefit the
children and I've kind of got off topic but (.) yes

R: That's okay

S: Yes

R: That was [

S: Sorry]

R: That's totally fine ((both laughing)) that's totally fine. I (.) okay (.)
I don't want to put words in your mouth or anything but it comes
across as you're so passionate about what you do but how does
being a teacher make you feel? It's obviously not on the recording
but I can see in your whole manner and the look on your face how
you sort of feel about that but...

S: Yeah, I'm definitely passionate about teaching. I think that ()
teacher (.) can inspire you to do things and make you feel you've
got the confidence to do things that maybe you don't think you
could before. I also think that being more than a teacher, being, you
know, especially in early years being a mum, being sometimes a bit
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of a social worker, being, you know, a doctor, being so many

elements of (...) of (...) different professions is really what children,
especially young children need. I've got a lot of children in my class
right now who have really difficult home lives. And it could be that
I'm their (...) that person that has the longest conversation with them
in the day, and gives them the most attention in the day, and, you
know, gives them any kind of, you know, I know we're not supposed
to cuddle the children but, you know, they might need to cuddle,

they might need a bit of affection because they may not receive that
at home. And I feel like it is the job of the teacher to provide the
children with whatever they need, so if it's just time to talk then it's
time to talk, if it's learning a maths skill it's learning a maths skill, it

it's taking care of them when they've fallen over then it's taking care
of them when they've fallen over and giving them some first aid. But

I think that as a teacher, the best part is that you get to see different
sides of children and you get to see (...) and you get to provide them
with everything that they need to feel happy and safe in their school
environment and knowing that they might not actually feel those
things outside of school. It's amazing. I think it's so incredibly

rewarding. Like I said when, you know, you've been working on a
skill, or even an emotional skill, so learning how to make friends
and learning how to maintain those friendships, learning how to
understand and explain how they're feeling so that they can
manage their emotions better which will then impact positively on
their learning. Helping them move towards and when they do finally
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get there it's amazing. And I do think that's why I can't leave
teaching, you know. despite all the stress and the anxiety that has
been created over the course of my teaching profession, especially
in this country. I feel that's the reason I can't leave, it's for those
high moments, where all the highs make it worth it. (...) for those
lows, the highs make it worth it. And then it's nice that when the
children have moved on and are in different year groups and
classes still come back to you and remember you and want to give
you a little cuddle and want to give you a little high five because
they're proud of something they've done and they remember you
were their teacher and they remember that and you've had an
impact and that connection with them and (...) that's really lovely as
well. I got married this summer and I had children that I taught back
in London that sent me cards and little presents that they made
because they still remember me which is really sweet and I still
remember them and I obviously had (...) a nice impact, a positive
impact on them. So, yeah, I think teaching is amazing. It is a
rollercoaster. (laughs) There are many highs and there are many
lows but obviously the highs make it worth it.

R: Mmmm, it sounds like it. Okay, you've shared so much and
you've given lots of really rich detail in your account of talking about
your teaching career; what would be the title of your story, about
the things that you've talked about today, if you were to give it a
title, what would that title be?
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S: (3) Well I have thought about this. Obviously I’ve spoken a lot
about highs and about lows and being a bit of a juggler with all the
balls you’ve got in the air when you’re a teacher. And I think that if
I had to put a title on my teaching career it would be ‘A Rollercoaster
because you get on a rollercoaster and you have those drops
where your stomach sinks and you feel anxious and worried
because, you know, you’ve got that pit of your stomach, you don’t
know what’s going to happen and then it’s okay again because then
the rollercoaster shoots up in the air, you know, it brings you back
on this high of feeling okay again and brings you back and it’s
brilliant and exciting and thrilling and rewarding because, you know,
you’re back where you want to be, and so, I think if I had to have a
title, it would be ‘Rollercoaster’

R: Super, thank you so much. That is really really fantastic. Is there
anything else you wanted to add that I maybe didn’t ask you about?

S: (4) The only thing that I think is really important, and I touch on a
little bit, it’s the element of OFSTED which is also obviously recently
came up in one of the questions that you asked me. It’s (. ) if I’m
comparing two systems, so Canada and England, we don’t have
OFSTED in Canada, we don’t have anything similar to OFSTED in
Canada, so the way that it works is that you don’t have to provide
Head Teachers with planning, you don’t have to provide any
evidence of paperwork or anything. the only thing that you do need
to provide is data. So, you know at the end of the unit you provide
your summative assessment. Anything else that you collect as a
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teacher, or any other way that you might work to collect that
information is based on you and how you work as an individual
which I think respects the individuality of people in general. There
are obviously pros and cons to the Canadian system but (.) I think
that’s amazing. And as far as inspections and observations go, your
Head Teacher in your first three years of teaching will come in a bit
more frequently maybe, sort of, three, four times in a year. But as
you progress through you career, those observations go down to
once a year, and you’re just trusted that you know what you are
doing (3) and having that sense of trust and feeling like you are
given that opportunity and responsibility to just do what you feel is
best, is really (.) amazing and (.) it makes the environment and the
whole idea of teaching so much more positive because it makes
you feel like, you know, you are in control, you know what you are
doing, you’ve been given the trust that you deserve after all the
training that you have put into your career and that you continue to
put in and you know what’s best for your children. And it makes,
just a really great feeling as a teacher feeling that trust (.) and I feel
that is the different between Canada and here. It’s that you don’t
feel that you’re trusted, you feel like you have to prove and justify
everything you do and you have to evidence everything that you do.
And with (.) the (2) with the (.) threat and I am going to use that
word, threat of OFSTED coming, you do, you have to do things that
the Head Teacher or a Senior leader say is for ‘Our OFSTED’
which I find interesting because OFSTED’s (.) motto or idealogy
or whatever you want to call it, is that there is no one right way of
doing anything. They said that to us at the beginning of their
inspection back in April, that they are not looking for one right
system of doing something, that all they’re looking for is that the
systems that are in place are effective for the progress and benefit
of the children. I agree with that to an extend that they probably (.)
and I think that has changed over the last few years because I don’t
think that Ofsted always had that sort of ideology in place but it is
what they are striving to work towards now. But if that were true and
if that ideology was really properly followed through then things like
(3) so one of the reasons we were put down as ‘needs
improvement’ was that some of the data from the previous Year’s
Six SATS, again, was not was not ideal. That cohort in general
didn’t do very well. Now, again, OFSTED is looking at that, and
other people looking at that as a group of numbers, not a group of
people, of little people who are growing and developing and
changing and turning into little adults and they’ve got their own
mental and social and emotional wellbeing to look after and things
are happening to them in their home life and their relationships. And
that’s not taken into account. So, they’re not just a number, they’re
an individual and I don’t feel that individuality is embraced in this
country. The individual-ness and uniqueness of a child is not
embraced (.) children are seen as numbers and targets and data (.)
and that is (.) it’s not real. I feel that children feel the impact of that
and I feel that Ofsted is partially to blame for that (.) and I feel like
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the atmosphere that Ofsted and the treat of Ofsted creates, for
example, if you go down to 'needs improvement' there's all these
things, like the council's interim education board we've got in place,
and the school decides to throw loads and loads of training into so
many different things (2) when actually sometimes it's about doing
one thing really well. Like sometimes schools get so worried that
they've had a bad OFSTED report that rather than actually coming
together as a school and saying 'Okay, what we do really well?
Because I think that there are areas that we do really well. What
areas do we need to improve? What shall we really focus on and
put our energy into and do it well?' I don't feel like that happens. I
feel like (.) systems (.) schools have this breakdown where they
don't want to do so they throw their energy into a million different
balls in the air, and again it's that juggling act. And they can't do
anything, they don't do anything well. They just do lots of things
poorly. I feel like that is in part due to OFSTED. I also feel like when
you're a 'good' school, you're constantly striving to be an
'outstanding' school. And when you're an 'outstanding' school,
you're constantly trying to maintain the 'outstanding' status. And I
just feel there's so much within a school environment that is
constantly catering to this idea of OFSTED reports. When actually
it's a group of individuals, that are there for a few days, they don't
know what the school runs like on a whole, they don't know, they
can get a little bit of a picture but they don't know the ins and outs
of everything. What they're seeing is maybe not necessarily always
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accurate or maybe they’re not seeing the whole picture from the
time that they do do an observation or a look through a book. And I
don’t think they generally look at children as individuals. And I think
that creates that tone in the environment that actually, yeah,
children are just a group of numbers. Yeah () I just think that it’s a
really unfortunate system that’s in place in this country because I
think it creates a law of this, the whole evidencing and (2) the extra
paperwork that goes into a school. I think that schools then feel
they then need to use that to prove OFSTED that they are doing
certain things and actually they just need to trust that teachers are
doing what they’re doing. And children will actually do better on
those summative assessments if they have those amazing lessons
and those amazing learning experiences that can only be planned
in when teachers have the time to plan them in

R: Thank you

S: So, yes, that’s the only additional that I wanted to add

R: Thank you. Thank you so much for your time and thank you for
everything that you’ve shared with me

S: Thank you
Appendix Nine

Luke’s ‘I Poem’

Background

I’m an English teacher
I was Head of English
I’ve also taught
I spread around
I've held so far
I’m an assistant head
I teach English
I’ve got quite a spread
Most challenging thing I’ve done
I’ve worked
I’ve always been keen on working in schools like that
I suppose that’s one of the biggest shifts recently
I turned to academies for purely financial reasons

Why Teaching?

I know that sounds
I can go with that
I first started working
If I’m going to be really honest

I became a teacher

I finished

I had a 56 grand student loan

**Best Moments**

I suppose

When I became Head of English

I moved

I improved results

I’ve delivered at

If I don’t continue in a school

I forget the name

I’m considering

I still enjoy schools

**Worst Moments**

I guess

I’ve had that happen

I had knives pulled on me

I left

I’d go and do bus stop duty
I had to
I had to deal with her
Said I was being racist
I was going
I wanted
I saw those members of staff
I just think that’s a bit of a disgrace
I think that’s wrong
I mean at the minute
I’m working ten to twelve hour days
What I do at work
What I take at work
What I take home
What I don’t take home
I care
People I work with
If I take anything more home
I wouldn’t have a relationship
I certainly wouldn’t see my daughter
I’m very lucky
I do know a number of Heads

I know

I’m very lucky to have a Head who understands

I think

I wouldn’t

I made a decision

I’m not going to work for that type

I’m sure that can work

I haven’t seen an example

I wasn’t looking

I wasn’t looking

I like working

I wanted

I was a bit nervous

I didn’t like

I’d never seen anything like that before

I just thought

I actually thought

I really like that

I was quite keen
I upped the concentration

**Turning Points...**

I very nearly left

When I worked

I very nearly left the profession completely

I thought

I took redundancy

I was being quite arrogant

I know

I'm good at what I do

I'm walking

I was kind of playing

So I did

I took the cheque

I suppose

I was deputy

I wasn't pleased with their tone

I wasn't

I wasn't being treated like that

I took the deal
I’d signed the paperwork
I was the only one
I took the money
I left
I was very close to stopping
I thought
I’d re-train
I would have gone
I was definitely drinking more
My wife and I’s relationship changed
I was always stressed
I stopped
I stopped
I missed it massively
I really missed it
I started looking
I stayed until the end of the year
I wasn’t able
I took that time
I made the decision
I want
I was interested
I also got
I would like

When I make the next move
I will take a hit
Or I’ll move up
I have been happy
I went back

I cannot see myself not working with children

I can muck about in a classroom
I can come out
I really don’t mind
I get really nervous
I get really anxious
I much prefer
I’m lucky
I teach

So I deliberately
I want the exam classes
I want Key Stage 5

I run the sixth form

I need the English results to be goo

I can pretty much guarantee

I feel

I can be a bit blunt

I definitely delegate

I would teach

I won’t teach

I have meetings before

I’m somewhere else

I regret taking on the additional

I couldn’t allow

I alone

I earn

I was completely offended

I think it’s absolutely shocking

I wouldn’t want to be a head teacher trying to get the balance right

**Significant People**

When I started
When I first started
I was greedy for more money
No way I was going to get
So I said
Then I'd like
So I did
I set it up
I got that running
Difference to what I was earning
I've created
I've led
I've been
Since I was an NQT [Newly Qualified Teacher]
I was very aware
I was confident enough
I had
I got
If I ever step any higher
I'm getting her
I started
I'm 39
I suppose
I say similar things
I think that's a bit of privilege
I find it disturbing
I still have hope
I think those two stand out
I was very green
I stepped
I left
I was really happy
I made sure
I've got
I line manage
I got CPD
I was given the right opportunities
I think it's really important
I do that to other people
I've seen managers

**Curriculum Changes**
I refer to it as double jumping

I will sit down with staff

What was I saying?

I don’t quite know how they make their decisions

I think what they have

I think the reason why

Do you know what I mean?

I don’t have discipline problems in my class

I think that’s pushed a lot of people

I have a member of staff

I was frustrated

I just found it

I suppose you could argue

I mean what does any of that stuff mean

I don’t necessarily think

But I do sometimes wonder

I look at

What I taught

Why am I doing this?

Why am I doing

301
What I'm doing
I'm not even
I enjoy teaching
I love teaching
I love
I don't really know

**Changing Schools**
I worked in
Every year I got
I had to make a decision
Am I going
Am I going to stay
I wanted
I wanted to become Head of English
That's what I wanted
I went
That's what I got
When I moved
I suppose
I was a little too big for my boots
I wanted to change whole school systems
I wanted to be able
I would be quite bullish
I wanted to change quite a lot
I got pushed back
I only did it
I wanted to have an influence
I learnt that
I was also
I did that
That's why I
I wanted
I became quite interested
I realised the politics that go on
I was dealing with people
How do I word this?
I felt that was frustrating
I've had to change
I've presented myself
I would be quite aggressive
I was told
I had to learn
I made loads of adjustments
I suppose
If I were to look back
If I really look
I had
If I look at the way
I dealt with things
I was Head of English
Beyond what I was
I was arguably
I’ve calmed down
I present
I want things
I’ve presented
I do think

As a teacher I feel...

I feel very privileged
I do feel very lucky
I’ve felt more and more
I differentiate
I don’t get marking done
I either have to sacrifice
I’ve 200 essays to mark over Christmas
I can leave that
I can do extra
However I do it
I’m actually a child-carer
I don’t get the time
The way
I used to
I’d work Monday
I’d get all my work done
I’d have three or four days off
I’m not willing to give up all of my evenings
I’m not willing to give up all my weekends
I can’t give up
Before I had a child
I would
I’d just crunch it
I’d work a few hours
I would go
I can’t do that anymore
I never sit in my office
I might do
I stay late
I stay til about seven
I pulled up a teacher
I find that quite refreshing
I have to take home

A Title...
I have my day
I took sixth form
I find them quite hard to relate with
I think
I’m a bit of a bull in a china shop
I said
I charge around the place
I’m not slack at all
I’m very high in my expectations

I wouldn’t allow

I would always acknowledge

I pulled the reigns

I wanted it

I never even thought

I’ll try

I guess

I do talk

I’ll make that very, very clear
Appendix Ten

This is a sample of quotations that demonstrates each of the identified voices in Luke’s narrative. Further examples are available in Luke’s full transcript (Appendix Eleven, pg. 311-378) and each voice is colour coded. Highs are pink, Low are green, Cultivation is teal, Awareness is blue, Balance is grey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice of ...</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higns</strong></td>
<td>“You see those kids get results, that’s still pretty special, yeah, it’s pretty amazing” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 306, lines 125-126). “I improved results by 20% and that was quite a big achievement” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 306, lines 128-129). “When you can just focus on the kids it’s alright 146-147 the classroom is the best place to be. Without a shadow of doubt.” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 321, lines 449-450). “Still the classroom is great” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 322, line 465). “Can’t be running anything unless you’ve got good people working alongside you” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 329, lines 635-636). “You get to work with young people. I think that’s a bit of a privilege.” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 330, lines 660-661).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Lows**     | “Adults mess schools up, kids don’t” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 307, line 146). “Being attacked by students. I’ve had that happen 8, 9, times now. So, from being spat in the face to being hit with tables, I had
“knives pulled on me in my school” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 307, lines 151-154).

“So to be a member of staff standing 100 metres away from a kid being handed a package of drugs and not being able to do something that went against everything that feels natural to me with regards to looking after young people.” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 308, lines 170-173.

“But most frustratingly so was that both members of staff walked away from that with good references and walked away to work in other inner London schools” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 310, lines 206-209).

“Sometimes your stomach does turn over because you don’t know how you’re going to deal with the next day or the next two days. You have parents coming in and trying to take you apart. You’ve got to stand really firm, you’ve got to hold on tight” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 362, lines 1405-1408).

Cultivation

“So, it was constantly about making sure that she was moving forward too” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 332, lines 693-694).

“That person should be taking your job if you’re doing your job properly. You should be line managing them to have your job. That’s one of the mentalities that I’ve got when I line manage ... You need to give them all the opportunities you can (.) particularly if you’re looking to recruit and recycle staff into more
senior positions in your own school” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 332, lines 697-712).

“I wanted to change whole school systems” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 346, lines 1024).

“You’re meant to personalise set targets for students” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 356, lines 1274-1275).

“You’re kind of like their stand in parent.” (Appendix Eight, pg. 362, line 1396).

| Awareness | “It was one of the reasons I left is that we were thinking of having a baby and Trudie was like ‘that has to stop’” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 307, lines 154-156).

“But actually having Carys (. . .) my 20-month year old daughter (. . .) she’s kind of (. . .) made me turn things off and a little bit better, a little bit more regimented about what I do at work and what I take at work (. . .) what I take home and what I don’t take home” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 311, lines 235-238).

“Getting that balance right is quite important” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 312, line 256).

“I made a decision that I’m not going to work for that type of a head teacher” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 314, lines 284-285).

“No, I couldn’t let my mind go there in a daily basis. It would just be too much” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 342, lines 929-930).

| Balance | “I’ve calmed down with the way I present my things, the speed with which I want things down and that’s relatively good for mental health too” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 345, lines 1104-1106).
“I’ve had to change the way I’ve presented myself in senior meetings” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 347, lines 1062-1063).

“I was told my facial expressions were quite (2) aggressive and confrontational. I had to learn there that the way to get things done is through democracy” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 347, lines 1063-1065).

“And if I look at the way I dealt with things when I was the head of English, it was trying to prove myself beyond what I was. Trying to be something that I was arguably wasn’t at that stage in my career.” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 1049, lines 1098-1100).

“And that’s really difficult because I’m not willing to give up all of my evenings and I’m not willing to give up all of my weekends and I can’t give up the majority of my holidays. Before I had a child, that was how I would deal with it before” (Appendix Eleven, pg. 356, lines 1255-1258).
Appendix Eleven

1 Researcher (R): So, thank you Luke, (.)

2 ((laughing))

3 R: And nobody is probably even going to listen to this part but you and I but…

4 Luke (L): It’s all good, it’s all good

5 R: Alright. So, if initially you could just give me a little bit of background to what your teaching career is like, so where you’ve taught and the age range that you teach…

6 L: Yep. So, [I've] always taught in secondary schools, so 11-18

7 R: ummhmm

8 L: Started in 2004, so 14 years ago. [I've] always worked in inner London schools. So, worked in the Convent of Jesus and Mary first in Willesden which was an all-girls school but boys came into the sixth form

9 R: okay

10 L: Then worked at Brightfields school in Barnet, which was completely mixed and not a catholic school

11 R: Okay

12 L: Then moved to Brookfields school in Bright City which was the most inner city school I’d ever worked in. That was completely mixed and non-denominational and I am currently working in St Augustine’s church of England in Hampstead, although it’s 80% Muslim students
Appendix Eleven

it’s still a very much inner city school. Those are the four schools I’ve worked in

R: okay

L: I’m an English teacher but have become an assistant head in the last four years. Before that I was Head of English but I’ve also taught media, film, psychology, RE, history, ethics and a little bit of PHSE

R: So that’s quite a varied

L: I spread around quite a lot (.) and at the minute I’m head of sixth form at St Augustine’s

R: okay

L: Which is the most senior position I’ve held so far in my career

R: And you do that alongside the assistant role…

L: I’m an assistant head at the sixth form and I teach English to Year Eight, Elevens, Twelves and Year Thirteens so I’ve got quite a spread of exam classes as well

R: Okay

L: (.) results have always been really good (.) it’s much more difficult in a management position (laughter) much more difficult

R: I can imagine

L: Ownership of other people’s result is the real challenge (2) yeah, so head of sixth form is the most challenging thing I’ve done
Appendix Eleven

45  R: okay

46  L: Head of English was tough but head of sixth form is something else

48  R: Okay, wow. And you know when you referred to the mixedness of the schools earlier, did you mean it in relation to the pupils attending?

51  L: So all of the schools have been completely comps, all abilities are allowed in

53  R: okay

54  L: They don’t cherry pick. They do band.

55  R: Okay

56  L: So in all the schools I’ve worked in primary school children come in and do their banding tests and then the school will choose 25% from the lowest ability and 25% up all the way to the highest quartile. So, I’ve always been very keen on working in schools like that (.) It’s why the progress results, which is now how everything is measured as opposed to A-C grades

62  R: Yeah

63  L: My schools have always been quite well reflected in that because of the lower ability students that we take in

65  R: okay
Appendix Eleven

L: (.) yeah, I suppose that’s one of the biggest shifts recently is that different measurement

R: Okay, and none of them have been academies?

L: So, the two schools in the middle

R: Yeah

L: were academies. My first school wasn’t – academies weren’t really that much of a buzz at that stage, they were still just

R: Sure

L: The two in the middle were. I turned to academies for purely financial reasons, just purely finance, the results were very good.

And then this current school is the only independent school in Westminster so we don’t, we’re not being taken over but there is always the threat. So, if we have two years of poor results then an academy will be sniffing around very quickly, yeah

R: Okay

L: Very quickly (laughter)

R: Okay, thank you. So what is been your best moment since been a teacher is the general question (laughter) if that’s hard to pin down into one thing then…

L: (.) for me the reason why I like the job for all the difficulties it’s got is the kids. I know that sounds a little bit cheesy
Appendix Eleven

87 R: I realise that I've asked you them in the wrong way round, but not
88 that this matters but I was thinking of what made you want to
89 become a teacher first of all, I dunno if that links into
90 L: That's alright. I can go with that one. All my family are teachers
91 R: Yes, okay
92 L: My dad was the head of English in the boys' school that was
93 twinned with the girls' school that I first starting working at so he was
94 head of English there for 35 years. My mum was involved in Early
95 Years education
96 R: Okay
97 L: So she turned into an Ofsted inspector for nurseries after running
98 her own nursery
99 R: Okay
100 L: Both my older sisters are teachers, then there’s me, brother below
101 me is a teacher, brother below that is a social worker for kids who
102 come out of prison, and then my sister below that is a teacher, my
103 uncles and aunts are teachers ((smiling)), my cousin is on the
104 education board for the Republic of Ireland, making education
105 decisions for them
106 R: Okay
107 L: My auntie is on the education board in Northern Ireland. It was
108 kind of entrenched within us ((smiling))
Appendix Eleven

109  R: Okay
110  L: But if I’m going to be really honest, the reason that I became a teacher was that when I finished my degree, well a helping dec (.)
111  helping make that decision was you got a ten grand ‘golden hello’
112  and they paid your student loan. And I had a 56 grand student loan
113  so it was certainly an attraction…
114
115  R: Yess
116  L: (.) into the system. I do love the job. I’m very lucky to have the job
117  R: And you’ve stayed there despite that. Yeah, okay
118  L: With all the difficulties (.) and to lead onto the other question which
119  is my best moment
120  R: Yes, thank you
121  L: You see, and again it’s a bit cheesy but you see kids get results
122  R: Yeah, sure
123  L: And you see kids get results that never had them before or
124  families that have never owned books or been to university or had
125  have had anything like that at all and you see those kids get results.
126  that’s still pretty special, yeah, it’s pretty amazing. Otherwise than
127  that personally I suppose (.) when I became head of English I
128  moved to Brightfield I improved results by 20% and that was quite a
129  big achievement, that got me recognised in a few different places
130  (.) and some of the national conferences I’ve delivered at, they’ve
131  been quite big moments too because if I don’t continue in a school I’ll
Appendix Eleven

go onto one of these big companies that are helping teaching
learning, something like the Pixel program or (3) I forget the name of
the other one (...) where they go around helping groups of schools at
the same time

R: Okay

L: Quite a lot of people are leaving the profession and going into
those support networks

R: Okay

L: So I'm considering that but at the minute I still enjoy schools still
just a little bit too much ((Laughter))

R: And I can just see in answering that your whole face lit up when
you were talking about that your whole face lit up into a smile when
you were talking about young people

L: Yeah, yeah

L: adults mess schools up, kids don't, so when you can just focus on
the kids it's alright. As challenging as they can be ((laughter))

R: That's great, thank you (...) so I guess then at the opposite end of
the spectrum, what has your worse moment been since being a
teacher?

L: I guess they could fall into two categories. One would be being
attacked by students. I've had that happen 8, 9, times now. So, from
being spat in the face to being hit with tables. I had knives pulled on
me in my school in Goats Bush. It was one of the reasons I left is
Appendix Eleven

that we were thinking of having a baby and Trudie was like 'that has
to stop'

R: Yeah

L: (.) going outside the school in Brookfields, in Bright City, and
seeing, so I'd go and do bus stop duty and you'd see (.) blacked out
windows and Porsche 4x4s pull up just out of the estate, right in one
of the roughest estates around and you'd see all your little Year
Sevens lining up and then someone inside the car would hand them
their first package of the evening, their first delivery because they'd
used Year Sevens to deliver drugs on the estate because they're too
young to get arrested

R: Okay

L: That was a pretty dark ((uncomfortable laugh)), pretty dark week
that one. And there was nothing you could do. These people have so
much power and such a threat that we were told as staff 'don't do
anything'. So to be a member of staff standing 100 metres away from
a kid being handed a package of drugs and not being able to do
something that went against everything that feels natural to me with
regards to looking after young people. That was pretty horrible. With
regards to adults, taking staff through capability measures

R: Okay

L: Is really not pleasant
Appendix Eleven

R: What does that involve? Just to add a little bit of context to
capability measures.

L: So, in Brightfield, as head of English, there were two members of
staff who were effectively not doing their jobs. One wasn’t marking
the books, she wasn’t planning her lessons, she wasn’t giving any
feedback to the students. And there’s quite a long process for a
teacher who isn’t working well. And the first steps of that are offering
support and help and not being too aggressive at all with them
however she didn’t turn it around at all and she didn’t show any
interest and was quite disengaged with the whole process (.) so after
making sure you clarify and show evidence of the guidance and help
and support that you’ve given, you then have to start measuring
performance on that, start going to meetings with the union and head
teacher about ‘look, this isn’t working, what do we do?’

R: Yes

L: The second lady who I had to put through that was getting
students to write essay plans on the inside of their arms before
they’d go into an exam. So, one of the (.) teaching assistants came
out of an English room and said ‘they’ve all got essay plans on the
inside of their arms, they’re about to go into a GCSE what are you
going to do about it?’ So of course you’ve got to deal with that
immediately.

R: Right
Appendix Eleven

L: The threat of that, first of all to the students, they won’t get their results, the school itself, the reputation and kudos of it and all that stuff, plus it’s just wrong, it’s cheating, you can’t do that (.) so I had to deal with her. Unfortunately, she pulled the racism card, said I was being racist against her, and having those kinds of accusations being thrown at you, that was quite an unpleasant month or so (.) but most frustratingly so was that both members of staff walked away from that with good references and walked away to work in other inner London schools. So that when I was going to interviews in other inner London schools when I wanted to make my most recent moves (.) I saw those members of staff on English teams

R: Okay

L: And just think that’s a bit of a disgrace. To behave that poorly.

R: Yeah

L: Actually the way the school gets rid of you is to give you a good reference, to get out of our school

R: And was that two different schools? That had that same type of policy?

L: Two different schools. Yeah, absolutely. We’ll just give you a reference if you get out. I think that’s wrong. Yeah, student wise (.) aggression. Staff wise (.) pulling people who deserve to be going through capability (.) Putting them through that process

R: Yeah
Appendix Eleven

223  L: It's not a pleasant thing to do
224  R: No
225  L: No
226  R: And I get the impression that that would overflow into outside of
227    school? You'd be taking that home with you as well (.) it's kind of
228    hard to [park up at school
229  L: It's very] difficult not to take things home
230  R: Yeah
231  L: I mean at the minute I'm working (.) 10 to 12 hour days. You come
232    home (.) you're exhausted
233  R: Yeah
234  L: But actually having Carys (.) my 20-month year old daughter (.)
235    she's kind of (.) made me turn things off and a little bit better, a little
236    bit more regimented about what I do at work and what I take at work
237    (.) what I take home and what I don't take home
238  R: Okay
Appendix Eleven

L: It’s (.) it’s (.) not easy mentality thing to do because (.) because you care (laughing))

R: Yeah

L: It’s very difficult not to do something extra if you care. While I care about the students, the people I work with and manage etcetera etcetera (2) It’s always that crossover between vocation and the job

R: Yeah

L: And to not (.) put in an extra ten (.) fifteen (.) twenty per cent when (.) kids kind of need it (.) it’s hard thing to do

R: Sure

L: So, to get everything done in the school day is very difficult (.) but if I take anything more home (.) I wouldn’t have a relationship. We may well be together but we wouldn’t see each other. I certainly wouldn’t see my daughter

R: Yeah

L: So, getting that balance right is quite important. I’m very lucky to have a head teacher who’s had children, who understands that and is quite understanding. For instance, he takes Wednesday afternoon off as head teacher to pick his kids up from school and spend some time with them. So, he does commit (.) he commits to that personally

R: Okay
Appendix Eleven

L: But I do know a number of heads who would not give that support (. ) or leeway (. ) or acceptance. Sometimes you’re not going to be able to come in because baby’s sick or you’re not going to be able to come in because baby needs to be taken to the doctors. But I know a number of friends who work in other schools and that would be an absolute no-no. No, you’re not going to your child’s Christmas assembly (. ) you’re not going to (. ) her ear appointment

R: Yeah

L: So, I’m very lucky to have a head teacher who understands that. I think that’s one of the reasons he’s held onto the school being (. ) as an independent school (. ) as opposed to the school being an academy school

R: Did you know that before you went there? Like was that a part of your criteria for where you wanted to move to next?

L: I wouldn’t have gone into a school with a head with a bad reputation

R: Okay

L: And there are loads of them. But they’re often so poor now (2) that it would take a very quick conversation (. ) or sometimes a very quick Google search

R: Okay

L: And it would give you a bit about the head teacher and I made a decision that I’m not going to work for that type of a head teacher.
Appendix Eleven

Often they're not through the education system. They've been dropped into run these academies or these academies trusts.

R: Yeah ((nodding))

L: And they're not from education (.) they're from business.

R: Yeah

L: Now, I'm sure that can work but I haven't seen an example of a head teacher who's running a school properly who's running it like a business.

R: Mmhm ((nodding))

L: There was an interesting Panorama show on a couple of months back about how academies are twisted round to make profit instead of the focus on what it should be which is children's education. And that's doing quite a lot of damage too. So, yeah it was quite a lot to do with a choice to go to a school (2) I wasn't looking for a (.) I wasn't looking for a white Christian school in inner London. I like working with challenging young people of all ethnicities (.) colour of skin doesn't matter to me at all.

R: Yeah

L: So, I wanted an inner London school and they're quite difficult to find that aren't academies

R: Sure
Appendix Eleven

L: So, this one stood out as an independent school. I wanted to go and have a look at it. I was a bit nervous about it being a Christian school. There were parts of working in the Convent, in a catholic school, that I didn't like how it was controlled. I was from a catholic education as well and an awful lot of control goes on in that. But actually in the Christian school it is actually 82% Muslim, it is 10% Christian and offers a full range. So, on my walk around there was a church service for the Year Eights and there was a Muslim girl carrying the incense for the priest, there were Muslim students coming up and reading from the bible. I'd never seen anything like that before. Ever. I just thought, I actually thought ‘Is this okay. Is everyone alright with this?’ And that's just how they do it. And I really like that. I was quite keen on getting in there then. Yeah, and I upped the concentration a little bit on the interview day. ((smiling and laughter))

R: Sounds good. I was wondering whether there had been any turning points in your career. You might have already touched on that a little bit, with thinking about moving.

L: I very nearly left when I worked in Brookfields. I very nearly left the profession completely. The way the school was being run was awful. It was being taken over aggressive by Future Academies. Lord and Lady Nash. And I thought that the way there were treating staff that had worked for a long time in a really, really tough inner city.
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estate school was awful. They said they were going to wipe away whole departments and bring in their own teams etcetera etcetera

R: Okay

L: So, at that stage I took redundancy. From the school. So, they offered all senior leaders () they said “Do you want to take a package or do you want to fight for your jobs?” And I went () rather arrogantly, I was being quite arrogant but also because I know I'm good at what I do

R: Yeah

L: I'm not being treated like that

R: Yeah

L: If you want to treat me like that I am walking. I was kind of playing a little bit of double bluff ((laugh)) but they called it. They went “walk.” So I did. I took the cheque

R: And at that point you were doing the head of English role as well as ()?

L: Head of English, assistant head and I suppose I was deputy leading the sixth form then

R: Okay

L: because the sixth form was an area that they needed to develop significantly. And the sixth form is worth so much money. Students
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pull in so much money that then gets spread around the rest of the school. So, the sixth form really has to be a working sixth form
R: Okay
L: Otherwise you’re better off taking more students in the lower years and not running a sixth form. So, I wasn’t (.) wasn’t pleased with their tone. Or their attitude
R: Sure
L: And for someone who had improved results massively, worked really well, had been threatened and had knives thrown at him (.) wasn’t (.) I wasn’t being treated like that. So, I took the deal. Two weeks late they took the deals off the table but because I’d signed the paperwork
R: Yeah
L: I was the only one that got the deal. So, I took the money and I left. And at that stage (.) I was very close to (.) stopping. I thought I’d re-train as an electrician, I would have gone and learned a trade somehow. (4) They were (.) they were pretty dark days actually (2) And when you look back on it you can see the things that were going on at that time. so, I was definitely drinking more, the idea of just coming home and just drinking to just turn off
R: Yeah
L: Didn’t have a child at that stage so wasn’t abusive ((laughs)) Our relationship, my wife and I’s relationship, changed quite significantly
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We didn’t really spend any positive time together. I was always stressed. Most of the grey hair you can see now came at that time

((smiles)) So it was borderline whether to continue to be honest

R: Okay

L: When I stopped (.) so when you take a redundancy deal you’re not allowed to work for three months. So, I stopped for two and I missed it massively ((laughing)) I really missed it

R: Okay ((smiling))

L: So, I started looking for some supply work

R: Was it in the middle of the year when you

L: No, I stayed until the end of the year. So, it was the summer holidays and then September and October I wasn’t able to go back in and work. So, I took that time (.) I made the decision that I want to go back into it. A lot of my experiences have been positive, a few of them have been negatives [and

R: Yeah]

L: Just try a little bit (.) try something a bit more (.) and it was a case of finding the school. So there were a few schools around here that I was interested in (.) then this school in Camden turned up. So this one, even though I also got one in Queens school up here in Bushy

R: Okay
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394  L: Which is a really really good school. I would like to end up there eventually. The difficulty with moving out here and getting the same level job is about 10 grand in pay

397  R: Okay

398  L: Which is a lot of money (.). A huge amount of money. So we weren't ready for that just yet.

400  R: Yeah

401  L: So when I make the next move out here, I will take a hit in pay. Or I'll move up to deputy and the pay will be less. So yeah, there have definitely been some unpleasant times. But those unpleasant times (.). For the first 10 years of my career they were challenging yeah.

405  R: Yeah

406  L: But no thoughts about stopping or concerns about stopping at all. I have been happy for the last two years. It is really just been that five years, sorry three years, in between that somewhere that

409  R: Sure

410  L: were pretty rough. The changing, the curriculums, the changing of the grade boundaries, the expectations, the lack of guidance, the lack of teachers. That is a massive problem at the minute because nobody wants to work in the profession. So you are kind of filling the spaces with people who aren't specialists or are very good at what they do (.). Those changes happened about that time. And English lead a lot of the pilots.
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R: Sure

L: so English turned before a lot of other subjects did. So all during that upheaval was quite tricky

R: Mmm

L: but it’s all right now

R: but in essence it was the missing the teaching that brought you back? That confirm the decision?

L: yeah. So my first job when I went back after was just as a classroom teacher. No responsibilities at all

R: that was a supply job?

L: yeah. So that was (. ) A school not too far from here. An Academy. Had a reasonable reputation but was been run awfully. I mean, the Head Teacher was really bad. And has since been sacked and told to go away. Going back into the classroom there (. ) Actually made me realise how hard classroom teaching is. So when you go up management and senior leadership you end up with less classroom contact

R: Sure

L: it is a kind of perverse system that the better you are in the classroom the quicker they take you out of the classroom

((laughing))

R: Yeah
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L: which is a bit odd. So going back into that classroom and teaching six periods a day was exhausting. Oh my goodness me, so exhausting. But not having to deal with any of the crappy meetings that go around that

R: Yeah

L: was quite refreshing (4) but yeah I cannot see myself not working with children somewhere along the line

R: Okay

L: still the classroom is the best place to be. Without a shadow of doubt. I can muck about in a classroom. I can come out of the cupboard dressed up as Macbeth [or

R: ((laughing))]

L: make a complete idiot of myself. And I really don’t mind. And the kids either get on board or they look at you with those sad eyes as though to say “what are you doing?” But they’re on board, they get it. But standing up in front of adults (.) Or meetings or governors, that sort of thing, that is where I get really nervous. I get really anxious, can’t hold paper my hands because my handshake. Whereas people who have seen me teach and they’ve seen me deliver in front of adults, they say it is like ((laughing)) two completely different people.

Yeah, I much prefer working with young people. I enjoy Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 more than Key Stage 3, they’re a little bit needy, I am not interested in their “where’s my pencil?”
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((both laughing))

L: Just like, let’s go, let’s go. So yeah, still the classroom is great. I’m lucky to hold onto the amount of classes that I teach. So deliberately take on four classes not three, I want the exam classes, I want Key Stage 5

R: Okay

L: partly because I run the sixth form and I need the English results to be good and I can pretty much guarantee that my classes will get the results. (5) also I feel that I can be a bit blunt (2) and maybe a bit bullish with the young ones and it’s not the style they need. So I definitely delegate back to other people ((laughing))

R: so what does your week look like? How many classes do you teach?

L: so I would teach three or four periods a day. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

R: which is more than half?

L: Oh yeah, yeah, more than half. And then on Friday I won’t teach any lessons at all. That is how my timetable has worked out. So, all the gaps on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday are taken up with meetings

R: Okay

L: so I have meetings before school on a Monday and Wednesday and after school on a Monday and Tuesday. We have parents
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evening on a Thursday (.). So it’s six or so Thursday evenings across the year. Friday is where I do all my catch up. My sending messages, my book checks, my staff checks, my observations. So Friday is (.). On paper my (.). Freest day but it is actually the day that flies past the quickest because I’m literally going (.). Every 50 minutes I’m somewhere else, doing something else.

R: Okay

L: So Friday flies by.

R: Good name for it! So would it be (.). The classes across the week, would they be classed as a full timetable?

L: No. It’s still not a full timetable

R: Okay

L: No, a full timetable would be five or six periods a day

R: Okay

L: Now I regret taking on the additional A-level class (.). But there was nobody in the school that could take it.

R: Okay

L: Nobody takes it, who gets those kids those grades?

R: Yeah

L: So yeah, you could have cover supply or a supply teacher to come in or the option was the Key Stage 4 (.). The catering teacher has half a degree in English, from 40 years ago. So she wasn’t going to take

I decided to ask the question that was filling my stomach with dread: would his teaching timetable be classed as a “full timetable.” I decided to continue with interview and when I reflected on it afterwards I recognised that each participant identified themselves as a full-time teacher with additional responsibilities. I also realised that this is how I described myself even when I had additional time out of class for additional coordinator duties.
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that class. You just can't let that happen. While I’m sure she’d get it, she wouldn't be sharp, she's not going to be up with the marking. So, I couldn’t allow that decision to be made. So, when I’m talking to the head about time management etcetera etcetera he does kind of say "Well you asked for that." It’s kind of on your head.

R: Okay

L: But there weren’t any other teachers or choices. We advertised for staff alone manage science, psychology, sociology, politics and the library. Now in all three of those areas in the last three or four years you cannot get the staff. Had an NQT come in last year just looking for a teaching science post and she wanted 5 grand less than what I earn and I was completely offended by that. What she was saying, the reason why she should get that was that her academy had offered her that but she didn’t want to work under the academy rules. She liked the freedom of our rules but she liked the money but that’s not the way it works (.) can’t have that (.) no way. So it’s really difficult to get staff. The best place we can get staff at the minute (.) we get good staff who’ve been used by the academy that they’re in.

R: Yeah

L: So, they’re so fed up by the system that they’re in and they’re good at what they do they’re just looking for somewhere else that isn’t going to treat them like that. So, our cherry staff from last year (.) our best staff, that’s where we’ve got them from because they’re
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so fed up with the academy that they're in that they are looking to
leave education or looking for a last chance. A place that isn't going
to make you work until six o'clock in the evening and you're not
allowed to leave the building or you have to mark all your books
every week. There are things which are too much (.). There's a head
teacher in a school who openly says that he wants to break all the
young staff that he's got and then send them out to work in other
schools

R: Because?

L: Because he gets all the work out of them and he gets all the drive
out of them until he breaks them. So he might get a year, two years.

And he says this quite publically (.). large speeches that this is his
policy

R: Okay

L: I think it's absolutely shocking. It's really really bad. Especially as
now Ofsted are meant to coming to judge us by talking to us and one
of their key questions should be 'How are you managing the work-life
balance of the staff that you manage, who you lead?'

R: Uh-huh

L: Now we've got a couple of things that we do for that. So, we have
hallow weeks where we have no meetings. We have a very lenient
marking policy, where we're expected to formally mark two pieces of
work a half term. You're still expected to have excellent classroom
delivery and set all the homeworks etcetera etcetera. And we're an
In Appendix Eleven, Luke’s Voice of Balance is divided into Rights and Law. Luke’s voice is divided into two sections: Awareness and Balance. Luke explains that outstanding schools have very positive results. Despite the leniency, many staff are finding it difficult to get their work done. Luke mentions that they have limited class sizes, under 25, and are under a huge amount of pressure. Across the whole, they now have to spread 160-odd kids into smaller classes and balance the financial squeeze. Luke agrees and says they can get rid of staff to make the classes substantially bigger. He continues, “or not. And keep staff hopefully teaching to a lower ratio of kids and doing a better job. I wouldn’t want to be a head teacher trying to get that balance right. Because it’s very easy to throw another six kids in a class. That’s a lot more work. That’s a lot more challenging. And actually in our building it would make some of our classes over-filled. So, you’d get kids sitting on the end of tables, instead of having their own space. Luke mentions that really comes out in all he’s said so far that the young people are central to everything. Definitely resonates with me and how I saw my role in preparing children for the next Key Stage, school and rest of their lives. Luke’s Voice of Balance really resonates with the importance of balancing the needs of students with the challenges faced by schools.
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should be. Which is quite frustrating. Again because it’s not right for the kids. It’s not the right thing to do which is really difficult.

R: A really tricky situation. Okay that’s been really interesting, thank you. I’m just thinking about whether there have been any significant people who’ve influenced you during your career?

L: Oh, without a doubt. Yes. The [ ] My first head of English [ ] so when I started at the Convent, he was my NQT mentor as well, we’re still close friends now.

R: Okay

L: He showed me an awful lot [ ] very calm [ ] very peaceful [ ] didn’t take any crap [ ] stood up for his department, defended his department openly in front of the head teacher [ ] who was a bit of bullish [ ] a bull of a head teacher but she was very good at what she did [2] Yeah, he was a big help [ ] told me I couldn’t say yes to everything.

R: Okay

L: Helped me set up a department. When I first started I was greedy for more money. There was no way I was going to get a lead English position. So I said if you allow me to set up a media department in the school [ ] then [2] and that’s successful [ ] then I’d like to be paid on management money.

R: Okay
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L: And the head teacher went “Well if you set out and make it work
then I’ll back pay you”

R: Oh wow!

L: So, I did it. I set it up. Made it work. The results were the best
results in the school. Media in those days wasn’t that hard at all. Set
all that up, I got that running and then she back paid me for the year
which made quite a bit of difference to what I was earning. And then
of course it allowed me to go to interviews saying that I’ve created a
department, I’ve led a department. I’ve been a part of middle
management since I was a NQT. And those kinds of things go down
quite well (laughing))

R: How resourceful of you!

((both laughing))

L: When you ask questions for management jobs, they want you to
know that you’re not only good in the classroom, what you’ve done in
the department, what have you done in the whole school, what’s
your influence beyond the classroom. So, almost immediately in
my career I was very aware of that. I was confident enough to be
able to stand up and deliver those kinds of things to students
there. Setting up for adults wasn’t too much of a problem in the
department because the media department was just me. It was just
me doing it. So it was quite nice running it. So, yeah he was a big
influence. When I was head of English I had a two IC in English

R: Two IC?
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L: So, second in charge

R: Okay

L: Both of us went for the head of English job. I got the head of English job. She was offered the second in English job. She took it which was great. And she was amazing. So at least 50-50, if not arguably maybe 60-40 to her. That was one of the reasons results went up by 20%.

R: Okay

L: So, she was unreal and made me realise that as a leader of (2) a good sized team, that was an English department with 11 people in it can’t be running anything unless you’ve got good people working alongside you or if you’re going to talk about it in hierarchical terms below you I don’t like that term but So she she was unreal. And if I ever step any higher or get to run my own school, I’m getting her. She’s amazing. The head of English that I started with at the beginning left education when all the changes started.

R: Okay

L: He said “I’m not doing it” so he went and to become a carpenter a very happy man

R: Okay

L: In the Isle of Dogs building people sheds and playing bowls. But he is So I’m 39 (2) he’d be 45 and left (3) eight years ago. So he
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left (. ) in his mid to late thirties. He saw what was happening to the
education profession and went “I’m not jumping through those
hoops” (. ) so left. And he was (. ) he was amazing (. ) he was
absolutely amazing. Kids under control, engaging, thoughtful, really
passionate about what he did. Again he says (. ) well I suppose I say
similar things to him in term of (. ) it’s the adults who mess it up (. ) it’s
not the kids. The kids just come around every single year and that’s
it. So it’s interesting that someone of his quality and a number of
people with those qualities are saying “No, I’m not doing it, I’m
getting out of the profession.” So even with all the perks, the holidays
(2) what other perks are there (. )

R: ((laugh))

L: The pay’s not bad (. ) you get to work with young people. I think
that’s a bit of a privilege. Even with all those things (. ) people are still
saying “It’s not for me, I’m not doing it anymore”

R: ((nodding))

L: Now, that was his career for twenty years and he still walked away
from it. I find it disturbing. But also I think the problem we’ve got (. ) is
people coming into management with experience or people coming
into senior leadership with experience, there are no head teachers
around anymore because they just get abused and treated badly too
(. ) except they get it from all angles (. ) the government and the
governors but they also get it from disgruntled staff that can’t handle
what to do
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R: Mmmmm

L: All of those positions are really (...) really thin on the ground (...)
which is disturbing for the future, but I still have hope (2) that it's
going to come full circle a little bit. It's going to come soon (...) in time
for my retirement ((laughing))

R: ((laughing)) Well good. Hopefully yeah. Is there anything else in
that group? Other people or?

L: (2) Lots have people have been very positive. Lots of people have
been very challenging. I think those two stand out as (4) I suppose
inspirations for me.

R: Okay

L: One when I was very green and then one when I stepped into my
first serious management role

R: Okay

L: So while head of media was a management role, it was very
small. To look after an English department means everybody (...)
everybody is on your books across the whole school (...) so to have
her there (...) and then when she became head of English which I
was really happy about as well. So the things that she didn't have in
the two and a half years that I worked there, I made sure that she got

R: Okay

L: So, it was constantly about making sure that she was moving
forward too
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R: Okay

L: Which taught me a lot about management of people, leading people (.) that is if you’re moving away (.) that person should be taking your job if you’re doing your job properly. You should be line managing them to have your job. That’s one of the mentalities that I’ve got when I line manage (.) and she really appreciated that too. I think she’s now a deputy head in that school, she’s gone all the way to the top, overtaking me immediately ((both laughing))

R: I love that teamwork type approach

L: It’s (.) it was done to me. So people all helped me out and made sure I got CPD and I was given the right opportunities and I think it’s really important that I do that to other people. One for the health of the profession, two because it’s how people should be treated (.) and if you are managing somebody (.) in quite a lot of areas I’ve seen managers (.) almost keep a lid on those members of staff. Which is completely the wrong way round to do it. You need to give them all the opportunities you can (.) particularly if you’re looking to recruit and recycle staff into more senior positions in your own school. You don’t want your best staff going to another school. You want to keep your staff in your school. When they stay it means they’re being developed (.) it’s kind of a healthy way round to do it (2) There’s only so many jobs and there’s only so many gaps ((laugh))

R: Sure. Super thank you. You’ve already sort of touched on this but thinking about there being any curriculum changes which have being
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implemented during your teaching career, about how these have
affected you

L: Well (.) the (2) new nine to one grading system and the new
English curriculum (.) it's become harder because there's more
content to cover

R: Yeah

L: There's more of an expectation on the students are going to be
doing it by themselves

R: Sure

L: Now (.) in an inner city school (.) that's really difficult (.) I mean
we've even considered in our school not even setting any homework
at all

R: Okay

L: Because quite a lot of our students go home and share bedrooms

R: Yeah ((nodding))

L: Or they're in a two bedroom flat and there's six kids and two
adults or uncles and aunts are living with them. There's an awful lot
of our students that don't have a family home with bookshelves (.) or
even English speaking families (.) so it's very difficult to try and get
those (.) to do the amount of work (.) they need to do (.) to do well

R: Sure
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L: It’s no longer about just what you deliver in the classroom. They have to do independent stuff as well. Now you can get past it a little bit at GCSE by cramming (.) very much an exam factory instead of more creative, free teaching but you can’t do that at A-Level. There’s just so much they have to have under control. So that spoon feeding at GCSE to maintain the GCSE scores does (.) do damage at A-

Level. So, I refer to it as double jumping. We made this student jump as far as they can at GCSE. Literally squeeze everything out of them but when they get that GCSE result that’s used to set their targets for Key Stage 5. So, if they’ve managed to get an eight then all of a sudden their targets are A* at A-level but they don’t then have that ability to work independently and autonomously and they don’t have that drive sometimes (.) at Key Stage 5 to do really well. And therefore the Key Stage 5 results regards progress drop off all the way. Then the school is labelled as an under-performing school

R: Sure

L: Or a poor school. So I think that’s a bit of an unfair way of doing it. The whole targets are being debated at the minute. The DFE have got an independent research study on whether or not targets are the best way to do it and research came back and said no, targets should not (.) be being used the way that they’re being. It’s being debated. So the DFE have verbally agreed with this research but they’re not endorsing it, they’re not going to push it through or we can’t see that they’re going to push it through any time
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R: Okay

L: So, I will sit down with staff at the beginning of the year and say these are your class targets, if you don’t get this, this and this you won’t get your performance management. So, if you think about that as the targeted system (.) it’s a very unfair way of doing it. And almost sets teachers against each other to cherry pick the classes that they want. So, interestingly thing there, people don’t want the higher ability students. They want the lower ability students because they’ve got lower targets and if they deliver it to the class they show progress.

R: Yeah

L: So that means that we’ve got staff who for their own pay and their own careers and their own (2) lives are not looking to teach the most able students. That can’t be a system that’s healthy. It just can’t be. How does that work? The other things that have changed with regards the curriculum, are (.) is one that they don’t give us the grade boundaries anymore. So grade boundaries are set when they mark the papers. Which means they just move things.

R: So, you don’t take an A-C paper anymore?

L: In English there’s (.) no foundation or higher. Everyone has the same test. It’s all linear so you can’t do any course work, so you can’t any things out of the way in Year Ten. But you can’t (.) what was I saying? (2) Yes, the grade boundaries. So where in previous
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years you could say 53 is a C, 64 is a B (.) a 70 is an A or whatever it
might be

R: Yeah

L: So you'd be marking your work beforehand and you'd be making
your predictions and the thing that you get judged on is how accurate
your prediction or results are going to come out. But they move the
grade boundaries according to the cohort in the summer. So we will
only know what the grade boundaries are when the results come out

R: So, does it work on a bell curve type idea?

L: I don't quite know how they make their decisions. So, I think what
they have (.) they get all the students who do the exam and they go
okay top three per cent, you're a nine, next ten percent, you're an
eight

R: Is this within an individual school or across the country?

L: From across the country

R: So, even when the papers are handed over I have no idea

L: Still don't know. So, to be judged on your predictions (.) and to be
setting students' predictions for UCAS (.) or for sixth form entries, for
a new course, for a new curriculum that they don't give much
exemplar writing on, they don't give you much CPD on (.) it's all kind
of flapping around in the dark a little bit and you really don't know ().
what's going to happen on the third Thursday of August when the
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results comes out. Well, that creates an awful lot of pressure (...) it creates an awful lot of stress

R: Yeah

L: You don't quite know the level (...) there's no level playing field, and what seems to be is that you could have a year group that is particularly strong (2) in comparison from one student from one year to the year before. One student could be much stronger because they moved the grade boundaries to fit that cohort.

R: Okay

L: That's wrong. That's just wrong. Why would you be able to do that? So that's quite frustrating

R: Mmm. And almost a system set up to fail teachers in their making their predictions and just a stab in the dark really

L: I think the reason why they do it is they want to control the outcomes. They want to control the headlines. They want to control how many people have done this or how many have got that. It's not student-centric, it's not balanced, it's not fair, it's not equal. It just undermines everything. The job has always been challenging. My dad used to speak about it (...) 30 years ago. It's really tough, you've got to deal with students every single day, you don't know what moods they're going to be in, they're going through changes of the teenage years and you have to try and make them interested in Dickens or Shakespeare, do you know what I mean? ((R nodding))

You can do that, you can definitely do that but you apply all those
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elements of the ambiguity of what the grades are, the lack of
support, increased pressures, the class sizes, judgements on your
pay, you’re not going to be getting pay rise or a promotion because
your class results weren’t good enough. I don’t have discipline
problems in my class, my classroom discipline is really strong but a
number of inner city kids misbehave in classes and staff, while they
may be subject experts or very good teachers, they’re not behaviour
experts, they don’t necessarily have that under control. All of that, if
you accumulate it all, plus the hours, the marking, the expectations,
all of it, put all of that together (.) those additional add-ons (.) lack
of clarity or a lack of knowledge or a lack of knowing what the
outcomes are going to be within a certain window, I think that’s
pushed a lot of people a step too far and they’ve disengaged
completely. So, I have a member of staff who openly says to me “I
don’t care about the targets, they’ll get what they’ll get.” Kind of in my
head I agree with him. I can’t sit there across the desk in my office
and just say “Yeah, ignore those, do whatever you want to do”

R: Yeah ((nodding))

L: Because his measurement of how successful he’s going to be in
the school is directly related to the grades walking out of that class.
So if you’re underperforming at certain stages of the year and you’ve
got students who are not targeted to get the grades that they are told
they should get then you have to offer interventions, you have to
offer things after school, you have to offer things on your Saturday
mornings, you have to give days up in your holidays. And that’s
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becoming an increasing trend too: the teacher should just give more. That’s that balance again of the vocation side of it and the business side. It’s not necessarily just down to the teacher having to give more. There has to be at least a little bit of a shift with regards to what young people are doing, what their expectations are of education for themselves. The premium students they do it for themselves. They read books. They’ve had books read to them every single time mummy and daddy have put them to bed. The kids that don’t have that, particularly in inner London schools, the kids that don’t have that, well, as soon as they leave school they’re not thinking about picking up a book, or doing a bit of research or doing a bit of wider reading or going to a museum. It’s those students that often will have reasonable targets but will be massively underperforming and that could trigger an Ofsted (.) And if Ofsted come in and they fail you, that triggers academisation. And all of a sudden your school has completely lost its independence or lost its control (.) and you’re being sucked into this big (2) conglomerate of ‘this is that way you do things, we all do things exactly the same.’ And I just think that’s horrible (.) really bad (4) Yeah I think they’re the big ones

R: Mmm

L: I was frustrated when they took away American literature. While English texts are wonderful, I just found it very (2) very Brexitly to take away other texts. Chaney was on there, he’s not on there anymore. Or any of the American or African or Iraqi writers, they’re
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not on our curriculums now. It’s just studying English texts. So, I
suppose you could argue even with the new curriculum, the things
they’re asking us to look at, the education system is arguably
outdated. What are we actually training young people to become?
R: Sounds quite narrow, even within that one subject
L: Even within the skills sets it’s quite narrow. Big Chinese business
men are talking about a different education model where you don’t
teach subject content, you teach teamwork, you teach creative
thinking and you teach (3) problem solving
R: Interesting
L: So that you develop the part of a brain of a child where they can
go out and do anything
R: As opposed to pass a test
L: As opposed to pass a test ((nodding)). Learn quotes from
Macbeth, I mean (.) are (.) what does any of that stuff mean
anymore? I don’t necessarily think that’s completely true but I do
sometimes wonder if I look at what I taught (.) a fifteen-year-old or an
eighteen-year-old in a year and they make a decision at the end of
that year to step out into the world, they’re probably going to use
very little of what we forced them to learn and that can’t be a system
that works ((whispered)). So you add that other layer of slight
frustration with it and it’s just another hammer on why am I doing
this? Why am I doing what I’m doing when I’m not even setting these
up to be what they potentially will be. That’s a bit of a weird one
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actually, (4) I enjoy teaching Shakespeare. I love teaching Dickens,
Poetry rocks. I love Seamus Heaney. We can have a great couple of
afternoon lessons. But is it actually helping those students to be
something? I don’t really know anymore. Have our business leaders
(. ) so PWC and Barclays, Santander and big companies that want to
come and work with us because we’re an inner city school and
independent, they’re really keen to contribute back into education

R: Yeah

L: But if I’m being really cynical, what those companies are coming
and doing is coming to cherry pick our best students to come and
work with them. However, when those students do get those
opportunities and work for them that’s their careers arguably worked
out

R: Sure

L: You get an apprenticeship with Price Cooper Waterhouse, unless
you screw it up, you’re set for life. Because they will work you and
work your way up. So having those (4) having that connection
between the value and content of what students are working on and
the value of what they need when they go out can sometimes be a
bit of a disconnect

R: Do you feel that internally in relation to the role and what you do
on a daily basis or is more of a reflection type?

L: That wouldn’t be on a daily basis. No, I couldn’t let my mind go
there in a daily basis. It would just be too much
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R: Yeah

L: I guess it happens more when I’m measuring or talking to students about what they’re applying to next or what they’re doing next

R: Okay

L: I’ve put a drive in our school to get apprenticeships going. So students who aren’t necessarily academically enjoying themselves, and I do think enjoying is the correct word there, it’s not necessarily not academically doing well

R: Yeah

L: Some students are doing A-levels and will say “I really don’t want to do this but my mum tells me I have to do this” Or go to university or whatever the case may be. Actually there could be other pathways, other options for them to choose. As much as I disagree with an awful lot of what Mr Gove said and implemented and tried to implement, there’s some things that I do agree with, which is the idea of giving the right education for the right student, giving them choices, not making them choose their career pathways really early and not having any freedom from there. That was a Gove thing and not a Gove thing to be honest with you, to choose the type of school from very young. You’ve got to give them those options and those skill sets, I think it’s predicted that our children will have 8-10 careers in their lives. So, what are we doing to prep them up for that?

R: Yeah
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L: We’re just forcing them to learn outdated content (.) Can you call Shakespeare outdated? I don’t feel comfortable with that but do you know what I mean? We’re forcing them to learn academic content

R: Yeah

L: Which might not even be a skill set (.) or developing the part of the brain that will allow them to be successful in the future (.) that’s what I find frustrating. Yeah, when you see other models in other parts of the world, Sweden does the same, Austria does something very similar, they teach them life skills. And apparently there is a (.) we can measure parts of the brain, the size of that part of the brain. So, your creative thinking part of the brain is more active or your problem-solving part is more active. There isn’t too much of that, there is still some, but there isn’t too much of that which goes on within classrooms anymore. We’ve got to do the exam, we’ve got to learn the content, we’ve got to get it done in 45 minutes. Then I’ve got to so that again. And I’ve got to do it again. And again. So, our students get tested (.) there are formal tests at the end of every term. Then, there are informal, checkpoint tests at the end of every half term and all your homeworks within that. Well, I can train a Year 10 student by the end of Year 11 to be able to write a 45-minute essay that’s got six paragraphs, six quotations, that’s got this context but it’s just learnt. Maybe just memorised and not even learnt and understood. That feels a little bit fake. Just to try and get the League Table or the badge of honour for results. That feels a little bit fake, And with the profession naturally having (.) academic professionals
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within it, they see that. You’ve got staff who haven’t come through
the new system but have come through 20, 30, 40 years. They see
what it used to be as opposed to what it has turned into

R: Yeah

L: Quite a lot of open meetings, where we have middle managers,
maybe thirty people in the room, that debate can go on for two hours.
Because there’s no definitive answer

R: Sure

L: But the way all those meetings finish are: how will we be judged?
Therefore, that’s what we’ve got to do. It’s pretty sad (4) I’m waiting
to see what will come (.) because the content is there, they’re not
going to change that. They’re not going to change a whole education
system into something more creative (.) or more diverse (.) or more
culturally relevant. I don’t know how that one gets tackled. I need to
do a bit more research to see how Finland did it or how Sweden did
it. I don’t know. We’re actually collecting Chinese students because
they’re fed up with the Chinese system because it works them too
hard and breaks them. We’ve got seven or eight Chinese students in
the sixth form at the minute. So, we’ve got one whose parents are
working for the Chinese embassy and they’ve obviously spoken to
others so we’ve got that cycle coming through

R: Okay

L: But they’ve left that system (.) because it’s too hard (.) because of
the suicide rates are really high
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R: Yeah (nodding)

L: And again it's just about working ten hours a day. It's not a healthy way to do it. Not a healthy way to do it at all

R: Really thought provoking

L: It is. I'd be out of a job though if it was down to creatively and problem-solving, that's not my skill set at all

R: Well you sounded very creative when you started off so you should be able to (inaudible) (both laughing) Alright, so just thinking about how did changing schools impact you? Across all of them or just particular ones

L: Until I got onto senior leadership so the last two schools (2) the first school I worked in for eight years or so (.) every year I got some kind of a promotion or responsibility

R: Yeah

L: I had to make a decision, am I going to go down the Media, Film route or am I going to stay with English. I wanted English because I wanted to become head of English. A head of English came up at Brightfield. That's what I wanted so that's what I went for and that's what I got

R: Yeah

L: So, when I moved there, I suppose I was a little too big for my boots because I wanted to change whole school systems
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R: Right

L: I wanted to be able to change whole school systems instead of being able to improve or be able to reform a whole English department.

R: Okay, sounds quite interesting

L: So, I would be quite bullish so I would consider head of English to be if not on par with an assistant head then (inaudible) because you have a direct influence over every student in the school. So, if you don’t get your English results, the school is in trouble. So, I wanted to change quite a lot as a middle manager and I got pushed back quite a lot. Hence why I only did it for a few years. So, results improved astronomically but I wanted to have an influence over the whole school.

R: Yeah

L: Instead of all the students studying English. So, I learnt that becoming head of English. But I was also told by friends and family that you don’t stay head of English very long because you get screwed from above, you get screwed from below and it’s just so intense. So, it was just two and a bit years that I did that. That’s why I went for assistant head because I wanted to have influence across the whole school.

R: Yeah
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L: So behaviour policies, teaching learning policies, communication policies (...) community, getting parents involved. I became quite interested in all that side of things. But in the first school of doing that I realised the politics that go on. The blocks that are put in the way and the constant battles against other peers (...) or leaders above you. And that was really frustrating. Especially, when I was dealing with people that hadn't been in the classroom for a long time.

R: Yeah

L: Or head teacher who (3) **how do I word this** (...) head teacher who didn't have a clue how to run a classroom. Had an idea of how to run a school

R: Yeah

L: But was disjointed and so far removed from what happens with the classroom, I felt that was frustrating

R: Mmm

L: And I've had to change the way I've presented myself in senior meetings. So, I would be quite aggressive (4) I was told my facial expressions were quite (2) aggressive and confrontational. I had to learn there that the way to get things done is through democracy as opposed to look, listen to me, this is the way it should be done. So, I made loads of adjustments coming into the new place here but it's also a much more open and willing to listen to ideas team. So, there's a lot more embedded confidence within the SLT team in my current school. Out of the seven of us, four have been in the school
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for over 25 years. So, they’ve gone through the process. They really
have a love and care for the institution of those students. The head
teacher has been there for 11 years. So, they are so much more
confident in their positions, there’s so much less politics and
insecurities going on around conversations.

R: Sure

L: So, you could suggest an idea of something and it could happen
or it can’t happen. And it can’t happen happens about equally to the
idea being run with

R: Yeah

L: You don’t get said no to or closed down. It’s always an open
forum. It’s always open to discussion. And the final decision, nobody
gets offended by or upset by (.) you that was an idea, it hasn’t
worked, lets come back to something else next time. So, it’s a much
healthier process

R: Okay

L: But it comes from a real security and confidence of those staff

R: Sure

L: Which in my experience is quite rare

R: And not just something that can just be built overnight

L: No. It must take years to do

R: Yeah
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1091   L: And also down to the individual as well. Being willing to listen to
1092   things. Being willing to change things. That takes a confidence too. I
1093   suppose if I were to look back on my career it would be leaders who
1094   were above me (.) if I really look closely at those ones who I had the
1095   most difficulty with, it’s probably because they were quite insecure.
1096   And if I look at the way I dealt with things when I was the head of
1097   English, it was trying to prove myself beyond what I was. Trying to be
1098   something that I was arguably wasn’t at that stage in my career. It’s
1099   an interesting way to look back on things
1100   R: Yeah
1101   L: I definitely deal with being an assistant head now for five years.
1102   I’ve calmed down with the way I present my things, the speed with
1103   which I want things down and that’s relatively good for mental health
1104   too. You’re not always feeling that you’re pushing something and
1105   you’re not always feeling that you’re going to get told “No”
1106   R: Yeah
1107   L: So, half a dozen things I’ve presented, changes have happened.
1108   Half a dozen, they haven’t but it’s being heard and turned down for
1109   these reasons. So it’s a healthier environment to be in. I do think
1110   though that running a school is a relatively simple thing. It doesn’t
1111   need to be over complicated. It needs to be relatively simple.
1112   Pressure comes from how we’re being judged. How we’re being
1113   measured. That’s my problem
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R: Ideally, am I thinking this right, you’d prefer it to be more pupil-centric?

L: If everything isn’t pupil-centric then what are we doing?

R: That’s a really good question. And is it important to you, even if you’re taking on more senior roles that you have contact within classrooms?

L: You have to. If you’re not, you’re not at the coalface to use a cliché, you’re not at the front line. Dealing with what would ultimately be what we’re being measured on. So I find it very frustrating that the one (. . .) member of the senior leadership team who doesn’t teach any classes does have quite a big opinion about how classes should be run.

R: Okay

L: Now, we listen to it because it’s the environment and it’s the way it’s done but actually people around the table who should be talking about this more are people who deliver curriculums because you’re aware of those changes. It’s okay to say (. . .) actually two weeks ago we had a discussion about an expectation to have another piece of work to be marked every half term. So, it was discussed, reviewed, answer: no. But the only votes around the table that was ‘yes’ was the members of staff that don’t teach classes. So, didn’t realise what that would mean. So, an option subject, or a smaller subject, say drama. There’s one member of staff who teaches every single drama class. And you add an extra piece of homework for him, that’s nearly
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400 extra pieces of homework a half term. You can’t do that. You just can’t do it. You do that for an English teacher, who teaches Year 10, 11, 12 and 13 and there’s an extra 70 or 80 pieces of work that I’ve got mark in a half term. So, an essay takes me 20 minutes to mark, that’s hours and hours and hours, you can’t do that. It was interesting that the people who had an immediate understanding of what that would mean, we voted no. So, there were other members of the senior leadership team who have deliberately removed themselves from the classroom, they voted ‘yes’

R: Sure

L: Our head teacher doesn’t teach classes. And if it’s ever something I do become headteacher then I would continue to teach classes.

You still have to have that content. I think it gives you authority when you’re talking to staff, I’ve got to do it too. I’ve got to hit the deadline on reports, I’ve got to make sure I’m ready for parents evening.

That’s if I was headteacher. In my experience a lot of senior leaders push for positions to get out of the classroom which (,) I find that quite odd

R: Yeah

L: To get away from the kids to be a senior leader is completely contrary to how I think it should be. I teach every afternoon and I look forward to those lessons. They’re knackering. They produce an awful lot of work but they’re still the best parts of the day. Without a shadow of a doubt, they are the best parts of the day
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R: I imagine if a I was a teacher in that school without a middle or senior leadership role, whether I knew it or not, that is something quite powerful to have those advocates that are actually doing the role and maybe they don’t even realise how powerful that is, that they’ve got people

L: I think a lot of people realise quite quickly

R: Yeah?

L: Even if it’s just in your line management. Because you appreciate how difficult things, you appreciate the deadlines. But I don’t think everyone gets it

R: Mm ((inaudible))

L: Morale’s not bad in our place. We’ve gone through a non-teaching staff review which has taken two years. So non-teaching staff are a little bit fed up and annoyed. Their jobs are up in the air. But it’s also still a school that still has LSAs. We have 14 LSAs. The school I left got rid of all their LSAs as a financial cut. So all those needy students lost all their direct support in the classroom. It was just put on the classroom teacher. Our SEN department is one of the only, well it’s the only deaf provision in the borough, in the tri-borough actually

R: Okay

L: We have a SENDCO, deputy SENDCO and third in charge of SENDCO in order to give so much support to that area
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R: Okay

L: But all that has been cut. We’ve got an ex-England footballer who’s a physio and works with our ADHD students. So, he takes them outside to play football and he calms them down. I don’t know any other school that’s offering, that’s still offering that kind of provision. But again it’s what those kids need.

R: Yeah

L: Now if you take that away you’ve got to put it on the classroom teacher

R: Yeah

L: What else is the classroom teacher meant to do? They’re meant to be an expert, a lot of children in our school have Charge syndrome. They’re meant to be that expert, you’re meant to be a delivery expert to deliver to the deaf students that we’ve got, plus you’ve got lower ability, middle ability, higher ability.

R: Counsellor, social worker

L: Again we’ve got one counsellor which we’ve been lucky to hold onto. Again incredibly rare. If all of that is put on the classroom teacher, plus the curriculum, plus the marking, plus the behaviour management that’s a lot, that’s a lot! And if someone comes into observe you, they’ll look at your register and go “Right, what are you doing for your deaf student? What are you doing for your student with behaviour needs? What are you doing for your student that likes
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kinetic learning or the student that likes to read more? Are you aware

the student at the back has taken their glasses off because they

should be wearing them?" What am I meant to be doing here? As

opposed to let me deliver some high quality teaching and learning.

You always need to differentiate but it’s differentiated to those

extremes without that being your area of expertise and not having

much training. And then being judged on the end. Being judged on

your students whether or not you’ll get a pay rise. Well maybe not.

That’s really challenging

R: Thank you. Okay, how does being a teacher make you feel?

L: In the majority (.) I feel very privileged to have my job. I do feel

very lucky in a number of ways. My days are not bad days.

R: Yeah

L: Some days do they take me apart? Yeah, of course they do,

they’re kids. You go home, you wash your hands and you come back

the next day and are completely the same.

R: Yeah

L: And when kids build that bond with you and they realise that

you’re not going to go away and that you are going to come back

and you’re going to give them a smile in the morning and you’re still

going to bollock them for swinging back on their chair but you’re not

abusing them or hurting them or deliberately trying to make them feel

small then that’s pretty cool.
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R: Yeah

L: That’s pretty cool. On the dark side is the (. ) I’ve felt more and more (2) marking is very important. It’s a direct way to speak to a student. So you have to deliver to a collective. You may well differentiate through questions. But the main way I differentiate is through marking. It takes quite a long time. Increasingly now, I don’t get marking done during the week (. ) I either have to sacrifice either whole weekends or I’ve got to sacrifice large chunks of the holiday. So, I’ve 200 essays to mark over Christmas. So, while I can leave that till over Christmas or I can do an extra two hours per night or however I do it, you have to get the balance right

R: Yeah

L: It is difficult accumulating that work and having to do that in the holiday time. And with Trudie not being a teacher she doesn’t get the same holidays and with baby not going to the child-minder during the holidays, I’m actually a child-carer through the holidays so I don’t get the time the way I used to. So on a half term I’d work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, 9-5, and I’d get all my work done and then I’d have three or four days off. It’d be the same over the Christmas holidays. Summer holidays aren’t six weeks, they’re about three weeks because I go back in to get the results, enrolments, things like that. My own time is being encroached on more and more and more. And that’s really difficult because I’m not willing to give up all of my evenings and I’m not willing to give up all of my weekends and I can’t
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give up the majority of my holidays. Before I had a child, that was
how I would deal with it before, I’d just crunch it. I’d work a few hours
and then Trudie and I would go out in the evening. But I can’t do that
anymore. The accumulation of marking is the most (.) it just builds up
and builds up and builds up and you’ve got to find the hours to do it.
They get tested so regularly so that marking accumulates and you’ve
still got to hit the marking policy so that marking accumulates but
there’s no time in the school day, it’s either classes or meetings. I
never sit in my office. Never sit in the office doing my work. It’s
always meeting somebody or observing somebody or leading
something or whatever the case may be. So there’s no point keeping
marking in my office because I (.) there’s no time to be able to get to
do it

R: Yeah ((nodding))

L: I might do an hour and a half on Thursday because on Thursday I
stay late. I stay til about seven. So in an hour and a half I’d get (.)
five essays done. A-Level it would be less. You’re meant to
formatively mark. You’re meant to personalise set targets for
students, you can’t just tick and put a smiley face or ‘very good’ or
well done’. I pulled a teacher up for doing that, you’re not allowed to
do that anymore; it doesn’t mean anything. To formatively mark it
takes thought. It takes care, know your student, know their needs (.)
so I suppose that’s one thing that feels like a weight around my neck.
You are never on top. Ever

Line 1281: “You are never on top. Ever.” For me, no truer words were ever spoken and I would have described myself as a hard-working teacher
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R: Yeah

L: But then that does have its flip side. So even if you have a really bad year, come September, you have a whole new set of kids. So, whether you've been successful or whether you've failed, you're always going to have a fresh set of kids. So, I find that quite refreshing. You're never down for too long. You've just got to go again, go again, go again. Once you've got your systems right then you can work well if the amount of work I have to take home is not balanced at the minute.

R: When you mentioned systems there do you mean personal systems or school systems?

L: Personal. Well school systems can have a heavy influence on that. My sister works in a school in west London. She has to mark her books (.) no book is ever allowed to be not marked within a two-week period. Now (2) I've seen her feeding her child while marking a book. I've seen her sitting up at the table marking, not on Christmas Day but when we're together and she's marking books before dinner goes on the table. And you're like, this is your family time. This is where you need to relax. This is where you need to turn off for a little bit and smile and have some fun. She can't do it. She has no responsibilities. She's a classroom teacher. I have two other sisters that work in primary schools and the amount of work they have to get through. Now they do pull evening shifts. But I don't get home until six in the evening. Feed baby, bath baby, put her to bed, there's
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1303 eight o'clock. I've been at work since 7 o'clock in the morning, if not
1304 earlier. I've not got much more to give (((laugh)))
1305 R: Sure
1306 L: So, even if I was sitting down marking books, you're going at half
1307 the pace because you're struggling to read the work and
1308 comprehend it
1309 R: Okay
1310 L: Cognitively you're slowing down. The high, personalised target
1311 that you want to set for that student becomes a bit of gobbled-gook
1312 or very very samey across all the books you're mark. Well that's not
1313 good. That's not a good way to work on any level. If I go past nine, if
1314 I go past ten o'clock at night, but it does start slowing down after
1315 nine. But I also won't be able to sleep. Because you're not slowing
1316 down.
1317 R: Yeah
1318 L: You're not relaxing, you're not turning off
1319 R: Yeah
1320 L: Hence, historically for me it was drink. It's not anymore which is
1321 really good but I could see how those things could become quite
1322 heavy, quite quickly
1323 R: Yeah
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L: When my brother lived with us for six or so months, again he works in a private school, he would drink every night. We actually had to have (.) a little (.) chat about it with regards to that’s what I used to do but I don’t do that anymore. You are aware that you’re doing four cans of beer a night? And then on a Thursday you might add a whiskey chaser or one last drink? And then on Friday, well it’s Friday, so I’ll have a proper drink. And it’s a lot (.) a lot of drink

R: Yeah

L: You have to be careful of that. There are a lot of teachers who are alcoholics in their older years or are really unwell in their older years and that needs to be considered too. But then how do you get that right? (4)

R: It’s tricky, isn’t it because it might work in the short term

L: It is tricky

R: But then it might become a problem in the long term

L: Yeah, it is really tricky. Asking students to produce less exam work (.) is one way. There is one member of senior leadership who wants to stop all homeworks. So we just deliver in class. There’s a couple of schools where I’ve read about where students do all their preparation at home and when they come into class they do all their assessments

R: Like flipped learning?
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L: Yeah. Which is quite an interesting idea. But if the student doesn't do any work at home then they're just not going to be able to do the work in class then so it does depend on the cohort you've got. I don't have an answer for that one yet ((laughing))

R: I'll come back to you ((laughing)) So, that was about how you feel and then to sum up what would the title of this, what you've been talking about, this story as a teacher, what would that be?

L: ((laughing)) (10) Let's go with roller coaster

R: Yeah?

L: It's still really exciting, you still don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. So, while I have my day set up per period (.). anything could happen (4) drugs, knives, Joy, could be sadness, kid going mental. Kid coming in and giving you a Christmas present and you didn't even think that they liked you (.). I took sixth form over last year and we've got quite a lot of quiet, reserved Muslim girls (2) I find them quite hard to relate with (.). and I think they think I'm a bit of a bull in a china shop. So this girl came into my office and she gave me a card and I said "That's very kind of you Samira. Thank you very much. I'll have a look at that later on." And I was pretty sure she didn't like me. The card she wrote was this beautifully written card:

"Sir, when you took over I thought you were going to ruin everything"

[  

R: ((laughing))]
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L: This was at the beginning of the card. My face was going red.

“You told us off straight away, you told us off about our uniform, you
told us you expected us to do three hours of work at night” (2) She
got onto be much more positive about me and was really thankful
at the end because she’d got her offer through from the university
she wanted and her predicted grades were good enough. And in the
end, she got the grades as well. So, it’s interesting sometimes you’ve
got to stop and think how do these young people see me

((both laughing))

L: I charge around the place, always busy, I’m not slack at all, I’m
very high in my expectations in how you address yourself, how hard
that you work, I wouldn’t allow a sixth former to walk past me without
acknowledging me because I would always acknowledge a sixth
former. All these things, I pulled the reins on because I wanted it to
be a more academic sixth form

R: Okay

L: And I never even thought that some of them might not even like
me ((laughing)) or might be like, well who is this guy coming in? But
when you get little notes like that or you see their faces on results
day or sometimes they’ll come up to you and give you big hugs and
I’ll try and give them finger-tip taps on the back of their shoulders
((laughing)) and you see that they genuinely do care and appreciate
it then (2) I guess it’s a little bit like (.) what’s the Latin phrase, in loco
parentis
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R: Yeah

L: You’re kind of like their stand in parent. I do talk to some of my
classes that we do have a lot of characteristics of love. Now, it’s not
sexual, I’ll make that very, very clear.

R: Yeah

L: At all. But we care for you, we guide you, we tell you off for the
right reasons, we’ll forgive you. Well they’re all the characteristics of
a good parental relationship. And when you get the cohort or year
group on side with that, it’s a real sense of ( ) so to connect it to
rollercoaster, it’s a real sense of momentum. It’s really exciting
sometimes. Sometimes your stomach does turn over because you
don’t know how you’re going to deal with the next day or the next two
days. You have parents coming in and trying to take you apart.
You’ve got to stand really firm, you’ve got to hold on tight. You get all
that done. You get off the rollercoaster and September comes round
again and you get back on again

((both laughing))

L: You just keep going on and on and on. Yeah, it’s overwhelmingly
positive ((smiling)). With the challenges and hiccups along the way

R: Thank you so much. Is there anything else that you wanted to
add?

L: I have noticed within the last (2) five or six years that students
have become lazy. Without a shadow of a doubt. It is possibly
something to do with the school I work in and the background that
they've got. But a number of them have never read a book. Or never
had a book read to them. Or have no books in the house at all
except for the Qu 'Aran or non-English books and don’t speak
English at home. Yet they're expected to do well in the English
education system and it's not set up for that. There's also a little bit
more of students expecting to be spoon-fed. So, if it's a lesson of
mine, it's my fault that they don't have the notes (.) Or they didn't get
the grade that they wanted. So, it's almost that students have picked
up on this idea that it's the teacher fault and not mine. And that's
the adults fault in the classrooms and schools because if you go into
observe the teachers and judge the teachers and that's what kids
know that teachers are judge on. I'm sure some teachers tell them
that your results will mean that I get a pay rise or not get a pay rise
and that kind of pressure. Because young people have almost
elevated senses of their own (4) 'rights' is too extreme because of
course they've got rights. And I don't ever want to go back to the
days where children got hit or (.) sanctioned in that way at all. Never.
But they do need a little shot in the arm that your success is down to
you. How hard you work is going to reflect how successful you are
and you can’t always be pointing the finger. So that's been a growing
problem I feel for (.) yeah five or six years. But I'm sure adults that
taught me said I was like that. I'm sure older people always say
these things about younger people. I noticed it more recently, that
there's this culture of gratification, 'I want it now, it's my right'
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R: Mmhm

L: That can be a real difficulty in the curriculum with all the content to learn. If you’re not able to read two sides of A4 in fifteen minutes, you’re not getting a GCSE. And that’s as cold fact as it can be. If you don’t understand what those words are. A few years ago the word ‘dormitory’ was in the unseen text.

R: Okay

L: Half the students didn’t know it. And that’s not a high tech word. And even in the context of the text itself, they should have been able to work it out, well no. Half of them had no clue. And that really did damage on that paper. So, it’s difficult when students The majority are self-motivated and have a self-driven, embedded literacy to study in any other subjects. And the ones that do arguably don’t need teachers as much. They just get it done, they just need a little bit of guidance, they need to be engaged and motivated. And their parents are usually on the case anyway. Those students caught in the middle or at the lower end, I do wonder sometimes if they are going to go through five to seven years of education and never really get anything possibly walk out with okay GCSEs because they’ve been spoon-fed it so much.

R: Yeah

L: I know how to answer this question, fine. I know how to structure this answer, fine. But what are they actually getting out of it, how
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much are they enjoying it? Are they really developing themselves?

There's quite a big question mark over that

R: And what kind of citizens are they being prepared to be without
that structure around them

L: Yeah. If we have students that go to university from our sixth form
who drop out in the first year. That is a negative light shined on us

R: Oh, really?

L: Because we haven't prepared them well enough to do well at
university. But if you track that back to what I said about Key Stage 4
and spoon-feeding, target-setting and the lack of autonomy and
independence for a lot of students at key stage five, but then they're
also getting into university much easier. On a BBC news report last
week said that 80% of students with two D grades got the university
of their choice. Half of our students in the sixth form got
unconditional offers. So, quite a lot of them got those unconditional
offers before they had sat the end of year 13. So, quite a lot are
turning off at the end of year 13 instead of turning on

R: Yeah

L: Those unconditional offers make students stop working because
'I've already got my place; I don't need to work'. If I want my figures
to look good, I should really be taking them off those courses. I'm
also sitting down with those young people and asking "Do you want a
physics A-level at 30 or don't you?" "Well I'll have my degree." Well
let's say you do or let's say you don't but having a physics A-level on
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top is better to give you more choices. A student who is studying to
study and all A-level students should struggle to study because it's
bloody hard, no-one should be finding it easy. They're finding lack of
motivation as a reason to not try as hard because the next step has
already been approved and then we're judged as a sixth form on the
results that they get. I've got to take a moral decision about whether
to take them off courses. This year I can't do that. So, I sat down in
front of the governors (.) there were nine students that got degrees
on unconditional offers. I sat in front of these 12 governors asking
"Why did these students get allowed through?" Because they should
be allowed to try it for a year and see if they get a qualification.
"We're not doing that this year." So you want me to drop kids off
courses? Yeah. You get the same amount of funding if a student
takes one subject or three. That's not right either. The unconditional
offers should stop. They have stopped offering them. They want
money. They can't afford for seats not to be filled. But then what sort
of degrees they're walking out with, I don't know. Are they dropping
degrees? We get a letter when a student drops out of university. I
don't know what repercussions there are for us as a school but
there's certainly a mark against us

R: Yeah

L: You're not getting quality out of that school. How do you win that
battle? Stop giving unconditional offers. Stop making it so easy to get
into university. And a big thing we try to push is that university isn't
the only option. There are lots of other paths as well. You can get on
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a good apprenticeship or a good work placement, I mean a good
work placement. Like Barclays or Santander. Some placements will
pay for your university as well. So, you'll get a degree and work
experience and a job which is a great opportunity. I think younger
students coming through are most used to those terms. But students
over the last few years, and this year's students, they hear words like
apprenticeship and work placements and they consider those to be
failure options. For students who can't go to university. So, it's about
making sure those pathways are clear and obvious and really
supported. And we have a committed member of staff that just looks
after that. In other places someone would be doing that as well as
being assistant or deputy. But we also don't want too many people
going on those other pathways because we need bums on seats in
our sixth form to fund the school

R: Yeah

L: Sixth form funds are spread across the rest of the school. So, we
increased the size of the sixth form by 20% last year, that's worth
tens of thousands of pounds. That's somebody's job. That's a
serious set of resources or a new science lab or whatever the case
may be. Our school would be in trouble if we didn't have a sixth form.
So we've got to recruit into the sixth form. Same kind of issue
happens to get students into sixth form. Same kind of issue happens,
we had to lower our prerequisite grades to come into the sixth form
because GCSE results dipped. They didn't go bad, they were still
positive results with regards to the Progress 8 measurement which
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was .64 which is really good. But with the results dipping we had to
lower prerequisite grades so that our numbers were healthy. So now
we have weaker students who are struggling with the academic
content of the sixth form. So the finance person on the governors is
really happy because there’s money. But the person responsible for
the academic result at the back end really frustrated asking “Why
have you let a student onto an A-level course if they only got a C-?”
we needed to do that for recruitment. “But what grade are they going
to get?” Well they’re on track to get an E. “Well what should they
get?” They’re predicted to get a D/C. “So, that students failing then?
It must be the teachers fault.” And you’re like “No, it doesn’t
necessarily just work like that.” So, that’s tough

R: Complicated

L: Really complicated. We like giving students the chance to prove
themselves so we do let them in. But the argument there is that I’m
letting a student the opportunity to sit a course for two years and fail.
Whereas, if that person was told “No, you’re not coming in” that
might be the kick up their arse to either change or don’t change. Just
to allow them to continue because it fills our coffers well that’s a bit
wrong as well. It’s always about that balance.

R: Super, thank you. Thank you, that is amazing
Appendix Twelve

Ann Marie Faughery
Registration number: 1401023415
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate of Child and Educational Psychology

Dear Ann Marie

PROJECT TITLE: The Roller Coaster Career that is Teaching
APPLICATION Reference Number: 01/01/16

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 12/07/2016 the above-named project was approved on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University ethics application form 01/01/16 (dated 04/07/2016).
- Participant information sheet 13/04/2017 version 3 (04/07/2016).
- Participant consent form 13/04/2017 version 3 (04/07/2016).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely,

David Jagar
Ethics Administrator
School of Education
Appendix Thirteen

A copy of the email which was sent to each participant prior to the member check is below. The attachment sent with each email was a Word document version of their individual 'I poem'.

Hi [participant name],

Thank you for assisting me in my research on teacher wellbeing. To help me analyse the data I used an approach called 'The Listening Guide' (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg and Bertsch, 2003). One of the steps within the Listening Guide is to create 'I poems' from the narratives each participant shared.

I've attached your personal 'I poem' which has been created by listening to your interview for the 'I' statements within it. Each line is made up of the I pronoun, the associated verb and sometimes a few other words. I've divided it into stanzas using the questions as a dividing point. Each phrase is recorded in the order in which it was spoken.

‘I poems’ are meant to pick up on the rhythm of the voice. They allow the story being told to be heard in a way which picks up on an associative stream of consciousness carried by a first person voice. It cuts across a narrative rather than being ‘contained’ by the structure of full sentences. Sometimes the ‘I poem’ may capture something not directly stated, at other times it may not.
I cannot put into words how immensely helpful your participation in this research on teacher wellbeing has been. I am truly grateful. I'll give you a call [date and time] to discuss the findings and the ‘I poem’. If you have any questions before, please do get in contact with me.

Kind regards,

Ann-Marie.